MALCOLM COWLEY

The Formative Years

1898 - 1930

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— Geachte heer/mevrouw,

Onlangs ontving U een exemplaar van mijn proefschrift,
Malcolm Cowley: The Formative Years, 1898-1930.

In een beperkt aantal exemplaren blijken pagina's 139 en 140 te ontbreken. Bij deze doe ik U deze mogelijkerwijs "missing pages" toekomen.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

H. Bak

—
Bijlagen:

A regular literary companion and, after Conrad Aiken, perhaps the most influential literary mentor of Cowley's early years was S. Foster Damon. Damon was Cowley's senior by five years; he had graduated in 1914 and was still in Cambridge doing graduate work. Damon served as an important catalyst in awakening the relatively staid and conservative literary milieu of Harvard to the delights of modern art and letters. A poet and musician, he was an editor of The Harvard Monthly and The Music Review, and a founding father of the Harvard Music Society. The year before he had appeared in Eight Harvard Poets. Cowley had seen and met Damon at meetings of the Poetry Society in his sophomore year and had joined him on excursions to Boston for sessions at Jake Wirth's German saloon on Stuart Street. Once, he had been warned against Damon's "pernicious influence" by a conservative literary friend.

In a tribute written in the late 1960s Cowley recalled Damon at Harvard as a most "adventurous reader" who, like a knight errant of modernism, rode to "the rescue of neglected books as if they were maidens immured in a donjon keep." Damon liked to act as a pioneer and guide his coevals to new discoveries. It was through Damon that Cowley first became acquainted with the early works of Ezra Pound, the poetry of Stephen Crane, Melville's Moby Dick, the less familiar poems of William Blake, the poems of the obscure Thomas Holley Chivers, the work of Gertrude Stein, and, perhaps Damon's outstanding gift, the poems of Jules Laforgue. Though Cowley never ventured far into Blake's prophetic books and did not share his mentor's enthusiasm for either Stein or Chivers, he was indebted to Foster Damon for exposing him to numerous modern authors still outside his youthful ken.¹⁷

In 1918 Cowley consorted with Damon most frequently. Several times he visited Damon's room above the Western Club, where he lived with Philip Hillyer Smith, later Cowley's neighbor in Sherman. In early March he attended a session of the New England Poetry Society with Damon and Royall Snow. With Amy Lowell's departure and the accession of Josephine Preston Peabody to the Society's Presidency, however, the New Poetry had abdicated to the Old and the society could no longer muster Cowley's enthusiasm. Its new president represented all he opposed: "her pet aversion is Aiken; my pet aversion is her."¹⁸ For comfort Cowley might pay his respects to Amy Lowell, to whose house he gained admittance through Foster Damon, who in turn had been introduced to Lowell by John

Brooks Wheelwright. More than once that year Amy Lowell invited Damon, Cowley and sometimes Royall Snow to Sevenels, her big house in Brookline, for dinner. Inside there would be warmth and laughter, as the youthful poets read aloud their manuscripts and were "praised and scolded" by their patroness or, puffing away at her Manilla cigars, sat listening to Miss Lowell demolish her literary enemies. Foster Damon also led Cowley into Boston society circles he might otherwise not have entered and gave him glimpses of the fashionable and dilettantish world of the Cambridge debutantes.¹⁹

Though Cowley was critical of Damon's "decadent ideas," his feelings for him approached adulation. Whereas Royall Snow struck him as a "wild, fruity aesthete in theory and a damned bourgeois in practice," in Damon he discovered "a very sound poetic workman," who wrote "tons of late-Elizabethan verse." When at the end of April Damon spent a week in Greenwich Village, Cowley arranged a meeting with Burke and anticipated the visit as follows:

No doubt you will find him irritatingly aesthetic and disgustingly supercilious. He has regular spiels which he repeats without much regard to the person with whom he is talking. On the other hand, he knows everything there is to be known. If you want to find out something about obscure Venetian poets of the eighteenth century, ask him. He'll tell you. He will also demonstrate the sexual perversions of the thousand most illustrious men in history, and set you hunting a boy favorite. So don't miss him.²⁰

After Foster Damon, Cowley's closest friend at Harvard was John Brooks Wheelwright. Wheelwright was a highly unconventional Boston Brahmin, an Anglican High Churchman who would become a modernist poet, an architectural historian and, during the last years of his life, a fierce devotee of revolutionary socialism. An eccentric dandy, a convivial bachelor and a fastidious dresser, Wheelwright gained a reputation as an obstreperous nonconformist with a quirky sense of humor. His "elliptical and often wilfully unmelodic verse" made him, in Cowley's words, perhaps "not an easy poet . . . but one of the very few whose poems demand and reward second reading." For Wheelwright, as for Cowley, the literary life at Cambridge was "a round of high excitement." Wheelwright's contentiousness led to his expulsion from Harvard in his senior year, reputedly for misspelling a word. His poetry was long unappreciated. Upon

MALCOLM COWLEY

The Formative Years

1898 - 1930

Malcolm Cowley in Paris, 1922

MALCOLM COWLEY

The Formative Years 1898 - 1930

een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de letteren

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The reputation of Malcolm Cowley has long hung in the balance between the literary hagiographers and the political executioners. On the strength of Exile's Return (1934; revised and expanded edition, 1951) and his path-breaking efforts on behalf of Hemingway and Faulkner, many have seen Cowley primarily as the chronicler and historian par excellence of a now legendary literary generation. Others, in particular the intellectual descendants of one-time anti-Stalinists, have recurrently reminded Cowley of his past political sins; they have accused him of writing politically motivated, anti-American criticism and exposed his supposedly pernicious influence on American literary history. Each critical approach, shaping Cowley according to its own intellectual needs, has found it difficult to see him whole and to do justice to the variety of his interests and the multiplicity of his achievement.

In recent years the nature of Cowley's achievement and the significance of his contribution to American literary history, both of the present and of the past, have only begun to be recognized. Lewis P. Simpson and George Core have written sensitive essays aiming at a comprehensive estimate of Cowley's influence as a man of letters. In a valuable but limited first study of Cowley's early career James M. Kempf has sought to redress misrepresentations of his influence and ideas. Henry Dan Piper and Donald W. Faulkner have provided perceptive introductions to compilations of Cowley's writings, while others have explored specific aspects of his variegated career as a poet, critic, editor, and historian of American literature.

The present study aims to give an impetus to an overall critical appraisal of Malcolm Cowley's influence as a man of letters. Based on a thorough examination of Cowley's published and unpublished writings, his

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private notebooks, and his voluminous correspondence with his literary contemporaries, it presents a detailed and comprehensive account of Cowley's early life and writings, in order to come to a critical assessment of his total achievement. It presents and evaluates the documentary historical record against which the semi-autobiographical Exile's Return needs to be measured; but it also aims to move beyond a critical biography of Cowley's early life. Between 1915 and 1930 Cowley first developed the set of literary values and assumptions which would remain the cornerstone to his subsequent practice as a literary critic and historian. He also arrived at a broad conception of his rôle and function as a man of letters to which he would remain remarkably faithful throughout his long career. By considering his early life and writings in the light of his mature efforts on behalf of American writers and American writing, the present study hopes to show that the years before 1930 have truly been the formative years of Malcolm Cowley.

Many individuals and institutions have helped in many ways to bring this study to completion.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to Malcolm Cowley, without whose generous support and cooperation this study could not have been written. Mr. Cowley has kindly granted me permission to examine and quote from his voluminous papers at the Newberry Library in Chicago, as well as Cowley material in numerous other libraries. Over the years he has patiently and painstakingly answered my many pertinent and impertinent questions, both in writing and in conversation. In addition, he has allowed me to study his notebooks at his home in Sherman, Connecticut, and has made available original material from his personal files. His many valuable suggestions and his unflagging trust in my efforts have been the best possible encouragement. Lastly, I am grateful to both Malcolm and Muriel Cowley for welcoming me into their Sherman home and graciously sharing with me their luminous reminiscences about the literary past.

The American Council of Learned Societies, the Fulbright-Hays Program and the Newberry Library have provided grants and fellowships which enabled me to carry out a substantial part of my research in the United States.

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Next to the Newberry Library, I am grateful to the staffs of over fifty libraries and institutions, for permitting me to examine printed materials and unpublished letters and documents in their collections, for providing me with xerox copies or microfilms of material relating to Malcolm Cowley, and for promptly answering my many queries. Here I list only those that have provided me with material directly pertinent to this study: American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York; Barrett Library, University of Virginia; Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Butler Library, Columbia University; Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania; Fred Lewis Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University; George Argents Research Library, Syracuse University; Gordon Keith Chalmers Memorial Library, Kenyon College; Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas; Houghton Library, Harvard University; John Hay Library, Brown University; Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague; Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York; New York Public Library; Princeton University Library; University Archives, University of Wisconsin; University of Illinois Library. The original of the photograph of Malcolm Cowley is in the Sylvia Beach Collection; it is reproduced here with permission of Princeton University Library.

I thank Daniel Aaron, Gay Wilson Allen, the late Marshall Best, Peter Blume, Eleanor Clarke, Robert Cowley, Felicia Geffen-Van Veen, R. W. B. Lewis, Robert Penn Warren, James M. Wells and Alan D. Williams for graciously taking time out to talk to me, often at great length, about Malcolm Cowley; their views and reminiscences, even if not always directly reflected in this study, have greatly helped to sharpen my critical perspective on Cowley. I am grateful to Gay Wilson Allen for making his personal correspondence with Cowley available to me, and I am indebted to Kenneth Burke for allowing me to have a microfilm made of his side of his correspondence with his oldest "sparring partner." I have also profited from discussion and correspondence with Donald Faulkner, Adam Gussow and James Kempf, who freely shared thoughts with me about

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Malcolm Cowley.

I wish to express my thanks to Rosie Taggart for critically reviewing my manuscript and pointing up stylistic and linguistic infelicities. I am grateful to Els Bronzwaer-Schrover for bringing her expertise to bear on the sections dealing with French literature, and to Jan Hertman for proofreading the manuscript. Thanks are also due to Tilly de Groot, Fleur van den Tweel, Diane Crook, Elly Kersjes, Nico de Milliano and Hélène Nieuwhof, who helped in the initial stages of research or typed substantial portions of the manuscript. Hans Beerens volunteered to help compile the index.

Finally, I thank my wife, my parents and all others, near and far, who sustained me through the making of this study.

I dedicate this book to my daughter Saskia.

Nijmegen, February 1, 1988.

Wanderers outside the gates, in hollow
landscapes without memory, we carry
each of us an urn of native soil . . .

One of the compensating pleasures of old age, Malcolm Cowley wrote with a twinkle of self-irony at the age of eighty, is "simply sitting still, like a snake on a sun-warmed stone, with a delicious feeling of indolence A leaf flutters down; a cloud moves by inches across the horizon. At such moments the older person, completely relaxed, has become a part of nature--and a living part, with blood coursing through his veins. The future does not exist for him." Experiencing a momentary suspension of time, the aged man finds himself in a state of passive receptivity, a "nirvana of dozing in the sun." Such a feeling of near-timelessness, an almost mystical sense of communion with nature, may at first glance seem incongruous in a writer whose works exemplify par excellence the "sense of living in history" which forms such a distinctive feature of the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald.¹ When we consider that certain of Cowley's later essays reveal a renewed interest in the perpetuation of the New England spirit of Ralph Waldo Emerson in modern American writing, we may even be tempted to read in such an experience a transcendent state in which the individual becomes "part and parcel of God."² Most essentially, however, the experience represents one of the prerogatives of old age: a return to the haunts and scenes of youth. In a memoir of his childhood written in 1982 Cowley has recalled how, as a boy growing up in the hills and valleys of Western Pennsylvania in the early years of the century, he often wandered alone in the woods, and how the woods "seemed to embrace me and say, 'You belong here, you are ours.'"³

One form which Cowley's harking back to the days of childhood has taken has been a large-scale revision and, in many cases, a thorough rewriting of his early poems, preparatory to the publication of his Collected Poems in 1968. "The spirit hasn't stirred in me . . . to write many new ones," he told Robert Penn Warren in the summer of 1967, "but I have a curious mania for revising old ones, as if I felt that each of the

poems written long ago was begging me to chisel away at the rough stone and give it a final form. I'm senilizing my juvenilia." He did write several new poems, however, one of which he submitted to Henry Rago, then editor of Poetry; it "will stand first in my collected book," he commented, "to serve as an induction to the countryside."⁴ "Boy in Sunlight," the opening poem of Blue Juniata: Collected Poems (1968), is an intensely personal evocation of the cherished landscape of childhood. It tells of a boy who, "having fished alone / down Empfield run," first amid the oak and chestnut timber, then among "bare-trunked beeches ghostly white in the noon twilight," now finds himself at rest in a patch of sunlight, in a burned-over stretch of land that "used to be hemlock woods," but of which only "great charred trunks" remain, lying crisscross, "wreathed in briars." And so the boy,

having caught four little trout that float, white bellies up,
in a lard bucket half-full of lukewarm water--
having unwrapped a sweat-damp cloth from a slab of pone
to eat with dewberries picked from the heavy vines--
now sprawls above the brook on a high stone,
his bare scratched knees in the sun, his fishing pole beside
him,
not sleeping but dozing awake like a snake on the stone.⁵

The boy's position in nature carries unmistakable echoes of the older man's "nirvana" of dozing "like a snake on a sun-warmed stone." The sense of being perfectly at home in nature has been for Cowley a most fundamental childhood experience. It represents the antipode to the sense of exile and alienation at the heart of his adult experience, the memory of a sense of wholeness which he has carried with him as his "most essential baggage" throughout his mature life. As with advancing age the future has tended to recede, the past has become alive only more vividly. "Funny how my whole boyhood comes back now, stone by tree by running water," Cowley wrote to Conrad Aiken in 1961. In imaginative retrospection the older poet has reached back to childhood for that sustaining sense of wholeness, now lost but still cherished as his deepest and most precious memory. It is "the secret voice of water trickling under stone" that the boy can hear; it is symbolically represented by the boy's instinctive oneness with the land:

The land absorbs him into itself,
as he absorbs the land, the ravaged woods, the pale sky,

not to be seen, but as a way of seeing;
not to be judged, but as a way of judgment;
not even to remember, but stamped in the bone.
"Mine," screams the hawk, "Mine," hums the dragonfly,
and "Mine," the boy whispers to the empty land
that folds him in, half-animal, half-grown,
still as the sunlight, still as a hawk in the sky,
still and relaxed and watchful as a trout under the stone.⁶

The attempt to approximate the "nirvana" of childhood, most nearly successful in advanced age, marks a movement towards completion of the arc or "great circle" (to borrow the title of one of Conrad Aiken's novels) of Cowley's life. It is the closest the exile has come to a full return.

The importance of the landscape of childhood for a correct understanding of Cowley's development as a writer and of his unfolding interpretation of modern American literature is difficult to exaggerate. The "shapes of his childhood," to lift a Proustian thought from his poem "The Pyre," have constituted the "patterns of his growth." Throughout his voluminous and varied writings the country of childhood looms as an obsessive memory, a poetic landscape which forms a rich and invaluable storehouse of values and attitudes, of metaphors and symbols. It has always remained "the landscape by which all others are measured and condemned." Many of Cowley's writings are infused with an undertone of aching nostalgia and wistful regret. "Nostalgia is one of the great motives of lyric poetry," Allen Tate once remarked to Cowley, who seldom uses the phrase "my own country" without a haze of affection. The nostalgic note resounds eloquently in the last stanza of the title poem "Blue Juniata:"

for sometimes a familiar music hammers
like blood against the eardrums, paints a mist
across the eyes, as if the smell of lilacs,
moss roses, and the past became a music
made visible, a monument of air.⁷

Although echoes of his childhood haunts reverberate throughout his long career, Cowley has never given a full-fledged autobiographical account of his younger years.⁸ Its richest account is lyrical-poetical and is to be found in the first section, "Blue Juniata," of the Collected Poems. Read in conjunction, as a unity, the poems make up Cowley's personal mythology of childhood.

