

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Poetry of Louise Bogan

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
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## ABSTRACT

The publication of Louise Bogan's biography, her letters and parts of her journals has done much to enhance an understanding of her poetry. But this new information is especially important when it is used along with a close reading of her poems and an appreciation of the major influences on her work which came primarily from the exemplars of modernism. Bogan was haunted throughout her life by disturbing memories of her childhood and psychic fears which were so terrible that she could seldom write about them explicitly, but they were the source of her poetry. The intense subjectivity of her poetry and her respect for the importance of the unconscious and of modern psychoanalytic theories are an important aspect of her modernism, as are both the formality of her poetry, and her use of that mode to order the chaos of her troubled emotions. Bogan believed that all art, including poetry, has its source in emotion and is an expression of emotion and certainly her poems are a confirmation of this theory. But in this belief she diminishes the importance of the intellect and of her own intellectual strength which she exploits utterly in her capacity to abstract emotion into images which become symbols in the extraordinary compression of her poems.

Her professed rejection of intellectual expression in art was, no doubt, part of her repudiation of philosophies and ideologies in art and also her firm belief that the meanings of poems should not be analyzed, interpreted, and described within the poems. Her poems are a direct articulation of emotion and however dark the emotion, the beauty of the poem is in the fact that the emotion is imbued within the words and the form. Two other important aspects of Bogan's commitment to the modernist quest are her endless experiments with tone, style, and form--but always within the precepts of formalism--and the fact that most of her poems are about the act of creating the poem. It is in this revelation of her creative capacity that the reader experiences a great pleasure in Bogan's poetry. Louise Bogan was born in 1897 and she died in 1970. She was a minor lyric poet who reached the peak of her career during the 1920s and 1930s. Although she published very few poems during the final thirty years of her life, some of her finest poems were written during that time.

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## INTRODUCTION

Louise Bogan's lyric, formal poetry is plain and elegant and the reflection of an intellect sophisticated and strong. She is a modern poet, who thought of modernism as "a complex and as yet unfinished phenomenon" (Frank, Portrait 378) with roots in the art and literature of late nineteenth century France. It was Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Rilke, and Auden, all exemplars of modernism in poetry, who influenced her most profoundly for she found in their work an affirmation of a new and different perception of poetry and the standards and integrity of good poetry. She drew from their poetics and their poetry her own conception of pure form which was, for her, both contrived and necessary. For Bogan's modernist journey is inward to the deepest and sometimes unconscious sources of her divided self, and her dark emotions--grief, betrayal, loss, fears of time and death, and an inexplicable terror of desolation. The formality of her poetry reflects a compelling need both to contain and to release these dark emotions. Moments of pure joy, peace, and reconciliation are rare in Bogan's poetry, but they are sought and found without the aid of mystical sources beyond the realm of the human heart.

But Bogan's means of expressing her emotions are another side of her modernism. Her practised technique, combined with her intuitive sensitivity to rhythm and sound and words, allows her to vary her form and style according to the mood of the poem to such an unusual extent that she rarely repeats a form. Her search for a new and better means of poetic expression is endless. Early in her career, for a brief period, Bogan wrote a small group of long poems, but her usual mode is short lyrics which she believed are intrinsic to minor poetry. Bogan is best known for her short, rhymed, stanzaic lyrics written in traditional meters but, in fact, she experimented with traditional form and she wrote poems in free verse from the beginning. The formality and compression of her free verse, along with her unusual sensitivity to rhythm, especially when the poem is broken into stanzaic units, is wonderfully ingenious. Occasionally a poem which appears initially to be unrhymed is, in fact, filled with internal and slant rhyme. Many of Bogan's finest poems are metaphysical in style; she uses metaphor in a perfect fusion of the sensibilities of emotion and intellect. Bogan published very few poems after 1940, but some of these are her best poems, partly because they reflect not an end to her search for poetic expression but the confidence and

maturity of the poet whose technique is sure and whose exploration of her inner self and her imperfect acceptance of her deepest fears can be written out again with a new and greater insight and in forms both more compressed, as in "Night" (The Blue Estuaries 130),<sup>1</sup> and more open, as in "Song for the Last Act" (119-20).

For Bogan, pure art, private speech, and an intensely personal experience of human existence are inseparable. It seemed to be impossible for her to invent a fiction separate from her own experience and while she defended the subjectivity of her poetry, she also feared confession. She believed that women in art, in poetry, must not lie (Journey 156) but she could be very circumspect about telling the truth. The subjectivity of her poetry and her equally strong need to dissemble the truth of the most disturbing experiences in her life make some of her poems obscure, and prevent a universality which would lift them out from private experience. Bogan seemed not to trust her readers to understand her deepest psychic fears, perhaps because she did not trust herself. Or, perhaps, there were moments when she shared with T. S. Eliot the need to be relieved of her burden of emotion for her own sake, whether or not it was meaningful to anyone else (On Poetry 107).

One of the greatest pleasures in Bogan's poetry is that she shares with her readers the creative experience of writing poetry. This may well be the true subject of her poetry, for throughout her life she wrote poems about poetry. If the emotion in the poem is dark, the expression of it is exhilarating. Her emotion becomes metaphor, becomes form, becomes poetry which is its own release. Assured prophetic madness becomes poetry in "Cassandra" (37). Cool subtle betrayal becomes poetry in "The Crossed Apple" (45). Absolute confidence in the creative process becomes poetry in "Musician" (106). Troubled peace and bitterness become poetry in "Henceforth from the Mind" (64). Pure terror becomes poetry in "Feuer Nacht" (36). Unreconciled violence, fear, calm, and equivocal peace become poetry in several poems throughout her work, from "Summer Wish" (53-9) to "Song for the Last Act." If the darkness of her emotions is alleviated only momentarily, or not at all, the integrity of her art has its source in her continuous search to express it, and in this, perhaps more than in any other aspect of her work, she is a modern poet.

## CHAPTER I

## A Woman Poet and Modernism

Louise Bogan's theories about poetry and the major influences on her own work can be found in her book Achievement in American Poetry, her notebooks and journals, her letters, her reviews of poetry and prose by both women and men. Although on more than one occasion Bogan wrote formal essays about women poets and what is expected of them, the essays are disappointing and contradictory.<sup>2</sup> What is most important about these essays is that we see that in many respects her own poetry directly defies her expectations for other women, and that what really interests her is good poetry, whether it is written by women or by men. Bogan was not unsympathetic to a tradition of women's literature and women's art, but along with the fact that her views of what is feminine were, in many respects, both archaic and troubled, she saw herself as being different from other women. Bogan shared with other women poets the restrictions of a masculine tradition in literature, but her profound personal and psychological problems did set her apart as a woman and as a poet. Although she was influenced by other women writers and poets, she was

quite confident in choosing as her mentors modern poets who were men.

In her essay, "The Heart and the Lyre" (Selected Criticism 335-42), Bogan alludes, not for the last time, to an insight she recorded in her journal in 1934:

I am a woman, and 'fundamental brain work' the building of logical structure, the abstractions, the condensations, the comparisons, the reasonings, are not expected of me. But it is only when I am making at least an imitation of such a structure that I am really happy. It is only when the notes fall into form, when the sentences make at least the sound of style that my interest really holds (Journey 133).

In 1962 Bogan gave a talk at Bennington College, "What the Woman Said," in which she alludes again to the same note in her journal:

What did the women say? Well, they said many things which closely resemble words said by their brothers, lovers, husbands, fathers, and sons. They have never issued so many preemptory commands, or drawn up so many propositions composed of abstract terms, as have men. But they have asked as woman and

artist, the same questions men have asked: Who am I? From whence did I come? Is there a design in the universe of which I am a part? Do you love me? Shall I die forever?

(Journey 157)

Bogan sees the capacity for making abstractions, condensations, comparisons, reasonings as intellectual expression that is not expected of women. Yet it is only when she exerts such intellectual energy herself that she is really happy. Bogan was neither the first nor the last woman to consider this a contradiction in herself. But her definition of what a woman poet should be is fraught with a combination of patriarchal expectations of women and her own complex views of herself as a woman, and of women's relationships with men. She reminds women poets that it is their nature to be "gentle, tender, nurturing" (Journey 155) and also that:

Women still have within them the memory of the distaff and the loom - and, we must remember, the memory of the dark, cruel, wanton goddesses. But because woman rarely has gone over, in the past, to a general and sustained low complicity or compliance in relation to her companion, man, we can hope for her future.

(Journey 158)



Women must control their inherent, dark powers and thus not comply with man's worst expectations of them.

What Bogan demands of other women poets is a direct contradiction of her own poetry: "gentle, tender, nurturing" emotions are almost absent in her poetry, and her memory of the power of "dark, cruel, wanton goddesses" is part of what makes her poetry strong and exceptional. Her defiance of traditional feminine expression in her poetry, along with its formality, its abstract and condensed imagery, have caused some critics to describe her poetry as masculine. Allen Tate made this judgment in 1937: "But Miss Bogan is a craftsman in the masculine mode" (42). Tate considered this a compliment and a characteristic which made her poetry better than that of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Elinor Wylie. He makes his judgment on the basis that Bogan is "fastidious" about "the detail of her work" (41). Allen Tate's attitude, that to be masculine is to be better, is exactly what has caused feminist critics to write about women's poetry as a tradition in itself. During the past twenty years feminist critics have pointed out women poets whose contribution to literature has been as important as that of many of their male counterparts, but different.

While I believe that we have benefited greatly from viewing women's poetry as a separate tradition, I also believe that this very separation has at times perpetuated traditional, indeed patriarchal, and above all, exaggerated distinctions between what is "masculine" and what is "feminine" in poetry. For example, Alicia Ostriker writes:

The belief that true poetry is genderless - which is a disguised form of believing that true poetry is masculine - means that we have not learned to see women poets generically, to recognize the tradition they belong to, or to discuss either the limitations or the strengths of that tradition. It also means that individual women writers are read askew. Without a sense of the multiple and complex patterns of thought, feeling, verbal resonance, and even vocabulary shared by women writers, we cannot read any woman adequately (9).

I agree with Ostriker that "writers necessarily articulate gendered experience just as they necessarily articulate the spirit of a nationality, an age, a language" (9). But it is just as harmful and disrespectful to impose arbitrarily defined feminine

attributes upon women poets as it is to believe that "true poetry is masculine." That feminist critics want to resurrect women writers and give them their due is absolutely justified and enlightening. But in the process we do these poets a grave disservice if we do not see them as individuals whose personal lives are unique and, as in the life of Louise Bogan, extraordinarily complicated. Always, the danger in embracing a theory of art is that it becomes imposed upon the art, indeed, that what is intrinsic in the art is neglected in an effort to prove the theory.

There is no doubt, as some feminist critics have noted, that Bogan's "poetics" are ambiguous and reflect a "problem inherent" in her discussions of poetry written by women (DeShazer 46). But these critics are mistaken when they see a similar problem in her poetry (DeShazer 46; Bennett 247-8). The truth is that Bogan's poems are filled with an intellectual energy and logic that is astonishing compared to the poetry of some other women poets of her day. She admired the women poets of her time, Gertrude Stein, Hilda Doolittle, and Marianne Moore, who "extended poetry's limits while reforming poetry's means" (Alphabet 432). Bogan had great respect for those poets who broke free from the limitations which had been placed on women's poetry, partly by women

themselves, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The projection of emotion in Bogan's best poems is sometimes shocking, partly because of its intense subjectivity. When the emotion is ambiguous, it is not problematic; it is a clear presentation of the contradictions inherent in the emotion. In fact, the lack of resolution of the contradictions creates the energy in the poem.

Bogan's letters are an important expression of her intellect. They are a revelation of her quirks and prejudices, her private opinions, her loves and hates, her wit and sophistication, and occasionally, her disinclination to be identified with other women poets of her day. Until her later years, many of Bogan's closest confidants were men: Rolf Humphries, the poet and classicist; Theodore Roethke; Edmund Wilson; and Morton Dauwen Zabel. In her letters to these men she matches their intelligence with a sweep of assurance that is never apologetic and, on the contrary, is often frankly competitive.

Critics often make a point of noting that Bogan avoided reviewing the work of other women poets. DeShazer notes that Bogan "in her first few years as a critic . . . refused to review women poets at all" (48). But DeShazer, again, is mistaken. In fact, when Bogan

first began to review books for The New Republic during the 1920s, her reviews were exclusively of books by women, some of whom were poets: Edith Sitwell, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Louise Imogen Guiney, Viola Meynell, Hildegard Flanner, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Ellen Glasgow, Elizabeth Shepley Sargent, Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, Djuna Barnes, Sofie Andreyevae Behrs Tolstoy (Frank, Portrait 367). Bogan received some bitter responses to those reviews which were critical and unflattering. She kept among her papers a vitriolic attack from Laura Riding, whose poetry Bogan had reviewed negatively (Box III, f. 6). Hence, she spoke with some authority when she wrote to Harriet Monroe in 1930, "I have found from bitter experience that one woman poet is at a disadvantage in reviewing another, if the review be not laudatory" (Letters 55). When Bogan began to write reviews for The New Yorker magazine in 1931 (which she continued to do for 38 years) she did avoid as often as she was able to, reviews of women poets who were her contemporaries. Those women writers whose work she reviewed with generosity and praise were usually distanced from her geographically, but kindred spirits emotionally. And they were not poets.

Bogan thought Viola Meynell's novel Follow Thy Fair Sun the "most remarkable study of the agony of love that

I have ever read, whether by male or female pen. The course of frustration, disillusion and despair is traced . . . with the author's bare nerves and sensibilities" (Letters 114). She compares Viola Meynell to Colette, as a writer who "has looked so closely and felt so accurately that her words have the value of some major discovery about life" (Letters 114). About Colette, Bogan saw that she "puts down what she knows--what her sharp senses and hearty nature have told her as the truth. This, we can conclude, is her only secret" (Alphabet 76). Bogan considered Ivy Compton-Burnett, "in many ways a female Swift of our day"--high praise from Bogan, who admired Swift's wit and insight. She had great respect for Isak Dinesen's insight into the darkest corners of human nature and for her style. About Winter's Tales, which she considered parables, Bogan wrote that the reader is left with "threads" of meaning which he can "examine and combine . . . according to his own experience" (Alphabet 106). Dorothy Richardson was for Bogan very important as a woman writer, and an innovator. "She used Henry James's viewpoint person, and she made that person--unchangeable--a woman: herself, at one remove . . . Miriam Henderson [in Pilgrimage] is the mirror in which all is reflected" (Alphabet 344). Bogan

thought Katherine Anne Porter's short stories stronger than almost any other contemporary writing (Alphabet 331). She understood Katherine Mansfield and identified with her preoccupation with her childhood. "But childhood prolonged, cannot remain a fairyland. It becomes a hell" (Alphabet 296). About Eudora Welty, Bogan wrote, "She proceeds with the utmost simplicity and observes with the most delicate terseness. She does not try mystically to transform or anonymously to interpret" (Alphabet 410). The one common quality Bogan notes in all of these writers is that they understand women.

Bogan's review of Caitlin Thomas' Leftover Life to Kill reveals an intense identification with Thomas, not only with her Irish heritage, but with her life experiences.

Caitlin Thomas puts herself down without extenuation as a childish woman and as a bearer of the terrifying Irish qualities of violence and rakishness. . . . Innocence and violence are terrible things. . . . Yet it is true, and always has been, that innocence of heart and violence of feeling are necessary in any kind of superior achievement; the arts cannot exist without them. . . .

For the child, a fairy tale goes forward from darkness to light. The deformed stranger becomes the radiant prince, and the ugly duckling turns into a swan. For the grownup manque, the story always unrolls in reverse . . . . (Alphabet 387-89).

Bogan might have been writing about herself. Her primary criterion for the artist was that she must face her demons--as she did, to the end of her life.

Bogan's troubled and complex vision of herself as a woman has its source in her relationship with her mother. May Bogan was a complicated, unhappy, strong woman who aroused in her daughter, in equal measure, a quite desperate love and terror. There are many descriptions of her in Bogan's journals:

When she sewed, and that, in my childhood, was rarely, I could hear the rasp of the needle against the thimble (she had a silver one), and that meant peace. For the hands that peeled the apple and measured out the encircling ribbon and lace could also deal out disorder and destruction. They could tear things to bits; put all their soft strength into thrusts and blows; they would lift objects so that they became threats of missiles. But sometimes they



made that lovely noise of thimble and needle.  
Or they lifted the scissors and cut threads  
with a little snip (Journey 29).

On another occasion she describes her mother's  
personality:

A terrible, unhappy, lost, spoiled,  
bad-tempered child. A tender, contrite woman,  
with, somewhere in her blood, the rake's  
recklessness, the baffled artist's  
despair . . . (Journey 35).

Again, with generosity and bitterness she writes:

I never truly feared her. Her tenderness was  
the other side of her terror. Perhaps, by this  
time, I had already become what I was for half  
of my life: the semblance of a girl, in which  
some desires and illusions had been early  
assassinated: shot dead (Journey 27).

In a letter to May Sarton (April 2, 1954), Bogan  
discusses her mother in relation to her poetry:

It is difficult for me to sum up briefly  
what I meant about my mother experience. There  
are certain phases of this experience which I

have never told anyone, and never shall. Let me only say that it was too much, and it lasted too long - right through my life up until the age of 39. [Bogan's mother died in 1936 when Bogan was 39 years old.] The most poignant and enduring things in the relationship are in my poetry. The rest exhausted me forever (qtd. in Ridgeway 4-5).

Having read Bogan's private papers--her teaching notes, reading notes, drafts of her poems, journals and notebooks--I feel certain that as a child she was physically and emotionally abused and, on several occasions, abandoned by her mother. Her love for her mother was both innocent and an expression of a desperate need to be perfect and giving in order not to incite disruption and betrayal. But her efforts were in vain, for she could neither anticipate nor control this disturbed and unpredictable woman. Such relationships are sometimes called symbiotic because the pathological needs of both beings begin to feed and nurture the other. A more common term for such behavior is sado-masochism. Thus, Bogan's model for herself as a woman was far from perfect. With some exceptions, she played out this sado-masochistic behavior in sexual relationships for much of her adult life, especially with her second

husband, Raymond Holden, who was, from Bogan's point of view, a perfect foil for these sad and disturbed expectations in a love relationship because he, like her mother, lied to her and betrayed her.

Bogan was hospitalized three times for psychiatric treatment and she sought support in psychotherapy off and on throughout her adult life and during the final decade of her life when she suffered again with anxiety and severe depression. This final illness during her sixties bothered her especially because she thought that she had overcome her problems, partly through hard-won insight into her relationships with her mother and with Holden, and partly from withdrawing from intense relationships with others. Yet, again her unconscious betrayed her by causing a repetition of the disturbing symptoms she had experienced during her thirties and by filling her dreams with distorted memories of her past and her childhood.

During the late 1920s, Bogan began to write what she referred to as her "long prose piece" (Letters 78<sup>n</sup>) which she continued off and on for the rest of her life. Here she wrote out her most painful memories, her endless and cruelly entangled search for herself, a poignant record of the darkness she lived with throughout her life. Some excerpts from this work, which she kept in her notebooks and journals were published as stories. Three pieces

which The New Yorker published in 1933 and 1934, "Journey Around my Room," "Dove and Serpent," and "Letdown" are as finely constructed and as powerful as her best poetry.<sup>3</sup> While she thought of this prose work as being in some sense therapeutic, she never discussed her poetry as serving a similar function. Her poetry continued to be an expression of felt emotion, transposed, with no attempt to analyse its source or meaning. She knew that the "repressed" becomes the poem: "Actually, I have written down my experience in the closest detail. But the rough and vulgar facts are not there" (Journey 72).

Two poems, one in which Bogan expresses an almost-conscious revelation of herself as a woman, and the other in which she gives her vision of women in general should be set against her reflections in prose about poetry written by women. The emotion in the poems is clear and pure--terror and a sad recognition of reality.

In "Medusa," (4) the speaker tells of an experience that has passed. Bogan uses the past perfect tense to enhance the movement in the memory of this experience: "I had come to the house, in a cave of trees. . . ." The feminine and maternal are expressed in the first line of the poem in the symbolic feminine vessels, the "house" and the "cave." The cave also suggests hell. Bogan's

vision of her mother as a Medusa is not surprising, but this particular vision of the Medusa/mother, "Held up at a window, seen through a door," appears again in Bogan's story, "Dove and Serpent," where she describes her mother in the kitchen of her childhood:

. . . she would stand by the window that looked toward old Leonard's house. The window had sash curtains over its lower half. My mother's gaze was directed through the upper, uncurtained panes. Sometimes she would stand there for a long time, perfectly still, one hand on the window jamb, one hand hanging by her side. When she stood like this, she was puzzling to me; I knew nothing whatever about her; she was a stranger; I couldn't understand what she was (Journey 5).

Unlike Perseus in the myth, who protected himself by viewing Medusa mirrored in his shield because he had been warned that looking at her would cause him to be turned to stone, in Bogan's "Medusa" there are no shields, no mirrors. The speaker and the Medusa confront each other. And the verb tense changes to the present: "This is a dead scene forever now." Everything is stopped dead except the speaker of the poem, who continues to tell us--"And I shall stand here like a shadow / Under the

great balanced day. . . ." Bogan has created exactly what Ezra Pound describes in his essay, "Cavalcanti":

. . . the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies . . . magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's paradiso, the glass under water, the form that seems a form seen in a mirror, these realities, perceptible to the sense, interacting . . .

(Literary Essays 154).

The Medusa and the shadow become a magnetic reflection of each other--"the form that seems a form seen in a mirror"--and the reflection, a revelation of the self, is all the more terrifying because this hell, this knowledge of and identification with the dreadful power of the feminine, exemplified in the Medusa, will last forever.