The country of childhood that figures as a significant poetic landscape at the heart of Cowley's writings can be precisely localized. Its emotive center is Belsano, a small village in Cambria County, Pennsylvania, on the western slope of the Alleghenies, seventy miles east of Pittsburgh. There, in the family's "summer home," a big clapboard farmhouse called "Maple Home," one mile west of Belsano, Malcolm Cowley was born on August 24, 1898, at four in the afternoon, during a thunderstorm, "after something less than the canonical nine months."⁹ In a "salute in prose" to Belsano published in Harper's Monthly Magazine of January 1929, Cowley has described the exact geography of "my own country:"

It is not an abstraction for politicians, a capitalized immensity like the Middle West, the South, New England, the Prairie States. My country is tangible, small, immediate: a Pennsylvania valley, or rather a high tableland cut by ravines, lying between Chestnut Ridge on the west and Laurel Hill on the east and south. By climbing to the highest branches of a pine tree on the knob behind our barn, one can survey the whole of my country, from the one steeple of Bethel to the stone house at Nolo, and from the high ground in the north, around Nicktown, to where, in the south, the coke-ovens of Vintondale cut the horizon with a wall of smoke.¹⁰

Cowley received most of his early education in big-town schools, but all of his summers were spent in the country, "fishing, shooting cottontails and pine squirrels, or simply wandering through the woods" by himself. Every May the family would drive down from Pittsburgh in a buggy and, after spending two nights on the road, open the farmhouse for the summer. While his father, a homeopathic physician, returned to grimy Pittsburgh to attend to his patients, mother and son would remain on the farm, sometimes through October. The long rural summers gave Cowley a deep-seated attachment to country life; always he would think of the country around Belsano as his "real home" and of the time he spent there as his "real life."¹¹

It must have been, by all accounts, a pastoral, idyllic childhood, even if the charm of it was periodically marred by loneliness and hunger. "I had the good fortune to be a neglected child, free as a weaned colt in an unfenced pasture," Cowley recalled. The boy's country duties were kept to a minimum; they amounted to little more than taking care of the family's two middle-aged horses, which he would collect from the

backfield and escort to the barn for oats. For the rest, if he had not forgotten to keep the woodbox properly stored with kindling, he was usually allowed to freely roam the sundrenched chestnut woods, most commonly barefoot, wearing "nothing but a blue-denim shirt and a pair of bib overalls," and carrying about his fishing pole, in search of mysterious trout hidden under the stones in Empfield Run. "I came to feel that the countryside belonged to me and that I belonged to the countryside," Cowley remembered over seven decades later. Sometimes, wandering through the small village, he would stroll back and forth between the church, the school and the crossroad general store; there, lingering in fascination over the barlow knives, the bolts of calico and the counter of "stale, delicious candy," or seated on the "jury box," a polished plank supported by nail kegs, he would listen to "tales of good crops and incredible fishing." It was such "absolute freedom" and "self-dependence," Cowley observed in 1983, that made his boyhood special: "There was hardly a No Trespass sign in the whole of Cambria County. You could go anywhere your legs would carry you--or, if you had a horse as I did, you could go any place the horse would carry you. You could go into anybody's woods and hunt, you could go into any stream and fish; you could wander over old fields anywhere. The only rule was you had to be home for supper."¹²

On a hot summer's day he might seek out the coolness of the swimming hole in Blacklick Creek, a hundred yards below the White Mill Dam. In 1929 Cowley remembered it vividly as "a pool in the deep woods, black and still, with a school of minnows floating at the surface of the water, in the sunlight, and hummingbirds moving from flower to flower along the bank. Usually it was the haunt of silence. At infrequent intervals it was invaded by half a dozen boys who stood shivering and naked in the water, one or two of them able to venture a few strokes and all of them splashing and shouting as if the stillness were an enemy to be conjured away." Years later, the pool of childhood figured in Cowley's poetry as a powerful symbol of the sources of all vitality and life, the destiny to which the exiled wanderer is seeking to return. There the poet hopes to find again "the arrowlike shadows of trout," "cool in their sunless kingdom:"

Climb,
stumble and climb, for the source of it all is here--

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here the final and secret pool,
with green scum at the edge if it,
a cloud of midges over it,
and bubbling from the depths of it,
stirring the frogs' eggs and the fishes' eggs,
here the source, the limpid and living water
rising from white sand.¹³

The incantatory rhythm of the lines, reinforced by the repetitive sentence structure, gives the poem the quality of a sorcerer's chant, a magical formula. As a poet Cowley likes to place himself in the line of Edgar Allan Poe, or, to remain closer to the experience of his generation, of Hart Crane. He has pictured the poet as "a would-be sorcerer bent on making a charm or weaving a spell or composing a mantra;" and he has spoken of Hart Crane in similar terms, as "the sorcerer of a primitive tribe, [who] was trying to produce not poems only, but incantations or mantras that would have a magical power. . . ."14 Cowley's poems about his Pennsylvania boyhood are informed with this very spirit. In the attempt to recapture the pristine, unadulterated landscape of childhood through the imagination, Cowley often infuses it with a feeling of primitive magic. Later, as a critic, he would single out the same quality in Faulkner's "The Bear" and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," from a feeling of instinctive kinship with writers whose values were equally rooted in the land. For each of them the country of childhood was a magical kingdom with its own rituals, symbols and initiation rites, a country "stamped in the bone" as a way of judgment and perception. This affinity helps to explain the remarkable degree of empathy on which Cowley's criticism of the literary achievements of his generation would be based. As he himself has recognized, it enabled him to grasp intuitively certain values, images and associations, which might easily be misconstrued by critics of a different background. Reading Hemingway's Michigan stories, Cowley would recall his favorite pastime of "walking through first-growth hemlock timber and feeling the short, warm, dry, a little prickly needles under bare feet." Reading Faulkner, he would be reminded of the first automobile chugging through Belsano in a whirl of dust, followed by "running boys, while men in overalls craned forward from the bench in front of the general store," where Cowley, like the young Faulkner, had often listened to stories and legends of the

past. Likewise, Cowley's attachment to the Pennsylvania landscape, not unlike the hills and valleys of Kentucky and Tennessee, helps us understand the friendship and affinity he would continue to feel, in spite of political, regional or temperamental differences, not only with Faulkner and his "brooding love for the land," but also with many other Southerners, whether one-time "Agrarians" like Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, or an independent Southerner like Hamilton Basso. Conversely, it helps to explain why, in spite of literary kinship and admiration, Cowley would never feel as close to writers like Van Wyck Brooks or Edmund Wilson, whose personalities were molded by a background considerably less rural and more patrician. "We were most of us countrymen, in one sense or another," Cowley was to write later. "We were radicals in literature and sometimes in politics, but conservative in our other aspirations, looking back for ideals to the country we had known in childhood, where people led separate lives in widely scattered houses; where there were broad fields in which a boy could hunt without fear of No Trespass signs, and big woods, untouched by lumbermen, in which he could wander with a pocket compass. I suspect," he added as a regretful afterthought, "that we were the last generation in which those country tastes could be taken for granted."¹⁵

The magic of Cowley's country speaks most clearly from its principal elements: trout, pinetrees and chestnut woods. Quite early these took on a value beyond their factual existence and became "the totems of a tribe." "To catch a trout, to cut a virgin pine, or to shoot a twelve-tined buck was almost a ritual act: it was like sacrificing a white bull to the god Mithra," he wrote in 1929. Such an instinctive feeling for the ritualistic dimension of an active life close to the soil would sensitize Cowley to the overtones of ancient myth and "magic lore" in Ernest Hemingway; to read Nick Adams's fishing trip, in "Big Two-Hearted River," as "an incantation, a spell to banish evil spirits" was for Cowley an intuitive response as much as a reasoned criticism. Just as he would credit Hemingway, in a famous essay, with "a sort of instinct for legendary situations," so he himself would come to write a powerful contemporary fable of exile and return that carried unmistakable echoes of ancient myth and legend.¹⁶

Though one can hardly attribute an inclination towards pantheism to a writer of Cowley's pragmatic sensibility, occasionally his feelings

Prologue: An Urn of Native Soil

towards the natural world of his boyhood carry a element of religious worship. Plagued by the summer heat of 1929, Cowley complained to Kenneth Burke that he longed for Belsano, where "the house is cool and the hemlock woods are dark as a cathedral." Years later he recalled how, during a return visit in 1944, he had "worshipped among the last surviving first growth pines." Once, in 1928, wishing to recapture the "tragic power" and "cold majesty" of his childhood country, Cowley climbed the old pine tree on the hilltop, from where, "perched on the highest branch," he could survey the surrounding countryside in silent contemplation, completely isolated and absorbed by nature:

[The old pine tree] stands some distance behind the farmhouse alone in a bare field, with its branches twisted northward in the direction of the prevailing winds. Branch after branch they spread like Egyptian fans of ostrich feathers or separate terraces of moss, hiding the ground from the watcher who has climbed to the top. There, a perpetual breeze creeps through the needles, exhaling the odor of dried herbs and a rustle of heavy silk.

The protective, moss-green bower high-up in the old pine tree would be one of Cowley's recurrent memories. It would remain the "true moral norm" at the heart of his writings, much in the way the idyllic fishing expedition at Burguete constitutes the moral core of The Sun Also Rises. With Hemingway he shared a feeling of nostalgia for the natural world of the past, unspoiled, orderly, secure. For Cowley, a lifelong aficionado of troutfishing, the activity would always be, as he once remarked to Allen Tate, "a piety, an obeisance to lost youth."¹⁷

Already during Cowley's childhood, however, the magical landscape was rapidly becoming a vanishing pastoral dream. For youngsters growing up in the early years of the century, at the breaking point between the Victorian and the modern age, it was still possible to imagine America as a rural Jeffersonian paradise of self-sufficient, independent farmers, who lived mostly by a system of barter and virtually without money. "They raised enough hay, buckwheat and rye to carry their cattle through the winter," Cowley remembered, and grew enough wheat for their year's supply of flour, which was ground by water power at the White Mill, on the creek below the Cowley farmhouse. "They paid the miller in grain; and when they carried butter and eggs to the general store, they were given credit against their year's supply of calico, shoes, overalls and chewing

tobacco." Such a primitive household economy did not make for prosperous living. There was, Cowley recalled in 1983, "real poverty" in Cambria County: "people ate what they could produce. Potatoes went into the root cellar. Apples were gathered, pressed into cider, and the cider boiled down into apple butter, which would stand on the shelves in the pantry. . . . They'd have a cow and a couple of pigs. In the fall you'd hear the pigs being killed by having their throats cut, their terrible wails going over the whole country. But by the end of the winter people actually didn't have enough to eat. And they would have lots of children. I pity those farmwives," Cowley mused eighty years later; "The farmwives didn't wear shoes, except on Sunday. They had bare feet, huge slabs of bare feet like slabs of bacon, and usually wore calico dresses."¹⁸

The old spirit of pioneer individualism was still strong; with each man working for his own salvation, social feeling was at a low ebb. Bad roads, primitive schools, polluted troutstreams, badly maintained churches, forest fires that went unfought--these were conspicuous symptoms of a lack of responsibility to the community. Yet, enough of the magic of a frontier existence remained for Cowley to think back on his country as a "mountain paradise," a fabulous land of deerhunters, lumberjacks and backwoodsfarmers, in which he situated "the myth of the pioneer." Old people in Cowley's youth still hummed the tune of half-forgotten sentimental frontier ballads: "Wild roved an Indian girl, Bright Alfarata, / Where sweep the waters of the blue Juniata." To the west of Belsano lay Duncan's Knob, which had been claimed and named by Cowley's great-great-uncle James Duncan, a deerslayer and "pinebutcher" who had hewn his cabin from the forest log by log. His son Thomas had built the White Mill, first of the water grist mills in the region, and by marrying Cowley's paternal great-aunt Lizzie, had brought the Belsano farmhouse into the Cowley family. For an imaginative boy the farm must have formed a living link to the pioneer past.¹⁹

Most eloquently the pastoral past and the pioneer spirit survived in the region's aging farmers, memorable old men who could still vividly recall a time when "the hills were covered with first-growth pine, when water grist mills hummed in all the valleys, when panthers slunk after white-tailed deer, when every creek and run . . . was full of shadowy trout." Later, in poetic remembrance of things past, Cowley would write two poems in tribute to these legendary pioneer-farmers, who embodied the

harsh practical spirit and sturdy individualism of an older time and who had attained a dignity of their own--men like Dan George who, as a sergeant in the Army of the West during the Civil War, had been wounded at Chicamauga and been a prisoner at Andersonville.

Dignity is an old man dribbling tobacco juice
on the yellow ends of his cavalry mustache.

The ring of their voices, the slow-spoken, "drawling singsong" of the Pennsylvania mountains, would always reverberate in Cowley's memory. "My country has no dialect of its own, but it has a verbal melody which is unmistakable, and the speech of these old men was a sort of chant that rose and fell like the slow Allegheny ridges." The magic of that melodious chant is heard in the dramatic voices of Simon Overbeck and Dan George, which, even after a lifetime of poetic revision, still carry faint traces of the strong appeal of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology for the young poet:

"Humpty Mert Miller,
ran a water sawmill in Pine Flats,
a hard man, a good hater, died fighting drunk.
Bury me at his side--"
and three words more,
remembered from a song--"where woodbine twineth" . . .²⁰

"Overbeck's Barn" tells a representative and symbolic tale. Simon Overbeck--"a hard man who never prayed nor helped / a soul in trouble, but only loved his land"--had arrived fifty years ago, with a brand-new wagon and a new wife dressed in printed cotton, and, having picked his "stumpy clearing" among the pinetrees, had begun to strike down roots in the rich "black loam" of Pennsylvania. Hard on himself, ruthless in dealing with others, but respectful of the land and always careful to "seed down / the slopes in clover to keep the soil from washing," he managed to expand an empty and windowless cabin into a majestic farm. Now, on his deathbed, his life and identity having fused with the empire he created "with his living hands," he is "seized / with sudden furious longing to destroy / present and past." Endeavoring to take the farm with him into death, he uses the last of his strength to try and set fire to the barn, but fails and dies in the attempt: "He clenched his chalky hands / as if they held the farm. His face went white."²¹ With the death

Prologue: An Urn of Native Soil

of the original homesteaders, the mountain paradise as a way of life died too. But the ideal of a life in loving contact with the soil would linger and be stamped into the bones of the boy, on whom some of the stubborn independence and sturdy practicality of the Pennsylvania farmer would rub off.

A more serious threat to the countryside was posed by the advance of industry and technology and the concomitant exploitation of natural resources. In 1907, when Cowley was nine years old, the Vinton Lumber Company embarked upon a rapacious process of cutting the second-growth pine, the first-growth hemlock and the sugar maple trees covering Cambria County, leaving only birch and beech as worthless or unprofitable. When, soon after, forest fires burned for two months in the slashings, thousands of acres were turned into a veritable wasteland, "black meadows where ashes stirred in the breeze like the pollen of infernal flowers." Minetipples and culmbanks stood out like "toadstools on the bare hills;" creeks, poisoned with sulphur, ran an orange color. "It was as if my country had been occupied by an invading army which had wasted the resources of the hills, ravaged the forests with fire and steel, fouled the waters, and now was slowly retiring, without booty." This destruction of undefiled nature would profoundly stir Cowley's imagination. It would, in effect, preclude a return to the world of childhood well before the adolescent embarked upon the long process of deracination which he later was to date from the moment he entered the "international republic of learning," rootless and timeless, in high school and university.²² Indeed, Cowley was an exile by historical necessity long before he became one by choice and interpretation.

Between 1907 and 1915, the summer when Cowley departed for Harvard, the farming paradise of childhood was irretrievably lost. Paradoxically, but perhaps not surprisingly, the process of destruction yielded a rich poetic harvest. The center of despoilment was nearby Vintondale, seat of the coke-ovens and of the Vinton Lumber Company, which had a big lumbermill beside the North Branch of Blacklick Creek. Vintondale, Cowley remembered, was "a hellhole." Owned by the coal company "lock, stock and constables," it was about "as ravaged and grimy as a town can be." On the South Branch of Blacklick Creek, about five miles from the farmhouse in which Cowley was born, lay a group of miners' cabins known as Mine No. 6. It had, Cowley wrote in answer to an inquiry from Robert W. Stallman, "no

other name, no post office, no school at the time, no church, no place to buy anything except the mine commissary, no law except the mine superintendent, no fish in the poisoned stream, no tree within half a mile, and nobody except the superintendent who spoke English." A seemingly unpromising subject, it brought forth one of Cowley's finest poems. "Mine No. 6," first published in the North American Review of August 1922, was one of the "lucky" poems that found its proper and permanent form from the beginning. Straining a modern subject against a classical sonnet form, it underwent only minor revisions over the years.

They scoured the hill with steel and living brooms
of fire, that none else living might persist;
here crouch their cabins, here the tippie looms
uncompromising, black against the mist.

All day their wagons lumber past, the wide
squat wheels hub deep, the horses strained and still;
a headlong rain pours down all day to hide
the blackened stumps, the ulcerated hill.

Beauty, perfection, I have loved you fiercely
--even in this windy slum, where fear
drips from the eaves with April rain, and scarcely
a leaf sprouts, and a wilderness in pain
brings forth its monstrous children—even here
. . . your long white cruel fingers at my brain.²³

Before long the dead would be the only survivors in a landscape of destruction. Abandoned and forgotten in their graveyard on the hill--
"sprawled on the ash-gray slope above the mine, / where coke-oven fumes
drift heavily by day / and creeping fires at night"--they remained as
silent witnesses of a despoiled paradise, awaiting the moment of nature's
redemption, the only promise of consolation the poet can hold out to
them.

What have you seen, O dead?

"We saw our woods
butchered, flames curling in the maple tops,
white ashes drifting, a railroad in the valley
bridging the creek, and mine shafts under the hill.
We saw our farms lie fallow and houses grow
all summer in the flowerless meadows. Rats
all winter gnawed the last husks in the barn.
In spring the waters rose, crept through the fields
and stripped them bare of soil, while on the hill
we waited and slept firm."

Wait on, O dead.
The waters still shall rise, the hills fold in,
the graves open to heaven, and you shall ride
eastward on a rain wind, wrapped in thunder,
your white bones drifting like herons across the moon.²⁴

Mines, lumber companies and forest fires put an end to the magical kingdom of marginal farmers and original settlers. Young men, instead of following in their fathers' footsteps, left the region to seek employment in the mills of Johnstown and Pittsburgh, or followed the lumber companies into Kentucky or Virginia for new acts of despoliation. Others went further westward to find labor in Michigan factories or Oregon sawmills. They became, Cowley observed in 1929, "landless men, trees without roots--the homeless peasants of the machine."²⁵ What remained of the way of life of their fathers was a host of dying and abandoned farms, dotting the countryside as reminders of an irrecoverable past.

I watched for years a sidehill farm that died
a little, day by day.
Branch after branch the dooryard maples died
and a buckwheat field was gullied into clay,

to the beat . . . beat of a loose board on the barn
that flapped in the wind all night;
nobody came to drive a nail in it.

. . .

The farm died when two boys went away,

or lived until the lame old man was buried.
I came then, and once more
to see how sumac overspread the pasture,
to smell dead leaves and hear a gust of wind
somewhere inside the house blow shut a door.²⁶

A door on the past had blown shut, but the way had been opened for what Lewis Simpson has diagnosed, in an admirable essay, as a "poetics of exile" at the heart of Cowley's writings.²⁷ It is in Cowley's poetry that the process of severance and alienation is depicted most lyrically and precisely. "Day Coach" opened the first issue of the avant-garde little magazine Secession in the Spring of 1922 and is one of Cowley's better-known experimentalist poems. Counterpointing stanzas of formal and

metrical regularity with sections of free, poetic prose, the poem's seven parts chart a train journey from New York back into Cambria County, past all the "grimy remembered stations" whose very names resound with the magic of childhood (Luckett, Munster, Ebensburg, Beulah Road, Nant-y-glo), to Twin Rocks, then the railroad station for Belsano. As the poet-traveler settles back in his coach, "his mind in animal reverie, kept warm / by remembered things as by an overcoat," he feels unassailable in the assurance that "strangers" can touch "only the frayed coattails of his dream." Metaphorically, the journey is a quest for a lost childhood, as the train takes the poet back over the same water he had crossed before into the prison of his exile:

The lights of the train now move
transversely across the water;
across the water strides
the shadow of the engineer;
barred rows of window shine across the water
as if they marked a prison that exists
nowhere on solid earth, but always bears
us the condemned across a world of water.

Arriving at the station of his hometown, however, the returned traveler finds that even in the country of his boyhood he is doomed to be a spiritual exile: wandering off into the darkness by himself, "[f]eeling the weight of darkness on his shoulders, / he stumbled on with his burden of trees and hills."²⁸ Shouldering his burden of alienation, the poet has come to the acute realization, so central to his generation's experience, that you can't go home again.

The truth of this was brought home to Cowley with renewed force during several return trips he made over the years. Shortly after his mother's death in the autumn of 1937, the son came back to sell the family summer home and its belongings. Thirty years later he recalled the day of his definitive break with his Belsano boyhood in a poem, "The Pyre," which he ended with a symbolic burning of the unsold furniture in the yard. In 1970, two years after he had returned in memory and imagination by painstakingly revising many of the poems about his Pennsylvania past, a last return in reality proved "a sad experience." "Ich kehrte zurück zu meinem Heimatsort," he lamented to Kenneth Burke on July 27 in a favorite foreign language of their boyhood. His birthplace, once a big frame house sheltered from storms by two locust trees--

"They're better than lightning rods," his grandmother used to say--had now been transformed into a roadhouse, "a piss-smelling ginmill," the old clapboards covered with "dirty vomit-colored asbestos shingles," the room where he was born converted into a barroom smelling of stale beer.²⁹

Nostalgia for a lost childhood would remain the strongest incentive for Cowley's pastoral lyrics, memory the supreme source of consolation. Poems infused with this spirit, notably "The Chestnut Woods" and (perhaps Cowley's best-known poem) "The Urn," are among his finest accomplishments in verse. "The Chestnut Woods," first published in February 1923 in Harriet Monroe's Poetry, is a dramatic dialogue between two poetic voices, which, vaguely conceived as a man's and a woman's, speak for two contradictory impulses within the poet. Here, as elsewhere, the chestnut trees, Cowley has commented, are intended as "a symbol of the rich natural world I once knew." The dialectic in the poem is between a longing to reach back to the "spring" of youth (as in "The Living Water") and a dawning awareness of its irremediable ruination. It appropriately concluded the series of Pennsylvania poems in the first edition of Blue Juniata (1929).

While nobody's million eyes are blinking, come.

It is too late now.

Come far, and find a place where orchard grass,
blue grass and fescue, white and yellow clover
tangle an orchard slope, and juneberries
ripen and fall at the edge of the deep woods.

Highways and areaways,
eyes, numbers, unremembered days;
it is too late now.

Since unremembered days the ferns have grown
knee deep, and moss under the chestnut trees
hiding the footprints of small deer. You ran
and I ran after, till we reached the spring
that flows from underneath the chestnut roots
in a bright stream, we traced it through the laurel,
crossing burned ground where briars clawed us back,
then headlong crashing down a hill to find--

and lose again and now it is too late.
We have lived a long time under sheet-iron skies
in neon-haggard dreams where no moons rise;
the juneberries will be withered on the branches;
the chestnut woods are dead.³⁰

"The Urn" evokes the poetics of exile at the core of Cowley's literary experience with greatest force, lucidity and beauty. For Allen Tate it was "one of the great 20th century lyrics." It is the concluding poem to a book of verse which was meant to be "the integrated record of a life."

Wanderers outside the gates, in hollow
landscapes without memory, we carry
each of us an urn of native soil,
of not impalpable dust a double handful,

why kept, how gathered?--was it garden mould
or wood soil fresh with hemlock needles, pine,
and princess pine, this little earth we bore
in secret, blindly over the frontier?

--a parcel of the soil not wide enough
or firm enough to build a dwelling on
or deep enough to dig a grave, but cool
and sweet enough to sink the nostrils in
and find the smell of home, or in the ears
rumors of home like oceans in a shell.³¹

To be a wanderer outside the gates, sustained by memories of home, would be not only a leitmotif in Cowley's literary life, it would also constitute the cornerstone of his interpretation of the achievements and vicissitudes of the writers of his "lost" generation. Just as in his personal life Cowley would seek to put down new roots in the land--this time in the foothills of the Berkshires rather than in Pennsylvania--so his conception of culture as an organic outgrowth of the writer's environment and experience, his humanistic insistence on a meaningful correlation between art and life and his perpetual effort to help establish a sustaining sense of literary community, are all part of Cowley's ongoing attempt to "redeem the American writer from his condition of alienation."³² Treading in the critical footsteps of the early Van Wyck Brooks, Cowley always conceived of culture as "the outgrowth of a situation," organically related to the soil from which it sprang. Consequently, as he later wrote in Exile's Return, "an artisan knowing his tools and having the feel of his materials might be a cultured man," and "a farmer among his animals and his fields, stopping his plow at the fence corner to meditate over death and life and next year's crop, might have culture without even reading a newspaper."³³ As

an essential corollary to this belief Cowley would always conceive of writing, in practical and professional terms, as a craft with its own high standards of excellence and decorum, and of the literary artist as foremost an artisan with an expert knowledge of his tools. Most typically, he liked to envision the writer as a manual craftsman, a worker at the writer's trade. Of himself he should prefer to think, he wrote in 1979, as "a wordsmith essentially, working at his forge and anvil, devoted to the craft of hammering his thoughts into what he hoped would be lasting shapes."³⁴ Because he early recognized the paradox inherent in each literary work--as both of its time and place, and growing towards an autonomous existence apart from its creator and its context--Cowley would become a brilliant literary historian of his own time as well as an expert at technical, exegetical criticism.

Cowley would often associate the act of writing with the concrete world of nature. Much of Exile's Return was to be "tramped out . . . on walks in the woods or along farm lanes," its crystallizing thoughts first spoken aloud "to a respectful audience of trees."³⁵ The result was a style of writing which remarkably resembled Hawthorne's, another writer deeply attached to the New England soil, who, as a result of "walking out" his stories in nature, developed "a natural, a walked style, with a phrase for every step and a comma after every phrase like a footprint in the sand."³⁶ In Malcolm Cowley the man, the style, the conception of culture and the writer's life would be one.

Sharing Faulkner's "admiring and possessive" love of the land, as well as his "compulsive fear lest what he loves should be destroyed," Cowley would remain a countryboy at heart. All his life he would be a ferocious gardener and a devoted conservationist. Though he would spend a substantial part of his professional life in the cosmopolitan company of big-city writers and intellectuals, particularly in New York and Paris, such a milieu would fill him with feelings of uneasiness and distrust. How deeply country tastes and habits remained an ingrained part of his character is difficult to fathom justly. Although he may have exhibited a degree of self-conscious posturing in his way of confronting city intellectuals and academics, some literary acquaintances have perhaps concluded too easily that Cowley was playing a plebeian part, construing a facade of sophisticated provincialism to hide his weaknesses. Such a feeling may inform John Peale Bishop's rather condescending epithet "the

plowboy of the Western world who has been to Paris." Alfred Kazin, too, recalling Cowley's manner of addressing young potential book-reviewers from behind his editorial desk at The New Republic, appears to have underestimated the impact of a largely rural upbringing and to have read a trait of temperament as a consciously adopted pose: "Whenever you crossed Malcolm directly, he would sidle into his familiar role of the slow-moving and slow-talking country boy from western Pennsylvania, clear-minded and deliberate, definite as the gestures with which he tapped the last pinch of tobacco into his pipe and then looked out at you through the flame of the match as he slowly and puffingly lighted up." Cowley, indeed, had preserved the slow and deliberate habits of speech of his country upbringing, just as he would retain "a farmer's blunt hands." But his apparently tardy and procrastinating manner was deceptive, as was the rocklike solidity and lucid transparency of his prose. As Cowley has commented about himself, "people were fooled sometimes." Behind the pipe-lighting posture were twinkling, light-blue eyes shining with quick, good-natured intelligence. If his conversation was punctuated with "a farmer's large silences" and lacked the verbal fireworks and fast-paced witticisms of the citified intellectual, his words when actually spoken usually displayed a careful consideration and judiciousness not easily punctured.³⁷

It would be an important theme of Malcolm Cowley's career, as well as an essential ingredient of his vision of modern literature, to be nourished on local values and traditions and to be simultaneously uprooted. It was to be Cowley's destiny, as it was the destiny of many of his generation, to live as "an exile at home," to be an "alien tourist" in his own country. Like Faulkner, he would be condemned to live as an "internal émigré," to be "a foreigner among his neighbors." But much more strongly than Faulkner, Cowley would be conscious of sharing the tribulations of the writing profession with his coevals: he would be both a member of a specific age-group and an autonomous individual committed to his own special talent and vision. This tension between the writer as both tribally inclined and individualistically oriented lies at the heart of Cowley's own career and his unfolding interpretation of his literary generation.³⁸

In late August of 1898, Dr. William Cowley was summoned to Norfolk, Virginia, to be at the sickbed of his younger brother David, who had served as a volunteer in Cuba during the Spanish-American war and had contracted camp fever. Only his sister Margaret, Aunt "Tannie," slightly crippled and fated to be a spinster, was at hand in the Belsano farmhouse to help her sister-in-law Josephine give birth to her first child. "For nearly two days Mother moaned in labor," Cowley has written. "Aunt Margaret became terrified and locked herself in a closet. There was no telephone. Finally someone heard the moans, whipped up his horse, and summoned a company doctor from the nearest coalmining camp. The doctor arrived during a thunderstorm, just soon enough to save two lives. But Mother vowed next morning that she would never bear another child."¹

Josephine Hutmacher Cowley was born to a family of German immigrants on December 17, 1864, in Quincey, Illinois. Her father, Rudolph Hutmacher, had fled from Westphalia to America in 1850, so as to avoid conscription into the Prussian army. Hearing of the famous purity of the water in Quincey Bay he set up as a wholesale ice merchant and prospered by shipping ice down the Mississippi, mostly to the Annheuser-Busch brewery of St. Louis. A successful trader, he built a pretentious brick mansion at the edge of Quincey, with a high cupola overlooking the cornfields, and married Rosa Josephina Stuckenberg, the daughter of German Catholic settlers in Louisville.

Their eldest daughter Josephine spent an unhappy childhood as "household slavey" under the strict regime of a cold, unaffectionate mother. She suffered the common drudgeries of keeping house for a family of five brothers and four sisters and received little formal education: she attended a parochial school for five or six years and for one year was instructed by the nuns of St. Mary's Academy, who taught her, Cowley has

recalled, "to write a fine, legible hand but not how to punctuate." She grew to be a handsome woman, "with a high brown pompadour, Gibson Girl style, gray eyes set wide apart, and classical features except for a Hutmacher nose that flared at the tip," a physical trait she would pass on to her son. Partly due to her mother's severity and constant scolding, Josephine would always lack social confidence and suffer from a "sense of unworthiness." Perhaps it was she who instilled in the son a habit of modesty and an aversion to haughtiness.

When she finally escaped from the tyranny at home, Josephine, now 33 and desperate to be married, found work in Pittsburgh as a seamstress for "Young Modiste," a relatively busy dressmaker. There, possibly because Miss Young was a patient of Dr. William Cowley's, she met her future husband. Their backgrounds differed in all respects; even physically they were oddly matched. Four inches taller than her husband, a short, round man, she would always avoid being photographed beside him. Instead of publicly walking side by side, they would go for buggyrides.²

On his paternal side Malcolm Cowley hailed from a family of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, who around 1840 had emigrated from the North of Ireland and settled first in Allegheny County, and afterwards in Pittsburgh, "that world metropolis of the Scotch-Irish."³ Great-grandfather Cowley had a truck garden on Troy Hill, raising vegetables for market, and lived next door to the legendary Carnegie family, then still very poor. Great-uncle William Cowley had been one of the original Carnegie partners. He had been the only member of the Cowley clan to fight in the Civil War, and had died of typhus, thereby "permanently removing the threat of wealth from the family."⁴ William's fiancée Margaret Mowry subsequently married his brother David, Cowley's grandfather, who had broken with the family tradition of Presbyterianism and exchanged its pretensions to business success and military glory for the devout and mystical writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772); he had set up as a homeopathic physician in Pittsburgh.⁵

William Cowley was born on September 8, 1864, in Pittsburgh and, like his father before him, was a pious, devoted Swedenborgian and an honest but not very successful homeopathic physician. His father, Cowley recalled, was "an impractical, wholly lovable man," who into old age, though plagued with arthritis, retained the benevolent looks of "a little round Santa Claus." His office was located in the Wallace Building, a

three-storied apartment building of grimy yellow brick in the commercial center of East Liberty, Pittsburgh, on Center and South Highland Avenues. With streetcars rumbling past until far into the night, with shops on the ground floor and a few cramped apartments occupied by music teachers and unprosperous physicians above, the building provided a rather inglorious, forbidding setting for a writer's boyhood.

After her marriage Mrs. William Cowley surrendered her Catholicism and joined the Church of the New Jerusalem, though she never ventured very far into Swedenborg's mystical writings. Forty years later, on her deathbed, she would ask to see a Catholic priest to receive absolution. "A restless, energetic woman, big-boned, full-bosomed, and proud of the strength in her arms," she never was fully accepted into the Cowley clan.⁶ By temperament, social background and education, she seemed a little out of place among the Cowleys, who still treasured memories of a more glorious family past with a coachman and two servants. Impoverished intellectuals of a sort--uncle Henry was a Swedenborgian minister and aunt Eliza had married an Englishman with ambitions for a similar vocation--the Cowleys cherished books and liked to discuss the mystical writings of the founder with others in the Swedenborgian community. Unused to manual labor and given to study and debate, the Cowleys of Malcolm's father's generation seem to have confirmed the popular view of Swedenborgians as "a dreamy and mystical people." Their impracticality was such that even their Swedenborgian friends spoke of them as "a little queer." The Cowley clan was privately condescending to Josephine, a simple and kindhearted woman, who had no interest in books, but was 'supremely skillful in practical matters.'⁷

The impact of the family's Swedenborgianism on Malcolm Cowley's literary outlook and career is difficult to assess. Never formally instructed in its religious doctrines, Cowley was yet exposed to the philosopher's notions of Divine Providence, "conjugal" love and the promise of spiritual reunion in a heavenly afterlife. "Graves played no part in our Swedenborgian family, / with my father's trust in celestial reunions," he recalled in a late poem.⁸ Everyday at noon, unless he was at school, his father would read him a passage from Swedenborg's writings, to which he "scarcely listened;" and every night at bedtime, until he was twelve, Cowley was read a chapter from the Bible. Many of Swedenborg's writings were available only in Latin. The English

translations used by Cowley's father could do little to fan the boy's interest; they were, Cowley recalled, "in leaden prose that put me to sleep."⁹ But even if he could have understood the original, Cowley would probably have found the mystic's prose singularly lacking in aesthetic savor; he might have sympathized with the words of an earlier admirer of the Swedish mystic, Henry James, Sr.: "Swedenborg's intellect was singularly deficient in humor . . . Thus it is, that whether I read of heaven and its orderly peaceful vicissitudes, or of hell and its insane delights, and feel the while my moral sense amply satisfied, I must say that to my aesthetic sense . . . the result is very much the same in either case, being always very dull and prosaic, with the poetical element very nearly eliminated."¹⁰

It is not unlikely that the religious atmosphere of a Swedenborgian upbringing worked its influence by indirection. As is apparent from the life and writings of the elder James, from Swedenborg's theological mysticism to theories of utopian socialism was not such a big step. In mid-nineteenth century America Swedenborg's visionary predictions of the New Church as "a new social and spiritual order" found a willing and sympathetic ear with many followers of Charles Fourier, for whom the social implications of Swedenborg's mystical theology were easily apparent. "All Religion has relation to Life, and the Life of Religion is to do Good," Swedenborg had written in Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem.¹¹ An early exposure to the Swedish mystic may well have prepared the way for Cowley's later dreams of a new social and economic order, built on justice and equality, which could satisfy man's spiritual as well as physical needs. Just as for the elder James the conjunction of Swedenborg and Fourier provided an opportunity for "a marriage of Society and God," so Cowley, basing his thoughts on the writings of Emil Durkheim and William Ernest Hocking, would later incline towards an explanation of religion in terms of society and, conversely, of Communism in terms of religion. In the radical 1930s he had been "less Marxian than Emersonian," Cowley wrote retrospectively.¹² Such insights, together with the recurrent presence of Emerson in Cowley's later writings, tempt one to read in his later interest in Emerson a modified return to the Swedenborgian creed of his family.