Bogan read her poem, "Women" (19), at the Library of Congress in 1968, remarking that it was written when she was twenty-four and that it "shared" all the bitterness of that age. She added that her feelings about her sex had improved "a great deal" since then (Louise Bogan: The Eight-Sided Heart). But one suspects that if her feelings had changed very dramatically she probably would not have read the poem. Critics have used the poem to

illustrate Bogan's negative view of women, her betrayal of her own sex, indeed, her "envy of maleness" (Frank, Portrait 67). But the poem is both a complaint and an admonition to women to see themselves. The speaker of the poem refers to women as "they," which separates her from other women; nevertheless, the poem is a dramatic insight into women's painful capitulation to what they assume to be society's and men's expectations of them. The bitter paradox in the first stanza, "Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts / To eat dusty bread" is an attack to be sure, but an attack from someone who knows that a woman's heart can be a "tight hot cell." The speaker makes a list of the negative qualities only a woman could see in other women: they do not "see" or "hear" the beauty around them; they wait when they should go about their own interests; they "stiffen" against unpleasant demands made upon them when they are expected to be supple, to "bend"; they are unkind to themselves; they cannot "think" or plan or take pleasure from work well done; their love is "eager" but meaningless because it is either too "tense," or too "lax." Finally, their need to please makes them frantic: "They hear in every whisper that speaks to them / A shout and a cry." The final lines are an expression of sad defeat: "As like as not, when they take life over their door-

sills / They should let it go by." But it is the first line of the poem that is most important: "Women have no wilderness in them." This is a sad admission that women have been forced to repress and to forget the wilderness they have inherited from their female ancestors, "the dark, cruel, wanton goddesses," because in its ultimate and most terrible expression, as in the mythical Medusa, it is terrifying, not only to men, but also to themselves.

After 1931 Bogan chose to review the work of male poets for the most part and she was not daunted by their angry reactions to unfavorable reviews. On the contrary, she seemed to take pleasure in defending herself. Her reviews of the works of Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Rilke, and the later Auden are admiring and insightful and reveal that their perceptions of the creative process were absorbed into her experience of poetry.

From the first time she read "Responsibilities" in 1916, Bogan was strongly influenced by Yeats--the powerful humanity of his poetry and his pure form and style (Journey 49). She perceived a deep psychological truth in Yeats' mystical ideas and his conceptions of "Image and Anti-Image, the Mask and its opposite" (Alphabet 459). Because of her Irish heritage, she also felt a spiritual identification with the idiom of his



expression, an echo, as it were, of her own ancestry.

Rilke's legend, "How small it is, that with which we struggle; what struggles with us, how great . . ."

(Letters 142) sustained Bogan and became the epigraph she used in all collections of her poetry beginning with her book The Sleeping Fury. She believed that his work should be made more accessible to students of modern poetry and modern thought because it "is one of the strongest antidotes to the powers of darkness--hatred, split allegiance, guilt, and regression--that our time has produced" (Alphabet 354). Bogan continued to translate Rilke's poetry until the last years of her life, seeking in it reassurance and answers to her own inner darkness. Bogan came to admire W. H. Auden's later poetry because she thought him "ceaselessly restless and inquisitive, inexhaustibly inventive, full of curious ancient and modern erudition . . . and still profoundly involved with modern dilemmas." Most important, she saw that "he has a sense of evil as well as a sense of history" (Alphabet 47).

Bogan's small book, Achievement in American Poetry, published in 1951 is an historical account of the development of American poetry in the first half of the twentieth century. The book is a survey rather than a close study of the poetry: she takes the traditional

role of the historical critic who studies poetry in relation to the time in which it was written, the influences on the poet, and its reception by its first readers. In the book she acknowledges the importance of the work of Ezra Pound in the modern period. Bogan was particularly influenced by Pound's experiments with form and with free verse:

The early contribution of Pound and the imagists to the establishment, in free verse, of responsible poetic standards cannot be overestimated. Pound's continual experiment with the freer forms, from 1912 to 1916 (when the volume Lustra was published), finally resulted in a formal vers libre in English which was at once flexible and severe, capable of dignity and poignance, afflicted with neither flabbiness nor rigidity.

(Achievement 37-8)

Bogan's poems in free verse follow Pound's "responsible standards" exactly and are no less formal than her rhymed stanzaic lyrics. She used Pound's "A Few Don'ts" when she taught poetry, and she understood immediately his description there of an "image" as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time . . ." (Poetry Mar. 1913. 200).

Bogan read the works of Freud, and later, the works of Jung, Otto Rank and his disciple, Jessie Taft and she was quite sophisticated in her knowledge of the power of the unconscious. The new scientific knowledge of the human psyche, especially through the influence of Freud, is revealed implicitly in the work of many of the leading poets of her time. Bogan was also familiar with Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough and the new academic interest in anthropology, partly through her friends, the anthropologists and poets, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. It was with this knowledge of psychology and anthropology that she read T. S. Eliot's early poetry and The Waste Land and saw that "With it any possibility of further ignorance concerning the spiritual state of the modern world is closed" (Achievement 70).

At the moment when Freud's discoveries in medical psychology and Frazer's in anthropology were beginning to filter into the popular consciousness - where they were to be turned to a variety of frivolous uses, when superficially applied - Eliot recognized them as possible carriers of a theme, and forged the first link between these important psychological and historical discoveries of his period and his period's poetry. So much concerning the modern

human dilemma was brought into focus in The Waste Land, that new sources of energy and insight were released; the poem remains an almost inexhaustible reservoir of 'vision' even after the passage of thirty years (Achievement 71).

Although she did not speak of it overtly, Bogan was influenced dramatically by the work of T. S. Eliot. She read Eliot's The Sacred Wood when it was published in 1920, and having been influenced earlier to re-examine nineteenth-century taste by Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature, which she read at the age of seventeen in 1914 (Box XX. f. 1), she was ready to appreciate Eliot's scholarly analysis and close scrutiny, always in "poetic terms," of poetry written over a wide period of time (Achievement 67). The fact that she believed that Eliot gave modern poetry an historical perspective and standards which steadied "the wilder oscillations of modern taste" (Achievement 67) suggests that she accepted not only Eliot's assured, authoritative stance, but that she understood his "historical sense" which he discusses in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"--"which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together" (Sacred Wood 49). Early and late in

his work Eliot's "historical sense" is always from the point of view of the present. Bogan understood Eliot's perception of time which he brought to perfection in Four Quartets. In "The Dry Salvages":

It seems, as one becomes older,  
That the past has another pattern, and ceases  
to be a mere sequence -

Or even a development . . . (II. lines 37-39)

And in "Little Gidding":

The moment of the rose and the moment of  
the yew-tree  
Are of equal duration. A people without  
history  
Is not redeemed from time, for history is  
a pattern

Of timeless moments. (V. 19-22)

For Louise Bogan, whose painful memories of her childhood remained in her unconscious and were revealed repeatedly in her dreams until the end of her life, time as a "pattern of timeless moments" was a terrible reality. The universal struggle to understand and to accept time is a theme which appears throughout her poetry. In 1929 Bogan wrote out a perception of timeless moments, "Beyond the hour . . . Long since . . . Far back . . ." in one of her finest metaphysical poems, "Old Countryside" (52).

Also, intrinsic within Bogan's concept of form in poetry, the binding element of which is rhythm, is the pattern of recurring words--abstractions of emotion--and sounds. Her poetry is a joining of the timeless and the temporal repeated in rhythmical patterns endlessly.

Bogan acknowledges that she was influenced by the English metaphysical poets which became a "literary fashion" (Journey 51-2) during her twenties, no doubt, partly as a result of Eliot's essay, "The Metaphysical Poets":

When a poet's mind is perfectly  
equipped for its work, it is constantly  
amalgamating disparate experience. . . .

In the seventeenth century a dissociation of  
sensibility set in, from which we have never  
recovered . . . (Sel. Prose 64).

Bogan's ability to embrace Eliot's theories as a further development of Pound's conception of the "image" is most perfectly expressed in her book of poetry Dark Summer--the title itself, an amalgamation of disparate experience.

Eliot's definition of his "objective correlative" is almost a description of Bogan's poetry and her capacity to use metaphor as symbol to project emotion in a poem.

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

(Sacred Wood 100)

In a letter to May Sarton in 1955, Bogan defines her own conception of Eliot's "objective correlative" which she considered "a practised technique." She also expresses her understanding of his concept of the "process of depersonalization" which must take place as the poet writes the poem (Letters 296). Eliot sums up his discussion of "depersonalization": "For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotion, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts" (Sacred Wood 55). Bogan's description of the process is clearly stated, with a simple rejection of the word "depersonalized," displacing it with the word she considered more apt, "transposed":

Certainly "unadulterated life" must be transposed, although it need not be

"depersonalized." Otherwise you get "self-expression" only; and that is only half of art. The other half is technical, as well as emotional and the most poignant poems are those in which the technique takes up the burden of the feeling instantly: and that presupposes a practised technique . . .

(Letters 296).

Both Eliot and Bogan refer to the psychological motive compelling the poet to write the poem as a "burden." Eliot described the unwritten poem as a "burden which he [the poet] must bring to birth in order to obtain relief" (On Poetry and Poets 107).<sup>4</sup>

While Bogan may not have been familiar with F. H. Bradley's influence on Eliot's analysis of the existence of a poem and the subjectivity and objectivity of immediate experience (Wollheim 169-93), she knew, nevertheless, what Eliot meant when he wrote:

The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader

(The Use of Poetry 30).



Bogan expressed her own analysis of the poem's existence apart from the poet:

The poem is always the last resort. In it the poet makes a world in little, and finds peace, even though, under complete focused emotion, the evocation be far more bitter than reality, or far more lovely (Journey 70).

Because of her candor about the subjectivity of her poetry, one might be tempted to read Bogan's poems as autobiography, but to do so diminishes her genius as a poet. Also, with Eliot, she explains that in the process of creating the poem, the poem takes on a reality of its own. Her poem, "Homunculus" (65), makes perfectly clear that real art is a transformation of life into life.

During the 1930s Louise Bogan found herself at odds with many of her contemporaries who wrote poems about their Marxist or socialist philosophies, their support of social protest in the United States, and their condemnation of the fascist powers during the Spanish Civil War. She believed passionately that ideology does not belong in poetry and she criticized very severely the poets of that period who believed that art must be part of revolution and social change. She believed that poetry should be private not public speech. "I have always thought that the pure artist had his place, and

should stick right in it, being as productive as possible and as pure as hell, whatever was going on outside . . . ." (Letters 92). Her attitude caused a temporary break in her friendship with her good friend Rolf Humphries during the 1930s, and it was also what caused her impatience with Auden's early poetry, and her quite bitter attacks on Muriel Rukeyser's poetry for many years. Yet, she also believed that as long as the "pure artist" remembered his place, he should not be afraid of change: "The times manifest themselves with increasing speed, and we are part of the times" (Alphabet 15).

In her own way, Bogan could be as recalcitrant and inconsistent as Eliot was in his theories of art. It is her own life experiences that take first place in her poetry and there is little evidence that she feels deeply about humanity or even about other individuals. Eliot spent his entire life opposing liberal utilitarianism or humanitarianism, a traditional progressive view of history, and a consequent romantic view of English literature. If Eliot's later religious conversion, his extreme conservatism, indeed, elitism, bothered Bogan, she was very circumspect in her comments about it, although there is evidence in her notebooks that she read After Strange Gods and Notes towards the Definition of

Culture in which these views are most blatantly evident.

In a review of Four Quartets in 1943, she wrote:

It has been said that some of Eliot's utterances about religion have been suspiciously melodramatic. Eliot, in making religious tradition a frame for his art, chose the artist's inevitable choice - cohesion and integrity. But a choice of form was evidently not enough. It is interesting to trace Eliot's shift from formal interest in his religion (its history, rituals, and so on) toward a far from formal interest in his own post-conversion spiritual development. . . . in "Little Gidding" many of Eliot's themes - one could almost say fetishes - are brought together in a real feat of reconciliation (Alphabet 111).

The "real feat of reconciliation" is a wry, but reasonably cautious judgment.

In 1950, in a summation of what poetry had become at that time, Bogan uses Apollinaire's songs, Rilke's Duino Elegies, and Four Quartets as examples of a philosophy of art which she wished for herself, but which contradicts utterly everything Eliot professed: "All objects await human sympathy. It is only the human that can humanize" (Alphabet 14). In the light of her earlier comments on

Four Quartets and "Little Gidding," it is doubtful that she misinterpreted Eliot. It is possible that here she chose deliberately to ignore his spiritual apotheosis. Unlike most of her modern mentors, including Eliot, except for fleeting moments of a reconciliation of the opposing forces within herself, Bogan makes no claims as they do in their later poetry, to have arrived at a spiritual or mystical answer to the mystery of human existence.

On only one occasion Bogan took a deliberate and public swipe at Eliot's elitist attitudes. Both Bogan and Eliot were extremely critical of the middle class, but because of their heritage, if not their pretensions, they viewed it from opposite extremes. Eliot considered himself an aristocrat and a patrician; Bogan considered herself "a poor and busy woman" (Letters 217). In her essay "Folk Art" (Alphabet 137-47) Bogan discusses Eliot's tribute to Marie Lloyd, an English music hall comedienne and, in the same essay, Eliot's ideas about society and popular culture generally. Bogan is not impressed with Eliot's view from a distance that Marie Lloyd, in her self-realization, expressed the spirit of her culture, the lower class. In his essay, "Marie Lloyd," (Selected Prose 172-4), Eliot rejects utilitarian morality and the cult of the individual in his perception

of Marie Lloyd as living proof of F. H. Bradley's thesis that human self-realization, cannot be achieved by an individual apart from his social community (McCallum 111). Bradley saw the individual as "a heartbeat" in the "system" of the community, as "an organ in the social organism" (163).

Bogan, in her essay "Folk Art" chooses exactly those lines from Eliot's essay which support his thesis. But she precedes her quotation with the caustic remark that the music hall "was based on that period of 'proletarian' existence when the workers were stiffly encased in the tradition of knowing their place and imitating their betters." (Alphabet 139) Eliot's gentlemanly declaration in his first paragraph that Marie Lloyd "represented and expressed that part of the English nation which has perhaps the greatest vitality and interest," (Sel. Prose 172) is a view of the lower class from a different perspective. Finally, Eliot's concern that with the disappearance of the music hall and the encroachment of middle class entertainment, which will allow "the working man" to go to the "cinema, where his mind is lulled by continuous senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon" (174) causes Bogan to react: "Eliot under-estimated his 'lower classes'" (140).

Bogan's reflections on poetry and her reviews of both prose and poetry are at times scholarly and objective and at other times prejudiced and subjective and in this she is not exceptional. It is not surprising that she had difficulty writing about other women poets. For one thing, she accepted overtly the social and cultural distinctions between masculine and feminine which prevailed in her day and have not yet disappeared. Yet when she wrote poetry she defied all such expectations because she wrote out her feelings which came from a source too deep to be affected by public manners and postures. Because of her childhood experiences she saw herself as being different from other women, not just as a poet, but as a person and there is solid evidence to suggest that her vision of herself as a woman was troubled and frightening. She did not want to compare herself as a poet to her female contemporaries--Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale, Elinor Wylie--because she thought her poetry different and she wanted it to be better than theirs. At the same time, and for obvious reasons, she did not want to imitate those women poets of her day whom she admired. Instead, partly directed by Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, Rilke, and Auden's later poetry, she sought out the best poetry that has been written in English regardless of whether it was

written by men or by women and happily she had no compunctions about taking male poets as her models. She was not without female models--women who were passionate, strong, independent: Louise Labé, St. Teresa of Avila, Mme de Sévigné, Emily Dickinson, and in her own day, Viola Meynell and Colette (Journey 154). But finally, as a poet, she knew that she must write out of her own experience and her own time.

## CHAPTER II

## Darkness Was Her Fate

The dark emotions in Louise Bogan's poetry rise out from her deepest inner self. The violence, the betrayal, the imposed lost innocence in her childhood are never forgotten and she seeks endlessly to transpose these memories into poetry. In some poems the speaker suggests that she cannot face her worst memories because the anticipation of complete revelation is terrifying: it might mean a kind of death or annihilation. Bogan's insight into her unconscious is acute. She sees herself divided, and her other self is both a wild, shrieking fury and a child. Eventually, the fury seems to be subdued and becomes a sleeping child. But Bogan abandons this child of herself and the child reappears--accusing, demanding, threatening. On two occasions Bogan transposes dreams into poetry because she sees them as revelations of her unconscious. She gives us the revelations without analysis or explanation. In many of her early poems, Bogan expresses the division within herself as that between her heart and her will. In her poems of lost love, the speaker rarely blames the absent lover; she has been betrayed by her own heart, by herself. In her poems of violent emotion--rage and



madness--the fierce power of the emotion is recreated in the moment of the poem. Like many of her contemporaries, Bogan writes not only about her inner darkness but also about forces outside herself over which she has no control: time, death, fate. Because she cannot believe in any mystical power which might relieve her darkness, she feels that she must accept it, but this is a difficult task for her and, in her poetry, one which she achieves rarely.

# A. The Gentle Self Split Up

"A Tale" (3) was first published in The New Republic in 1921 and Bogan placed it at the beginning of her first book of poetry, Body of This Death, and of all subsequent collections. The poem introduces most of the themes she uses in her poetry for the rest of her life, except the writing of poetry itself: the relentless passage of time; the mutability of weather and its association with one's emotional state; the fearful instability of the sea; the comfort of interior landscapes protected by hills; the security of dark rooms lit by lamps ("Rooms in this city . . . - need darkness, lit lamps, and the sound of rain" (Louise Bogan Papers Box XX, f. 2);<sup>5</sup> a sense of isolation or imprisonment; the desolation of her childhood, worse than "hidden deserts," which caused enduring scars; and the vision of the double--"something dreadful and another / Look quietly upon each other." By telling the story of a young man, Bogan places herself at a distance from the emotions she projects in this poem. But the emotions are there.

The tale is about a young man who goes from his home, a land beside the sea, where the seasons change, to a strange land where the sun is hot--made hot and bright by its plural "suns"--and the soil is hard. He feels

imprisoned there, shut in, and his days are measured by the weather vane and the "tripping racket of a clock" which imprisons him as surely as its confining echo, "lock on lock." He "cuts" his days--breaks their unrelenting pattern--by "seeking" or dreaming of peace and security in another place, not his home, where he imagines a welcoming light in darkness, the protection of "hills like rocky gates," and no sea. But, the speaker tells us, "he will find" that his dreams of peace and security will not endure and what replaces them is even worse than the strange land where he now lives. What will endure in his mind is "south / Of hidden deserts," a terrible place where "torn fire glares / On beauty with a rusted mouth." The speaker repeats this fearful vision of the divided self in the final couplet.

The almost-tentative interjection of the speaker, "I think," is touching and persuasive in convincing the reader of the experience of a young man, but the tale is also Bogan's own experience. The image "lock on lock" and the strange hot land were probably inspired by the time she spent in the Panama Canal Zone where she lived with her first husband. What is most important is the final image in the poem. As a child Bogan's reaction to the domestic violence around her, as she recalls it,

seems to have been to withdraw--at one point, literally into darkness:

The secret family angers and secret disruptions passed over my head, it must have been for a year or so. But for two days, I went blind. I remember my sight coming back, by seeing the flat forked light of the gas flame, in its etched glass shade, suddenly appearing beside the bureau. What had I seen? I shall never know (Journey 26).

This "flat forked light" may be the "torn fire" in "A Tale." If Bogan could not remember exactly what had caused her escape into blindness, the images in the final lines of this poem are a solemn recreation of the revelation of violence and the loss of innocence.

Bogan placed her poem "Medusa" (4) immediately after "A Tale." Again she describes a vision of "something dreadful" but this time the vision is much more dramatic because the poem is written in the first person and what the speaker sees is a terrifying revelation of what may be her dual self.

"Statue and Birds" (14), which was first published in The New Republic in 1922, is often discussed with "Medusa" because it, too, is a poem of tension between stasis and movement and the form of the two poems is

similar. Here, the tension exists in the restive emotion within the marble statue, caught in the prison-like bracts of vine surrounding her, and by the birds with their marching step slowly encircling her, but revealed in her posture--"with hands flung out in alarm . . . her heel is lifted, - she would flee." But in the end, of course, she cannot escape, "-the whistle of the birds / Fails on her breast."

"Statue and Birds" is filled with internal rhyme and repetitions of sounds which enhance the emotion and the texture of the poem. In the first stanza the ar of the two most important words, "alarm" and "arrested" is repeated in "arbor," "carven," and inverted in "straight" and "remonstrances." In the second stanza the sounds of the "bracts of the vine" are repeated in the consonants in "pattern," "angles," "quill," "fountain," "falters," "rake," "sky," "brusque," "tangles." In the third stanza the slow walk of the birds is echoed in the long sounds and feminine endings of "slowly," "circling," "golden," "pheasants," "arrowy," "dragging," and stopped abruptly with the threatening, masculine "sharp tails." In the final stanza, the "whistle of the birds / Fails on her breast" but sounds in the sibilance of the s's: "inquietudes," "sap," "spent," "forsaken," "rest," "whistle," "birds," "fails," "breast."

There is no overt double in this poem, but the contained movement is implicitly the other. The poem creates a hard, cool exterior within which is imprisoned hidden restless passion. The assurance with which Bogan both creates and describes this circumscription is stunning.

The eye is crucial in Bogan's poetry, not only because most of her imagery is visual imagery which is described, as it is in "Statue and Birds," with the most acute sensitivity to detail, but also because the compelling motive of her poetry is to see herself--the I--and to describe the seen. In her poetry she advanced toward and retreated from the sight of the center of herself because, I believe, she was terrified that as she wrote in "Summer Wish" it might be "a vision too strong / Ever to turn away."

"Summer Wish" (53-9), a long poem, unrhymed, and in free verse, was first published in Dark Summer in 1929 and Bogan kept it in all subsequent collections. The poem is influenced by Yeats' "Ego Dominus Tuus" (180-3) and, as she wrote to her publisher, John Hall Wheelock, it is "in the form of a colloquy between This One and The Other" (Letters 46)--like the Hic and Ille of Yeats' poem. This One and The Other are again two aspects of the dual self of the poet and in the published poem

become "First Voice" and "Second Voice." Bogan begins the poem with an epigraph from Yeats' "Shepherd and Goatherd": "That cry's from the first cuckoo of the year. / I wished before it ceased" (159) which is an allusion to her summer wish but also to her unsettled, lost, divided self.