From early youth, however, Cowley's temperament clashed with his father's predilection for the mystical and supernatural. Though he

inherited his father's love of reading, he clearly took after his mother in his inclination toward the pragmatic. Indeed, Cowley had begun to reject his father's Swedenborgianism well before he was fifteen. In 1943 he wrote to Harry Duncan that he had "rejected all religious dogmas so long ago that the loss of faith seems to have been an experience of early childhood (though I think I was fifteen before I actually said to myself, these are myths and lies)."¹³ In a letter to Kenneth Burke of September 1, 1924, Cowley emphatically repudiated the notion of a personal immortality and a divine providence: "Such topics are sweet to meditate, in the country, in the dusk, when one is seventeen."¹⁴ Much later he would feel that, rather than a pervasive Swedenborgianism, it had been "the decay of the Protestant sects" which had largely determined his (and his coevals') religious background: "pragmatism and instrumentalism was not for us a point of view to be adopted after struggles, but something taken for granted at first, and then questioned afterwards." Yet Cowley too, though not exactly raised in a Calvinist tradition, was to have "a Protestant ethic drilled into [him]."¹⁵

On the whole the effects of Swedenborgianism on his character were only indirectly religious. Having lost his belief in divine providence in early adolescence, his father's daily readings nevertheless impressed upon him a carefree confidence in life, "the habit of not worrying about tomorrow." Similarly, Cowley would retain a strong belief in the sacredness of marital or, as Swedenborg called it, "conjugal" love; for twelve years it kept him from divorcing his first wife, in spite of mutual pain, even though he later felt that he had had ample "cause for divorce and three times fell in love with other women."¹⁶ In part his rejection of formalized religious doctrine may have come so soon and so easy, because Cowley, like Henry James Jr., was exposed "much more to religious feeling than to religion itself." Still Cowley would never consent to calling himself an atheist. "We all feel the need of some doctrine to color our live[s] . . . All of us, even the confirmed William Jennings Bryans of science, feel the need of some religion," he observed in his notebook in the early 1920s. "I don't think there are any true atheists," he speculated almost sixty years later; "Everybody has some sort of God, if he is only an abstract principle." There would come a time when Cowley believed, with Durkheim, that God is Society. But he would continue to believe that there are "depths of the mind in which the

Passion survives for most of us, religious or irreligious, as the archetypical story."¹⁷ Religion, either in the sense of formalized doctrine or as intuitive faith, would not be a guiding principle in Cowley's mature years. But it was not absent from his life; rather, as it had been for Henry James, it was translated into a religious passion for art.

The germs of Cowley's literary ambition lay in the experiences of early childhood. In his infant years Cowley enjoyed his mother's wholehearted and undivided attention, only to lose it at about the age of six. "[R]adiantly proud" of her only child, Mrs. Cowley used to parade him through East Liberty in snow-white, self-embroidered dresses. Surrounding him with a worshiping host of volunteer babysitters, she instilled into Cowley an early feeling of difference, of being the miraculous "center of the mysterious world." Years later, fully aware of the possible overtones of "the too-famous Oedipus complex," Cowley recalled the moments of strong affection when, having slept late, his mother would let him climb into her warm bed. Even when they quarreled, he reflected, they fought "as equals, almost as a married pair." The effects of his mother's unswerving devotion would stay with him all his life. In later years he recognized the pertinence of Freud's observation in The Interpretation of Dreams that "a man who has been the indisputable favorite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror, that confidence of success that often induces real success."¹⁸ The boy's sense of specialness, of being fortune's favorite son, would grow into the young man's self-confident desire to be a famous and successful writer.¹⁹

A dramatic shift in his relations with his mother occurred when Cowley reached the age of six. Spurred on by his father, an avid reader and great admirer of Charles Dickens, Cowley entered a new magical world closed to his mother. Discovering the enchantments of the written word, he began to lose her undivided attention. "You learned to read," she told him later, "and you weren't my boy any more. You lay on the floor reading a book and I couldn't get a word out of you." Feeling that she "might as well have lost her son,"²⁰ she would henceforth aim her nervous energies at devising countless practical projects, partly to make or save some money, partly to find an outlet for her thwarted affective impulses. For three years, obsessed with poultry, she raised special breeds of chickens in Belsano, keeping guinea fowl, turkeys, pigeons and a flock of geese on

the side. At other times she was seized with a rage for baking pies and loaves, sewing quilts or collecting music boxes and student lamps at country auctions. Once, on a visit to the farmhouse, Cowley found the parlor given over to a free-flying swarm of countless canaries, "all chirping for food with a great fluttering of yellow wings," which she hoped to sell for a small profit. Over the years Cowley would display a similar pragmatic ingenuity in devising countless literary projects.

Others now claimed their share of his mother's untapped affection. When Cowley was twelve, she adopted the illegitimate child of a distant relative. The girl, Ruth, died at the age of nine of diphtheria, depriving Cowley of the nearest equivalent to a sister he would ever have and leaving an "appalling vacancy" in his mother's life. Later, she took into her home the little daughter of a miner, whose wife had just died, and cherished her as her own child until the father could remarry. Once she gave shelter to a lively girl of fourteen who, Cowley recalled, "caused a scandal by leading boys behind the barn." Asked why she behaved in such indecorous ways, the girl replied, "Mrs. Cowley, I like it."²¹ Her charitable concern for the needy would surface in the son's humanitarian sympathies during the depression years and inspire his acts of generosity towards writers in need.

Cowley's parents were unpretentious and hardworking people, "not quite members of the respectable middle class." Though they lived in East Liberty, a generally prosperous area of Pittsburgh, and were able to afford an underpaid servant, their social status was insecure; they were regarded as "quite strange, if harmless, and too poor to clothe themselves properly." As a result, Cowley was early made to feel a slight, if not a traumatic sense of social maladjustment: "I didn't wear the right clothes or use the same words as my schoolmates."²² Dr. Cowley was a good and generous man, who allowed his medical services to go unremunerated too often. In the economic crisis of 1907 his income was cut in half, as steelmills closed down, patients stopped paying their bills, and banks refused to give out loans. That Christmas Cowley did not receive the lead soldiers from Germany or the steam engine with a brass boiler he had prayed for, but found a large parcel containing a blue-serge suit, a hateful present for a boy who abhorred wearing suits. For three winters he walked the mile to school without an overcoat or a muffler. Though eventually his mother bought him a raincoat at a bargain

sale, the memory of such experiences would rankle.

Cowley grew up a rather lonely and neglected child. Once, in Belsano, his mother having been summoned to Pittsburgh by a family crisis, the eleven year old boy was left alone for a whole month and suffered serious malnutrition: the sores on his legs were later diagnosed as symptoms of scurvy. Even in the city, he seldom saw his father except at bedtime for the daily ritual of Bible reading. The one attempt his mother made to instil at least a modicum of culture was her insistence that, in spite of his short and stiff fingers, he learn to play the piano. In his adult years Cowley would occasionally perform the Chopin waltzes and Beethoven sonatas he had played in early youth "with more brio than correctness." In one of his earliest pieces of verse, published in his high-school literary magazine in March 1915, the juvenile poet, displaying an early mastery of conventional form and an easy skill with language, paid his own defiant tribute to a favorite composer:

Chopin

Bearded professors in their musty schools
Have analyzed your every pulsing dance
Into its mingled chord and dissonance.
I think those garbling pedants are but fools
And see a Polish warrior with a lance
Stalk lord-like through each stately Polonaise,
And after burning tones and chords that blaze,
Hear a still voice with half-abashed caress
Sing like a maiden in the wilderness.

Cowley's musical training may well have helped to give him a feeling for the sound and rhythm of words. Mostly, however, his mother rarely bothered to inquire where or how he spent his time and often he was left to his own resources, free to indulge in reading or to explore vacant lots in the neighborhood. Since the Wallace Building was situated in the commercial center of East Liberty and there were no other boys on the same block, even in Pittsburgh Cowley was without playmates most of the time. As if in compensation, he chose to live in an "imaginary world peopled with Scottish clansmen and Robin Hood's band." The loss of his mother's attention at an early age, Cowley reflected as late as 1982, "made me a loner for many years that followed, down to this morning."²³

The years of loneliness and poverty mark an important formative phase in Cowley's literary career. They triggered a desire to rise from such

early humiliations "by force of ability," and help to explain his later "rage for putting justificatory words together." Such a period, Cowley wrote to Alfred Kazin in 1962, occurs in almost every literary life and is the writer's salvation as well as his sorrow; "the early humiliation is what winds him up and keeps him going." One should be grateful for it, Cowley felt, or at most regret it was not worse.²⁴

Loneliness encouraged a habit of reading which soon became a consuming passion. Cowley's early reading was indiscriminate; he swallowed everything he could lay his hands on. On rainy afternoons he would climb to the attic of the farmhouse in Belsano and leaf through a pile of fat bound volumes of ancient magazines, in which he discovered stories of slavers, filibusters and pirates, of African travels, the battle of Sedan and of the Civil War.²⁵ From the circulating library in a local stationery store he borrowed trashy romances, which he consumed by the armload; once he read five of them in a single day. Much was read in a daze and barely remembered a few hours later. From the East Liberty branch of Carnegie Library he borrowed books that made a more lasting impression, in particular long historical novels filled with action and color, such as the Polish trilogy of the Nobel Prize winner of 1905, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), whose With Fire and Sword, The Deluge and Pan Michael Cowley relished especially. Written in a vivid style of epic clarity and simplicity and, despite their theatricality, possessed of real narrative power, such books helped to give the young Cowley a "taste for history and geography," besides filling his mind with "dreams of becoming a bold cavalier whom the ladies would admire (as the little girls in pigtails showed no signs of admiring me)."²⁶ Mostly, his early reading spurred his imagination and incited an early ambition to write books of his own. It provided him with subjects, scenes, characters and an abundance of new words for what was to become an inveterate habit and necessity of his writing life: an "inner conversation" between the storyteller and the listener in himself. In youth, isolation and a degree of social maladjustment would tempt Cowley to conduct "imaginary conversations with imaginary playmates," a habit which heightened a sense of separateness from his coevals and helped to give him, in his own words, "the sense of perspective that writers have to possess."²⁷

Malcolm Cowley attended elementary school in Pittsburgh from October 1904 through June 1911. His first seven grades he completed at Shakespeare School, a good but not always diligent pupil. The principal, Miss Ella Hanlon, whom Cowley would remember with respect and affection, used to move him into a higher grade whenever he showed any disposition to study. For his eighth grade he went to Liberty School, attending a three-room "high-school class" headed by Miss Ruswinkle. There he wrote his first story, later published in the high-school literary paper.²⁸ On the verge of entering high school Cowley encountered his first example of the artistic life in the figure of Allison Crawford, then his best and almost only friend:

He was two years older than I, a sandy-haired boy with a high, thin bridge to his nose, that gave him a look of quizzical contempt. I thought, and still think, that I had never met anyone so brilliant or so far beyond his years. At fifteen he wrote some stories that are still remembered by his high-school classmates. He also began to visit the red-light district that flourished on Second Avenue, chiefly because he thought it was the reckless thing to do. At sixteen he contracted gonorrhea, which was never cured. At seventeen he got into a street fight with an amateur boxing champion. He was kicked in the bladder, complications set in and he died a few months later. At twelve and thirteen, when I knew him best, he already seemed to carry with him an intimation, almost a halo, of early death.²⁹

Allison Crawford was to be Cowley's first acquaintance with the picturesque and squalid heroism of the bohemian artist, the world-weary pose of the decadent aesthete and the shocking indifference to prevailing moral standards of the Dadaist. Here was a type he would frequently encounter in the artistic milieu of Greenwich Village and the Quartier Latin, though by then he had matured sufficiently for his admiration to be strongly qualified. In 1910, at age twelve or thirteen, Allison Crawford inspired Cowley with visions of reckless adventure and tragic, sordid love and wore a halo of the glories of the literary life. Soon the young reader, entering high school, would write a story about Allison Crawford that was admired by his English teacher and read aloud to the class. By the time of this first sign of social approval his youthful ambitions to be a writer had consolidated.

Apart from four months in 1912, when he was enrolled in the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn, a Swedenborgian school near

Philadelphia, Cowley attended a public high school in Pittsburgh. From September 1911 through June 1915 he was at Peabody High School, then new, well-equipped and counting about a thousand pupils. Cowley was in the second class to graduate. Though the general atmosphere was "prosperous and middle-class," the attending pupils were socially and racially mixed and Cowley consorted with youngsters from all sorts of backgrounds. "Irish, Jew, Italian, Wasp, poor boy, rich boy, we didn't give a damn," he recalled nostalgically in 1967. As a mature literary critic he would always be sensitive to the formative influence of social class and background on a writer's character and career. In the middle of the socially minded 1930s he would look back "with deep gratitude to the fact that I went to school with poor kids in the city and with farmers in the country." At Harvard, he would be made painfully aware of the difference in status and respect accorded to boys from public schools and those who had attended privileged and exclusive preparatory schools. At Peabody, he always felt, the social and human atmosphere was "certainly happier than at Harvard."³⁰

Cowley's literary ambitions materialized early. "I broke the family tradition," he wrote to Stanley Young in 1944; "I wanted to be a writer from the time I entered Peabody High School and began contributing to the school paper." Cowley was lucky in his choice of Peabody. Instruction, by all accounts, was excellent; it would allow him to be excused from taking English A at Harvard and enable him to establish an excellent record during his freshman year. Whereas he hardly bothered to distinguish himself socially and athletically, Cowley soon managed to make himself conspicuous in Peabody's literary crowd, which was exceptional by any standards. His first story, written at the age of twelve, was published in an early issue of The Peabody in 1913, "a pretty good literary paper" for a high school, Cowley felt in 1969. Soon he became president of the Debating Club; he was awarded a ten-karat gold medal for essay writing; and upon his graduation in 1915 he was elected Class Poet.³¹

Between February 1913 and June 1915 Cowley contributed five short stories and seven poems to The Peabody. One of his earliest pieces of verse pictured the young ambitious poet-philosopher vainly and self-ironically yearning for an unattainable high-school love, but doing so in a mock-Romantic fashion which suggested an early talent for parodic wit:

To Lotta on Her Double Chin

I cannot paint the smiling lines that creep
Through your pink nose; the blush that dyes your skin,
Nor tell the pert charm of your pointed chin.
I know, but cannot tell just how you keep
A crowd around you always. Words are cheap
And I am losing time, for as I sing
Of your two jewels made for languishing,
Others are stealing favors I should reap.
But my great day will come in twenty years
When those two dancing eyes of yours will blur,
At that far day when you will wear a rat
And mourn your youthful grace with futile tears.
For then, my dear, I'll be Philosopher,
While you at forty, Lotta, will be fat.

The short stories he wrote for The Peabody exhibit an equally precocious feeling for characterization and a surprisingly firm narrative control, which indicate that Cowley's ambitions in the field were not wholly unjustified. "The Best Story of the Year," published in June 1915, not only testified to the intensity of its author's adolescent ambitions, but also showed that, from the first, Cowley was intrigued by the problems of art and craftsmanship besetting the writers of his age-group. Inspired by Cowley's friendship with Allison Crawford, the story deals with the son of a poor music teacher who is pressured to realize vicariously the literary ambitions of the father. Finding himself without a subject and a style, the son secretly arranges with an older, more sophisticated and already published high-school writer to write a story for him, against payment. The ensuing literary fame places the son in a false position, as he is now expected to turn out a story every month. The crisis moment inevitably comes, when his self-enamored ghostwriter makes stiffer financial demands than can be met. In despair the son, who has meanwhile acquired a style of his own from copying and secretly revising his mentor's prose, dashes off a story about his recent humiliations which, miraculously, wins him greater popularity than before. In conclusion Cowley pointed a typical literary moral: whereas the "intellectual" senior writer had "tried to write literature," the younger boy had "tried only to write a good story, and succeeded in writing a good story, a very good story, the best story of the year."³²

Cowley's literary consorts at Peabody made up a motley but remarkable crew: Kenneth Burke, with whom he had also attended eighth grade, would go on to a distinguished career as a critic and philosopher of language;

Jake Davis followed Cowley to Harvard and became head of a firm of diamond merchants in Pittsburgh; Russell Farrell, valedictorian of the class of 1915, "changed his mind and didn't become a priest;" James Light would go on to Ohio State University, edit the collegiate magazine Sansculotte and become theatrical director of the Provincetown Players in postwar Greenwich Village; Light's future wife Susan Jenkins would write a book of memories of Hart Crane and later marry the novelist William Slater Brown; Mary Blair would study at the Carnegie Tech School of the Theatre, become a leading actress with the Provincetown Players and marry Edmund Wilson. Most of them were editors of or contributors to Peabody's literary monthly and "loyal rooters" for the school's champion football team of 1913 and 1914. They would reassemble in New York City in the years following the First World War. It was an intellectually precocious and self-consciously brilliant group. Years later a non-literary classmate, Hilda Wallace, remembered how Cowley, Burke and Davis used to terrorize the teachers "by being brilliant and knowing so much."³³

It was at Peabody, too, that Cowley had his initiation into literary politics. It occurred when he was seventeen and it was, he later told Allen Tate, "an almost traumatic experience." On the brink of being named editor of the high-school paper, Cowley's appointment was overruled by the faculty adviser, who decreed that the editor was to be chosen by a vote of the class. Four candidates were named: Burke, Cowley, Davis, each excellently fitted for the job, and Russell Farrell, who had never yet written for the paper. The outcome was predictable but deeply shocking to the novice: Burke, Cowley and Davis split the vote and Farrell was elected. "I soon recovered from the heartbreak," Cowley recalled in his seventies, "but I couldn't forget it."³⁴ It was the first of many disillusioning confrontations to follow. They would teach Cowley much about the folkways of the literary community and, as no college course could, convince him of the necessity of tact and circumspection in his dealings with fellow writers. Though such experiences would help to make him an eminently tactful and prescient literary politician, they could not protect him against blundering at times into hot and hurtful situations.