Bogan's First Voice is the bitter and vulnerable unmasked self, and the Second Voice is the self wearing the mask of reason, outward vision, and optimism, but with a subtle capacity for treachery. The First Voice, familiar with and tired of the yearly effort to greet summer recognizes the March equinox--the inescapable beginning of summer--as betrayal: "The season of the lying equinox / Wherein false cock-crow sounds!"

The Second Voice seems initially not to react to the First, but she continues her description of the beauties of the season by speaking of the "shadow" in March and, in a perverse fashion, goads the memory and the repressed pain and grief of the First Voice. The First Voice ignores the beauty in the description of spring given her by the Second Voice, but responding to the "shadow" admits that because of pride, "pomposity, arrogance, . . . You cannot / Take yourself in." She acknowledges her own inner darkness and also the shadow of March which is a reflection of it. She cannot write

poems in praise of spring and summer when she has lost all faith in the desire and passion which these seasons represent. How can she make "A wish like a hundred others"--a futile wish, which would be for her arrogant and false?

The Second Voice continues to describe not any spring flowers, but the flowers of the poet's youth. And the First Voice responds: "Memory long since put by . . ." and proceeds to recall the violence of her childhood. The Second Voice describes, with superficial innocence, the "scant light, pale, dilute, misplaced" at six o'clock in April, "Light there's no use for," and that at "overcast noon" the sun comes out and is taken "slowly back to the cloud." The First Voice, responding to the description of an April twilight, and the shadowed sun at noon, speaks:

Not memory, and not the renewed conjecture

Of passion that opens the breast, the

unguarded look

Flaying clean the raped defense of the body,

Breast, bowels, throat, now pulled to the

use of the eyes

That see and are taken. The body that works

and sleeps,



Made vulnerable, night and day, to delight  
that changes

Upon the lips that taste it, to the lash  
of jealousy

Struck on the face, so the betraying bed  
Is gashed clear, cold on the mind,  
together with

Every embrace that agony dreads but sees  
Open as the love of dogs. (69-79)

The First Voice persistently recalls her past--perhaps both the observation of and the experience of sexual encounters and of the simultaneous emotions of sexual passion, violence, jealousy, emotional pain, fear, and repugnance.

Now the Second Voice describes "two shadows," from the trees and from the cloud which come together upon a man. "Dark flows up from his feet /. To his shoulders and throat, then has his face in its mask, / Then lifts."

The unidentified man, who seems to symbolize the mortality of human life but who may refer to a specific memory which she does not reveal, was hidden by the shadows, but now he is seen. The response of the First Voice, who has listened to the Second Voice, is initially to ask herself if she will continue to see nature and the seasons as nothing more than a reflection of herself, to

"press sight / Into a myth no eye can take the gist of; /  
 Clot up the bone of phrase with the black conflict / That  
 claws it back from sense?" Will she cling to her most  
 disturbing memories? Will she continue to write poetry  
 that is so private, so dense with symbols that no one can  
 know what she is saying?

But her words have taken her too far now to retreat  
 and she succumbs again. "Go into the breast . . .":

You have traced that lie, before this, out  
 to its end,

Heard bright wit headstrong in the  
 beautiful voice

Changed to a word mumbled across the shoulder  
 To one not there; the gentle self split up  
 Into a yelling fiend and a soft child.

You have seen the ingrown look  
 Come at last upon a vision too strong  
 Ever to turn away. (94-101)

The First Voice sees her dual self--"a yelling fiend" and  
 "a soft child"--and madness. But after only a moment's  
 hesitation she comments bitterly on her vision: "The  
 breast's six madresses repeat their dumb-show,"  
 suggesting that what has been said is only the beginning,  
 a hint of what is to come, and that it has been said,

again, in words that are not the real words of the truth.<sup>6</sup>

Now the Second Voice introduces images of life and death: paradoxically "bright twilight"; "children" and "evening"; "strawberry blossoms" and "stalk"--old weeds; the pear-tree filled with flowers and leaves--the symbol of hope and good health (Cooper 128), and the cherry with blossoms only--symbolizing man, naked, as he is born and as he dies. Here is the balance of life and death--an assurance, but also a challenge to the First Voice, as if both to appease and acknowledge the shock of emotional revelation.

But the First Voice will not be appeased and feels tricked. The mind cannot be trusted. The images are strong: "malicious symbol," "key for rusty wards," "crafty knight in the game." In a letter to Ruth Benedict in December, 1928, Bogan wrote: "Chess, I find, is quite terrifying. That closing in on the king is like time and fate sitting in opposite quarters, and chuckling quietly, because their designs are not immediately apparent" (Letters 43).

The Second Voice interrupts the First Voice and, repeating symbols of both life and death, proceeds to describe an extraordinarily beautiful image of fields

plowed inward from the outer edge of a field to the center:

Fields are ploughed inward  
 From edge to center; furrows squaring off  
 Make dark lines far out in irregular fields,  
 On hills that are builded like great clouds  
     that over them  
 Rise, to depart.  
 Furrow within furrow, square within a square,  
 Draw to the center where the team turns last.  
 Horses in half-ploughed fields  
 Make earth they walk upon a changing color.

(115-123)

Again, this time in the symbol of the spiral, the Second Voice evokes birth and death, the cyclical seasons, the rotation of the earth around the sun, and the generative force at the center. But this image of the spiral is not circles; it is squares within squares. Squares denote earthly existence, static perfection, honesty, integrity, but also limitation and form, and "the fixation of death as opposed to the dynamic circle of life and movement."

(Cooper 157) Here is one of Bogan's many suggestions that the form of poetry can cause a death of the emotion contained by it. The horses "Draw to the center where the team turns last." Yet the Second Voice does not stop

at this symbol of the end. The final two lines of this section are a reiteration of the beauty of change and renewal in the natural world and in human life. "Horses in half-ploughed fields / Make earth they walk upon a changing color" is one of the loveliest images in all of Bogan's poetry.

The First Voice submits: "The year's begun; the share's again in the earth." She will "speak out the wish like music." Laughter will draw out the poison that "cheats the heart." The First Voice will speak out the wish, "as that man said, as though the earth spoke."

Bogan is quoting from Thoreau's Journals which she read and re-read throughout her adult life.

I hear a man blowing a horn this still evening,  
and it sounds like the plaint of nature in  
these times. In this, which I refer to some  
man, there is something greater than any man.  
It is as if the earth spoke (qtd. in Frank,  
Portrait 130).

But the First Voice also qualifies her release which will happen "By the body of rock, shafts of heaved strata, separate, / Together." The negative will rise up to balance the positive. The rock--desperation, solitude, and death--cannot be forgotten. The wish will be spoken,

if only "for sleep at night." "The vine we pitied is in leaf; the wild / Honeysuckle blows by the granite."

The poem ends with an image spoken by the Second Voice:

See now

Open above the field, stilled in

wing-stiffened flight,

The stretched hawk fly. (140-2)

Now, for the first time, there is an equivocal tone in the speech of the Second Voice. The consonants in the words in these final lines, and especially the l's, like those in "black conflict / That claws it back from sense," make them difficult to pronounce and, in fact, hold them back from the projection the image demands. Elizabeth Frank compares the final image in this poem to the ending of Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning" and Yeats' "The Tower"--"an earthly moment that makes no claims beyond its own evanescent completeness"

(Frank Portrait 130). Harold Bloom sees "Summer Wish" as Bogan's "Resolution and Independence" and the image of the hawk's flight as one "both of acceptance and of the effort to hold oneself open to experience" (Louise Bogan Reads Her Work).

The final image, the hawk, a predator, "stilled in wing-stiffened flight" conveys not only "acceptance" and

"effort," but also a reminder of the betrayal at the beginning of the poem, and submission, and an element of death and madness. Bogan has used this image in another poem and we are reminded of the "stony wings and bleak glory" which "battle" the dreams of the speaker in "Late" (39) and the earth there which she finds "harrowed and wild." If there is reconciliation at the ending of "Summer Wish" it is in the fact that the two voices have acknowledged each other and speak finally, and for a moment, as one.

"The Crossed Apple" (45), which also was first published in Dark Summer, is a ballad, and one of the small group of poems Bogan wrote in a light tone about a subject that is deadly serious. The ballad is about a mature woman and a maid, or a mother and a daughter, or the poet's divided self. It is about passion and knowledge, deceit and death. It is filled with symbols from myth, fairy tales, religion, magic. The acceptance of an apple by Aphrodite, the goddess of love, led eventually to the Trojan War. Snow White is tempted by her jealous and wicked stepmother, who wants her to die, to eat the poisoned half of the apple. Bruno Bettelheim has noted that in "Snow White," the apple symbolizes not just jealousy between mothers and daughters but something else they have in common and which is much more

deeply felt--"their mature sexual desires" (213). Eve uses an apple to tempt Adam, but in religious iconography the apple also symbolizes the mother's breast. The "crossed apple" evokes many symbolic meanings, but perhaps most important in this poem, life as a cross, a test. Bogan's five pips suggest the five senses, the human body, but also the pentacle which when pointed down or planted, which the pips will be if they are used to "breed," symbolizes witchcraft and black magic.

Contrasts which are epitomized in the mature woman and the maid, knowledge and innocence, death and life, are repeated throughout the poem. The speaker's orchard is well known, "Of wide report," yet the apple she offers is from a "tree yet un beholden, / Where two kinds meet"--not the tree of traditional religious symbols--a secret tree. Perhaps it is the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The pips from the apple can breed the safe warmth but dangerous passion of the fire, or the cool protection but darkness of the shade. The most brilliant paradox, however, is in the red and white: the oxymorons "Sweet Burning" and "Meadow Milk." It is partly because of Petrarchan conceits such as these that some critics see Elizabethan influences in Bogan's poetry (Ivor Winters 31; Theodore Roethke 87). But, also, the rhythm of this poem is reminiscent of seventeenth-century



lyrics, George Herbert's "Praise (I)" (79) and "The Search" (168), for example. Yet here, as always, when using the form or rhetorical devices of another poet or another time, Bogan up-ends the original spirit, using the borrowed device for her own purposes.

Bogan's adherence to end-rhyme is slightly altered--with assurance and authority--in the first stanza. Internal rhyme is scattered throughout the poem. The alliteration of "red and russet," "green and golden," "sour and sweet," and the parallelism of the series soften the contrasts seductively.

The light tone of the poem emphasizes its opposite, "shade" and "darkness." The "darkness at the root" is set deceptively in a series of "tastes": "Blossom," "sun," "air," "rain," "dew," and finally and more seriously, "The earth we came to, and the time we flee / The fire and the breast . . .," birth, death, sexual passion and motherhood. Yet the tone of the poem is gentle, enticing, and utterly manipulative to the last words: "I claim the white part, maiden, that's for me. / You take the rest." The speaker is wonderfully wicked. In eight short stanzas Bogan has recreated the ancient act of subtle, cool betrayal: a mother's betrayal of her daughter, a woman's betrayal of herself.

Compared to the earlier poems in which Bogan openly acknowledges her dual self, especially "Summer Wish," "The Sleeping Fury" (78-9) is a poem of catharsis and release and it was treated as such by her close friends. Theodore Roethke, in his review of the poem, refers to it as an "address to the self as the soul's dark double" (86). During the fall of 1933, a time of intense introspection, when Bogan realized that her marriage to Raymond Holden was over, she noted in her journal:

For at my worst, I [am] certainly a fiend, a woman driven by all the assorted forces of a personal hell. And that is another admission that I have never been able to make before.

Let alone write down on paper (Box XX, f. 2). After relentless self-examination during her illness in 1934, Bogan has gazed into the eyes of her mother and can see, now, her own dark self. The "you" of the poem is as much herself as it is her mother. What she sees finally is no longer wild and frightening, her earlier "Medusa," but a Fury subdued, sleeping like a child.

The poem was partly inspired by Bogan's having seen in Rome at the Museo Nazionale delle Terme, "L'Erinni Addormentata," or "The Sleeping Fury," which is a relief sculpture portraying a beautiful female head, eyes closed, lips half-opened in sleep (Frank, Portrait 242).

A reproduction of this relief was placed on the dust jacket of the book, The Sleeping Fury. In Bogan's papers, on the first page of the drafts of the poem, she has written just under and to one side of the title, as if she might use it as part of the title:

" - Megaera - " (Box XI, f. 62). The Greek Furies, who pursued sinners on the earth were three: Tisiphone, Alecto, and Megaera. (Hamilton, p. 40) Of the three Furies, or Erinyes, the Megaera was the jealous fury, particularly determined to punish sexual crimes--a fit description for the Fury in Bogan's poem. (In one line of the poem, Bogan refers to her fury as an "avenger" and so, for a moment she combines Megaera and Tisiphone - the avenger.)

The poem is very difficult to understand without some knowledge of Bogan's personal experience. The Fury, like May Bogan and like the Fury Bogan has come to recognize in herself, is a liar, a coward, cruel, a scourge, out for sexual intrigue. But in telling this Bogan alludes to experiences in her life about which the reader can only guess. For example, in stanza seven, "the two who for peace tenderly turned to each other" are probably Bogan and her husband. In stanza nine, I suspect that the masculine pronoun again refers to Holden: she is the "scourge," he is the "hunted."

Throughout the poem Bogan seems to be blending her childhood experiences with her mother and the sado-masochism in her own marriage.

It is only in the first and final stanzas that we are not reminded of the fearful violence of the Fury. Typically, Bogan's images are formidable. "The days close to winter / Rough with strong sound . . ." evokes an ominous approach of darkness and cold. But the sound of the sea and the forest and the cold are juxtaposed with the sexual heat of the "flames" of the Fury's torches--". . . lit by others, / Ripped by the wind, in the night. . . ." We see the inhuman and pathetic terror of inevitable violence in "The black sheep for sacrifice / Huddle together. . . ." The speaker cannot get rid of the Fury, for even though the knife is "whetted and plunged" she remains unappeased, unaltered, the "avenger," who "does not move from my side." Images which are familiar in Bogan's poetry reappear here, "the broken light," "the mask, sly, with slits at the eyes." A central and unforgettable image of maternal violation appears in this poem--"The milk is cold in the jars."

What is important in the poem is that the speaker looks upon the Fury, who is reminiscent of the earlier "Medusa," but whose hair is "no longer in the semblance of serpents" as a child alone and asleep. "You lie in

sleep and forget me. / Alone and strong in my peace, I  
look upon you in yours." The emphasis is on separation  
and surrender.

After this poem, Bogan's Fury was not silenced, but  
she was subdued and Bogan seemed to accept her dark self,  
her shadow, as a child. Aeschylus called the Furies  
"Children of Eternal Night," and Sophocles, "Daughters of  
Earth and Shadow" (Walker 327). Bogan's child-Fury is  
haunting and sad.

Eliot wrote in "East Coker," "So here I am, in the  
middle way, having had twenty years - . . .

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind  
of failure

Because one has only learnt to get the better  
of words

For the thing one no longer has to say. . . .

(V. 3-6)

For Louise Bogan, "The Sleeping Fury" marked a turning  
point in her poetic production. After 1937 there were  
fewer occasions when she allowed her personal and  
emotional experience to become again a "burden" for which  
she sought both order and release. In 1935, soon after  
her most serious emotional breakdown, she wrote to Morton  
Zabel:

The reconciliation of the warring elements in my own nature was effected in such an unconscious and unknowable Jungian manner that I have become rather impatient with surrogates for religion, and life-lines and rocks of ages and snug harbors and other dogmatic frameworks (Letters 83-4).

But eleven years later, in October, 1946, she wrote to Rolf Humphries:

. . . - No creative work in five years! "No wonder you are calm," as you said to me once," . . . the daemon has been silenced, and whatever silenced it is sitting pretty."

Well, it looks as though the calm were healing up. I don't really take much pleasure in reading, any more. I get restless and guilty. So little time left, before decay sets in!" (Letters 255)

What she had hoped had been a reconciliation of her "warring elements" seemed now to be an uneasy calm which was irritated anew by her fears of the passage of time, of aging, and of death. Unlike Eliot, Bogan did not try "to get the better of words" for something she no longer had to say. She knew that she had not yet said all that she had to say, but for reasons which we will never know,

she could not bring herself to say it. She wrote few poems during the remaining years of her life: some express moments of diversion, or of reconciliation; some, which are among her best poems, express her dark emotions unappeased.

In February, 1937 Bogan wrote to Edmund Wilson that "The Dream" was "just hot from the Muse . . . I really did have this dream" (Letters 158<sup>n</sup>). "The Dream" (103) is another transcription of Bogan's dual self into a poem, but she did not publish the poem until it was included in her collection Collected Poems in 1954. On rare occasions Bogan discussed her poems with her close friends, especially with Rolf Humphries, but also for a time with Theodore Roethke, Edmund Wilson, and later May Sarton. But at her readings and when she taught poetry her comments about her own poetry were scarce. While a poet's comments about her poems are not necessarily reliable or definitive, because this poem is a record of an actual dream which is filled with archetypal imagery, in this case the poet's own interpretation is interesting.

In August, 1954 Bogan wrote to May Sarton:

"The Dream," by the way, is a poem of victory and of release. The terrible power, which may v. well be the psychic demon, is tamed and placated, but NOT destroyed; the halter and the bit were already there, and something was done about control and understanding (Letters 369).

The "psychic demon" is a good description of her "terrible horse," an almost universal symbol of the unconscious, and for Jung, a symbol of "the mother within us" (Cirlot 152). In the poem, "Fear kept for thirty-five years" and "retribution" are direct references to Bogan's feelings about her mother. It is interesting that Bogan insists that the psychic force is "tamed and placated" but "not destroyed," for this is the "victory" initiated by "another woman" who is, no doubt, the wise and healthy aspect of the poet's self. The glove from the speaker's right hand which she offers to the horse is a fascinating example of the archetypal symbols in dreams, for the glove for the right hand is a symbol not only of disarming oneself before a more powerful figure, but also of "candor and frank disclosure" (Cirlot 119). And for Bogan, the right hand is an instrument for her poetry. Here in the poetry is the "control" and "understanding." Now the horse, "like a lion in a



legend"--no doubt Androcles and the Lion--"Came to my side, and put down his head in love." The poem is beautifully compressed into four short stanzas with an abab rhyme until the final stanza, the dénouement, where the rhyme changes to abba. Now, "the glove" and "love" embrace the "right hand" and "understand." As one long statement, separated only by commas, the final stanza by its form conveys, without analysis, catharsis and peace.

In 1966, responding to a student who was writing a thesis on Bogan's poetry, Bogan referred to the poem as:

. . . the actual transcript of "a nightmare,"  
but there is reconciliation involved with the  
fright and horror. It is through the  
possibility of such reconciliations that we, I  
believe, manage to live (Letters 368).

Here, Bogan places herself at a distance from the poem, speaking of it with humor, and giving it a universality which is quite appropriate. Perhaps Bogan was willing to discuss this poem because the dream was greatly reassuring to her, and on this occasion, quite without interference from her conscious mind, her dark side was acknowledged and accepted with confidence and compassion.

Bogan wrote "The Meeting" (129) in the spring of 1956 and referring to it in a letter to Wheelock, she wrote: "It certainly is the record of a recurring

subconscious experience, concerning which I used to suffer a good deal; but now I am only curious and puzzled" (Letters 308). With this poem, as with "The Dream," Bogan has, herself, although here perhaps unwittingly, provided an analysis. In a letter to Glenway Wescott in 1957, she wrote, about "The Meeting":

It came out practically whole, although a few shifts had to be made. The change in the dream-creature's personality had taken place; the creature started out by being Raymond at his most guileful, of course. And I always thought of the locale at the bottom of the dream (Letters 309<sup>n</sup>).

Then in April 1958, also to Wescott:

Now the encounter has faded out a little. - I wait and wait to meet my personus and the Wise Old Man, and other Jungian archetypes; but to little purpose. For one thing, I can't stand Wise Old Men. . . . (Letters 309<sup>n</sup>)

Although Bogan rarely repeated the forms of her poems, the form of "The Meeting" is similar to that of both "Medusa" and "Statue and Birds" and like "Medusa," especially, it is an expression of a revelation which was only partly understood by the conscious mind.

It is quite possible that Bogan suspected that in this dream she had met what she called her "personus," for she knew that her Jungian personus/animus was male, unlike her shadow which is of the same sex as its owner. But her reluctance to accept or perhaps to admit the depth of the revelation in this dream is not surprising. If she allowed her vision to touch the deepest core of her inmost self, we are rarely told about it directly. Jung considered the animus an archetype--"the psychopomp, a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious and a personification of the latter" (Aion: Aspects of the Feminine 173).

Though the shadow is a motif as well known to mythology as anima and animus, it represents first and foremost the personal unconscious, and its content can therefore be made conscious without too much difficulty. In this it differs from anima and animus for whereas the shadow can be seen through and recognized fairly easily, the anima and animus are much further away from consciousness and in normal circumstances are seldom if ever realized . . . But when [the shadow] appears as an archetype, it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his

nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil (Aspects of the Feminine 10).

A Jungian interpretation of Bogan's poetry is not pertinent in all but a very few of her poems, but because she herself suggested the possibility of such an interpretation of "The Meeting" it would be negligent to ignore it. In the light of her other poems about her dual self it is safe to say that "The Meeting" is one of the most dramatic accounts of her confrontations with her unconscious. She sees this creature who is masculine, as her animus would be, as a "symbol of loss": he smiles, but his smile disappears; he speaks, but only to say "farewell"; his eyes shift and he looks toward a place that is "No world of men"--a terrible place; he greets her "eye to eye" as if they knew each other, but it is a "bitter compliance" because as soon as he takes her hand he drops it. Many of Bogan's poems are expressions of grief because of the loss of a lover, the loss of control over her body, the loss of innocence. In this poem what she seems to suggest is that she cannot truly grasp the vision of her unconscious, her animus, because if she did she would lose herself.

When she was sixty-nine years old Bogan wrote a sad appendix to "The Sleeping Fury." "Little Lobelia's Song" (132) is the first of the final "Three Songs" in The Blue Estuaries--those she considered to be poems of "dream and aberration" (Letters 371). Beside the title of the poem on a manuscript copy of it, Bogan wrote "autonomous complex" (Box XI, f. 35). This notation suggests that she had been reading the works of Carl Jung who wrote about what he called the "autonomous complex":

. . . this dark side of the soul [that] does not come within the purview of consciousness, and therefore the patient cannot deal with it, correct it, resign himself to it, or renounce it, for he cannot be said to possess the unconscious impulses. By being repressed from the hierarchy of the conscious soul, they have become autonomous complexes which can be brought again under control by analysis of the unconscious, though not without great resistance (Collected Papers 377).