Cowley's most intimate friend at Peabody was Kenneth Burke. They had first met one day in 1901, when Dr. Cowley, the Burkes' family physician, had taken his wife and three-year-old son along for a visit. On their

first day together, his mother later recalled, Cowley "went around the Burke parlor touching everything in reach while Kenneth followed repeating apprehensively, 'Don't touch, Mustn't.'"³⁵ Though Burke was his senior by some sixteen months—he had been born in Pittsburgh on May 5, 1897—in their early years Cowley appears to have been the more reckless and venturesome of the two, the natural one to lead and take initiatives. Round-faced, chubby-cheeked, blue-eyed, with a thick wave of hair and a solid, somewhat clumsy build, Cowley made a more daunting impression in adolescence than Burke, agile, of nimble mind and of sligher build. Referring to a poem recited in high school, Cowley once spoke of them as "the mountain" and "the squirrel."³⁶ Pimpled, awkward, bashful and self-questioning, yet given to boastful posturing as a shield against shyness, Cowley was inclined to adopt an attitude of protective and solicitous concern towards the sensitive, timid Burke. "You are at your best when you are like me," Burke remembered being admonished by Cowley in youthful arrogance.³⁷ Wholly engrossed in their own hesitantly developing personalities, yet persuaded of their secret distinction, the boys brooded on the mysteries of death and sex, and yearned for love. They naively assumed that the world-weary stance of the decadent aesthete would mysteriously endow them with artistic genius. Leagued in covert companionship against an insensitive adult society, Cowley and Burke often met at night at the Carnegie Library in Schenley Park. Burke later recalled how he and Cowley used to read technical and theoretical "How-to books" on poetry, drama and story writing, and took a particular fancy to authors on the librarian's list of "restricted" modern literature: Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, Dostoevsky. When the library closed at ten o'clock, the two walked home together, a stretch of some three miles. Making their way through "streets that were empty except for the trolley cars that banged along Ellsworth Avenue," they conducted heavy-handed philosophical discussions, punctured by shouts and fierce gesticulations, on the literary and amorous topics closest to their hearts.³⁸

They were entirely different in character and intellectual disposition. Bristling with ideas, Burke's ceaselessly fermenting and punning mind was already marked by what Stanley Edgar Hyman has called an "endless fertility, suggestiveness, an inexhaustible throwing off of sparks." Whereas Burke's mind would tend to move from concrete instances and specific works to general concepts and hidden principles, thus making

him one of the boldest synthetic and "truly speculative" thinkers of his era, Cowley had primarily a poet's and historian's sensibility. His mind, as Allen Tate noted in an early review, was "basically concrete and unspeculative."³⁹ Unlike Burke's intellectual fireworks, Cowley's writing habits would be careful and laborious and involve slow and painstaking revision. Their handwriting reflected their different personalities. Where Burke would write a cryptically illegible hand, resembling secret hieroglyphics and having the look, as Cowley once remarked, of miniscule mousedroppings or sparrows' footprints in the sand, Cowley's handwriting was classically round, bold and lucid. Already as youngsters their temperaments were so unmistakably their own, that there would be little danger of one succumbing to the other's influence. Though their early views on art and life would be developed in close communion and correspondence, each would remain his own man and follow the direction of his intellectual and emotional disposition. Whereas in their early years Cowley appeared the bolder leader, even if he was occasionally daunted by Burke's complexity and soon had intimations of inferiority, in the end Burke would prove the more persistent quester and innovative explorer. Without a doubt they aided each other in their intellectual development and reinforced each other's inclination towards the literary life. Convinced that true friendship demanded radical frankness, they felt that tact and consideration would reduce them to mere acquaintances. Accordingly, they tended to be unsparing in analyzing each other's characters and criticizing each other's literary efforts; in the ring of letters they were to be each other's principal sparring partners. Though their friendship would suffer minor injuries along the way, it continued, intact and unabated, throughout their long lives. Their literary correspondence extends over seven decades and constitutes a unique chapter in American literary history.

Cowley grew up during the period Van Wyck Brooks has famously labeled "The Confident Years." It was a time when the majority of Americans lived in a moral atmosphere of belated Victorianism "even stiffer and stuffier than Victoria's English reign" and still retained an unshakable faith in the reality and certainty of universal and eternal moral values. Herbert

Spencer had instilled a stubborn belief in the doctrine of social evolution and Theodore Roosevelt seemed bent on proving to the world that no nation would be permitted to thwart the imperialistic course of America's rise to world power. Progressive idealism would soon find the perfect symbol of its hopeful vision of the future in Woodrow Wilson, the living embodiment of "sound morals, faith in democratic progress, and traditional culture." The period basked in a spirit of rational, scientific optimism and was marked by faith in automatic progress. Technology produced miracles like the first automobiles and moviehouses. Cities grew rapidly and agricultural-industrial production soared, implying a promise that, in Cowley's words, the world would grow "in wealth and wisdom toward the goal of universal peace." If, as muckrakers like Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair and Lincoln Steffens had set out to show, neither the social system nor the political and legislative branches of government could provide a waterproof guarantee against injustice and corruption, their moral protestations and pleas for reform barely affected the social and religious foundations of the system: people retained their confidence in "the basic rightness of things as they were." All that was needed was to drive the moneychangers from the temple; the temple itself was perfectly sound. There was no reason to doubt that social ills could be adjusted, as long as young boys would grow up to become honest and hardworking men who would strive for success by a diligent pursuit of their personal interests and thereby ensure the progress of society.⁴⁰

To Cowley, in the throes of adolescence, such a moral atmosphere seemed oppressive and debilitating rather than reassuring. By the time of his graduation in the summer of 1915 he had come to question most of the values and traditions of his upbringing. Countless arguments about God and religion had led him to reject his parents' Swedenborgianism; at seventeen he was "converted to indifferentism." He repudiated prevailing morality as the cloak of a prudish Puritanism. To want to be a poet was in itself an act of filial disloyalty and rebellion; he was, he later wrote in a long, confessional poem, "a bad son, but a poet"--"My world has deeper colors than yours," / I boasted, 'and the words will come / to match the colors.'"⁴¹

But in a society ruled by scientific, impersonal laws, there seemed scant opportunity to live the life of art, devoted to the uninhibited

development of one's creative and emotional talents. Instead of being free to exert a meaningful influence on the direction of one's life, one was inescapably geared towards a future which seemed to Cowley the epitome of boredom and security, "an intolerable utopia of dull citizens, without crime or suffering or drama." Nor did Belsano promise a more inspiring future. The options open to young men of Cowley's age were limited; they could either move away and become landless, homeless servants of technology, or they could stay behind and succumb to "the yoke of women and the past." In their provincial and puritan lives the only relief lay in barn dances, hayrides, church festivals and picnics or, in wintertime, husking bees and sociables. A moment of spontaneous sexual passion might be punished with a premature marriage and the prospect of a stunted life, "hard and in its essentials tragic." For a youngster with artistic aspirations the country offered only the options of exile or imprisonment. In 1915, with other incipient artists of his age, Cowley felt that society was beyond the reach of his life and writings, as if he were on a train smoothly gliding towards a destination he would never have chosen for himself.⁴²

However, for an adolescent who felt "disillusioned and weary" there were encouraging signs that the smug and complacent surface of Victorianism was cracking. For all its apparent moral certainty the Progressive period was, in the words of Alfred Kazin, "an upheaval, a sudden stirring, a breaking of the bonds between the old order and the new." The years of Cowley's adolescence witnessed the gradual disintegration of moral and religious confidence. As Henry F. May has shown, this disintegrative process, most commonly associated with the revolution in morals and manners of the postwar years, was already well under way before, then sharply accelerated by, the First World War. Cowley thus grew up in a transitional age, when the universe began to be conceived of as "fluid and plural" instead of "orderly and single." If, in art and literature, this breaking-up of traditional standards would lead Ezra Pound to proclaim, in 1913, the imminence of an "American Risorgimento" and Van Wyck Brooks to announce America's cultural "Coming-of-Age," for a younger generation the joyful and exuberant expectation of an artistic renaissance was often dimmed by a mood of tentative groping, of puzzled search and self-questioning.⁴⁵

In a time when literary standards were predominantly British and

literature was regarded as "an effeminate upper-class affair open chiefly to men with a Harvard education," it was Cowley's reading of The Smart Set which opened up new and entirely unexpected literary vistas. In 1912 it was for Cowley "the wittiest, the most deliciously wicked of American magazines," largely because of the idol-smashing presence of H. L. Mencken, whose merciless debunking was perfectly attuned to Cowley's dissatisfied adolescent sensibility. At fourteen, he "worshipped" Mencken, read every author he recommended and "took his word for gospel." It was Mencken who first gave Cowley the ambition to become a critic: "I would praise good books, tell the bitter truth about the others, recite little German lyrics, and drink tremendous seidels of Löwenbrau." It would not be long, however, before Cowley would turn against his literary mentor and find his perpetual mockery "a rather slender diet." By 1919 he had come to regard Mencken as his "bitterest enemy," "the greatest existing menace to American letters," and would "cheerfully have hanged him to the nearest lamp-post." As a literary critic Mencken was puerile and immature; he showed "the keen literary judgment of a peewit," Cowley felt in 1927.⁴⁴

The influence of The Smart Set also worked in other ways. It may have been the example of George Jean Nathan that set Cowley to dreaming of becoming the drama critic of a metropolitan or provincial newspaper; "I should earn about three thousand dollars a year and have a mistress." More importantly, The Smart Set, essentially an upper-class magazine of cosmopolitan sophistication and elegant artiness, allowed young littérateurs of Cowley's Midwestern middle-class background to vicariously "escape from their class limitations" and breathe an artistic atmosphere of subtle, bored and aristocratic decadence. The Smart Set for 1913 in particular, then still under the editorship of Willard Huntington Wright, had a "tremendous" impact on Cowley; it exposed him for the first time to the wonders of European modernism. Though, as Henry May reminds us, much of the content of Wright's Smart Set was "insistently exotic and boringly naughty," the magazine did introduce Cowley to an impressive galaxy of modern European writers none of whom had before appeared in an American magazine: Arthur Schnitzler, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Max Beerbohm, Frank Wedekind, Mikhail Artzibashev, Gabriel d'Annunzio. "It seemed," Cowley recalled, "that a new world was being revealed to us, that it was time to smash the Victorian gods, open all the windows, go

floating off on a cloud of dream towards golden Vienna and Paris the City of Light."⁴⁵

The intensity of Cowley's literary ambitions was unmistakable; still indefinite and uncertain were the form and direction his ambition was to take, as well as his vision of the ideal artistic life. "We were launching or drifting into the sea of letters with no fixed destination and without a pilot," Cowley observed in Exile's Return. Eager to establish a mode of writing which could give artistic expression to his own youthful sense of life, he lacked suitable models to emulate. The great themes of literature--the trials of men in battle, heroic death and tragic love--had been mined so exhaustively that for youngsters like himself only the marginal or trite seemed left. The standard English authors he had been made to read tasted, he felt, of "chlorinated water." American literature offered only the discouraging examples of a William Dean Howells, guardian of the established culture, and of a Henry James, who had deemed it necessary to expatriate himself to lead the life of art. America seemed "beneath the level of great fiction" and literature existed in a world light years removed from his own humble adolescent experiences. The effect of his high-school instruction in literature, Cowley later felt, was little short of disastrous. It implied that only foreign authors were worthy of admiration, that wisdom and beauty were the exclusive property of Europe and the past. If he wanted to write about his own contemporary reality, he was made to adopt "a standardized Amerenglish as colorless as Esperanto," instead of his own colorful, local idiom, a language properly rooted in his own time and place. He was precluded from developing an organic sense of culture and compelled to turn away from a native to a foreign literature. In high school, Cowley wrote in a famous passage, he and his coevals were forced to embark upon "a long process of deracination," which would end by making them "homeless citizens of the world." Only the example of Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg proved that in America art could be made out of a narrow Midwestern provincialism. But although it would be Sandburg and Masters who incited Cowley to write verse, it was not long before he would curse their influence and struggle to erase its traces from his poetry.⁴⁶

For the moment, embarking on "a desperate search for guidance," Cowley plunged into an extensive course of reading, which would continue

through his college years and work a revolution in his literary taste. From Dickens and Sienkiewicz he went on to Keats, Swinburne, Kipling, Stevenson, Meredith, Hardy and Gissing, then proceeded to W. Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad. James Light, later director of the Provincetown Players, introduced Cowley to modern dramatists like Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, August Strindberg, Oscar Wilde, Gerhart Hauptmann.⁴⁷ Soon he would pass on to Chekhov, Dostoevsky and the Elizabethan dramatists and steep himself in the writings of the French Symbolists, in particular Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. At Harvard he would further be exposed to the influence of American moderns like Amy Lowell, Conrad Aiken and T. S. Eliot.

Such explorations were neither original nor idiosyncratic. Most importantly, they exposed Cowley to the peculiar sensibility of modernism, a sensibility "ironical, introspective and self-questioning." Though it would take time for him to understand the aesthetic assumptions and intellectual premises underlying the modern spirit, his reading dramatically changed his literary taste, in that it led him to discover, as he wrote in A Second Flowering, "subtler methods and more difficult standards in literature than those of The Saturday Evening Post."⁴⁸ The process of discovery of and adjustment to the modern spirit would by no means be easy or untroubled; Cowley's search for aesthetic guidance would be marked by uncertainty and ambivalence and would continue through the 1920s.

Towards the end of his high-school years Cowley had evolved his own peculiar and simplified notion of the "modern:" its crucial element lay in the "sense of paradox." Whereas a classical writer's reactions were emotionally logical and thus predictable--death causes grief, an unfaithful wife anger and sadness--the modern writer was engaged in perpetual efforts to outguess and outwit his audience. The modern writer, Cowley observed in a notebook entry of 1922, was embarked on a "constant round of convolutions:" he subverted his readers' expectations by inverting logic. Cowley and Burke had first developed this "theory of convolutions" at Peabody. Motivated by a desire to be different and advanced at all costs, they were led to adopt a chain of literary enthusiasms, each to be quickly discarded and inverted as soon as their less modern followers had caught up. Thus, they would praise Oscar Wilde, when others were still mired in Victorian or Edwardian dullness; as soon

as others had advanced to Wilde, they would denounce him in favor of Strindberg, Schnitzler or Flaubert. In the end they threatened to lose track of whom to praise or to condemn and the process ended in a vicious circle: the ultimate "convolution" was to be like everybody else, while cherishing a sense of secret distinction as apprentice writers who could appreciate the "modern" and understand the "sense of paradox."⁴⁹

Such theories helped prepare Cowley to understand a mode of the artistic life he would later subsume into his interpretation of the "religion of art." It was the perfect theory for young writers with grand ambitions but without as yet much to say: "we wanted merely to live in ourselves and be writers." By 1915 Cowley had come to feel that "artists" were different from ordinary "lifelings;" they constituted a special, secret order, a freemasonry of initiates, who lived in a world of their own and maintained only the most tenuous of connections with the "real world." "Living in himself," Cowley was to write of the adolescent as literary apprentice, "he could hope only to preserve his self-integrity--to yield, if it was necessary to yield, but make his enemies pay for their triumph; to lie or cheat as a last resort, but never write sloppy prose."⁵⁰ From here it would be but a step to embracing the aesthetics of Symbolism and the belief of salvation by art alone; soon enough, however, skepticism would preclude a wholehearted embrace. Upon his graduation from Peabody High in June 1915 the door to a life devoted to the possibility of modern art in America was wide open; beyond it loomed a long process of uneasy and ambiguous accommodation.

Cowley spent his first weeks after Commencement in wistful idleness, cherishing the memory of a "jubilant" Class Night, attending graduation parties and consorting with other "outs" in Pittsburgh. He had applied for a scholarship from the Harvard Club of Western Pennsylvania and was anxiously awaiting news from the committee. He had scored excellent marks for English and Latin in his entrance examinations and his hopes were high. Meanwhile, he took his classmates Susan Jenkins and James Light on outings on the Allegheny river, haunted the moving picture palaces and wrote plaintive letters to Kenneth Burke, berating him for not writing old classmates and criticizing his poems for retaining too much Smart Set

artiness. With Burke gone--he had moved with his parents to Weehawken, New Jersey--Cowley felt miserable and lonesome. His life, he wrote to his friend with a touch of ironic self-dramatization, was in a state of disorientation, an aimless mass of loose details. On June 24, 1915, he complained: "I often have that empty feeling at the pit of my stomach, which takes the bassoon part in the series of unconnected dissonances with no discoverable tonic or dominant which seems to make up life." At school they had consorted on terms of such exclusive intimacy with each other that they had kept themselves from a broad acquaintanceship with other schoolmates. He now advised Burke to meet many strangers and resolved to devote himself to friendships during his freshman year at Harvard as the best antidote to loneliness. For immediate relief he invited Meyer Saul, an athletic classmate eager to get in good physical shape for college sports, to join him on a hiking trip to Belsano. Meanwhile, he admonished Burke to read Ernest Poole's The Harbor, feeling it would help to clarify Burke's "aspirations towards anarchistic novels." As for himself, writing, he feared, was becoming "a strange art" to him.

By the end of July he wrote from Belsano, complaining again of being in a "disgraceful predicament:" he had had no "spiritual states" worthwhile reporting, his sole literary efforts having consisted of letter-writing to Burke. The country gave Cowley a curious shift in perspective. From Belsano Pittsburgh and Cambridge seemed "far off towns" and he feared that ultimately the attractions of country living would prove the deathblow to his literary ambitions: "I would be quite content to stay here, managing my own farm and bossing a hired man, until literary ambitions seemed as far off as New York city," he wrote on July 20. Thoroughly absorbed in summer activities on the farm, he seemed to lose a sustained capacity for writing and thinking. Ideas were becoming "as scarce as chocolate plain creams in a buckwheat field," he complained a week later, adding despondently: "the pen is becoming a strange weapon to me."⁵¹ Meanwhile, Burke's mind appeared to be seething: "Your brain must be a hotbed of ideas, but I am afraid many of them are weeds," he wrote back snappily. "My brain isn't like yours. I am a farmer. 2.5 pages is decidedly a feat for me." Art flourished best in an atmosphere of languishing decadence; rural Belsano seemed fatally uncongenial to literary creation: "I have no moods. I write no poetry. The country is

decidedly healthy, and health produces no modern literature."⁵²

Working on the farm, rollicking about with visiting friends or "fussing" the girls, Cowley and Meyer Saul were much too busy to be bored. Saul inspired him with a longing for physical fitness and impressed him by his easy gregariousness. Through him Cowley was discovering the art of making acquaintances, which would serve him well in later years. Spending a year with Saul in Pittsburgh, Cowley was convinced, would perfectly equip him for a career in politics. "Making acquaintances is easy," he reported to Burke; "One merely is scrupulously careful about offending them, and fulfills all obligations religiously. Real friends, I used to think, were persons one could slight without offending, but now I am beginning to think that one can not even slight a real friend. I am compiling a private codex amicitia[e]." Still, he doubted if he could ever reach the same intimacy with others as with Burke and feared that association with those of blunter sensitivity might dull his finer perceptions and incapacitate him for the artistic life. Even so, he convinced himself, companionship was preferable to loneliness and an immersion in real living was a prerequisite for creating art; "after all," he reflected, "the passion to write novels cannot fill a whole life. There must be something else, or one cannot even write novels."⁵³

Thus, at an early stage, many of the conflicting impulses that would govern Cowley's career were germinally present. City and country exerted contradictory pulls, as the attractions of rural living seemed to cancel out the realization of his literary dreams. The demands of the writing life collided with his social instinct for companionship and the impulse to immerse himself in the active, practical reality of life. The seeds of his later ambivalence about a life exclusively devoted to art at the expense of life had been sown even before he entered Harvard.

In mid-August, upon learning that his application for a scholarship had miscarried, he returned for a short visit to Pittsburgh. When, to his surprise, he was informed that there was yet a probability of his receiving \$150, he celebrated his high spirits with Jimmy Light and Sue Jenkins, with whom he got slightly drunk and indulged in confidential discussions about her experiences of "the horrid immorality of the country districts." If Harvard fell through, he decided, he would follow them to Ohio State. Some days later, back in Belsano digging ditches, he

learned he had been awarded the \$150 scholarship. It took another week before he announced to Burke: "It seems to me that Harvard is my fate." He hoped to share a room with his old classmate Jake Davis and expected to tutor. Meanwhile, he tried to master ragtime tunes on the piano, learned to dance "those two most difficult of all difficult dances, the waltz and the twostep," and got into a fistfight over his mother's culinary reputation. "I have a spark of fighting blood in me somewhere, and a hot crazy temper that arises at curious times," he observed to Burke, as if in anticipation of his later Dadaist shenanigans.⁵⁴

As long as he remained engrossed in country life--early September was threshing time and Cowley was busily helping out the neighboring farmers, getting in the grain before the summer thunderstorms and pitching oat sheaves into the thresher--his interest in writing was a stream running underground. He was fully confident, however, that his stay in Cambridge would bring it back to the surface and infuse it with new vigor. "Wait a month till the metropolis has fascinated me," he wrote Burke on September 3, "till I begin whirling in the squirrel cage of success." He was expected to arrive at Harvard on the 26th and planned to stop off in New York en route to Cambridge to visit Burke and to "resume my position as foil to your wit." It had been a long summer of separation and Cowley was anxiously anticipating their reunion. When Burke reacted with less than unqualified enthusiasm, Cowley's response was typical of the tone of their early friendship:

Kenny, you are much too complex. First you try to frighten me away with your cordiality, and then to keep me off with your distrust. I shall pay neither of them the compliment of my regard and will come anyway--if I can. I ought to enjoy the visit very much. It won't be a matter of unalloyed enjoyment. It won't be a matter of ecstasies. A person who would ecstacize over me has to be either very discerning of character or a little off in the head. You--who are gifted and cursed with the intensity of an Irish nature, will have either a pleasing surprise or a bitter disappointment, depending on which convolution you are in at the time. And I, the German-English-Irish-Scotch moderate, will find the visit about as I expected. But don't take such a humble opinion of your own attractions, or you will have, instead of friends, people who merely pity you.⁵⁵

Cowley's departure for Harvard signaled a decisive step in his formative years as a writer. Though his rebellion against his parents had

never been fierce or violent--a matter of silently disregarding their advice rather than of open hostility--his choice of Harvard meant a definitive break with the Swedenborgian world of his parents and the cultural standards of his past. Much too humble and sweet-tempered a man to stand in the way of his son's desire, his father, who had been deeply disappointed when Cowley had refused to stay at the Swedenborgian school in Bryn Athyn, now could not help regretting his choice of a college "dominated . . . by godless Unitarians." As for the son, his motives for choosing Harvard were crystal-clear: "I earned myself a scholarship to Harvard, because I had heard that other writers went there."⁵⁶

In 1915 Harvard University basked in the glow of a "golden age." The social and intellectual prestige of the eastern seaboard universities was at its height and Harvard could pride itself on producing the greatest number of eminent lawyers, educators, government officials and men of letters. The aftereffects of the legendary reign of President Charles W. Eliot were still tangible. Under Eliot's liberal presidency Harvard had experienced years of unprecedented growth and expansion; by 1909, when Eliot retired, it had been transformed from a small-scale New England college into a full-fledged university with a graduate school, a cluster of autonomous professional schools, museums and an observatory. The Medical and Law Schools had been radically reformed and Eliot had assembled a distinguished faculty with a "golden quality." A zealous educational reformer as well as a notorious builder and expansionist, Eliot had introduced the "elective system," which allowed undergraduates complete freedom of choice in the matter of courses.¹

When Cowley entered Harvard the elective system had been abandoned by Eliot's successor, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, then in his sixth year as President. Lowell had curbed Eliot's policy of intellectual laissez-faire by striking a balance between discipline and freedom. He introduced a policy of "concentration and distribution," the familiar system of majors and minors prevailing at most American universities today, supplemented by a tutorial system and an honors program, and proposed to bridge the gulf between rich and poor students by bringing them all together in a new complex of Freshmen Halls.²

Though Lowell initiated even more new construction of university buildings than Eliot, his greatest achievement was to establish higher standards of education at Harvard. The university, he had pleaded in his inaugural address, ought to produce "not defective specialists, but men

intellectually well rounded, of wide sympathies and unfettered thought" and this implied "a mastery of something, acquired by continuous application." Lowell's consistent attempts to improve instruction and the emphasis he laid on the value of strenuous intellectual effort attracted, so Samuel Eliot Morison believed, the devotion of the younger generation and made Harvard under his Presidency "an exciting place" for students and teachers alike. Cowley's later distrust of any narrowly specialized methodology, whether in science, philosophy or criticism, and his concomitant ideal of the intellectual as "a universal man" may well owe something to his experience of Harvard under Lowell.³

By 1915 Harvard teachers of Olympian stature such as William James, Josiah Royce and George Santayana were no longer part of the intellectual scene. Though neither James nor Santayana exerted a direct influence on Cowley, their controversial and often iconoclastic subversion of the strongholds of Victorian thought--it was Santayana who had dubbed it "the Genteel Tradition"--had engendered an open and exciting intellectual atmosphere of skeptical humanism, experimental pragmatism and aesthetic pluralism that was still palpable and pervasive in Cowley's Harvard days and could not fail to leave its mark upon his young impressionable mind.⁴

Though he would study under neither Barrett Wendell nor Irving Babbitt, both were still around as reminders of a vanishing era and their conservative opinions were part of the intellectual currency of any undergraduate seriously interested in literature. Wendell, an Anglophile defender of New England gentility and a symbol of Puritanism and patrician snobbery to the younger generation, had written A Literary History of America (1900) which breathed such a patronizing air of New England superiority and provincialism that it was often derisively called "A Literary History of Harvard College." It displayed such outright antipathy for its subject matter, that it had enraged even the gentle William Dean Howells. T. S. Eliot felt in 1920 that Wendell's book virtually amounted to "an admission, in a great many words, that there is no American literature."⁵ In effect, the same condescension and contempt for American literature that was expressed by Barrett Wendell still prevailed during Cowley's stay at Harvard. "When I was in college," he recalled in 1984, "American literature was at one of its low points in critical and scholarly estimation. . . . In academic circles here and abroad it was still a question whether the body of prose and verse

produced by Americans truly constituted a national literature or whether it was no more than a provincial branch of English writing. I can't remember that so much as a single course in American literature was offered to Harvard undergraduates. The authors to be emulated by young Americans were Shaw, Wells, and perhaps Compton Mackenzie.⁶ It would not be the least important part of Cowley's distinction as a man of letters that, as chronicler and interpreter of his generation, he would do much to help raise America's conception of the merit of its own literature.

Irving Babbitt rivaled Barrett Wendell in his vitriolic denunciations of the tendencies of modern culture. Placing his trust in the standards of Greek classical humanism--"poise, proportionateness, the imitation of great models, decorum, and the Inner Check"--Babbitt was convinced that the decline of culture had begun with the French Revolution. He denounced materialism, science and naturalism, but found his principal villains in Rousseau, whose belief in the goodness of natural man he detested as mere gushy sentimentality, and in the poets of Romanticism, in particular French Symbolists like Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine, whom he saw as disastrous excrescences of the Romantic movement. Paradoxically, his fierce denunciations helped to introduce these poets to many of his students who otherwise might not have heard of them until much later, but now gladly turned to them as congenial beacons in their revolt against traditional culture.⁷

Among American universities Harvard was indubitably the best training ground for writers. Any other university was, in Cowley's words, "a second choice." Van Wyck Brooks, who graduated in 1907, was likewise drawn to Harvard as a veritable Mecca for young, ambitious litterateurs and might have spoken for the young Cowley: "I went to Harvard just as students in the twelfth century went to Paris, because, for me also, Abelard was there; for I knew I was a writer born--I seemed always to have known this--and I supposed that Harvard was the college for writers." Brooks was only one among many of Cowley's illustrious literary predecessors at Harvard. In Brooks's class were Edward Sheldon, John Hall Wheelock and Maxwell Perkins; T. S. Eliot, John Reed, Walter Lippmann, Heywood Broun, Alan Seeger and Robert Edmond Jones all belonged to the famous class of 1910. Other literary predecessors of Cowley included Conrad Aiken, Robert Benchley, S. N. Behrman, Witter Bynner, Stuart Chase, Bernard DeVoto, Arthur Davidson Ficke, John Gould Fletcher,

Hermann Hagedorn, John P. Marquand, Samuel Eliot Morison, Stuart Sherman, Harold Stearns and Wallace Stevens. Among those of his own literary generation were E. E. Cummings, who had graduated magna cum laude in 1915 and was still around during Cowley's freshman year for a year of post-graduate work, and John Dos Passos, then in his senior year. Edward Weeks, later to become editor of The Atlantic Monthly, recalled meeting Cowley at Harvard in 1919.⁸ Cowley's closest literary friends at college would be S. Foster Damon (class of 1914), Robert Hillyer (class of 1917) and John Brooks Wheelwright (class of 1920).

At the time Harvard had an excellent reputation in the field of "composition." George Pierce Baker taught playwriting to a carefully selected group of students, "Baker's Dozen," in his English 47 Workshop, and sympathetic mentors of undergraduate students like Charles Townsend Copeland and Dean Russell Briggs were famous and inspiring teachers of composition whose classes Cowley attended. Besides reading Elizabethan drama under Baker, Cowley would study literature under John Livingston Lowes and philosophy under William Ernest Hocking, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Raphael Demos.⁹ In Cowley's field of literary criticism the program at Harvard was curiously but not untypically deficient. A student of Cowley's generation could receive excellent training in the principles of historical scholarship and criticism under such renowned professors as George Lyman Kittredge, a Shakespeare scholar who had done pioneering research in Anglo-Saxon literature and the history of the English language, or William A. Neilson, a specialist in medieval literature and Elizabethan drama. He might learn to master the principles of prosody in Bliss Perry's course in lyric poetry, but there was hardly any way to obtain a thorough training in aesthetic or formalist criticism. At Harvard, as at most other universities, there was no serious critical method of aesthetic analysis and judgment before I. A. Richards developed his Principles of Literary Criticism (1925) and initiated the teaching of "practical criticism."¹⁰ Such a training in a formalist, aesthetic appreciation of art could be obtained outside the established academic world, by following one's own critical bent or the example of poet-critics like Eliot and Pound; or it could be obtained in an altogether different cultural milieu like that of France, where in the early 1920s Cowley would be exposed to a method of critical analysis (explication de texte) that, largely through the endeavors of the "new" critics, was to

become the dominant mode of literary teaching in American universities in the decades after the Second World War. But as a young writer at Harvard in the late 1910s, struggling for criteria to make literary judgments of the modern writers, Cowley could only resort to his own literary sensibility and would easily fall back upon personal impressions and intuitions. In the absence of a critical vocabulary and approach to deal seriously with the formal properties and technique of modern writing, it would be one of Cowley's principal endeavors to help create the language and standards of criticism by which such qualities were to be judged. But Cowley's criticism would also always have a strong historical dimension and retain the marks of impressionism; his personal literary sensibility would remain the cornerstone to his practice as a critic and historian of American writing.

During his first two years at Harvard Cowley was able to observe the college literary ferment in one of its more picturesque manifestations. A group of poets, or would-be poets, who subsequently became known as "the Harvard Aesthetes," languished in the pallid atmosphere of a type of decadent aestheticism and were trying, in Cowley's words, "to create in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an after-image of Oxford in the 1890s." Cowley's composite and ironic portrait has often been cited:

They read the Yellow Book, they read Casanova's memoirs and Les Liaisons Dangereuses, both in French, and Petronius in Latin; they gathered at teatime in one another's rooms, or at punches in the office of the Harvard Monthly; they drank, instead of weak punch, seidels of straight gin topped with a maraschino cherry; they discussed the harmonies of Pater, the rhythms of Aubrey Beardsley and, growing louder, the voluptuousness of the Church, the essential virtue of prostitution. They had crucifixes in their bedrooms, and ticket stubs from last Saturday's burlesque show at the Old Howard. They wrote, too; dozens of them were prematurely decayed poets, each with his invocation to Antinoüs, his mournful descriptions of Venetian lagoons, his sonnets to a chorus girl in which he addressed her as "little painted poem of God." In spite of these beginnings, a few of them became good writers.

Fond of displaying their erudition before Boston barroom mirrors, the Aesthetes claimed Arthur Machen's The Hill of Dreams as one of their favorites and indulged in dreams of "laurel-crowned Thessalian dancers."¹¹

The Aesthetes experienced their halcyon days during the undergraduate

years of E. E. Cummings, whose early verse was tinged with their spirit, and John Dos Passos, who for a time adopted a touch of the Aesthetes' pose and moved on the fringes of the group, which consisted largely of contributors to The Harvard Monthly.¹² Cowley did not directly befriend Cummings or Dos Passos at Harvard--as graduate students they were "outside the horizon of a freshman"--but he would see both of them, along with many of the Harvard Aesthetes, at meetings of the Harvard Poetry Society, which, with their cooperation, had been organized in 1915 by S. Foster Damon, shortly before Cowley's arrival at Harvard. The foundation of the Poetry Society--its founding fathers were chiefly contributors to The Harvard Monthly and its meetings were mostly held in the sanctum of the Monthly on the third floor of the Harvard Union--had given rise to some malicious gossip, including the rumor that it was dominated by homosexuals. "There have been hints of effeminacy, of desires on the part of its members to grasp the flickering halo of aestheticism that hovers about the long locks of pseudo-geniuses," an editorial in The Harvard Advocate had pontificated; it had deplored the falsehood and malice of such gossip and urged "the howling" to cease, as ill-befitting "students with any claim to seriousness." Speaking up in defense of the new organization, it had declared: "The Harvard Poetry Society is doing its small best to gain more intellectual and artistic benefit, by their meetings and the privilege of listening to well-known poets, than is required to enter 'the brotherhood of educated men' by reason of English A and sixteen other courses. . . . Let those who scoff ape gentlemen, or let them at least swallow their sour grape scorn in silence."¹³

Cowley, who always showed himself wary of belonging to any group, was never formally a part of the Aesthetes, though he, too, basked in their spirit and could not prevent his early verse from being tainted by their decadence. Unlike Cummings and Dos Passos, however, who were regular contributors to the Monthly, most of Cowley's publications would be for its rival, The Harvard Advocate, for which he wrote over thirty pieces of prose and verse. Coming to Harvard when the Aesthetes were enjoying their greatest vogue, Cowley would, in a manner that was to be typical, observe, witness and record their literary vicissitudes from an ironic distance, rather than participate and follow suit. There is little in his early letters that points to an awareness on Cowley's part of the Harvard Aesthetes as a special literary phenomenon; such an awareness would grow

in time and materialize by hindsight, once Cowley was able to adopt "the long view" in the early 1930s. It was only then that he recognized their type of aestheticism as an extreme manifestation of Romanticism and a precursor of the "religion of art" he would lash out against in the heat of his radicalism.¹⁴

Arriving in Cambridge in late September of 1915, an innocent, smiling boy from a Pittsburgh public high school with a scholarship and a face scarred with pimples, Cowley would need the bulk of his freshman year to get his social and intellectual bearings in the complex new order of things at the august seat of learning.

During his freshman year Cowley roomed with two Jewish students, John Rothschild and Jake Davis, his friend from Peabody. With them he occupied a suite in Gore Hall, one of the new freshmen halls initiated as part of President Lowell's social program for the College, which was to allow even the poorest students to live with their classmates and participate in the freshmen social activities. An open quadrangle facing the Charles River, Gore Hall contained a dining hall and a common room and suites for from one to five persons, holding modern comforts and conveniences.¹⁵ In the freshmen dormitories, Cowley remembered, one could find accommodation for as little as \$35 a year, including "a goody to make one's bed every morning." Tuition was \$150; it was raised to \$200 in 1918. Board at Memorial Hall, the big common dining hall, 164 feet long and seating over a thousand students, was \$5.50 a week, though there was an even cheaper dining hall. Prospective students were advised that they needed a minimum of \$500 to get through the academic year. "Harvard, though it sailed under false colors as a gentleman's finishing school, was really a poor boys' college," Cowley observed in 1967; "I could have lived there for two weeks on what Howard Johnson charges for one night's rent of a double room."¹⁶

Eager to profit from Harvard's intellectual offerings, Cowley took on a load of six courses during his first semester: a survey course in English literature, a "rather advanced" composition course (English 22), and courses in French, historical German, European history, and the history of philosophy. The new experience of attending college lectures

roused Cowley's intellectual enthusiasm, even if it irritated him that there was no opportunity to contradict or deny a professor's views, "no matter how faulty they may be." Nevertheless he felt intellectually stimulated and granted that one might "actually learn things at college;" high school had managed "only to instill a hatred of learning." By the end of his first month, however, Cowley's initial ardor had cooled and he had begun to doubt the relevance of much that he was being taught. "When I graduate from Harvard I mightn't know anything worthwhile, but I'll at least be educated," he cynically reflected.¹⁷ His educational dissatisfaction with Harvard would grow with time and eventually inspire the derogatory interpretation he put upon his college experience in Exile's Return.