Bogan's notation beside the poem endorses her belief that, "the tap root of a work of art must plunge into feeling, even into unconscious and repressed feeling

and must make an impact, rather than either argue or explain" (Box XIV, f. 11).

"Little Lobelia's Song" is a short, rhymed, stanzaic lyric. It was written during a period of extreme emotional pain and depression when Bogan wept uncontrolledly during the mornings. In the poem, it is the child, Little Lobelia, who weeps. Unlike the speaker in "The Sleeping Fury" who addresses a symbol of her dark self, here, the poet's unconscious speaks to her. I am the child you once were, but now I am alone. I am innocent, and helpless, and you have abandoned me. So I weep. It is my tears you feel and see on your cheek. And it is my face you see when you look in the mirror. Give me back your sleep, for that is where I will be until you die. Or I shall weep. But this child is not so innocent and helpless as she seems at first to be. She accuses the poet of having abandoned her as Bogan herself was abandoned--"the milk is cold in the jars." And Little Lobelia's retribution is powerful: "This is my hand / Upon your mind."

In the other mythical or symbolic poems of the dual self, "Medusa" and "The Crossed Apple," where a mirror, according to tradition, would have been appropriate there was none. But here ". . . your

face / In the looking glass . . . is the face / My likeness has." Bogan comes face to face with her shadow--the child of herself--in this poem. The poem is a heartbreaking revelation that having seen the child-fury sleeping Bogan abandoned her, refusing her presence in herself and now the demanding, weeping child confronts her with her incapacity to feel and to give. Yet the poem is also an exquisitely sensitive presentation of the abandoned child and it is a revelation of the vulnerability of Bogan's psychological state during her last years that is probably as candid as anything else she ever said about herself in a poem.

The form of the poem "Psychiatrist's Song," (134) the second of the "Three Songs," makes it difficult to understand. Originally Bogan called the poem "Psychiatrist's Recitative and Aria" (Box XI, f. 56). The idea of a psychiatrist's song seems incongruous to some readers today whose trust in the psychiatric profession is not what it might have been thirty years ago and it is difficult to read the poem in sympathy with its original spirit. Bogan's faith in psychiatry is as much an aspect of her modernism as the many other characteristics of her work. Yet reading the poem now, we cannot help but see it as a measure of Bogan's

vulnerability and in that sense it is sad, but somehow it is dated and not universal.

The first half of the poem is the voice of the psychiatrist saying that he or she hears the deepest secrets of the patient, who we know to be Bogan, for we recognize "those people," "that house," "that evening," "the dividing window sash," and "hours when murderous wounds are made, / Often in joy." We are not sure that the patient has actually said these things because ". . . even the exquisite eye of the soul / Cannot completely see." But the suggestion is that nevertheless the psychiatrist knows that "they are there."

The second half of the poem seems to be the healing which comes after the revelation. This part of the poem is also written in the first person, so we must assume that the psychiatrist and the patient become one as the psychiatrist not only supports the patient, but goes with her on a journey which is at first frightening and strange. It is a journey on the ocean in a "boat without oars" toward a florid, tropical land which is, initially, fearful and suggests sexual emotions and also a place that is unreal and grotesque. The ocean was a negative image for Bogan. Here, perhaps it symbolizes boundless space. When the boat drifts up to shore, the speaker steps out and walks "fearlessly through ripples of both



water and sand" until: ". . . I am on firm dry land,  
with, closely waiting, / A hill all sifted over with  
shade / Wherein the silence waits." A "landlocked vista"  
was "peace in the heart" for Bogan (Journey 164). The  
poem ends:

Farewell, phantoms of flesh and of ocean!

Vision of earth

Heal and receive me. (29-31)

Bogan thought that she had written the poem "Masked Woman's Song" (136) in about 1940 (Box XI, f. 38), but it was not published until it appeared in The New Yorker as the last of the "Three Songs" shortly before the publication of The Blue Estuaries. The fact that Bogan referred to the poem as "a fairly old erotic song" yet later she thought it belonged to the same "world . . . of dream and aberration" of the other two poems (Letters 371-2) suggests that she came to see the poem as a deeper revelation of herself than she had thought it was initially. What the speaker tells us about herself is absolute and terrible. Because of what she has seen, nothing can ever be the same again.

Masked Woman's Song

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

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

Now, having come face to face with her unconscious, her animus, although she wears a mask to keep this knowledge from others, she accepts her dark inner self. "Masked Woman's Song" is the final poem in The Blue Estuaries.

Reading the poems which reveal (most explicitly) Bogan's painful childhood memories and her dual self, one becomes familiar with the images she uses as symbols throughout her work. The house, the divided window sash, evening, autumn, all symbolize remembered abuse and pain, fear of abandonment, and loss of childhood innocence. The vernal equinox symbolizes dread of what is to come but also betrayal. Spring brings with it the promise of summer which is passion at its fullest expression although that, too, becomes betrayal. But spring and summer move quickly to the dreaded autumn and only rarely

to the death of winter. One sees in Bogan's poetry that the blending of past memories with the anticipation of what is to come is much more dreadful than the event, the arrival, which rarely happens. The equinox is terrible because it lies. But also, the moment of balanced light and the image of balance itself is often an expression of madness, of something unreal or deranged. Flames, torn fire symbolize sexual experiences, violent betrayal, and absolute terror. Eyes unmet, shifting eyes, masks with slits at the eyes symbolize both lies and a fear of revelation. The ocean is a negative symbol and is often placed in opposition to dry land, hills at the edge of a horizon, interior darkness lit by a lamp which are peace and safety. Trees and shadows, blossoms and weeds symbolize the passage of time, but also the division between life and death and the division within the self. Stones and rocky hills symbolize isolation and death. Hands express the will as opposed to the heart, but often they are the instruments of creation, and control. What is most important about Bogan's symbols is that they act. The precise attention to detail in her visual imagery and her choice of words, compressed to the furthest extent, create the immediate projection of emotion which she believed must be the essence of formal lyric poetry.

B. She Had a Madness in Her for Betrayal.

Before the publication of her first book of poems, Body of This Death, in 1923, Bogan had published poems in many of the prestigious journals of the day: The New Republic, Vanity Fair, Voices, The Liberator, Rhythmus, The Literary Review of the New York Evening Post, in Harriet Monroe's Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, and in the "little" New York magazine, The Measure (Frank, Portrait 46, 47). By this time severe, highly compressed poetry by women, such as that by H. D. and Marianne Moore, had been given some positive attention. But these years were also the peak of Edna St. Vincent Millay's career. One of the editors of The Measure, Frank Ernest Hill, considered Edna St. Vincent Millay to be "just now the most interesting person in American poetry" (25).

Millay's early lyrics were often about a young woman's fall from romantic innocence into the disillusion of lost love, but the emphasis was on the poet's hidden strength and her capacity to flaunt the traditional role of the forsaken woman with bravura, indeed sardonic flippancy. While Bogan admired some of the poetry of Elinor Wylie, the later poetry of Sara Teasdale, and even some of Edna Millay's early poetry, she deplored poetry by women, including Millay, which expressed coy, winsome

pinning over unrequited love, however bravely or flippantly it was made. Bogan's quip for such poets was the "O God, the pain girls" (qtd. in Adams 111). If women insisted on writing about their lost loves Bogan much preferred poems about the experienced modern woman as aggressor, the "to-hell-my-love-with-you-stuff" which she found in some of Dorothy Parker's poems in Enough Rope (Letters 30).

Although there are no recorded details of the incident, knowing Bogan's quick wit and her competitive nature it is interesting to see an epigram she wrote obviously in response to Millay's "First Fig." Bogan's perspicacity in her choice from Millay's poetry is quite wonderful since the little poem has become almost a symbol of Millay's early work:

My candle burns at both ends;

It will not last the night;

But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends -

It gives a lovely light!

(qtd. in Frank, "A Doll's Heart" 136)

Bogan's epigram, which she called "Pyrotechnics" was published in The Liberator in 1923:

Mix prudence with my ashes;

Write caution on my urn:

While life foams and flashes

Burn, bridges, burn!

(qtd. in Frank, "A Doll's Heart" 136)

"Pyrotechnics," even in its humorous exaggeration, illustrates immediately the difference between the two poets.

Bogan made her poetry different by her refusal to pine, however flippantly, by the serious tone of her poems, and, most important, by the action of her language and the logic imbued within it, an early sign of her intellectual strength. Bogan, in her poems of this period, is less likely to lament the loss of her lover than she is to attack herself for allowing her body to direct her behavior. She takes vengeance, in poetry, against the betrayer--more often her own heart, than the man. Also, her early poems of betrayal in love are frequently another aspect of her divided self, the division between her heart and her will, most passionately expressed in the poem, "The Alchemist" (15). "Ad Castitatem" (8), in which chastity is invoked with sad futility; "Portrait" (11), in which the speaker has

nothing more to fear from men because she is dead, literally or figuratively; "The Romantic" (12), in which a young man has foolishly believed his lover to be faithful and chaste, but is told by the speaker of the poem: "Another man will tell you what she was"; and "The Frightened Man" (6), in which the young woman is revealed to her lover as the opposite of what he expected, express the bitterness of lost innocence, and often the duplicity or betrayal on the part of the young woman rather than the man. All of these poems were published in 1922 and 1923.

"Chanson un Peu Naive" (23), published in 1923, is a song of pride and self-delusion. The speaker regrets deeply the fact that she has allowed herself such licence sexually. But she cannot change the fact that it is done and she makes the situation worse by pretending that she does not care: "So from strength concealed / She makes her pretty boast." But now she must live with her lost innocence and her duplicity. What the speaker sings in her song is increasingly contradicted by the refrains at the ends of the stanzas. The refrain at the end of the first stanza is cool and proud; at the end of the second stanza, it is an admonition to break free from her heart's subjection; and at the end of the final stanza,

it is a sad admission of her heart's betrayal of herself:  
 "Cry, song, cry, / And hear your crying lost."

Another poem, published in Body of this Death, in which Bogan attacks the vulnerability of her heart, herself, and women generally, is "Men Loved Wholly Beyond Wisdom" (16). These men are terrified by the vision of the love for them which they can see in the woman's eyes--"like a fire in a dry thicket." But the speaker, after describing the intense passion women should never allow men to see, tells us that her heart, "trembling" in the effort to do it, has learned to be subtle and wise, "To love never in this manner!"

The image she creates now is extraordinary. Her heart, like a "thing gone dead and still" will listen to the "prisoned cricket"--a symbol of what her heart has become, and of herself, the poet--shaking its "terrible" concealed music in the cold and impermeable granite hill. The solitude and submission are terrible.

"Knowledge" (9), published first in Poetry in 1922, is one of Bogan's perfect lyrics. It sums up anything else she would say about lost innocence, but also its compression and sophistication announce her individuality and, indirectly, her disinclination to attach herself to the style of the poetry of some of her female contemporaries. The language of the first stanza,



reminiscent of the seventeenth century, is formal and bitter and rich. The second stanza gives ease and acceptance and submission to what cannot be changed. The shadow and the sound of trees are the knowledge of human experience and mortality.

Bogan's work moved away from that of the other women poets partly because she deliberately developed her own style, but also because she openly acknowledged early in her poetry that aspect of herself which was not part of the traditional and patriarchal vision of woman--virgin, mother, whore--but which Bogan knew to be part of her unconscious self: her fiend, her fury, her madness.

The Greek prophetess Cassandra had the power to foretell the future, but because of Apollo's curse on her, no one would listen to what she said and her prophecies were thought to be demonic and mad. With a marvelous sweep of courage and defiance, Bogan sees herself as Cassandra and in her poem, "Cassandra" (33), she announces that it is the madness within her that chooses her voice--and makes her threatening to others. Because she has been betrayed, she is different from other women. She will not be a mother to a child, nor a comforter to men, but "the shrieking heaven lifted over men." Here, Bogan not only declares the dark source of her poetry, she also challenges the expectations for

women poets, that they will write what others have determined is appropriate for them or endure rejection and be silent. She sets herself apart. She is alone. And even if it means that she is utterly rejected, she will speak out what she knows to be true.

"Song for a Slight Voice" (47) is surely the most ironic title of all of Bogan's poems. While the speaker begins conditionally, "If ever I render back your heart . . .," she has begun to "render" her lover's heart, not only into poetry but also, through the poetry, to try to separate it from her own heart. Her lover's heart has been for her not only "delight," but "plunder"--something she has taken by force. When she renders it, as she is doing now, "It will be bound with the firm strings / That men have built the viol under." Her lover's heart will be bound and tortured with compression as this poem about it is.

The tone of violence in the first stanza changes to bitter irony in the second. The lover's heart was "stubborn" and "piteous" and while it "bent" to be "the place where music stood"--while the lover tried to be near the source of her poetry, which is the speaker's own heart, "some shaken instrument / Stained with the dark of resinous blood"--the implication is that he could neither be in that place nor understand what she said.

But now, in the third stanza, her lover's "stubborn, piteous heart . . . Will find its place . . . Will hear the dance, O be most sure." He bent to hear her heart before and could not, but now he will hear it as he hears this poem, because she will lay his bound heart, which is the poem, upon her own heart, "the curved wood of the viol / . . . the struck tambour," the instrument of this poem. In rendering back her lover's heart, she has, ironically, laid it upon her own and in an act of violent retribution she has joined their hearts as they were not joined before.

"Song for a Slight Voice" is one of Bogan's most intense and compressed poems. The rhymed stanzas, the slow, deliberate rhythm, the subtle iambic beginnings in the first two stanzas which change to the trochees in the first words of the first three lines of the final stanza weave together the embedded emotion in the words. The poem defies explication, in fact to describe it is almost a violation of it, because it is for the reader a vision, a deeply etched emblem of one cruelly bound heart placed upon another, a musical instrument stained with the "dark" of the blood of both.

"For a Marriage" (43) is another poem of the same period in which Bogan speaks of the heart, but this time it is the heart of the woman. This poem may well have

its source, as Elizabeth Frank suggests, in Sidney's "My True Love Hath My Heart and I Have His" (53), but while I suspect Sidney of deviousness which goes beyond "a pretty trope of sentimental exchange" as Elizabeth Frank calls it (Portrait 122), the overt violence in Bogan's poem far exceeds the subtle hint of perversity in Sidney's sonnet. (The title of Sidney's poem is "The Bargain.")

Bogan's poem is filled with words of darkness: "dangerous," "sharp-edged," "deep-hidden," "sullen," "forbidden," "tougher," "barbed," "blood," and finally and most unexpected in a poem for a marriage, "solitude." The intensity of the two images, the double-edged sword and the barbed heart is too great for one poem and, perhaps for this reason, readers are puzzled by it and interpret it differently. In the intimacy of marriage, the husband has seen an aspect of his wife which has been forbidden to all other eyes. Now, according to the speaker, he will know what he must do. He must have the toughness to clasp on her "barbed heart / That once shed its own blood / In its own solitude." The proposal is bitter and cruel.

Many of the poems in Dark Summer give out the air of madness and derangement. In this collection, Bogan's natural ability to juxtapose antithetical images seems to race with an excess of the bizarre. The title poem,

"Dark Summer" (41), in the antithesis in the title itself, and its setting of ominous darkness and almost sulfurous density of the air before a storm breaks through, suspends all that is normal:

The apples that hang and swell for the  
late comer,  
The simple spell, the rite not for our word,  
The kisses not for our mouths, - light the  
dark summer. (4-6)

In "Dark Summer," the madness, the signs, "light" or authenticate the darkness.

"Feuer Nacht" (36) is a poem of the shock of revelation, of violent betrayal, of innocence destroyed. The deceptive "leaf-veined fire," having sworn to burn just a little and then stop--"To touch at the sedge / And then run tame"--has burned everything. The eye has been betrayed, but it has also allowed itself to be a willing victim. Having seen whatever it is that cannot be named, but is symbolized by fire, the eye turns from "its feast," a vision it was drawn to, yet knew was terrible. But it continues to watch from a hidden place, its "lair." Thus the eye (the I) betrays itself and in fear and guilt becomes one with the flame. Here are known images: "shuttered eye," "the thicket," "deepest shade," and "bare rock" which in earlier poems have conveyed

terror, betrayal, isolation. But now they are joined with the image of sexual experience, the "leaf-veined fire," which tears down the page with a swiftness that is breathtaking, until--"Sworn to lick at a little, / It has burned all."

The poem "Late" (39) is an extraordinary realization of madness. In this poem the speaker addresses herself as "you." In her dreams, the cormorant, another predator, "screams" and the paradoxical "stony wings" and "bleak glory" battle against themselves. Now, after the experience described in "Feuer Nacht," the speaker is no longer a child but, implicitly, a woman "sullen and deranged" who, looking upon the earth, finds it agonizing and "wild." Having seen this sight in her dreams, when she looks at the bare cliff, the unchanged sky, it is only to mock them because she knows now that the reality of her unconscious is more powerful than reality itself. There is a helpless familiarity with madness here.

But some of the spirit of "Cassandra" reappears in "Fiend's Weather" (49). The speaker addresses her "fiend" as the contradictory "embittered joy." The madness she feels is terrifying, yet there is also a wild, exuberant joy in the unleashing of the fiend, the letting go, the howling of "foul winds from secret quarters." The obscenities inferred in the word "foul"

are released utterly in the rhyming "howl." The astrological signs are right for the fiend--"This is your night, my worthy fiend"--and despite the fact that "In this wind to wrench the eye / And curdle the ear," nothing in the real world appears to have changed: "to-morrow," the stones "in true-colored fields / Will glitter for your eyes." The hyphenated words symbolize the joining of the unreal and the real. This time, the real world, and poetry, will have been affected by the power of madness.

"Fiend's Weather" lifts the reader out from the terrifying madness in "Feuer-Nacht" and "Late." Bogan is beginning to observe herself using her demonic source of poetry and almost to rejoice in a fiery, vigorous expression of wild emotion.

Louise Bogan's daughter, Maidie Alexander, studied singing at the Julliard School of Music in 1935 and 1936 and often practised at home accompanied on the piano by her mother. Elizabeth Frank notes that in a letter to Rolf Humphries Bogan describes the "arrival" of the poem, "M. Singing" (82), after she had listened to Maidie sing Fauré's Après un Rêve--"which has a rather punk lyric . . . ending on the word mysterieuse - se, [sic] but by the time that final non-mute e has sounded in the

air, one is positively cold with excitement. - Or maybe it's only me" (qtd. in Portrait 263).

Bogan's description of her reaction, "cold with excitement," is strange and disturbing, but it explains the inspiration for her poem. Maidie, in her innocence and fresh voice and with Faure's melancholy words, has unleashed "Those beings without heart or name. / Those creatures both corrupt and proud" from what has now become, in the poetry, a familiar image of madness and the unconscious, "the sunk land of dust and flame." Bogan seems to have experienced the same exhilaration as that expressed in "Fiend's Weather." Again, with absolute assurance, she lifts out madness to a "space beneath our sky."

In another, very beautiful poem, published later in Poems and New Poems (1941) Bogan reverses the movement out from sleep and the wild unconscious to a reflection on it. Bogan took her title, "Come, Sleep . . ." (108), from John Fletcher's poem: "Come, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving . . ." (209). While Fletcher longed for sleep to give him some release from care, Bogan knows that sleep unleashes her shadow, that "whispers in the glassy corridor" trouble her dreams. She includes in her list of "forms and appetites," "the palm's love." A natural caesura occurs here and a break in the list,



because there is no modifier for "love." The pause draws the reader's attention to the "palm's love" and creates a variation in the rhythm of the poem that is quite beautiful. The speaker expresses no identification with the "selfless lover." She knows that the "shadows of these forms and appetites" do not haunt their sleep, their dreams. Her life, and her memories, on the other hand, "the dark turreted house," are reflected in the "depthless stream" of her unconscious. Sleep for Bogan cannot be Fletcher's "sweet deceiving."

In 1959 Bogan wrote about Emily Dickinson:

Step by step, she advances into the terror and anguish of her destiny; she is frightened, but she holds fast and describes her fright. She is driven to the verge of sanity, but manages to remain, in some fashion, the observer and recorder of her extremity. Nature is no longer a friend, but often an inimical presence.

Nature is a haunted house. And - a truth even more terrible - the inmost self can be haunted

(Alphabet 100).

Bogan's ability to observe and record her extremity allowed her to see and to understand Dickinson as she did. And Bogan can write with the assurance of experience that her "inmost self" is haunted.

Louise Bogan rejected orthodox religion and she also rejected existentialism because she believed absolutely that there are aspects of life over which one has no control and which, thus, make up what she often referred to as the "mystery" of life (Journey 67-8). Over the years she created various amusing but also serious excuses for her behavior. In "Second Song" (37) she equates passion with black magic and renounces it because, she suggests, it made her into a witch. In "The Daemon" (114) the speaker asks, "Must I tell again / In the words I know . . ." the bitter memories of childhood? The Daemon answers: "Why not? / . . . Once more." Her Daemon gives her permission to tell her pain and grief again. Although part of the mystery Bogan spoke about was the fear that she could not always control herself--her passion for betrayal, or the terrors and anxieties that haunted her--she never ceased looking for answers or explanations, or for means of control. During her later years she developed a rather curious fascination with astrology, which was influenced by her friend, Robert Phelps, and probably indirectly by Yeats (Letters 317). Yet in her poems of superstition and astrology, while she hopes for good fortune, the signs are never right. In her poetry, at least, she could not allow astrology to appease her dark fate.

"The Sorcerer's Daughter," (125) and "The Young Mage" (126) are two poems about superstition and magic which appeared for the first time in The Blue Estuaries. In "The Sorcerer's Daughter," it is because she is the sorcerer's daughter that the speaker can recognize the signs and symbols of her fate. Perhaps also, it is because she is the sorcerer's daughter that her fate is sealed. At first all the signs for a romance were right: scars on corresponding thumbs, their two heights in proportion, old remembered songs, the meeting almost, but not missed. Bogan creates the "full fillip" of good fortune in the rhythm of the first two stanzas; the jazz-like syncopation of "It was in the stars, on the cards, in the hand; / It couldn't have been otherwise" is wonderfully evocative of sexual intrigue.

But the poem is divided by the two lines at the center where we see that this was an imagined meeting-- "The train pulled out of the station . . . / The boat pulled away from the wharf . . ." And now, "But this series of events had no good auguries about it . . ." The inflated emotions of the first part of the poem diminish until "With all the marks of luck changing," the speaker begins to realize that the good luck was "crossed from the start" and therefore she sees it as her own.

Bogan described "The Young Mage" as "added lyric notes" to "The Sorcerer's Daughter" (Letters 317), as if to substantiate her own anticipation of inevitable bad luck. At first, despite suggestions of ominous portents: eagles, serpents, the vine's "triumph over marble"--life over art, and the wind at night, the mage said, "Make free," and "Delight." Then, not so confident, he said "Hold / Fast" to the two metals of alchemy--silver and gold. And, finally, he said, "Beware" of the "round web"--the astrologers wheel and of "the comet's hair." The comet's hair is another subtle appearance of a Medusa in Bogan's poetry. A comet was thought to be a strand of the Medusa's hair appearing in the sky as the world was slowly darkened by her shadow (Walker 368). The young mage knows the poet's fate.

Following "The Sorcerer's Daughter" and "The Young Mage" in The Blue Estuaries are two more poems in which Bogan writes about observing signs and symbols which are invariably wrong and have determined her unhappy fate. In "March Twilight" (127) the speaker expresses a perverse delight in misfortune. Here again is the "shadow" of the "lying equinox" of "Summer Wish." The whole poem is a series of paradoxes which creates a balance similar to the balanced light at the equinox

which is, for Bogan, an inexplicable symbol of disturbance.

Bogan wrote "July Dawn" (128) in the summer of 1955 (Letters 308). But an entry in her journal twenty years earlier, on September 5, 1934, suggests what may have been, partly at least, the source of this poem:

From the disordered bed in the little wooden shack I saw the morning. The new moon, on its path, moving slowly upward into the thin lightening sky, which would dissolve it, the sun rising almost immediately into clear lightness. But it all seems part of a crazed, provisional, disordered world. - the whole dawn had a look of quiet madness, of a subtle idiocy. What were these idiot lights shaped like scythes and saucers that moved and rose and flew? (Box X, f. 3)

It was a new moon Bogan saw on the morning of 1934; nevertheless, "the whole dawn" had a look of "quiet madness." In the poem, the speaker initially mistakes the "waning crescent" for a new moon, but having recognized it for what it is, describes it as a symbol of "dis-hope"--the reversal or negation of what it might have been. The thesis again is that all symbols seem lucky until she reads them correctly. Even the light of

a July dawn moves down to the "dark." The sickle shape of the moon, a reminder of time and death, moves "Swift to the cluster of evenings / When curved toward the full it sharpens." "Dis-hope" and the fate brought on by unlucky symbols belong with betrayal and darkness.

Any suggestion that Bogan sought some religious or mystical resolution to the appalling, endless continuity of time, and the finality of death is dispelled in her poem "I Saw Eternity" (50). Her fierce, bitter denunciation of Henry Vaughan's "Eternity . . . Like a great ring of pure and endless light, / All calm, as it was bright . . ." is wonderful (345-6). Bogan's "cycle" of light languishes and weeps and, just as it has spoiled her mind, it will spoil the stomachs of the mice and the birds which will eat it. But with supreme defiance she offers a "crumb of Forever" to every miserable creature she can think of. The poem is deadly serious and, as she wrote in a letter to Ruth Benedict in December, 1928, it was written in a "mood of katharsis" (Letters 39). The release she creates here is magnificent.

Some years after writing the poem, when she was reading Aldous Huxley's Beyond the Mexique Bay, Bogan quoted in her journal Huxley's remarks about the first stanza of Vaughan's poem: "For all its beauty, the imagery is inappropriate. Eternity is an everlasting

present" (220). (The italics are Bogan's). Bogan wrote in the margin, "I felt and said this in the 'I Saw Eternity' poem" (Box XX, f. 4).

In Dark Summer, and in all of her collections of poetry thereafter, Bogan placed "I Saw Eternity" and "Come, Break with Time" (51) opposite each other. The tone of the two poems is different, but each complements the other and they belong together. "Come, Break with Time" is another dialogue between the will and the heart.

As the treacherous heart exhorts the proud will to break with time, the measured rhythm of its words paradoxically beats out the ticking of the clock, which is interrupted intermittently by full stops, like the last sporadic ticking of a clock that is about to stop, until the final stanza where the "rocks' speed," the "earth's heavy measure," the "buried seed / Draining out time's pleasure" bring the passage of time with the weight of "time's decrees" slowly to a complete stop. The final line is an invitation, and the beautiful oxymoron "cruel ease" must surely be death. For how else can we break with time?

Both Theodore Roethke (91) and Elizabeth Frank (Portrait 124), perhaps because they knew of Bogan's fear of death, have suggested that because of the ambiguity of the last line of the poem, it could mean something other

than death--perhaps the imagined stasis of her poems "Medusa" or "Simple Autumnal." But I think the finality of the preceding line: "Take time's decrees" precludes any ambiguity. Bogan has opened the poem into a meditation on time which is universal and which includes but goes beyond her personal experience. Here she allows the heart to tempt the will with death. "Come, Break With Time" is a lyric lovely in its simplicity and desolate in its recognition of the only real escape from time.

In 1935, when Bogan asked Rolf Humphries to return some of her letters and any poems in them, one of two poems he sent was "To My Brother Killed: Haumont Wood: October, 1918" (77). She could not remember having written it, let alone when (Letters 108). The poem is a formal elegy, but there is no turn at the end to consolation or even acceptance. Its slow beat is of grief over life as well as death and in that sense, it is a poem as much about herself as her brother who now, presumably, is at peace--which is of all things, she tells us in the poem, the one thing that does not remain.

But there is also in the poem a sense of communion with her brother--their shared experiences--which she does not name but implies. The visions she does describe are what she imagines he must have seen in France during



the war, and they are graphically evocative of the war. But the images of destruction also suggest the experiences she and her brother shared as members of the same family and the fact that she lives to affirm that these things endure. This feeling of communion with her brother and what they shared is something she acknowledges implicitly as an experience belonging only to them. Her brother was, to her, "masked and obscure," and if he had affected her life in a dramatic way, she never told about it. One senses, however, a strangely sad accusation in the poem, perhaps simply that she must endure what he has escaped by death. The poem is eloquent but, partly because of what she has left unsaid, it is also fearful.

Bogan wrote many poems about death in life, but she rarely wrote about the act of dying. Her poem "Eternity" is a fiercely bitter rejection of any contemplation of an existence after death. But in "Cartography" (107) she alludes to something which will "rise" beyond our death although we cannot see or know it now.

Bogan wrote out her life in metaphors and symbols which are not comparisons of one thing with another, but statements in which one thing is another. But in "Cartography" she uses similes: "Plain as the strength / Marked upon the leaf . . ." and "Mapped like

the great / Rivers. . . ." Here, she is writing about someone else, not herself, although she overtly shares the mortality of the person about whom she writes and in doing so she reveals an aspect of her personality which seldom appears. The poem gives out a generous, loving observation of someone sleeping, and perhaps dying, but more than that an identification with "the wiry brand / Of the life we bear" and a vision of something--not defined--"Beyond our fate / And distant from our eyes."

The language in the poem could not be more simple; the only words which are not monosyllables are: "artery," "running," "mortal," "wiry," "rivers," "distant," which enhance her title, "Cartography," and in sequence move from life to death to something beyond death. Because of the similes, "Cartography" is a more open poem than her usual compressed poems of metaphor/symbol. It is a tender, generous poem--the reality and the mystery of our mortality.

Since her death and the publication of some of the facts of Louise Bogan's life, the poems which seem to have become most easily accessible to readers and critics, or perhaps those which are immediately interesting in the light of her lived experience, are those specifically about her divided self. These poems appear periodically throughout her life. Her early poems

about lost love are often another expression of the division within the self, a conflict between the mind and the heart. In these poems the unruly heart is the betrayer, a part of the self which the speakers do not wish to be but over which they do not have complete control. But there are moments when the poet can impose control, as she does with elegant restraint in "Statue and Birds," or with violence in "Song for a Slight Voice."

Those poems which rise out from the darkest center of the unconscious, and which express rage and madness are announced in the poem "Cassandra." Like Cassandra, most of the speakers of madness reveal their emotions in complete isolation. The poems in which Bogan expresses her fascination with the stars and magic are all the more bitter because what seems initially something which might bring relief she turns, instead, into inevitable misfortune and betrayal. What is most apparent in the poems of superstition is the anticipation of betrayal. Time and death are forces of betrayal over which she has no control. But there are rare moments, as in "Cartography" when she seems to accept her own mortality and she expresses for the only time the possibility that something may exist beyond our human fate.

In Bogan's poems of her dual self, of her unconscious, of lost love, of madness and superstition, and of time and death, while there may be, for a moment, an expression of a need for reconciliation, or the relief of a healthy dream understood, or the singleness of spirit in the boast of madness, or an acceptance of mortality, her anticipation of a perverse duplicity in life, in human nature, and in herself seems to prevail. Yet, the bleakness of Louise Bogan's perception of her dark fate is both controlled by and written out with an aesthetic grace that creates its own release.

## CHAPTER III

## A Little Troubled Peace

In 1976, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane wrote about modernism:

The search for a style and a typology becomes a self-conscious element in the Modernist's literary production; he is perpetually engaged in a profound and ceaseless journey through the means and integrity of art. In this sense, Modernism is less a style than a search for a style in a highly individualistic sense . . . (29).

Louise Bogan's passion for order, and compression, and circumscription has led many readers of her work to consider it cold, chiseled, and closed when, in fact, it is wonderfully sensuous rhythmically and, in its revelation of emotion, a reflection of intellect, wit, candor, vulnerability, a love of mystery, and a capacity for insight that is rare. The paradox of her poetry is that it is in her most highly compressed poems that her contradictions are least likely to be resolved. If her circumscriptions prevent revelation, it is the absence of revelation which she presents in the poem--without explanation, or argument, or any defense of herself--and

this, of course, is the essence of her formalism. The variation of form and style in Bogan's poetry is quite unusual and reading her work as a whole, we see that throughout her career as a poet she was "engaged in a profound and ceaseless journey through the means and integrity of art."

Throughout her career, Bogan occasionally wrote poems which suggested, if not a belief in, at least a flirtation with magical powers other than religion. "The Alchemist" (15) which was first published in 1922 in The New Republic is, in its entirety, a metaphysical conceit: the speaker burned her life to find "the mind's avid substance"--obviously what would be for her the elixir of life--but instead, she found "unmysterious flesh . . . Passionate beyond the will."

While the speaker claims that she attempted to escape from desires of the flesh, and while for a moment we see, again, the "flawed light of love and grief," she is also describing the physical experience of sexual passion consummated: "I burned my life . . . I broke my life, to seek relief . . . With mounting beat the utter fire / Charred existence and desire. / It died low, ceased it sudden thresh . . ." The language is extremely sensuous and overtly sexual. "The Alchemist," is one of Bogan's best poems about the struggle between

the dual forces of the body and the mind--and the triumph of the body.

"Winter Swan" (29), which Bogan placed at the beginning of Dark Summer, heralds the darkness of the poems in this collection and her use in them of paradox, antithesis, and oxymoron. The title of the poem suggests immediately an association with death as do the deathly, grave-like "hollow garden" and "hollow earth" of the harvest done, in the first two lines of the poem. A swan is symbolic of the joining of the masculine--the long phallic neck, and the feminine--its rounded, silky body, alluding to complete satisfaction of desire. But the poet's song, the "swan's song," is also an allusion to desire which brings about its own death (Cirlot 322). So a swan may symbolize both passion satisfied and death. The "live blood" shouting in the mind and the "willing blood"--the fire of passion--burning in the breast, are set against and surrounded by the cold, hollow, dark earth. There is no suggestion that the heat in the mind and breast will overcome death, partly because the breast is "shut." The garden is "under the cloud," cold and dark; summer has disappeared. The pattern of rhyme in the first six lines, ababba, turns back into itself, just as the earth is turned, the fire is shut in the breast, and the garden is under the cloud.

At the center of the poem the speaker admonishes her "proud" self to speak. But what is spoken is a question: "Where lies the leaf-caught world once thought abiding, / Now but a dry disarray and artifice?" The speaker had thought that summer would endure, but it is gone, and winter is not only dry and disarrayed, but "artifice"--a ruse, a trick. For the winter hides, and the lines describing it surround or hide the description of the passion which shouts aloud in the mind and burns in the breast.

The first words of each of the ten lines of the poem are interesting alone: "It," "Beneath," "Within," "Under," "Shut," "But," "Where," "Now," "Here," "Bird." In this progression of words the hidden is revealed; but the revelation, the swan, is another artifice, a symbol, and the last word of the poem is "hiding." After the speaker asks her question, she points to the vision of the swan: "Here, to the ripple cut by the cold, drifts this / Bird, the long throat bent back, and the eyes in hiding." The preposition "to" beginning the phrase "to the ripple cut by the cold" draws our attention to the sound of the ripple and in such close conjunction to "artifice" seems to refer to the poem as an act of hiding or a ruse. The swan, a symbol of the poet, is proud, alone, and secretive.



So it is reasonable to suggest that the poem itself is a metaphor for the act of hiding. Whether what must be hidden is passion, as an attempt is made to hide it in the center of the poem, or the fear that passion will die, or the fear of passion itself, or simply the vulnerability of the speaker is difficult to know. Certainly the poem projects both a sense of death and of fearfulness because of the act of hiding.

Bogan wrote another poem specifically about the act of hiding in her poetry. "Hidden" was published in The New Yorker in 1936 (20) but she never included it in any collection of her poetry. The structure of the poem is wonderfully lyrical, and perhaps she decided too obviously so during a time when she denounced the women poets whom she considered to be "songbirds" (Letters 86). In each of the eight stanzas, the first and third lines are short and must be, by virtue of their syntax, spoken slowly, but the middle lines are long and become a rush of words. The speaker of the poem decides that "for safety's sake" she will make the "smallest possible compass for loveliness," but when someone, "you," tells her that the clever "archer" spots "tiniest marks," she changes her mind and decides to make her compass "secret and huge." In the structure of each stanza, the short slowly spoken first and third lines control and hide the

long middle line--secret and huge. The subject of the poem, which is the compass, is mentioned only once and thereafter is referred to as "it." Except that she says that the compass is "for loveliness," we are never told exactly what is within it or why its contents must be hidden.

Hidden

I thought to make  
The smallest possible compass for loveliness  
For safety's sake:

To cheat the skill  
Of any who might well measure or covet it  
Against my will.

"They have big eyes;  
This, if it be but a little seed-point of  
brightness,  
They will not prize."

But you said, "No;  
It is the little thing that the marksman  
looks for  
With his long spliced bow.

The arrow takes  
(With luck) a line into the the target's  
center,  
Holds there, and shakes.

If the archer be clever  
The landscape about him is scattered with  
tiniest marks  
Speared neatly forever."

What shall I do?  
It cannot be small, so that any casual arrow  
May rive it in two.

Beyond all size,  
Secret and huge, I shall mount it over  
the world,  
Before the bolt flies.

The "smallest possible compass" is a means of self-protection and of safety and by reducing it to an abstraction--"a little seed-point of brightness"--Bogan may be referring to her poetry which becomes so compressed that it no longer has meaning to anyone but herself. Still, the "clever marksman" may see it and break it in two, revealing the emotional conflict and vulnerability concealed within it. The alternative, to make the compass/poetry "huge" and universal, and mounted

over the world will save it from the flying "bolt" and also assure that it is hidden. The vulnerability of the poet is hidden in the lyrical rhythm and the tone of this poem. "Hidden" is a lovely poem and sad. But obviously Bogan preferred "Winter Swan" which is abstract and compressed and is, in fact, the "little seed-point of brightness" she rejects in "Hidden."

Another poem about hiding, "If We Take All Gold" (30) was first published in Nation in 1925 and then included in Dark Summer. The poem is a marvelous, desperate rush of words with no full stop until its end--except for the slight hesitation after the word "peace." The repetition of the word "under, under . . . under" is similar to the frenzied madness in Sylvia Plath's "Medusa":

I didn't call you.  
I didn't call you at all.  
Nevertheless, nevertheless  
You steamed to me over the sea,  
Fat and red, a placenta . . . (21-5).

The speaker in "If We Take All Gold" is not mad, but she is desperate to hide her treasure of sorrow, and the fact that it is treasure, expressed in the oxymoron, "sorrow's gold." Her contradictions are subtle. Even though she

will put the gold under "the shelved earth's crevice," she does not use the word bury. She will "Lay by the treasure." "If it be hid away / Lost under dark heaped ground" is wonderfully devious. The person who hides something does not lose it, even though it is out of sight. Although she says that if the gold is hidden "under the dark heaped ground"--which suggests that the dark ground of her unconscious is filled to overflowing--there will be "peace," there is barely a pause before she reiterates her frenetic act of hiding.

The poem suggests that Bogan wanted, at least with part of herself, to disperse her hoarded memories, her misery, but she knew perfectly well that she could not consciously and deliberately hide or, certainly, lose something in her unconscious. She was much too sophisticated in her knowledge of the unconscious to believe that. Bogan wanted peace, but here peace is secondary to the act of hiding her treasure of sorrow. And there is, after all, little difference between hiding and hoarding. The poem and its title, in the subjunctive mood (conditional on a wish for something that is not true) make very clear the ambivalence of her desire.

Three years earlier Bogan had written the poem, "Memory" (18), a rhymed lyric in three stanzas. "Memory" was published in her first book, Body of This Death. In

the poem the speaker speaks to herself, and although she refers at first to her memory as "rich stuff," she warns herself that she should not think it so important that it should be guarded, or dramatically laid down "with tragic masks and greaves." Greave is a piece of armor, or a costume, but greaves is also tallow refuse used for dog food or fish bait and the fact that as masks and greaves it would be "Licked by the tongues of leaves," suggests that she is using the word ambiguously. Also, her memory should not be thought fragile as "eggs" hidden under "the wings / Of helpless, startled things." Nor should her memory be perversely and fleetingly glorified by encompassing it with "song."

Rather, like shards and straw upon coarse  
ground,  
Of little worth when found, -  
Rubble in gardens, it and stones alike,  
That any spade may strike. (9-12)

What was initially "rich stuff" has become something of "little worth." Yet, while in one sense she diminishes the importance of her memory, she also regards it as "shards"--broken bits and pieces of something that once was whole, even precious.

The difference between "Memory" and "If We Take All Gold" is interesting in several respects. Although the voice in "Memory" is hortatory, "Do not guard this as rich stuff . . .," it is quiet and while it is somewhat ambivalent, it remains rational and the speaker's direction to herself seems to be sensible. But it is not realistic. We cannot will ourselves to discard our memories no matter how much we might wish we could. The desperate ambiguity of "If We Take All Gold" is much more realistic--and much more dramatic. The poem "Memory" has a graceful, rather poised lyric formality that is similar to the poetry written by her women contemporaries during the twenties. Bogan soon rejected the style and tone of poems like "Memory." Perhaps she kept the poem because in it she acknowledges that her memory is "rubble" and "coarse," a recognition that must have been painful and frightening, but significant for her. "If We Take All Gold" is mature and powerful; it makes the impact she knew to be the indispensable quality of good lyric poetry.

In her collection, Dark Summer, between "If We Take All Gold," a poem about her need to hide the fact that she cannot give up her painful memories, and "Division" (32), a meditation on memory and time, Bogan placed "The Drum" (31), a passionate defiance of the grief she lived

with. We are reminded of "the drum pitched deep as grief" of "Summer Wish."

"The Drum" is another example of Bogan's marvelous control of diction and sound and rhythm. The first line, with a full stop at its end is like the introductory roll of the drums: "The drum roars up." The word "up" captures exactly the stance of the drummer and the resonant suspension of sound at the end of the roll. Most of the lines have masculine endings but she intersperses feminine endings to prevent a steady dirge-like beat and give the whole the slightly varied beat of surprise, pleasure, and celebration. The final stanza is a perfectly contrived climax, ending with one swift strong beat, "brave," and the vibrating silence following it.

Bogan knew well, as Yeats had written in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" that:

All men are dancers and their tread  
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.  
(II. 9-10)

But, as perhaps only her closest friends knew, she also enjoyed moments of unrestrained revelry quite free of remorse or guilt. She noted in her journal:

X said, "I think that at least four of five times a year, when people least expect it,



drums should start in beating and the signal for a general saturnalia be given. While someone is out in a boat fishing, or alone in a room, or at an office desk, or washing up the breakfast dishes. Then all bets would be off, everyone would disappear into the crowd and forget and be forgotten, do what they please, and when everything was over, come back home completely satiated and without remorse."

(Journey 93)

The fact that her poetry can project such moments of absolute abandon without the attachment of philosophical explanations is part of what makes it pure and unique and modern.

"Division" (32), written in free verse, exploits the poet's perception of the division between the time of the natural world and of human experience. There is no regular rhyme in the poem, although some end words are repeated, and there is some imperfect or slant rhyme-- "weather," "together" and "air" and "there." The repetition of the word "single" and its similarity in sound to "mingle" enhances the joining of the tree and the shadow in the first stanza even though the speaker is describing the hours during which the tree's shadow flies free, as it would not at high noon, or at night. It is

"long days and changing weather" that separate the shadow from the tree. To describe the separation of the shadow and the tree as "fly free" is a celebration of the division. But she ends the stanza with the phrase "that burned together" which leads to her discussion in the second stanza of her own shadow.