In 1915, however, his attitude towards lectures and exams soon took on a more pragmatic coloring. Knowing he would have to carry himself through college on scholarships, Cowley developed a knack for getting good marks at examinations and established an excellent record in his freshman year, standing second in a class of 685. "I had a gift for remembering almost anything for 24 hours, displaying my knowledge in a blue book, then wiping it as from a blackboard," he mused with self-mocking pride almost sixty years later. Calculating that, in terms of scholarships, each A equaled roughly \$100, he decided that, since A-would yield the same reward, studying hard enough to make a full A was a waste of time. "I wanted to be distinguished by careless brilliance and for getting drunk in Boston," Cowley recalled. Unwilling to be known as a grind, he did most of his studying "in secret" and often worked in the library at the Harvard Union, which was hardly used by anyone.¹⁸

After a month Cowley had sampled enough of Harvard's social and literary life to report on his impressions to Burke. His initiation into the pleasures and pains of student life had taken place, he wrote, during the festive exuberance attending Harvard's smashing victory over Yale in the annual football derby: 41 to 0. Cambridge had swarmed with students, tickets had sold for as much as \$75 a pair and the stadium had been packed. The enthusiasm upon the first touchdown had been tremendous, though soon the matter of making touchdowns had grown monotonous. With 2000 others he had thrown his hat over the goal post after the game and lost it. Thoughts of the night that had followed still sickened him: "At the Woodcock I poured everything I could get my hands on down my throat.

I drank cocktails, lacrimae Christi, Moselle, Burgundy, Sherry, Champagne, beer and ginger ale." At two o'clock at night, "lost to the world," he had begun a bout of vomiting that lasted for twenty-four hours and he had ended up in the Stillman Infirmary, from which he was now writing; "I really am not at all proud of myself for once."

More importantly, he had begun to discover that Harvard had an exciting literary life and to take pride in its intellectual preeminence. There were, he claimed with professional Harvard arrogance, only three universities in America, two of which, Yale and Princeton, were not "awfully good." Harvard men might find "an infinite number of faults" with their university, but this did not shake their conviction of "the one shining fact that Harvard is America's greatest university." He had found that there was "a remarkable lot of good verse" being written at Harvard, mostly in the form of free verse and sonnets; there was even "a Poet's Club." He also had begun to discover the complex college club system and was actually competing in the Dramatic Club's publicity competition. "It is an honor to belong to any of the clubs here," he explained. Requirements, however, were stiff. To be eligible for membership in the Deutscher Verein one must write a comic poem in German "on special invitation" and the Cercle Français demanded that one act in a French play. Both organizations, Cowley had learned, were "infamous for booze and smutty stories. I must belong." But his principal interest was in the six undergraduate magazines and the opportunities they offered to realize his ambitions. A few days after his arrival he had attended a smoker for candidates held by The Harvard Illustrated, but had found the requirements for making the staff of the paper "tremendous and impossible;" he had "more hopes" for the The Harvard Advocate. A few weeks later he summed up his impressions of Harvard journals. The Advocate was "a remarkably poor magazine," he judged, even if it published some good poetry. The Monthly had "a lot of good stuff in it." The atmosphere at the office of the Crimson he found "invigorating." "I would like to get on the staff of all these three papers," he announced ambitiously. He admired the Lampoon for being "independent in what it says," and considered it "really one of America's best humorous publications, in or out of college." The Illustrated was "not of much account," but in The Music Review he had relished the "original compositions and articles on Scriabine [sic] and on Moussorgsky's

songs."¹⁹

Staggering under a load of six courses, however, Cowley had little time or energy left for outside activities. "Believe me, I am having a good time. I do nothing but amuse myself. Every afternoon I amuse myself with French or Philosophy, and every evening with History or English. What a happy life!" His literary activities were restricted to commenting on the poems sent to him by Burke or shown to him by his roommates. Though he was often afraid to speak his mind, he was already discovering a penchant for criticism. He had been advertising Burke's poems to his fellow students and was convinced that, given time, he would be able to found "a culte de Burke" at Harvard with himself as "stage manager."²⁰

Meanwhile Burke had been promoting Cowley's verse at what had been his exciting literary debut: an evening at Theodore Dreiser's. The evening had been "an epoch," Burke reported; he had had "the fullest hours of [his] life." Though Dreiser had been cold and perfunctory, Burke had managed to worm himself into conversation with the older writer, only to make "a very gratifying discovery:"

. . . you and I could give him kindergarten-lessons in convolutions. He calls things subtle which are plainer as Hell--he talks about religion as though it were bread--he admits that the Easterners are in possession of greater brains, greater intellectual development, than the Westerners, and then adds that he cannot understand the more Eastern type, without seeming to be aware of the conclusion that was implied.

Cowley's poem, an early piece of imitative verse written under the spell of Edgar Lee Masters, had been read to the guests by a woman who struck Burke as "a cash girl who had read Nietzsche;" it had met with a lukewarm reception:

It was neither enthused over, nor was it condemned. Dreiser, who is a great admirer of Masters, said it was the usual waves that one could expect to follow in his wake. But please don't think I am exulting over you. I was very pleased to find myself up in arms to defend you. I am honestly sorry the poem did not make a stronger impression. As I was still being consistently ignored by Dreiser when the poem came up, I did not venture to commence a long harangue in your favour, but we must take the will for the deed.²¹

In response to Burke's account of Dreiser's niggardly verdict Cowley feigned indifference to the judgment of "that American behemoth of letters." Instead, he heartily recommended three plays by Arthur Schnitzler he had just read, Intermezzo, The Lonely Way and Countess Mizzi; they were all "extremely psychological," he argued, the latter having the added interest of being "sexual." Thirteen years later, when Schnitzler's early plays and novels had become "a romantic memory" associated with his "first eager foray" into modern literature, Cowley analyzed the appeal of the plays of the Austrian writer to the younger generation:

We read them in our college days, at a time when the modern drama was a prevailing fashion, when German seemed a language of the sophisticated, and when Vienna was the city of ultimate enchantment. Schnitzler to us was the modern drama, and he symbolized Vienna. Being very young, we failed to understand the half meanings in his plays; we disregarded most of their realistic elements; we prized them only for their glamour, for a sort of thick persistent charm, for their portrayal of a civilization that was tolerant, sentimental, rather witty and delightfully corrupt. We planned a visit to Vienna; we dreamt of young women--süsse Mäd1--with yellow hair, brown eyes and a tolerant smile.²²

Cowley's own poetic productivity, meanwhile, was at a low ebb, as his literary energies were channeled in unwanted directions: "I pride myself on my lecture notes. I take them in good English." He was writing only sporadically and had taken to polishing up old poetry. On November 14 he sent a sample of his revisions to Burke: "It isn't good, but it gives good practice." The poem, a "Rossettiquesque sonnet," with its struggle to master a perfect regularity of meter and rhyme, its pose of weary decadence, and its daring sexual suggestiveness, showed that the "modern" note in Cowley's verse was as yet strongly colored by a spirit of Harvard aestheticism. Its conventional diction marked the immaturity of the juvenile poet:

Let the great master's crashing harmonies
Rouse the brave soul within the concert hall,
Let Margaret sing to stately Parsifal,
And Chopin whisper in his minor keys--
There is a time and place for such as these.
Bach and Debussy, Haydn, Mozart, all
Are masters, yet there is a time they pall

And the tired soul seeks simpler melodies.

And when the warm spring night rests on the land
When blood is young and youth is in the raw
There is one music we can understand--
So whisper softly in some woman's ear
Go with her to the cabaret, and hear
The frantic rhythms of the orchestra.

For the time being, neither Cowley's poetic nor his intellectual efforts met with much encouragement. His verse was not appreciated in his composition class, where it scored only C. And though he had little trouble making excellent marks in English literature, five hours of strenuous study for a philosophy test yielded only a B-plus: "I confess myself mediocre." The net result of his studies so far, he skeptically reflected, was only a near-pedantic ability to use "moderately strange words" like ontology, subinfeudation, hylozoism, empiricism, dialectics and eclecticism. Harvard, he feared, was rapidly turning him into a "self-sufficient prig." With Jake Davis he made the debating team, which he rated "somewhat of an accomplishment," since only three freshmen were elected. Finding, however, that he must either slight schoolwork or surrender debating, he tendered his resignation. He was swamped with work and feared a serious backlash in his second year. Several boys from Pittsburgh, now in their sophomore year, who had also carried six subjects, had come near a nervous breakdown and were still suffering from the physical and intellectual aftereffects of their strenuous exertions. "Man, I don't want to be an invalid," he complained. "I hereby swear off studying."²³

In spite of his own scholastic troubles, Cowley persistently advised Burke about college. He would dearly love to have his friend by his side in Cambridge, but thought that Columbia would be the better university for Burke: "You are too individualistic for a school where boys are herded in dormitories." If, however, at the end of a semester Columbia proved disappointing, Burke should "raise heaven and hell to get up here." When Burke intimated that he was still considering Harvard, Cowley's response was ecstatic: "I would be damned glad if it would happen. Harvard won't be exactly suited to you. You will find many defects--all Harvard men spend their spare hours picking the University to pieces in the New Republic. But the faults of Harvard are the faults

of the American university. And many of its virtues are its own." Burke's only social life at the time consisted of writing letters; it would be good for him, Cowley urged, to break out of his isolation and meet people again. By the time Burke was to make his appearance at Harvard, Cowley hoped to have met "a few writers and poets."²⁴

Cowley planned to spend Christmas with relatives in Washington, but it did not take much pressure from Burke to persuade him to accept an invitation to spend some time in Weehawken, where Burke's parents lived in an apartment on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson river and Manhattan. Burke was eager to show Cowley "a very assertive Bohemian restaurant" he had discovered; it was done "in the futuristic way--its yellow, for instance, is as shameless as that on the seat of the El cars." Rapturous over the aesthetic splendors of New York, Burke managed to make his invitation irresistible:

I am dying to show you the city just as a work of art. I cannot express it--it is too sweeping--and thus I want to purchase the consolation which comes of merely showing it to someone who can rhapsodize with me. To be out on the river by the Cortlandt Street Dock about a quarter to six is simply agonizing. Then there is that nocturne I was telling you about by the Latrine of Endymion. Oh, oh! if I ever can express those things with words I shall be proud and impregnable. And the skies--I often wonder if the skies are especially gorgeous here, or if I had not awakened to them in Pittsburgh. In one place Jennie Gerhardt cries because she cannot express such things. I hardly dare be so confessedly sentimental as that, natürlich, but at times I permit myself to swear most abominably.²⁵

Burke's letter touched off a shower of responsive sparks in Cowley, doubling his desire to see his friend in New York en route to Washington. He was "dying" for a good philosophical discussion, especially since he felt college life was turning him into "a brute:" "All I do is study, eat, sleep, take a shower, go to classes, eat, and study. I know more about Friedrich Hohenstaufen and Hildebrand and the Ching movement than I do about such interesting matters as imagist poets or Bohemia." Nothing would please him more than to eat again in an "artistic restaurant," drink and talk to his "heart's content."²⁶

Cowley proposed a clever scheme to be released from college obligations a few days early. Burke had been reading Louis Wilkinson, a

British novelist who had come to New York after the outbreak of the war in Europe and who had published some stories in The Smart Set. Feeling that Wilkinson was "preceding him in a chosen field," Burke had written the novelist a beginner's letter, which had led to a meeting, the first of many to follow over the next few years. Cowley's plan was founded on this literary acquaintanceship. Burke, he proposed, was to write a letter informing Cowley of a "splendid opportunity" to meet Wilkinson, who, in turn, could arrange for an interview with Theodore Dreiser, "my favourite novelist." He would then take Burke's letter to the Dean and try to get off on the twentieth: "I'll lay the bull on thick." On December 15 Cowley triumphantly announced the success of his plan: "Your letter worked like a charm." The Dean had allowed him to leave three days early, making an exception on account of Cowley's "remarkable record." Once in New York Cowley planned to rest, walk, and, "if my tongue unties itself," talk. Dreiser he did not want to meet, even if he could: "Such a colossus could have no interest in a Harvard freshman." Wilkinson, however, he would like to meet, "just out of a desire to hear a great man talk."²⁷

Cowley spent Christmas at the home of his great-uncle Alexander McKenna, trying to make himself agreeable to his second cousins in Washington. Mr. McKenna was not only "transcendentally good;" he also proved a very generous man. Though he was "a thoroughgoing atheist," he presented his nephew with a gift of a hundred dollars. "I am going to embrace atheism," Cowley announced to Burke upon his return to Harvard; "Think of it, Burke. A hundred dollars. Damn." The McKennas did much to help Cowley get through Harvard. Great-aunt Lydie complemented his scholarships by sending him a check for \$300 on three successive Christmases. "I have a shrine to her in one corner of my heart," Cowley wrote his cousin Phillip fifty years later.²⁸

Back in Cambridge for his second semester, Cowley decided to drop a course at midyear and to devote more time to literature. Rivalry with Burke helped to goad his ambition. Notwithstanding Cowley's expectation that some of Burke's poems would be "too advanced" for The Little Review, Burke had managed to get some poems published in an obscure little magazine and Cowley admitted that he was "mildly curious" to see how the

poems looked in print. When, on top of Burke's achievement of publication, he discovered that a fellow freshman regularly had his work accepted by The Smart Set, Cowley was driven to "a literary renaissance:" he wrote three poems. "I couldn't stand seeing you get work published while I was simply studying philosophy." He submitted a satire to The Smart Set and a poem to The Harvard Monthly, expecting both to be rejected; they were. Eight days later he quoted to Burke, as proof of his poetic renaissance, part of a reworked version of an early "awfully sensuous" pastoral lyric, "In the Garden," a poem which he rightly judged was "distinguished--for immaturity:"

Ah wonderful starless, moonless night,
Ah night of the blossoming South,
You hide the flower of my delight--
The heavy eyes that my eyes seek,
And the flush that comes and goes on her cheek,
And the warmth of her flowerlike mouth--
Ah the whispering silence of the night,
The starless night of the South.

He felt that, even in the "old" mode, his poetry was "slowly maturing," but he was rapidly tiring of such conventional verse. "I renounce such poetry," he declared. "After writing free verse, there seems to be something gaudy and cheap about this recurrent rhyme of the old lyrics."²⁹

One of Cowley's experiments in vers libre met with a curious fate. When his roommate Jake Davis had no time to write a poem for composition class, Cowley lent him a high school poem about his ancestor Thomas Duncan, "The Oldest Inhabitant," thinking it a mere "monstrosity of free verse." The poem had promptly been singled out to be read aloud in class and Davis had suffered the dubious triumph--and Cowley the torture--of hearing his rival's work praised as his own. The only real success Cowley could boast of for the moment was in debating, where the freshmen had beaten the seniors. In the eyes of the chairman it had been "the best interclass debate he had ever heard." Cowley expected the victory would put him "back in harness." "A little praise makes me run a long way."³⁰

Cowley had now become enough of a Harvard man to boggle at Burke's plans to attend such a "provincial university" as Ohio State. He could not picture Burke at any college other than Harvard or Columbia. Cowley's

principal indictment of Ohio State was that it had "no past at all." He had come to appreciate Harvard's august traditions and ancient history, and to savor its flavor of late-nineteenth century English decadence. "I am coming to love the past--to love Oxford and Cambridge. Some of their lustre is reflected to Harvard." As symptomatic evidence he adduced "the masterful conceit" of Harvard men. Moreover, Boston was near and held out the promise of cultural and social attractions; the city, Cowley noted, had "a disgustingly sensual night-life which would inspire any decadent poet." The very nature and reputation of Harvard was inspiring and lent its students an aura of respectability and prestige: "Even street whores are highly respectful to Harvard men." He clinched his argument by evoking the university as the quintessence of modernity: "The whole idea of going to Harvard is a paradox. Normal Americans go to Yale." The one thing he could not promise Burke, he reflected ironically, was the "daring insurgency" of Ohio State: in Cambridge it was no longer possible to be shocking merely by proclaiming oneself an atheist. Instead, at Harvard there was a "disagreeable sanity," which made it "hard to be a rebel."³¹

Though Cowley could never assent to Burke's decision to spend a semester at Ohio State--"Columbus is an unthinkable town and lacks a good library," he advanced as a last desperate objection--his friendship with Burke was too precious to be so easily disrupted. Despite reciprocal vilifications and insults, whether in jest or in earnest, it remained for him the strongest antidote to loneliness--there were times, he lamented, when he felt "as desperate as some Latin Quarter Impressionist." But Burke was far away and in order to combat "that damnable loneliness which is the greatest danger here," Cowley sought out a group of fellow students with whom he could socialize and conduct intellectual discussions. He liked to play first fiddle: "as long as I can talk--and I am naturally the best talker in the crowd--I am happy." The group must have comprised an odd assortment of intellectual stances: one was "an idealistic humanist," Cowley reported, another defended the double standard, a third wavered between Orthodox Christianity, Unitarianism, Deism, Agnosticism and Indifferentism, and, as capstone to the company, there was Cowley himself, "a skeptical Hedonist with a philosophy of negation."³²