The speaker addresses her own shadow as "replica" suggesting more explicitly, perhaps, than the word "shadow" would, her dual self. The syntax of "Replica, turned to yourself / Upon thinnest color and air --- almost transparent, almost invisible---suggests that the burning together of herself and her shadow may not be seen as the shadow of the tree is seen. Her shadow has been "Woven in changeless leaves," it has been translated into words on leaves of paper and has become her poems, and "The burden of the seen / Is clasped against the eye." She has looked upon her shadow, her memories, her pain, her unconscious and now can see them as poetry. Here, in a poem, Bogan refers to the "burden" she discusses in her theory of poetry. She has been able to write down herself even "Though assailed and undone is the green / Upon the wall and the sky," even though the "green"--her childhood, her desires, her vulnerable self--has been attacked and abused in the presence of an unnamed wall and sky. But the final line of the poem:

"Time and the tree stand there" draws us back to the first stanza and the realization that the time of the tree and the shadow--the time of hours and seasons--is different from, divided from, the life-time of personal existence and experience, even though they are lived out with and against the other. Also, there are moments when the tree and its shadow "fly free" from each other, which she and her shadow, her unconscious, cannot do. There is also a division between her lived experience and her vision of it which becomes her poetry, and in this respect her shadow (her poetry) is like the shadow of the tree--it flies free. "Division" is metaphysical in style, it is abstract, and a picture, almost an emblem which tells a story. It is also something seen, that is, seen visually, and understood.

A cupola is a small dome-like structure on the roof of a house which is used for ventilation and sometimes, if it is large enough, for storage. On November 13, 1929, in a letter to John Hall Wheelock, Bogan wrote: "I'll send them a picture of my birthplace, which will strike them dumb, I am sure. The house has such a cupola . . ." (Letters 50). Bogan's poem, "The Cupola" (34) is a vision of a cupola from the inside, even though the speaker seems not to be present.

The first two stanzas are a series of short declarative statements describing a mirror which hangs in the cupola and what is reflected in it. The quiet deliberation of the language, as if a story were being told, is intensified by the punctuation at the ends of the lines, which causes the reader to pause and embrace slowly the description. A haunting anticipation of death is suggested in "draughty cupola," "shuttered room," "drifted leaves," "darkest reflection"--the extreme of dark. The mirror, which "someone has hung . . . here for no reason" is "an eye for the drifted leaves." The mirror is personified and as an eye, it sees the drifted leaves and absorbs them, as well as giving out "a handsbreadth of darkest reflection."

But the tone changes in the third stanza. Here, we are told that there was deliberation in the placing of the mirror after all: "Someone has thought alike of the bough and the wind / And struck their shape to the wall." Now the language moves forward more quickly as the bough and the wind, "Each in its season / Spills negligent death throughout the abandoned chamber." There is no pause at the ends of the lines. The caesura comes in the middle of the second line, enhancing the cool violence of the final statement. The cupola is abandoned but the mirror, the eye, the poet, has filled it with death.

This is one of the poems in which the power in Bogan's use of language is most perfectly exemplified. Always, she concentrates on nouns and verbs, she uses prepositions and adjectives with great discretion, and adverbs rarely. In this poem she uses the verbs "mix" and "spills"--surely two of the most common words in the English language--yet each projects a force of personal presence and immediacy that is extraordinary.<sup>7</sup>

Bogan referred to "The Mark" (38) as an early "comtemplative" poem (Letters 368). It was first published in The New Republic, January 9, 1929 and she included it in Dark Summer. It is a difficult poem, striking because of its sharp images which both reveal and hide the intense ambivalence of it.

In "The Mark" Bogan writes about man's literal shadow which is joined inescapably to us and is a reminder of the inexorable passage of time and inevitable death. We are freed from the sight of the shadow, and the shadow itself is "loosed" only when it is imprisoned within us, a paradox all the more terrible, not only because it is the hours of the day, not ourselves, which determine the moments when we cannot see the shadow, but also because while it is absorbed within ourselves and lost from our sight, we cannot renounce it as we could if we are able to see it clearly. For Bogan, her shadow is

both reassuring and terrifying because it confirms the existence of herself but also, it joins her inseparably to the inner darkness of her memories, her dreams, her unconscious over which she fears she has no control.

In the poem, the speaker commands the shadow:

"Stand pinned to sight . . .," but time is more powerful than she. What was, earlier in the poem, "The spear of dark in the strong day," which could point man down, has become the "webs" of "whirling shade" which are visible, but which, moment by moment, times wears thin until "all at length are gathered in"--an ambiguous symbol--not only of death, but of the terror of the shadow engulfed within the self.

"Simple Autumnal" (40) is a beautiful sonnet of an imagined natural world on which Bogan has projected her need to stop time. The stasis here is similar to that which she creates in the poems "Medusa" and "Statue and Birds" because it incorporates within it the movement of natural life and of lived experience.

The rhythm of the poem quietly echoes the beat of the "measured blood." The end-stopped lines emphasize the stopped time until the change in rhyme and rhythm in the third quatrain with the explanation, "Because. . . ." Like her grief, which she holds full within her, she creates autumn in its complete fruition stopped. There

will be no harvest, no death, no expression of sorrow, no recognition of an ending, no letting go. If there is not exactly pleasure in holding to the grief, there is at least safety, for the revelation of her emotion is "forbidden," always an act of treachery to herself and terrifying because its release may mean that nothing is left.

Yet, in the final couplet she suggests that this imaginary stasis cannot hold: "Full season's come, yet filled trees keep the sky / And never scent the ground where they must lie." Now, she acknowledges that the ripeness of the autumn "must" be harvested, and winter must come because time cannot be stopped. But she does not say in the poem that her "forbidden grief" will be released, even though she knows that "Sorrow would break the seal stamped over time. . . ." The release of her sorrow is conditional upon her control of it and separate from time's control. However, the poignancy of the poem exists in the poet's beautifully imagined attempt to force time to stop, in itself an expression of her grief which she has controlled in the exquisitely restrained revelation of it in her poem. This act of art is an affirmation of herself. It is a personal triumph over time and the release of sorrow which is fleeting to be sure, but nevertheless, different from the dark, hidden,

despairing fear of time, death, and the shadow in "Winter Swan," "Division," "The Mark," and "The Cupola."

Ten years later, in 1936, Bogan was able to express her grief with Dionysian triumph in her poem, "To Wine" (71). Here are love and betrayal, life and death--the sources of grief--spoken out with a fierce joy of defiance and release and the marvelously abandoned command: "Give that beat again." Now, the buried "sorrow's gold" rises up to have its due.

In 1925 Bogan published a long narrative poem called "The Flume" (Journey 60-7). The title refers to the flumes from the dams in the mill towns of her childhood. "My mother was afraid of the flume. It had voices for her: it called her and beckoned her. So I, too, began to fear it" (Box XIX, f. 1). The sound of the flume was similar to the sound of thunder which Bogan also feared (Letters 9). "The Flume" is the story of a woman who:

. . . had a madness in her for betrayal.  
 She looked for it in every room in the house.  
 Sometimes she thought she must rip up the floor  
           to find  
 A box, a letter, a ring, to set her grief,  
 So long a rusty wheel, revolving in fury.  
 But all that she ever found was the noise  
           of water



Bold in the house as over the dam's flashboard,  
 Water as loud as a pulse pressed into the ears,  
 Steady as blood in the veins - often she  
     thought

The shout her own life, - that she did not  
     listen and hear it. (I. 1-10)

The woman, sitting on her bed, looking into her mirror  
 sees a tree behind her reflected in the mirror:

    The tree moved over  
     Its bounded space, and gave some sky to  
         the glass  
 Mixed with its leaves. Although the branch  
     rushed loud  
 A field off, it was lost within the steady  
 Leap of the dam to the flume, made to a silence  
 She had heard it so long. Nothing against  
     the cold  
 Beat of her own proud purpose was noise  
     or power.

She had some guilt in her to be betrayed,  
 She had the terrible hope he could not  
     love her. (I. 40-8)

Bogan rejected "The Flume" after its publication in Dark  
 Summer because she thought the ending not satisfactory.  
 The woman gives up her "lust for betrayal" and "Hearing

at last the timbre of love and silence" lies on her bed waiting for her husband to return. Bogan decided, "one doesn't get out of that kind of obsession so easily--the 'facts' are false, at the end" (Letters 8<sup>n</sup>).

The poem, "Old Countryside" (52) which also was published in Dark Summer, is a miniature of "The Flume." The sound of the flume has been replaced by the sound of thunder; the house is there, the mirror, and the leaves reflected in it, now dry. Most important, in "Old Countryside" the expectation of betrayal has been brought to its fulfillment: "all has come to proof."

While the imagery in the poem has a clarity that is extraordinary, the story is only implied. The poem is a narration of memories in layers of time: "Beyond . . . Long since . . . Far back." The first stanza begins: "Beyond the hour. . . ." The present time is not made explicit in the poem, but all of the memories are related to the fact in the first stanza: what was anticipated has happened.

Bogan wrote the poem in the form of the heroic quatrain, putting the form to her own use and although she uses the traditional abab rhyme, she varies slightly the expected iambic pentameter, especially in the trimeter in the final line of stanza two. She draws attention in this line to the one positive image in the

poem: "You braced against the wall to make it strong, /  
A shell against your cheek." The speaker's companion  
braced himself (or herself) against impending disaster,  
and holding a shell against his cheek, not his ear,  
suggests that he held an amulet, or a token of love, to  
ward off evil.

All of the other recalled memories evoke negative  
emotions. The fear which is engendered by the rain, the  
thunder which rang "like a wooden bell," the wind, the  
creaking clap boards is doubled by the storm's reflection  
in a mirror which "cast the cloudy day along / The attic  
floor." To be standing in an attic during a thunder  
storm is in itself strange and dangerous.

The imagery in the third stanza which begins, "Long  
since . . .," is slightly bizarre, creating a sense of  
time suspended, of vigilance against something not yet  
brought to fruition. "We pulled brown oak-leaves to the  
ground" because, apparently the leaves had not fallen or  
been blown from the trees--"dry trees"--which had been  
left unprotected by snow. The cock's cry, the note of  
betrayal, was heard, but was "unplaceable." A  
magnificent moment of suspended time and sound and danger  
and the synesthetic joining of sight and sound is  
projected in "we hear . . . the axes's sound / Delay a  
moment after the axe's stroke."

In the final stanza, "Far back . . .," in another winter when there was snow, silence is placed against the sight of violence: "we saw . . . the scrawled vine shudder" with cold. It is strange to use the adjective "scrawled" to describe the vine because it refers to writing that is almost illegible, and perhaps to this poem. "[W]e saw . . . the rose-branch show / Red to the thorns" joins the red of passion with the thorns of pain. "[W]e saw . . . sharp as sight can bear" a vision of cold betrayal--"The thin hound's body arched against the snow."

Paul Ramsey wrote of "Old Countryside" in 1970, that it "is of the most etched yet suggestive lyrics in the language" (125). The memories are dark, and what "has come to proof"--betrayal--is darker still. Elizabeth Frank, Bogan's biographer, gives it a perfectly apt description, "a hieroglyphics of fate" (Portrait 125). For Bogan, the "facts" are not false at the end of "Old Countryside."

Bogan obviously approved of her poem "Zone" (109) because after its first publication in Poems and New Poems, she included it in her final two collections of poetry. "Zone" is another poem about Bogan's reaction to the March equinox. In this poem, she likens herself to a ship which comes upon the stormy seas of March which she

equates with the inner turbulence she experiences at this time each year.

Commenting on the poem some years after it was published, Bogan noted that it was written during the late 1930s--a "transitional period both of my outer circumstances and my central beliefs" and that "it derives directly from emotional crisis, as, I feel, a lyric must" (Journey 118). The poem is tightly circumscribed, and it is filled with assonance. The sound of "grief" is repeated in the words, "regions," "keel," "reef." "[F]ear" is repeated aurally in "ear," "hear," "year," and visually in "heard" and "learned." With consonants, she repeats the sounds of the wind: "The wind breaks over us / And against high sharp angles almost splits into words"-- which is exactly what she makes it do.

In her note on the poem, she goes on to say that she thinks:

. . . that the poem's imagery manages to express, in concrete terms (the concrete terms which poetry demands), some reflection of those relentless universal laws under which we live - which we must not only accept but in some manner forgive - as well as the fact of the

human courage and faith necessary to that acceptance (Journey 118).

The transitional period to which she refers is the emotional turbulence after her separation from Holden, the joy and reassurance she felt from her first uncomplicated relationship with another man, also her discovery of the work of Rainer Maria Rilke--both his poetry and his prose--which affected her very deeply during this period. Her remarking on the necessity of acceptance, forgiveness, courage, and faith comes partly from Rilke's influence.

The central poetic device in the poem is a simile: "Like a ship, we have struck expected latitudes / Of the universe, in March." But by placing "we" closer to the disturbance than the ship, and by beginning the poem: "We have struck the regions wherein we are keel or reef . . ." the simile almost becomes a metaphor. The nautical terms are, not surprisingly, ambiguous. Keel refers to the lowest longitudinal timber on which a ship is built and which supports the whole frame. But also, keel, used in the common expression "on an even keel" denotes a state of balance and here, is related to the balance of light at the vernal equinox in March. Throughout her poetry Bogan writes about balance which is often an experience of simultaneous joy and terror. But

in her poems about the March equinox, "Summer Wish," "Didactic Piece," and "March Twilight," the balance of light is an intensely disturbing experience. In "Zone," the inner storm is one of "fear and grief." Reef, as well as referring to strips of sail, refers to a ridge of rock. In antiquity, reefs were often personified as aquatic monsters (Cirlot, p. 272).

The couplet at the center of the poem reminding us of what we know, if we are familiar with Bogan's poetry, "Thinking: Now we hear / What we heard last year" combined with the final statement: "Equally with so much / We have learned how to bear" diminishes the impact of the poem. The reaction of the reader is that one never learns how to bear fear and grief, and neither did Bogan. Perhaps the absence of anger in the poem is its fault. For bearing, even enduring are too close to submission.

Taken separately from the rest of her poetry and with no knowledge of the poet, "Zone" may well be considered a good lyric, if obscure. Technically, it reveals great skill. But considered as part of Bogan's complete work it is disappointing because it is what we have heard before. Her submission to the necessity of endurance suggests at this stage in her life a need to

cling to her fear and grief--indeed, it suggests that the fear arises from what might exist in its absence.

In February 1925, at the end of her three-month term as editor of The Measure, Bogan wrote that young poets, looking for material for their poetry, must look into their inner lives, not into a "a stale gallery of mirrors or with one ear to the ground, alert for rumors . . .

The mystic recognizes his own dark night of the soul, if he feels an emptied heart, cut off from whatever thing he considers grace . . . To be cut off and not to know, - that is the triple darkness. (Measure 14).

It may seem obscure in a discussion of the poem "Zone" to refer to a statement made by Bogan more than ten years prior to her writing it. But "grace" was then, as it continued to be, what Bogan considered a source of poetry. To be cut off from the source is "triple darkness." Bogan's need to keep her fear and grief may have existed partly because she feared that without it she would have lost her source of poetry. To acknowledge her fear and grief was one thing, but the prospect of giving it up, or of being released from it was terrifying.

When Bogan writes about the poem "Zone" she speaks of the necessity of "forgiveness" and "acceptance" and



that both require "human courage and faith." (see above) These are not the words she uses in the poem. However, her comment suggests that she sees forgiveness and acceptance as being synonymous with bearing--all of which she appears to believe are acts of the will. In her psychotherapy and in her reading she was taught to think this. During the late 1930s, when she wrote the poem "Zone," she quoted at length in her journal from Jessie Taft's Dynamics of Therapy in a Controlled Relationship:

It is this getting away from the sense of external violence and imposition to a convincing realization of inner forces which are not fearful and alien but belong to the own self as well as to external reality, that is necessary for healing. The neurotic is caught in life as in a trap. Fear will not permit him to recognize his creative power or to admit the destructiveness which he shares with the rest of life. He must be everything or nothing; all powerful or consumed with fear of a reality which is stronger than he, - perfect, or condemned to an intolerable imperfection. What he needs is to learn to flow with life, not against it, to submit willingly, to let himself be carried by its strength into one giving up

responsibility for being that particular fall of the current which is uniquely himself . . . . That he can be destroyed by life is true, and that when threatened from destruction from without, he feels life as alien and fearful, is true also, but it is equally true that even this life which can turn against him is like him. [Bogan' italics] Somewhere within him is the capacity to accept it (Box XX. f. 4).

That Bogan quoted this passage from Taft is probably an indication that she saw herself in Taft's description of the neurotic. But what interests her particularly is the need to lean to "flow with life" and she notes in the margin that she has seen this also in Rilke's poetry, in the "Orpheus Sonnets." In order to do this, however, one must "submit willingly" and one must have the "capacity" to "accept" one's fear of destruction.

One cannot help but react to this emphasis on the will, because the experience of acceptance and especially of forgiveness seem very often to be something given to us--a moment of true grace--a kind of miracle. While Bogan desired such an experience, because of her terror of the release required to achieve it, it occurred for her very rarely, if at all. Yet she knew about such an experience and in a wonderful revelation of this

knowledge she wrote to her friend, F. W. Dupee on June 10, 1941:

Someone said to me the other day that he didn't see any point in going on with psychiatric help, because THE CENTER was probably a horrible vortex of some kind, full of howls and shrieks and brimstone. I reminded him, in my motherly way, that lots of people have found a center: "the still point of the turning world," [Eliot. "Burnt Norton." IV. 10] where the dove's foot rests at noon; and whether it is grace, as the Christians call it, or reconciliation, as the Jungians call it, it is possible to reach.

(qtd. in Frank, Portrait 320)

Bogan's first draft of the poem, "March Twilight" (127) was written on March 1, 1940 (Box XI, f. 37) and one stanza she wrote then, which she rejected when she re-wrote the poem in 1956, reveals more about her reaction to the vernal equinox:

Suddenly upon the edge of day and of the season  
 Events occur a little above themselves, as out  
 of time;

A little whichway, a little altered for an  
 inscrutable reason,

Like the pentatonic scale half resolved in the  
 normal, or an off-rhyme.

Bogan's acute awareness of the interplay of light and shadow and its affect on her emotional state is apparent throughout her poetry and her autobiographical prose. She shared this sensitivity to the quality of light with Emily Dickinson:

There's a certain Slant of light,

Winter Afternoons -

That oppresses,

. . . . .

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -

We can find no scar,

But internal difference,

Where the meanings, are -

. . . . .

When it comes, the Landscape listens -

Shadows - hold their breath -

When it goes, 'tis like the Distance

On the look of Death - (258. 1-3, 5-8, 13-16)

The "Heavenly Hurt" the light in March gives to Bogan is not explicitly a vision of death, although the state of balance suggests it, but it is her use of the word "bias"--oblique or slant--which is the more specific allusion to the poem by Dickinson in her own poem "March Twilight."

The title, "March Twilight" embraces the "edge of day and of the season" from the earlier stanza which she rejected. Unlike her poem, "Zone," where she speaks about the balance in the March equinox, in "March Twilight" she recreates the balance, even in the title. What is particularly interesting about the poem is that while a balance is struck repeatedly throughout it, the poem is unrhymed in the first stanza but rhymed in the second. The weight of the opposites is perfectly matched; the structure containing this balance is perfectly haphazard--which together creates an effect "a little whichway, a little altered for an inscrutable reason."

The light, the balance, is "loss backward; delight by hurt and by bias gained"; "nothing we know about and all that we shan't have"; it "presages to the loser luck, / And cowardice to the brave" (a double balance); it is "shed for the most desperate and kindest embrace"; at an hour "when the oldest and the newest thoughts

begin." In the final two lines, "a watcher"--anyone--"in these new, late beams might well see another face"--perhaps the watcher's shadow, her dual self, "And look into Time's eye, as into a strange house, for what lies within." Bogan puts herself at a distance at the end of the poem by speaking coolly of "a watcher" and by replacing her original "its eye," the eye of the face, with "Time's eye." Here, as in "Come, Sleep . . ." she uses the word house as a metaphor for the self. This is a "strange house"--perhaps simply alien, perhaps bizarre, but the tone suggests fear and possibly madness, and certainly a kind of death in life. "March Twilight" is the culmination of her poems about the vernal equinox.

Two poems which, when put together, reveal something about Bogan's motivation for writing poetry are "Poem in Prose" and "Short Summary." "Poem in Prose" (72) is about a relationship that is good and has not ended and for that reason she does not want to write about it in poetry. The suggestion is that she would betray the relationship by writing it out in poetry and perhaps that by doing so, she would end it.

It is you that must sound in me secretly for  
the little time before my mind, schooled  
in desperate esteem, forgets you -

And it is my virtue that I cannot give you out,  
 That you are absorbed into my strength,  
                   my mettle,  
 That in me you are matched, and that it is  
                   silence which comes from us. (5-8)

Bogan placed "Short Summary" (73) opposite "Poem in Prose." The poem is a "Short Summary," but the speaker begins with a "long line" which is "fit only for giving ease / To the tiresome heart." The long line begins beautifully, "Listen but once . . ." which is a promise that she will say this once more only, but that she must say it. The fact that the line gives ease to the "tiresome heart" suggests that the speaker has said it so many times, at least to herself, that it is monotonous. The caesura in the middle of the third line of the first stanza gives emphasis to what follows: "I say: . . ." I have decided, or I am convincing myself of this. This is the end.

The poem is written in accentual meter with five beats to each line, except that the final lines of the first three stanzas have two beats. In the last stanza there are five lines, unlike the four lines of the previous three stanzas, and the final two lines have two beats. The effect of the structure of the poem is that as the lines become shorter and shorter the poem dwindles

down almost to silence at the end. The speaker breaks the promise she made at the beginning of the poem and begins to repeat the story: "It was early season; . . .". At the same time, the final rhyme in the poem: "we were not there" and "It was evening air" tells again that the relationship has ended. The separation of the final rhyme, the extra line in the poem which has no complement, "It was our land," is another affirmation of the anticipation of betrayal which, reminiscent of "Old Countryside," has "come to proof."

The second and third stanzas are filled with antitheses of beginning and end, light and dark, the life and death of love which the speaker wants to forget, and which come in the final stanza to the moment when the fateful "balance" falls, and at "dark's mid-most pitch" the lovers are gone. In both "Poem in Prose" and "Short Summary" Bogan uses the word "sound." In "Poem in Prose," the sound is silence. In "Short Summary," the speaker, from the first word calls attention to her voice, "Listen," but in the end, her voice has become almost a whisper of the sad reiteration of loss.

For reasons which we will probably never know, Bogan seemed unable to write about human relationships, love relationships, when they were happy. Perhaps, as she suggests in "Poem in Prose," writing out the



relationships, ordered, and controlled in formal poetry was a betrayal which would mean inevitably that they would end. It may be for this reason that she considered "Song for a Lyre" (90) "perhaps the only love poem I ever wrote" (Letters 142). "Song for a Lyre," while it is a beautiful lyric, is about a love long over, and her imagined recollection of it, "as in a dream," is carefully contrived. The thesis that writing out the emotion would end it cannot, however, be applied to her poems about her childhood and her dark unconscious, for she wrote this out endlessly and while there were moments of release for her, perhaps because she had not told everything about it, the source remained.

During the summer of 1938 Bogan and Edmund Wilson, in one of their games of intellectual competition and blatant wickedness schemed to parody some writers whose work they disliked but also one or two whose work they had, in the past, admired. "Evening in the Sanitarium" (111) was one of Bogan's parodies of Auden which she published initially in The Nation in December 1938, with four others, under the title "Five Parodies." But she must have come to consider the poem more seriously because she included it in Poems and New Poems and also in her final two collections, with the subtitle, "Imitated from Auden," dropped.

The poem is interesting for several reasons. It does imitate the colloquial language and tone of Auden, neither of which was typical of Bogan, but it is Bogan's recollections of her own experiences in mental hospitals. And it is a unique attempt by Bogan to write about her observations of others. Yet, while she keeps herself at a distance, the most profound phrases in the poem have their source in her own illness: "the deadly game of chess," "the book held up like a mask," "the period of the wildest weeping, the fiercest delusion," "one paranoiac afflicted with jealousy," "the obscene nightmare abated," "the shadow of the obsessive idea."

The most powerful and poignant words in the poem derive from a specific experience during her illness which she recorded in her journal on August 15, 1934. She places her comment, which is written in the third person, within quotation marks so she must have seen it written and she refers to it as her doctor's "honest verdict": "She will never be entirely better--she has too many things to contend with--but she'll be able to do her work" (Box XX, f. 3). The truth is that no doctor can ever know that his patient will "never be entirely better" and the fact that some doctor made this statement and that Bogan was allowed to read it is a strong indictment against the psychiatric profession. Bogan

accepted this "verdict" and whether one day in the future she was able to dismiss it, as she should have, we do not know. But it appears in this poem: "The women rest their tired half-healed hearts; they are almost well. / Some of them will stay almost well always . . . Some alleviation has been possible."

However, despite the knowing revelation of the imprisonment of the mentally ill, not just by the institution in which they must be treated, but by their illness, and by life itself, "Evening in the Sanitarium" is not successful. The flat tone throughout and the sardonic comments in the last half of the poem give out a disturbing, cool, disillusioned acceptance of tragedy and an absence of compassion. The final line: "Miss R. looks at the mantel-piece, which must mean something," was intended, no doubt, in the original publication as a parody, to be wry humor. But it is cruel and inappropriate. Perhaps the poem, no longer overtly a parody, would have been more successful if it had been written in the first person. But Bogan did not do that, partly because she believed passionately that poetry must be unadulterated life "transposed" (Letters 296).

Bogan achieved greater success, telling about this particular experience in her life, in an unpublished story, "Afternoon Walk," which was part of her

autobiographical "prose work" which she continued to write over a long period of years. The handwritten date on the typescript is "Winter (1934-1935)" (Box XIII, f. 6). Ruth Limmer included it in Journey Around My Room (85-90). The story is about a daily afternoon walk taken by women patients in a mental hospital. In a description of the procession of women and their surrounding landscape, Bogan creates swiftly, subtly, a sense of disrupted lives, troubled minds, in a symbolically cold, winter twilight. The story creates a rare moment of community in Bogan's writing.

According to Elizabeth Frank (Portrait 410), the poem "The Dragonfly" (123) was commissioned by the Corning Glass Company and a piece of Steuben Glass was carved to illustrate it. What pleased Bogan about the poem was that it was "based on FACT" (Letters 332). She thought of the poem as an intellectual exercise rather than a projection of her own emotion, yet she did not keep herself out of the poem. In the first stanza she personifies the dragonfly in "Grappling love." Her identification with the dragonfly in the third stanza is poignant: "You dart into the shadow / Which consumes you." And the dragonfly, like all living creatures, will come, eventually, to death. She was justifiably pleased with the free verse form. She told Ruth Limmer that the

final line was "pure 'inspiration'" and added "Get those repeated u sounds - one of them disguised." (Letters 332).

In her collection, Poems and New Poems (1941), Bogan presented five new poems that were completely different from any others that she had published previously. Having come to believe absolutely that the true artist faces his inner darkness and his own personal hell, and that he or she is different from other people, she wrote "Several Voices out of a Cloud" (93). Here, she attacks "Parochial punks, trimmers, nice people, joiners true-blue," those artists who so thoroughly provoked her ire with their social and political ideologies. "Animal, Vegetable and Mineral" (94-6) is a quite sensuous and gentle parody of a catalogue written to accompany a show of "Glass Flowers from the Ware Collection" at the Harvard University Museum. The poem is clever, but it is also an acknowledgment on Bogan's part of the mysterious design in the creation of all life:

What is the chain, then ask, and what  
the links?

Are these acts sad or droll? From what  
derived?

Within the floret's disk the insect drinks.  
Next summer there's more honey to be hived.

What Artist laughs? What clever Daemon  
thinks?. (61-5)

The bitter "Question in a Field" (97) is one four-line stanza; the knowing "Solitary Observation Brought Back From A Sojourn in Hell" (98) is two short lines.

"Variation on a Sentence" (99) was inspired by one sentence in Thoreau's Journals which she quotes beneath the title of her poem: "There are few or no bluish animals . . . Thoreau's Journals, Feb. 21, 1855." All of these poems are slight compared to Bogan's other poetry, but they reveal her sensitivity to the artist and the world around her and perhaps a temporary avoidance of the intensity of emotion usually expressed in her poetry.

Bogan returned to her true poetic expression in a small group of poems which she wrote before her death. The poem "Night" (130) is the most important of these final poems. "Night" most perfectly embodies Louise Bogan's Rilkean epigraph. She wanted life to exceed its limitations, but she also submitted to a recognition that there are some things that even with the greatest determination she simply could not change. Bogan placed "Night" immediately after "The Meeting" because, I believe, "Night" is the "bitter compliance" of "The Meeting" written out. In Poems and New Poems Bogan included a translation from Heine: Der Tod, das ist die

kuhle nacht . . . "Death is the tranquil night" (113).

In her poem, "Night," Bogan creates a tranquillity that breathes the terror of both life and death.

The poem is unrhymed and is divided into four stanzaic units: six lines in the first, five lines in the second and third, and four lines in the fourth. The diminishing number of lines in each stanza serves to dramatize the final solemn exhortation to herself. The first three stanzas of the poem, after the introduction, "The cold remote islands / And the blue estuaries," are a series of adjectival clauses, beginning with "where," which are not brought to a conclusion until the final stanza. The subject of the complete sentence, the poem, is you (understood) and the definitive verb is "remember." The language, as usual, is plain but softly resonant with the almost silent revelation of the poem. Until the final stanza, she repeatedly uses words beginning with wh and w: "where," "what," "wind," "what," "where," "weed," "wait," "wash," "westward," "where," "where," "water," and words beginning and ending with s. The w's and s's breathe and whisper the sound and movement in the estuaries and the cold, fearful agitation of the spirit.

Symbolically, the poem is dense with ambiguities and perhaps for that reason readers interpret it very

differently. I disagree profoundly with Elizabeth Frank's interpretation of the poem, that it "suggests a source of ultimate spiritual renewal in the non-human and organic, the bodies of salt and fresh water out of which all life begins" (Portrait 405). Carol Maldow makes a similar interpretation to that made by Frank: "'Night' makes manifest the recurrent, eternal, and healing qualities of rhythmic motion. . . ." (192-3) The title "Night," suggests the darkness of the soul preceding an experience of rebirth or spiritual illumination. But it also suggests not only death, but chaos, madness, disintegration. Bogan knew that at night ("Come, Sleep . . .") in her dreams, she saw her shadow and night was seldom for her a reprieve from living, but rather an opening up of her unconscious over which she had no control. Because it was night and darkness that she knew best, we might expect that this poem is the center of, or perhaps the culmination of her poetic expression.

Although islands might be thought of as symbols of safety and refuge, Bogan's islands in the first line of the poem are "cold remote" and suggest implicitly another meaning of islands: isolation. The first line of the poem sets its tone: cold, isolation, fear. The "blue estuaries" are the mouth of a river. Again, the



symbolism is ambiguous. The mouth of river shares the symbolism of a door or a gate which might open to another passage--from one emotional state to another--or, perhaps spiritually, to unity with the source of all life. But also, unlike the journey from one bank of a river to another which is usually symbolic of life or death, passage in the mouth of a river is dangerous (Cooper 139). While a river corresponds to "the creative power of nature and of time," suggesting fertility and continuous enrichment to the soil, it also is a reminder of the relentless passage of time and the knowledge of loss and, finally, oblivion (Cirlot 274). The ocean is the source of all life, but its salt water is destructive to higher forms of life. A translucent calm on the ocean denotes a state of contemplative serenity but, for the sailor, potential danger. For Bogan, the ocean was always a negative symbol.

In the first stanza, "The cold remote islands / And the blue estuaries" are a place "Where what breathes, breathes / The restless wind of the inlets." "Where what breathes . . ." suggests that not everything breathes and hence the presence of not only life but death. The "restless" wind is unsettling and carries the same negative suggestions as "cold" and "remote." But the "restless wind of the inlets" suggests an uneasy

ambivalence of the estuaries as entrances inward, but also entrances outward to the ocean--where the river opens out to the sea. The river at its mouth is lost in the immense void of the ocean. Again, "what drinks, drinks . . ." suggests that not everything there drinks. But what "drinks" in the poem drinks the "incoming tide." So at the conclusion of the first stanza of the poem our attention is drawn to the ocean flowing back into the river, and only implicitly that the river flows out into the ocean. The word in is hidden in the words "wind," "inlets," "drinks," "drinks," "incoming." We are directed not only to the flow of the water inward, but subtly to the inner salty rivers of blood in the body, and to the inner emotional and spiritual experience of the poet.

In the second stanza, the "shell" and "weed" waiting "upon the salt wash of the sea" remind us of the ocean as a symbol of the mother in her benevolence and also in her terrible, unpredictable violence. The shell, an aspect of life, is sometimes considered the symbol of love and this life and love may be nourished by the mother-sea, but she also nourishes the weed, an aspect of death and madness--wild and uncontrollable. The blue estuaries are "where . . . the clear nights of stars / Swing their lights westward / To set behind the land." Here is

Bogan's "landlocked vista . . . peace in the heart: the horizon" (Journey 164). But the "swinging of their lights westward" is also a reminder of the source of tides in the firmament, and the passage of time. The moon, the eye of the night, is not mentioned in this poem.

In the third stanza, the blue estuaries are "Where the pulse clinging to the rock / Renews itself forever"--the "pulse," the unceasing tides and time--and "Where again . . . The water reflects / The firmament's partial setting." Bogan repeats the movement of the stars westward creating a reflection not just in the water, but in the poem. But in her reflection she introduces the word "partial" which reassures us implicitly that the setting of night is to be reborn as day. The word partial also suggests hesitation or incompleteness and an attempt to separate her inner experience from the ongoing movement of the natural world. The crucial word in this stanza, however, is "clinging." The tide--and time--cannot be shaken off; it "Renews itself forever."

During the late 1950s Bogan tried several times to write a poem which she called "The Vestibule Dream," but repeated attempts to write the poem produced only a few words (Box XIX, f. 1). There is some possibility that "The Vestibule Dream" became, eventually, "Night." The

first draft of the poem "Night" was written in February, 1962 and there were three further drafts, the final draft in October and November of that year (Box XI, f. 44).

Until the final draft, the third stanzaic unit was:

Where nobody walks  
And no voice speaks  
Where eyes do not mirror eyes  
I remember these wild entrances  
In my narrowing nights.

As in some of her other drafts of poems, Bogan lessens the darkness in the final draft--in this case, dramatically. The lines in the early drafts strongly suggest a vestibule rather than estuaries. But what is important is that the early lines reinforce the tone of the first two lines and the final lines of the poem "Night." The result of this change prolongs the unremitting restless movement until the final stanza where she brings the poem for the first time explicitly to herself, and where she makes the primary statement of the poem. The entire poem is a metaphor for night, but now we have the metaphor brought to its finest abstraction, "narrowing dark hours," suggesting death and terror.

It is almost impossible to read the final lines of Bogan's poem without recalling Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey":

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the  
heart. . . . (23-29)

Wordsworth was reassuring himself that his experience was authentic and that what he felt was valid and indirectly that he existed as an individual capable of this experience and of remembering it and recording it. Apart from the fact that Bogan's sensations were not "sweet," part of her terror had its source in the possibility that she could lose herself. Unlike Wordsworth, Bogan did not have the belief that when "we are laid asleep / In body" we "become a living soul." For Bogan, the "burthen of the mystery" remained (45-6, 38).

In the final stanza of "Night" the speaker counsels herself to remember what she has just told us: that she will escape neither the fateful and inexorable patterns

of nature and time nor the isolation and terror and the darkness of her life.

From the beginning of her career, Louise Bogan's poetry reveals the genius of a practised technician; a profound respect for integrity; the terrible constraints of perfectionism; the necessity and bliss of order in her poetry; and a determination not to lie, but an extraordinary capacity to be very circumspect about telling the truth. It was almost impossible for her not to write about herself and those poems which are about concrete things, "facts," apart from her own emotion, were unusual achievements and indeed, compared to her other poems remain as pleasant intellectual exercises, separate from her finest work. Her search to find in her poetry the best expression of joy and pain and what she continued to believe was an inexplicable mystery in life never ended.

## CHAPTER IV

## Where the Dove's Foot Rests at Noon

It was Malcolm Cowley, in 1941, who saw that the real subject of Louise Bogan's poetry, "implicit in her manner of writing, was always poetry itself" (Cowley 58). Bogan's diction, the way in which she makes words act, creates the poem before our eyes. Many of the poems which are most explicitly about poetry are songs, of which there are nine in The Blue Estuaries, or those in which music or musical instruments are metaphors for poetry. The poems about time stopped, about emotion contained, about pain or vulnerability hidden, about memory discarded or kept are about poetry. In "The Cupola" the eye of the mirror, the eye of the poet "Spills negligent death" throughout the poem. In "Summer Wish" the first voice bids herself to "Speak out the wish." In "Simple Autumnal" the "filled trees keep the sky" just as the speaker keeps her grief in the poem. Often in Bogan's poems the nouns are the art and the verbs are the making of it. The "real subject" of Bogan's poetry is another aspect of her endless search to transpose life into art.

"Sub Contra" (5) was published in Bogan's first book of poetry, Body of This Death in 1923. Sub contra is the lowest possible note on a stringed instrument which Bogan does not identify, but which appears to be a harp. Bogan's other instrument in this poem is the language of sound. At first, the notes which are plucked or silenced by the hand "whimper" to the ear which is delicate and spiral-shaped. The whimper is like the "mockery in a shell"--the sound which we say is the ocean but is really the sound of our own heart and blood. The ear, like a shell, can deceive us. And in case the brain might forget the deception, "the thunder," which the "roused heart once made it hear," the speaker calls up a sound from the bottom of music--"One note rage can understand"--a noise of things struck and splitting. The speaker commands the implicit "you," herself, to build a "chord of wonder" there, (in Latin cor, cordis is the heart) something unknown before, on which "for every passion's sake" she will beat until it breaks. The rising up of the volume of sound from almost-silence to the terrible noise of a breaking heart becomes the poem which is a projection of absolute rage.

The fourteen lines of "Sub Contra" and the couplet at its end make it technically a sonnet. But the disordered rhyme scheme and the projected violence are



a deliberate defiance of the traditional form. Bogan wrote very few sonnets because she thought the sonnet and the sonnet sequence had been over-used, especially by women poets in the nineteenth century, but also by her contemporaries (Letters 333). However, she included in Poems and New Poems a very beautiful sonnet. "Musician" (106) is a lovely creation of music with words--the will and the heart woven together in a gracefully sensuous acceptance of both the limitation and the freedom of life and the inevitability of death. Here, "under the palm" which is the will, the artist's sure control, "the string" which is life and destiny, "Sings as it wished to sing."

The poem is a Shakespearean sonnet with a rhyme scheme only slightly altered from the traditional. In the first quatrain the short vowels in "been" and "thin" embrace the long vowels in "delayed" and "stayed." In the second quatrain the long vowels in "grace" and "interlace" embrace the short vowels in "skill" and "will." The vowels of the rhymed words in the two quatrains remain the same, although the consonants at the ends of the words change. The enjambment joining the first two quatrains, "Apart from the thin / Strings which they now grace," creates a long legato line which in its deliberately sustained sound gives a second meaning to

the words "delayed" and "stayed," describing the act of the words in the poem as well as the human experience to which she refers.

There is a full stop after the word "interlace"--the crucial word in the poem--and now the end words in the third quatrain and in the couplet are long sounds:

"slow," "strong," "long," "know," "string," "sing." In the third quatrain, the climax of the poem, the rhythm changes for a moment: "Now . . . The thumb, the finger, the strong / Delicate hand plucks the long /

String. . . ." Bogan emphasizes the strong individual sounds of the strings being plucked by giving the third line of that quatrain four beats, unlike the two and three beats of the other lines in the poem. But also, the individual words: "thumb," "finger," "strong," "delicate," "hand," "plucks," "long" build to the climax in the word "string." In the couplet, the repetition of ing and the sibilance of the s's completes the song.

Bogan brings Eliot's long and short syllables, which he discusses in "The Metaphysical Poets" (Sel. Prose 62), to perfection in "Musician." The words with long vowel sounds in this poem, when spoken have almost more than one beat: delayed, stayed, grace, interlace, slow, strong, long, string, born, know, sing. In the first two stanzas, even the words with short vowel sounds: been,

thin, skill, will are made musical by the resonating consonants which end them.

Because of the intensely sensuous nature of the language in this poem and also because of a comment Bogan made about what appears to have been "Musician" in a letter to Ted Roethke (Letters 157), "And that poem wasn't about music, idiot," some readers see it, as Elizabeth Frank does, as a celebration of "eroticism" (Portrait 310). Such an interpretation is not wrong. But the poem is also obviously about the poet and her poetry. As well, it is "Sub Contra"--where the hands have been delayed--re-written. The rage and betrayal have diminished and now emotion and the "cool will / At last interlace." But there is another aspect to this poem. The musician here, as the musician in "Sub Contra" is a harpist, who symbolizes death. The "thick chord of wonder," the heart, of "Sub Contra" upon which the speaker wishes "for every passion's sake" to beat until it breaks, has become the "long string" the hand "was born to know" and under the hand it "sings as it wished to sing." Now, the poet celebrates her life--her emotions of rage, loss, grief, the joy of sexual passion, the knowledge of death, and of artistic expression--with the absolute assurance of the musician/poet.

"Didactic Piece" (42) was first published in Dark Summer. The poem is a long meditation on grief which may have been influenced by George Herbert's poem, "Grief": "A narrow cupboard for my griefs and doubts, / Which want provision in the midst of all" (170). But Bogan's poem is so dense with symbols of vulnerability, and memory, and time, and a synesthetic confusion of seeing, hearing, and feeling, that her futile direction to herself to let go her allegiance to grief is overwrought and, in the end, lost in the obscure drama. Nevertheless, one very beautiful image, that which recalls Herbert's "Grief," and is another image of a harp, a symbol of grief, and the silence of it unrelinquished, occurs in the final stanza:

If but the sign of the end is given a room  
By the pillared harp, sealed to its rest  
by hands -  
(On the bright strings the hands are almost  
reflected,

The strings a mirror and light). (15-18)

The music of the harp is silenced by the hands which are "almost," but not, reflected by the strings--"mirror and light." This is one of Bogan's perfect, ambiguous metaphors: grief is the strings and mirror and light. But the hands resting against the strings will prevent a

reflection of grief, its music, and release, yet it is the hands which write out the grief in the poetry which is its "mirror and light."

During and after her serious illness in the 1930s Bogan was all the more determined to exert the mind's influence over the unruly or broken heart. In the deeply ironic "Song" (63), the speaker claims, from her grieving heart, that her heart is dead and that her mind--which she does not name, but is suggested in the sound of other words: "kind," "lined," "blind"--is hardened to her inevitable grief and loss, and must bear it. Again, seventeenth-century influences appear in this poem which is almost entirely words of one syllable:

Years back I paid my tithe  
 And earned my salt in kind,  
 And watched the long slow scythe  
 Move where the grain is lined,  
 And saw the stubble burn  
 Under the darker sheaves.  
 Whatever now must go  
 It is not the heart that grieves.  
 It is not the heart - the stock,  
 The stone, - the deaf, the blind -  
 That sees the birds in flock  
 Steer narrowed to the wind. (5-16)

The heart is "stock," "stone," "deaf," "blind," but it creates the song.

In 1931, after reading Swift's Journal to Stella, Bogan wrote to Edmund Wilson: "The Journal to Stella wrung my heart. The passion is so real, so imperfectly dissembled, and the wit is such a strange mixture of roughness and elegance." (Letters 58) Swift's Journal inspired her stunning poem "Hypocrite Swift" (68). The technical perfection of the poem radiates a baroque madness. Bogan knew about "imperfectly dissembled" passion. Swift betrayed Stella, and Bogan knew about betrayal. She felt a deep identity with Swift and in her poem she writes about herself and about her poetry:

Dream the mixed, fearsome dream. The

satiric word

Dies in its horror. Wake, and live by stealth.

The bitter quatrain forms, is here, is heard,

Is wealth. (25-8)

Perhaps partly because of Theodore Roethke's description of "Henceforth, From the Mind" (64), that it is "a masterpiece, a poem that could be set beside the best work of the Elizabethans" (Roethke 93), it has been chosen by anthologists as representative of Bogan's poetry. Bogan commented about the poem, that it was "written in my early thirties in the midst of a state

which bordered on despair" (Letters 368). The poem is not only despairing, it is bitter and a resignation to time and life. In my view, it is not typical of Bogan's best poetry, partly because the first stanza is misleading and also because her imagery is too often excessive and romantic, and for that reason the poem becomes melodramatic and artificial. Except for the elegant form of the poem, a reader familiar with Bogan's work might not recognize it as hers. It is a poem about her own poetry which, "Henceforward" will be "A smothered sound that sleeps / Long lost within lost deeps."

In "Exhortation" (67), a brilliant and bitter poem written in 1932, the speaker scorns all vulnerability and feeling and claims with fiery emotion that she will find relief by giving up the burden of it to the form of poetry:

Indifference can be your toy;  
 The bitter heart can be your book. (3-4)  
 . . . . .  
 In the cold heart, as on a page,  
 Spell out the gentle syllable  
 That puts short limit to your rage  
 And curdles the straight fire of hell,  
 Compassing all, so all is well. (6-10)

When the poem in the heart is spelt out carefully onto the page all will be well. But what can be read there is terrible; her anger against herself and the world is fierce, and in the end, it is difficult to know if the betrayal she feels is not partly because she has deceived herself:

It is the dead we live among,  
The dead given motion, and a tongue (14-15)  
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Know once for all: their snare is set  
Even now; be sure their trap is laid;  
And you will see your lifetime yet  
Come to their terms, your plans unmade, -  
And be belied, and be betrayed. (21-25)

Her "plans," her life may be "belied," "betrayed," but she defies the familiar betrayal and celebrates her fierce, proud anger with absolute triumph.

"Baroque Comment" (76) was published in The Sleeping Fury. The poem is a list of nouns and past participles and while in the first stanzaic unit the speaker lists, bitterly, the arbitrary fact of nature and the evil in humanity, in the second, longer part of the poem, she describes the action of the artist who, finally, opens art into life. The list of past participles in the second half of the poem is dazzling. The artist has:



"separated," "fitted," "swung," "stretched," "curled," "contrived," "named," "chosen," "considered," "ordered," "turned," and "opened." The poem is a joyous and poignant exultation of language and art.

"Roman Fountain" (80) is a wonderfully sensuous poem in which the speaker describes the water in a bronze fountain and then the making of the fountain and the poem. The moment of suspension when the gush of water reaches its full height in the air is marvelous.

Another song, "To be Sung on the Water" (105), is an unusually tender and graceful expression of the ending of a love affair. The speaker refers to the relationship as "my delight" that must "pass." The passing of delight will leave behind what it cannot save--"scattering dark and bright," as the reflections of dark and bright are strewn upon the water from the movement of the oars, and in the poem. The night and the dark in this poem are not disturbing and haunted. Indeed, the light and dark are given equal emphasis.

She asks the passing to be "less" than the "guiltless shade / To which" their vows were "said." The shade witnessed their vows with benevolence. The passing should also be "less" than the "sound of the oar" to which their vows were "made." The caesura before she repeats, "Less than the sound of its blade," enhances the

only reminder of the reality and the pain of separation in the ambiguous word "blade" which will continue to dip into the stream of life. The final two lines give the only sign that this experience has happened before and may happen again. But implicit in the renunciation so told--tender and sad--is the joy and beauty in the telling of it. In this poem Bogan appears to be in control of her destiny and there is--almost--perfect balance. The poem is rich with the rhythm of the rowing of the boat, which is marked by the trochees at the beginning of all but two lines. The sibilant s's echo softly the dipping of the oars and create the song, the "scattering dark and bright."

The two things one notices immediately about the poem "Kept" (87) are the irony of its title, which seems to contradict the substance of the poem, and the fact that it is a rhymed stanzaic lyric, perfectly controlled and circumscribed. The speaker, in the first stanza, by her use of the pronoun "we" seems patronizing. Her tone of authority reflects St. Paul's admonition, "but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Cor. 13:11).

The second stanza is quite extraordinary. The "rags," the "toys," the memories are not twisted; it is "we" who "twist our hearts upon" them or "clutch" them

"hard in the sweating fist." What are they to affect us so strongly, the speaker asks, attempting to diminish their importance: "They are not worth so much."

The tone changes in the third stanza as the speaker offers an explanation. She says that we must keep these things until we become them, which would be a kind of death: "our nerves their strings" and "their dust, our blood within."

But in the one line which stands separately: "Our hand the doll's, our tongue," she seems to say that the dark memories of the child's experiences should be kept until they can be recreated in poetry. Implicitly now, in poetry, is the "Time" for the "pretty clay . . . the straw, the wood" to "Get broken, as they should." Releasing the memories into poetry will put them away. But reminiscent of the ending of "Short Summary," the plaintive tone of the final stanza, unlike the determination of the first, and the repetition of "Time . . . Time" and "Get broken . . . Get broken" into five lines, rather than the four of the other stanzas, suggests that the speaker is repeating what she has been told, and may even hope is true but she is either loathe to let go, or unable to do so--thus, the title "Kept."

As an adult, Bogan "kept," indeed she seemed unable to stop twisting her heart upon her memories, those

"rags," and release from them may have come momentarily when she could speak them out in poetry. But this poem expresses, I think, not so much the release, but the desire for it. And in the suggestion of death when the speaker becomes the memories, it is the speaker who will be dead. Thus another interpretation of "Our hand the doll's, our tongue," is that letting go of the memories into poetry will mean that the speaker, the poet, will no longer exist. So the poem is sad, and ambiguous, and a lamentation for something that has not yet been accomplished.

Some further evidence to suggest that Bogan meant what she said in her title, "Kept," is that in The Sleeping Fury where the poem was first published, and again in The Blue Estuaries she placed it immediately before the poem "Heard by a Girl" (88). The latter is a lyric in five rhymed couplets in which a girl hears "Something" tell her that she has nothing to fear because along with several other attributes, she has large, thin hands, "well designed to clasp within / Their fingers . . . / The secret and the delicate mask." Hands and fingers are, for Bogan, almost always related to writing poetry and here, she describes in a swift, delicate moment, the untold secrets within her poems.

In Bogan's tribute to Yeats after his death, she quotes Yeats speaking to a musician who was to write music for his later plays: "Lose my words in patterns of sound as the name of God is lost in Arabian arabesques. They are a secret between the singers, myself, and yourself" (Alphabet 463). The "Something" who speaks to the girl in "Heard by a Girl" is an echo of her beloved Yeats.

Bogan's fifth volume of poetry, Collected Poems, 1923-1953, was published in 1954, with three new poems: "After the Persian," "Song for the Last Act," and "Train Tune." "Train Tune" (118) tends to be dismissed as the least substantial of this group, but in fact, it is a tour de force of rhythm, and meter, and onomatopoeia, and the pure music Bogan could create in poetry. It is an anaphoric list of adverbial phrases which symbolize a life-time of emotion, and of poetry.

#### Train Tune

Back through clouds

Back through clearing

Back through distance

Back through silence

Back through groves

Back through garlands

Back by rivers

Back below mountains

Back through lightning

Back through cities

Back through stars

Back through hours

Back through plains

Back through flowers

Back through birds

Back through rain

Back through smoke

Back through noon

Back along love

Back through midnight

The repetition of "Back" creates the rhythmical clickety-clack of a train, with the occasional off-beat in words with feminine endings. The poem itself is like a long track down the page. There is no punctuation in the poem, not even a full stop after the final word, "midnight." It was midnight that Bogan knew best and she

had no reason to believe that her passage back through it was over.

The title of "After the Persian" (115-17) comes from Bogan's years of looking at Persian art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Art. (Portrait 350) The poem is written in free verse and is divided into five sections. It is written in the first person, who seems to be speaking to herself. The language and imagery are extraordinarily beautiful:

I am the dweller on the temperate threshold,  
The strip of corn and vine,

Where all is translucence (the light!)

Liquidity, and the sound of water. (I. 5-8)

In an elegiac tone, the speaker recalls her life:

I have wept with the spring storm;

Burned with the brutal summer.

Now, hearing the wind and the twanging  
bow-strings,

I know what winter brings. (II. 1-4)

She refers to her painful memories as "the hunt" which she describes as if it were a painting with fine delicate lines, brilliantly detailed, but cool.

In part III she says that her life has been translated into poetry:

All has been translated into treasure:  
 Weightless as amber,  
 Translucent as the currant on the branch,  
 Dark as the rose's thorn. (III. 1-4)

This is a graceful and accurate description of Bogan's poetry: "Weightless," "Translucent," "Dark." But the speaker adds, because she must:

Where is the shimmer of evil?  
 This is the shell's iridescence  
 And the wild bird's wing. (III. 5-8)

It is here that the poem begins to fail. The darkness in Bogan's poetry is much more than "the shimmer of evil" or "the shell's iridescence" or "the wild bird's wing."

Parts IV and V of the poem are so unlike Bogan that the poem appears almost to be an exercise in taking a new and different and open view of life and poetry which others wished for her and, influenced by Rilke, she wished for herself:

#### IV

Ignorant, I took up my burden in the  
                   wilderness.  
 Wise with great wisdom, I shall lay it down  
                   upon flowers.



V

Goodbye, goodbye!

There was so much to love, I could not love  
it all;

I could not love it enough.

Somethings I overlooked, and some I could  
not find.

Let the crystal clasp them

When you drink your wine, in autumn.

All that Bogan has said in her poetry and about it defies that she would ever be prepared to "lay it down upon flowers."

One of the things about which Bogan struggled to the end of her life was the capacity to love. In her journal on September 21, 1961 she wrote:

And the poems depended on the ability to love.  
(Yeats kept saying this, to the end.) The  
faculty of loving. A talent. A gift. "We  
must always be a little in love," Elizabeth M.  
said to me (at 70!) . . . Yes, but it becomes a  
difficult task. And one that must be  
dissembled. (Journey 172-3)

Bogan claimed that she could love and certainly she wanted to (Letters 57). Yet if one loves, one does not

think about whether one loves, nor does one think of it as a "task" that must be concealed.

Bogan wrote many poems which were published once but, by her own choice, never again. Her definitive collection of poetry, The Blue Estuaries, is 105 poems. Among her papers were some fine poems which were never published at all. One such poem, "When at Last," is a lovely, open lyric in which she says what she seemed to be trying to say in the last parts of "After the Persian." The poem is undated (Box XI, f. 76). Ruth Limmer included "When at Last" in Journey Around my Room (68).

When at Last

When at last we can love what we will  
not touch;

Know what we need not be;

Hum over to ourselves the tune made by the  
massed instruments

As the shell hums the sea;

Then come the long days without the  
terrible hour,

And the long nights of rest.

Then the true fruit, from the exhausted flower.

Sets, in the breast.

"Song for the Last Act" is a miniature of the emotional voyage of Bogan's life, and of her poetry. Here are the memories of her mother and herself shaded almost imperceptibly together, and the quest to understand concluded--if only momentarily--"I look . . . I read . . . I see." Bogan wrote the first drafts of the poem in 1947. It was published in 1954.

In her journal, describing her feelings as a child, for her mother, Bogan wrote: "So that I do not at first see my mother. I see her clearly much later than I smell and feel her . . ." (Journey 23). Now, at the age of fifty, she knows her mother's face by heart and she looks, not so closely at its features but at its "darkening frame"--its shape or form--which is becoming less clear, for in it Bogan sees herself: "quince and melon, yellow as young flame."

Bogan tells in her journal of the first occasion when, as a child, she clearly differentiated herself from her mother. Her mother was in the hospital and had been sent a bouquet of pink roses which the child, Louise, instinctively disliked--perhaps because she knew that they had been given to her mother by someone other than her family. "The roses rather struck a chill into me--was I eleven?--and I found myself moving away from my

mother's bed toward the fireplace, on the opposite wall.

Here is what I saw . . .

Someone had put, rather casually, certainly, into a small glass vase, a bunch of what I now know is a rather common garden flower called French marigold. The flowers were dark yellow, with blotches and speckles of brown, and they had, I think, a few rather carrot-like leaves mixed with them. The sight of these flowers gave me such a shock that I lost sight of the room for a moment. The dark yellow stood out against the brown woodwork, while the dark brown markings seemed to enrich the sombre background. Suddenly I recognized something at once simple and full of the utmost richness of design and contrast that was mine. A whole world, in a moment, opened up: a world of design and simplicity; of a kind of rightness, a kind of taste and knowingness, that shot me forward, as it were, into an existence concerning which, up to that instant of recognition, I had had no knowledge or idea. . . . A garden from which such flowers came I could not visualize: I had never seen such a garden. But the impulse of pleasure

that existed back of the arrangement - with its clear, rather severe emotional coloring - I knew. And I knew the flowers - their striped and mottled elegance - forever and for all time, forward and back. They were mine, as though I had invented them (Journey 22)..

In the poem, the yellow in the "darkening frame" lies with "quilled dahlias"--maturity and age, and the "shepherd's crook"--authority and protection. The statues in a garden which lies beyond the vision of the face and which recall Bogan's poems of statues ("Statue and Birds," "Roman Fountain," "Baroque Comment") watch with unusual, even contemptuous "ease . . . the show / Of yet another summer loath to go / Although the scythes hang in the apple trees." Unlike the kept-harvest of "Simple Autumnal," here, the scythes hang ready to be used. The fullness of summer and of life, which moves inescapably to harvest and death, is acknowledged.

But the suggestion of death, and the sound of the voice lead Bogan in the second stanza into the symbols buried deep in her unconscious. ("Poetry is an activity of the spirit; its roots lie deep in the subconscious nature, and it withers if that nature is denied, neglected, or negated." Journey 115) Bogan had difficulty writing this stanza (Box XI, #64). Initially,

she wrote of the "text" and the "words" whose "symbolic utterance" she could not understand. She changes the imagery finally to music that is not music--"Whose emblems mix with words that shake and bleed." The "song" is so terrible that it can be neither spoken nor sung: "The staves are shuttled over with a stark / Unprinted silence . . ." This image, like the title of this poem, "Song for the Last Act" is an expression of synesthesia, of hearing and seeing: the song is an act of vision.

Here, again, is the inability to see in "Summer Wish": "Rejection of voice and touch not your own, press sight / Into a myth no eye can take the gist of . . ." She could not understand the symbols of her unconscious then, nor can she now. In "Summer Wish" she comes "at last upon a vision too strong / Ever to turn away," but she cannot understand the vision, except as madness. In "Song for the Last Act," with different imagery, the music and the words give out silence.

It is interesting to note that Bogan uses the verb to read in this poem and the similarity between the language of the poem and that which she uses in her journal to describe her frustration at the age of seven when she was still unable to read. "I remember . . . staring at pages of print in bafflement and anger, trying to shake out some meaning from the rows of printed

words, but it was no good: I could not read" (Journey 31). In another entry in her journal, telling that because of her feeling of loyalty to her mother who was criticized by those around her, Bogan "abjured the ordinary world." She asks herself if she expected or wanted "deliverance" from this experience:

Not at first. Not in the days when I stared with fury upon printed words I could not read, that I could not unbraid into meaning. I remember such a day. I took the book down from the top of the bureau: I feel the grain of the binding under my hand; I see the marks upon the paper; I feel my fury rising. It was from these words that the deliverance later rose. But then they were closed from me." (Journey 57)

She associated deliverance with the ability to read. In the second stanza although the music and the words appear "upon a dulling page," and she tries to spell out the symbolism of "the storm" and the "running stream"--the terror in her poem, "The Flume," and in her story, "Journey Around My Room"<sup>8</sup>--she cannot: "the beat's too swift" and the symbols of the music, the notes, "shift in the dark."

Yet she says again: "Now that I have your voice by heart, I read" which suggests a dismissal of any expectation of an understanding of the confusion which lies deep within her and becomes instead both an acceptance of it and a deliverance from it as she turns her face away, embracing the confusion, almost fusing it with her own heart: "Now that I have your heart by heart, I see. . . ."

The child lives in a region it knows nothing about. So that whatever memory of childhood remains is stable and perfect. It cannot be judged and it can never disappear. Memory has it inexplicably, and will have it forever. These things have been actually 'learned by heart' (Journey 101).

Now she translates the painful memories into a symbol of her own life--"on a strange beach under a broken sky . . . a voyage done!" Again she alludes to her own poetry--the "rusted mouth" of beauty in "A Tale" has become the "red rust" of the anchor. But it is seen in the "lengthening sun." There are no words of darkness or shadow in this final stanza. Her repeated statement: "Now that I have your heart by heart, I see" is a dramatic affirmation of her vision of herself.



One of the true joys of Louise Bogan's poetry is that she always makes the reader conscious of the creation of her poem. This self-conscious making of the poem within the poem is not unique to Bogan; it is intrinsic to formalism and modernism. Unlike the romantics who recollected their emotion in tranquillity, modernists create the emotion in the moment of the poem. It is for this reason that Eliot's wish to replace the word "lyric" with "meditative verse" (On Poetry 106) was obviously rejected by Bogan because, for her, the action of the lyric supersedes any other aspect of it, even in a poem of meditation such as "Song for the Last Act." Very rarely, as in two or three of her sonnets and perhaps because she wanted to break the tradition of the sonnet form, the act of creation in the poem is strained. The great majority of her poems, however, even when the emotion is darkest, express implicitly the intense pleasure of a moment of creativity.

## CONCLUSION

Almost twenty years after her death, it is possible to read Louise Bogan's poetry with a new respect for her vision and her art. She was a modern poet who, defying the expectations of women artists of her day, and with the utmost respect for the integrity of art, spent her life perfecting her expression of emotion in poetry.

What did Louise Bogan say in her poetry? She said: that her own fury tormented her life and that when it became a child--the child of herself--she abandoned it; that some dreams are important insights into our inner selves; that people betray one another and themselves and that it is possible to be obsessed with betrayal; that to hold on to one's feelings of grief and betrayal may be safer than to let them go; that poetry can be a release for violent emotion and madness; that time is one of the most difficult things to accept and to live with and that the time of human experience is both separate from and similar to the time of nature and the universe; that facing one's deepest self is terrifying; that the human spirit is vulnerable and that she will hide her vulnerability and her deepest secrets; that life is a long passage to night and to death; that joy and peace are evanescent at best. She also said, implicitly: that

poetry, and art, must be alive and that words embedded with emotion can act; that classical form is intrinsic in good lyric poetry; that form in art contains and controls the emotion it expresses; that poetry is an endless search to communicate the splendor and pathos in life; that poetry is always about poetry.

Louise Bogan's engagement with herself in her poetry is always intense and for that reason it is impossible to discuss her poetry without some reference to her life. But her poetry transcends autobiography and it must also be discussed within the context of its formalism and its modernism. Reading her work as a whole is both fascinating and pleasurable, and it is also a revelation that the reconciliation within herself that so evaded her in her life has become, in her poetry, her deliverance.

## APPENDIX

Books by Louise Bogan

## POETRY

Body of This Death (1923)  
Dark Summer (1929)  
The Sleeping Fury (1937)  
Poems and New Poems (1941)  
Collected Poems 1923-1953 (1954)  
The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923-1968 (1968)

## CRITICISM

Achievement in American Poetry, 1900-1950 (1951)  
Selected Criticism: Poetry and Prose (1955)  
Emily Dickinson: Three Views, with Archibald MacLeish and  
Richard Wilbur (1960)  
A Poet's Alphabet: Reflections on the Literary Art and  
Vocation (1970)

## TRANSLATIONS

- with Elizabeth Mayer  
The Glass Bees by Ernst Juenger (1961)  
Elective Affinities by Goethe (1963)  
The Sorrows of Young Werther and Novella by Goethe (1971)  
  
- with Elizabeth Roget  
The Journal of Jules Renard (1964)

## ANTHOLOGY (with William Jay Smith)

The Golden Journey: Poems for Young People (1965)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent references to Louise Bogan's poems in The Blue Estuaries will be cited with page numbers only.

<sup>2</sup> Three essays: "Poetesses in the Parlor." The New Yorker 12. 5 Dec. 1936.

"The Heart and the Lyre." Selected Criticism. New York: The Noonday Press, 1955. 335-42.

"What the Woman Said," an address at Bennington College, 1 Oct. 1962. Published in Journey Around My Room. 134-58.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Limmer included "Journey Around my Room," "Dove and Serpent," and "Letdown" in Journey Around My Room.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Teasdale also used the word "burden" in the same context: "the poem is written to free the poet from an emotional burden." qtd. in Sara Teasdale: Woman & Poet by William Drake. San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1979. 215.

<sup>5</sup> Subsequent references to the Louise Bogan Papers will be cited with Box and folder numbers only.

<sup>6</sup> Six is the symbol of both ambivalence and equilibrium and also of the human soul (Cirlot. 233).

"A 'dumb-show', often used in Elizabethan drama, is a short pantomime which summarizes the subsequent action in the play.

<sup>7</sup> Charles O. Hartman in his book, Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody, uses Bogan's poem, "The Cupola," to illustrate the use of counterpoint in free verse.

"Bogan's method is to disperse various degrees of counterpoint . . . The reader barely notices the separate existence of the first six lines, so directly do they match the syntax. Though they generate attention they do not shift its focus. But in the last stanza she tilts the sentences in relation to the lines. The effect startles us; and in the context of the whole poem, we interpret the surprise as a sudden passion in the speaking voices" (61-3)

<sup>8</sup> "I am set upon by sleep, and hear the rush of water and hear the mill dam, fuming with water that weighs itself into foam against the air, and see the rapids at its foot that I must gauge and dare and swim. Give over, says this treacherous element, the fear and distress in your breast; and I pretend courage and brave it at last, among rocks along the bank, and plunge into the wave that mounts like glass to the level of my eye. O death, O fear!" (Journey 183-4)

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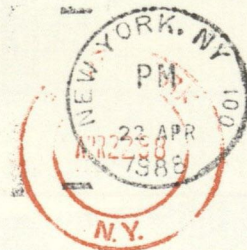
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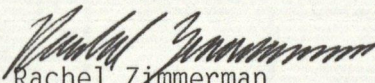
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