Studies and exams continued to interfere with literature and formed a

perpetual source of irritation. Though he did well in examinations and expected to be eligible for a substantial scholarship at the end of the year, he complained that exams were "not aesthetic" and took up too much precious time: "Harvard is certainly not a loafer's school, and graduating in three years and picking scholarships as you go, is a job for a full-grown man." Though he still entertained hopes of rooming with Burke in the future, he longed to leave the conformist atmosphere of the freshmen dormitories and had already settled on a room and roommate for the following academic year; he had decided to exchange his Jewish roommates for a "clever, charming, selfish, young, average Yankee." Eager to improve his living conditions and to make his way upward in Harvard's social hierarchy, he had selected a room in Russell Hall, on Mount Auburn Street, on the Gold Coast--"oh magic name." There the new private dormitories were more spacious, comfortable and expensive (some had swimming pools and squash courts), and drew the richer undergraduates, who tended to shun the college dormitories in the Yard, thus helping to create a social and financial cleavage between the Gold Coast and the Yard. "I am developing into a disagreeable prig and a good deal of a snob," Cowley confessed to Burke on March 9. He felt badly in need of someone to balance that inclination.³³

For all the burden of his studies and the pull of social diversions, Cowley's heart remained with literature. In February he made the "important" discovery of a book by George Moore about his early life in Paris, Memoirs of My Dead Life (1906), which fanned his ambition for the literary life: "no one can lay claim to being an artist who has not read the Memoirs or at least lived them." Halfway through his second semester he began to make decisive moves to realize his ambitions and make his way into Harvard's literary scene. In early March he announced that he was "out for the Advocate." In addition, he regularly attended meetings of the Harvard Poetry Society, which, he reported to Burke, numbered some thirty members, "most of them skilled sonneteers" and "connoisseurs of verse."³⁴

Despite the blustering tone of his letters to Burke, Cowley felt somewhat daunted by his senior colleagues-in-verse and, feeling that it would be "a presumptuous act" for a freshman to freely address them, he tended for the time being to move on the periphery. He listened to Robert Hillyer--already an established Harvard poet (he was the only

undergraduate to have a book of verse published by Harvard University Press)--declaim his poems, "looking like a wicked cherub." He heard John Dos Passos shyly read his verse, "speaking in very low tones as he peered at a manuscript from behind very thick lenses."³⁵ And he witnessed S. Foster Damon recite his unorthodox poetry in the dimly lit room of The Harvard Monthly, where the poets were habitually seated round a huge table: "Pale in the lamplight, with straight rye straw-colored hair, Foster read some poems that were chaste in form, but rather less chaste in sentiment. The reading was almost apologetic, with a notable lack of drama. When Foster came to a line that was shocking, for those days, his flat New England seaboard voice would become flatter and more noncommittal. Still there were a few gasps of indignation."³⁶

Notwithstanding his ambivalent feelings, Cowley could not remain entirely unaffected by the atmosphere of decadent aestheticism he encountered at Harvard. In late March he recommended to Burke the stories of one Lilith Benda in The Smart Set, which he relished for being clever exploitations of vulgarity and horribly "fin de siècle." In the same letter he exulted over a "blessed vulgarian" he had met at the Advocate, who shared his interest in Ernest Dowson and who "swears beautifully, is a scoffer, a nigger-hater, everything that is cheap and much that is able." Occasionally, Cowley liked to adopt an aesthete's pose of decadent vulgarity; more commonly he felt that the conservative literary climate at Harvard stood badly in need of modernization: "You and I, Kenny, could in time overturn literary standards here . . . and we could make the Advocate a radically poetic magazine."³⁷

Such literary ambition, however, could not stifle the self-doubts that besieged the young poet at regular intervals. "I am losing all faith in my ability as a writer," Cowley confessed to Burke; "I like to talk. Perhaps I can be a playwright." Whatever his hopes for publication in the Advocate, he more than once despaired of the quality of his writings and lamented that his imagination had not provided him with a single plot for a story all year. All he had been inspired to do was rehash and revise earlier work. As a result, he came to gloomy but ironically prescient conclusions: "No, Burke, I won't be the great one of the crowd. I repeat it, the burden rests on you. I am too willing to become a hack." If original work were not forthcoming--his latest poem, "a trifle in the 'Smart Set' style," proved that he was "less a poet than ever"--he would

try to establish a small reputation by translating German free verse for the Advocate. He realized that, if he ever hoped to amount to anything as a poet, he must forswear reading The Smart Set, where all he found were singular demonstrations of poetic ineptitude.³⁸

The poetry Cowley wrote at this time revealed that, like many apprentice poets, he possessed a talent for absorbing and reflecting literary influences, without giving them too much conscious thought; his understanding of them was intuitive rather than theoretical. The same letter which had expressed his doubts about himself announced his first publication in The Harvard Advocate of March 31, 1916. The poem, addressed "To Certain Imagist Poets," expressed Cowley's uneasiness with the languishing decadence of the Harvard Aesthetes and demanded of modern poetry a more vigorous realism and a subject matter that spoke of the world he knew:

Why do you write of your delicate lusts
And your ephemeral sensations?
Why don't you write of a village street
With scampering dogs, and scampering boys, and houses
sleeping in the light,
With tired horses standing before the blacksmith shop--
They prick up their ears when Bob Marks rattles past in his
buckboard,
Dust rises in banks and settles on the drooping maple
leaves--
Why don't you write of a village street in August?
I am tired of delicate sensations.

In his own unsophisticated fashion Cowley was already pleading the need to express--as Hemingway was to write--"what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel."³⁹

The fortnightly Advocate was Harvard's oldest publication; it had been founded in 1866 as a college newspaper and "advocate" of students' interests; in the 1890s it had shifted from polemical and repertorial to primarily literary concerns. Its principal rival was The Harvard Monthly, which had been founded in 1885 by George Santayana and others and could boast a distinguished roll-call of editors and early contributors, including Bernard Berenson, Robert Morss Lovett, William Vaughn Moody, Edwin Arlington Robinson and John Hall Wheelock. Though both undergraduate papers published verse, fiction, essays, reviews and literary polemics, the Monthly enjoyed a superior reputation in the field

of poetry. A glance at the list of contributors to the Advocate, however, instructs us that, as much as its rival, it was a "nursemaid of genius;" besides Moody, Robinson and Wheelock, the Advocate published undergraduate writings of Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, of George Lyman Kittredge and Charles Townsend Copeland, of Van Wyck Brooks, Maxwell Perkins and Hermann Hagedorn, and of later famous poets such as Conrad Aiken, E. E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and others.⁴⁰ A healthy rivalry marked the relationship between the editors of both magazines, who would nod coldly to each other from the facing doors of their respective sanctums under the eaves of the Harvard Union: "The Monthlies," Cowley recalled, "thought that the board of The Advocate . . . was composed of journalists, clubmen, athletes, and disciples of Teddy Roosevelt, a former editor, with not a man of letters among them. The Advocates suspected that the Monthlies were aesthetes (as indeed most of them came to be called), scruffy poets, socialists, pacifists, or worse." Such rivalry persisted through the years. As late as 1951 Cummings, who had served on the staff of the Monthly, protested in a letter to Cowley that "our unhero [Cummings himself] wrote for a literary mag called The Harvard Monthly, not for a social sheet called The ditto Advocate."⁴¹

Once his first poem had been accepted, Cowley soon became a regular and distinguished contributor to the Advocate, publishing free verse poems side by side with regular, polished sonnets. In the pages of the rather conservatively inclined Advocate it was the poetry of such as Cummings and Cowley that showed an awareness of the possibilities of modern verse. Whereas Cowley, in spite of early misgivings about the form, at least tried seriously to explore free verse, to the majority of Advocate critics vers libre meant little more than "whimsical formlessness" and "sordid realism:" "The undisguised unwholesomeness of the new manner in poetry we reject without more ado as unfit for human consumption," an editorial proclaimed in 1916.⁴²

Cowley's attitude toward free verse was indeed far from unambiguous. As a rule, he confessed to Burke, he did not like it, since it bred a disturbing amount of bad poetry. Having read "ream after ream of broken prose," he became convinced that "a law ought to be passed" prohibiting all poets except Walter Arensberg, John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell, Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley from forsaking meter. "Do you really wonder that I have come to despise free verse and despise myself for

writing nothing else?" He soon realized that, if he wanted to stand a chance of publication and election to the Poetry Society, he would have to cultivate the writing of regular verse more in accord with the accepted mode. The next two poems to be published by the Advocate in Cowley's freshman year clung to metrical regularity and conventional rhyme schemes. "Execution" dealt with a timeless subject against a vaguely Spanish-Catholic backdrop; "On Rereading Wordsworth" revealed that Cowley had fallen under the spell of the English Romantic poets, whom he had been reading under John Livingston Lowes. The poem evokes a contrast between the harsh reality of the bustling city life outside of the poet's window and the barren landscape of solitude of Wordsworth's nature poetry. This tension between the demands of life and the attractions of literature formed a recurrent motif in Cowley's early writings.

I turned the pages. From below arose
The multitudinous noises of the street,
The shouts of boys, the constant tramp of feet,
The echoes of the trade that ebbs and flows.
The town stretched out beneath me with its woes,
Plying its business in the summer heat.
I saw the fool, the drudge, the drab, the cheat,
In all the bustle that the city knows.

But as I read, I felt the clear, cold breeze
From the bare northern hillsides, and I saw
The driving storm clouds, and the bending trees,
And the dead leaves that drifted without law;
And heard the whistling gull's monotony,⁴³
And roaring under jagged cliffs, the sea.

What little time Cowley had left for outside reading he spent trying to keep up with his favorite authors. Edgar Lee Masters' latest volume, Songs and Satires (1916), helped to sharpen his ambivalence about his own poetic direction. Though Masters, like his disciple, had returned to regular verse forms after Spoon River Anthology, Cowley was disappointed at his former model's most recent output: "I like his verse hardly any more than my own." He could muster greater enthusiasm for Arthur Schnitzler's Der Ruf des Lebens, which radiated the same morbidity about life and death that had afflicted Cowley of late. "As a boy I used to be frightened to be alive, and now I am frightened when I think I must die."⁴⁴

Taking stock at the end of his freshman year, Cowley felt that Harvard had effected many changes in his personality, outlook and habits. The late-night poker games in Pittsburgh and the "nocturnal, almost matutinal conferences" with Burke had given way to a passion for health and physical exercise. Formerly often the last to leave a social gathering, he now went to bed at ten, rose at seven, ate regularly, took an hour of "strenuous exercise" each day and had come to despise physical flabbiness: "I am now a healthier animal than I ever was before." He was rapidly becoming a real "university man," a development he viewed as both "dangerous" and "pleasing." In early May he summed up the changes Harvard had brought:

Harvard has made me healthy. It has made me respect myself, and yet at the same time made me snobbish. It has ruined me as an author, and made me a much better citizen. It has taught me to kiss girls without blushing. The old views I had are dropping off one by one. Perversity I now adopt only as a pose to amuse people, and even then I soon drop it. I have come to believe that the Allies are right. If all goes well, I shall join the Harvard Regiment and later go to Plattsburg. I even entertain ideas of becoming a professor. You see I have changed.⁴⁵

Coming to Harvard when the college was in an "ineffably snobbish" period, Cowley could not avoid becoming tainted by a prevailing spirit of anti-Jewish feeling. Elitist and tradition-bound, the repositories of New England Protestant values and upper-class standards, many of the institutions of higher education in the Northeast had not remained untouched by the waves of discrimination that followed the massive influx of East European Jewish immigrants since the 1880s. Harvard, too, had to face its "Jewish problem," when Jewish enrollment increased from six percent in 1908 to twenty percent in 1922. Under Eliot's administration the college had earned a reputation as the most liberal and democratic of the "Big Three," making Jews feel that the avenue to a prestigious college was not altogether closed. By 1922 President Lowell, presumably motivated by a desire to preserve Harvard's historical identity and presenting his proposal as a way of restricting the growth of anti-semitism, initiated moves to curb the enrollment of Jews at Harvard.⁴⁶ Harvard, Cowley later recalled, besides its social and intellectual snobberies, also had its "ethnic snobberies, with a deep social prejudice against Jews, Boston Irish, and Radcliffe students." His own class of

1919, he reflected upon another occasion, "must have reached nearly the acme and zenith of Harvard snobbery."⁴⁷

Cowley had encountered and begun to absorb the current spirit of anti-Jewish sentiment shortly after his arrival at Harvard. His very first letter to Burke reported that he was becoming "a Jew hater;" he had talked to a student from one of the exclusive prep schools, Andover, and had come away with the conviction that Harvard would "some day be ruined by the damn Jews." A naive freshman from a public high school, Cowley appears to have felt intimidated by the boys from rich, exclusive prep schools: "as for the fellows from Andover and Exeter and Groton, I lick their boots. My son is going to Exeter," he wrote on November 9. Partly from a sense of personal insecurity and social inferiority, partly from an instinctive longing to relieve his loneliness and belong to the crowd, Cowley allowed some of their snobbishness and prejudice to rub off on himself. His roommate Jake Davis he considered a "besotted fool" for joining the Menorah Society and thus "advertising his Judaism." Seven months later he observed in a similar vein that he was "always willing to be interested in a Jew who is afraid to acknowledge his race. I know I should be if I were a Jew."⁴⁸

It is not unlikely that Cowley's ethnic prejudice was partly caused by literary and intellectual envy. He found himself in scholarly competition with "a bunch of bright Jews" and was irked by their outstanding academic performance. On April 5, 1916, he expressed himself more elaborately than before on the "pertinent subject" of Jews. There were few Jewish intellectuals, he maintained, and there were none on the staff of the Advocate or Monthly. They were "mostly a race of ill bred grinds," who worked only for A's, imitated "the jolly good fellows of Harvard in a tawdry way," ran after chorus girls, played poker, and boasted of their wickedness. There were, however, "intelligent Gentiles, some of them very intelligent."⁴⁹

Cowley's anti-Jewish prejudice was hardly more than skin-deep and, as a convenient social pose, soon wore itself out. In later years some of his closest friends and literary associates, like Harold Loeb and Matthew Josephson, would be of Jewish origin, as would be some of his bitterest enemies and critics.

By the end of his freshman year Cowley had become thoroughly steeped in the Harvard atmosphere and had come to adopt many of the stereotypical

traits of the Harvard student, both good and bad. Indeed, he assimilated to the mass of students so rapidly that at times he feared a loss of individuality and, as a consequence, despaired of his ability to write. Typically, he continued his self-analysis by speculating on the effects Harvard would have on Burke, by contrast. Whereas he himself was "never very much of a literary man" and "always nourished conservatism in [his] heart," Burke was indubitably "an original from the core," who stood in no danger of losing his individuality but needed the social pressures and herdlike atmosphere of a year at Harvard for balance. Burke would not run the risk of becoming a university man, Cowley felt, but Harvard might draw him out of his "Einsiedeln," by forcing him to socialize and involve himself in the larger life about him. Such a life, Cowley was convinced, would make Burke a better writer by carrying him outside of himself and providing him with new subject matter: "As it is, all you know, all you can express yourself about, is self, sex, and the business of writing."⁵⁰

Cowley's analysis of Burke tells us as much about himself as about his friend. He early developed an aversion to narrow specialization and a preference for broad orientation in different fields. Intuitively, he sensed the nefarious effect of too strict a limitation of experience for the writer and felt a tension between the pressures for social conformity and the demands of the individual, between a desirable interdependence and a necessary isolation. Already, he seemed distrustful of a hermetic subjectivism in art and a mode of writing dissociated from life.

Cowley spent the summer of 1916 in Belsano. Even before his last examinations in June, anticipatory thoughts of the "old town" filled him with nostalgia and "near-sentimentality." Overcome with an "infinitely sweet longing" for Belsano, he hoped to see Burke there and together to "travel the dusty road and swim in the little creeks and crawl down Chestnut Ridge just as the sun is setting." He applauded Burke's decision to leave Columbus, Ohio, and once again praised Boston for possessing the attractions of "more work and romance and drunkenness, more theatres, cafés, parks, tenniscourts, boat-houses."⁵¹

Once in Belsano, however, the allurements of the cultural and artistic life in the city were pushed to the background, as Cowley became

absorbed in the rural scenes of his boyhood. In Cambria County even Bohemian living in Greenwich Village lost its aura of enticement. Confident that he would some day live there with a mistress, he could muster the patience to wait until he had acquired enough sophistication and had outgrown his adolescence. As yet, he felt, he was "not ready for the Square," nor was he willing to relinquish his boyhood too soon. Deeply attached to the values of his childhood country, he longed to linger there a little longer and was inclined to be nostalgic even before he had been properly severed from his youth. Modern man, despite his push for progress, had "lost God's greatest gift," he wrote, the one "ingredient of happiness:" the blissful ignorance of youth. "Even with life as short as it is," he explained to Burke, "there is no use rushing too early to enjoyments. I am still a boy, and you know it. I still like to swim, and canoe, and flirt in a cheap way, and roughhouse. I want to live a healthy life until I am strong enough to stand the late hours of Bohemia, which I cannot stand now. And when I remember that I can be a boy only once, and that once I have deserted the old life, I can never go back to it, I am quite content to stay here and enjoy myself. I am content to let the dear old Advocate publish my corsetted verse (they do it regularly now), to study a little, and to bide my time."⁵²

Cowley's mood of nostalgia soon spent itself. He was quick to recognize the childishness of his own thought, even if he felt that he had "learned to mask its inanity" rather well. On the Fourth of July he complained that he was "bored to death" and lonely; he despaired of getting through the summer, unless the family got a decent horse or Burke's father could get him a summer job in Weehawken, preferably one with "a good share of manual work," so as to take him away from Belsano. Meanwhile he kept in touch with old friends and classmates, corresponded with Susan Jenkins and James Light--Sue's poetry, he thought, was but "rotten stuff;" it deserved little more than one's "good-natured contempt"--and tried unsuccessfully to impress several of his female acquaintances with his poetry and "prose libre."⁵³

Two full weeks he spent chasing around the country with one of the local characters who intrigued him deeply, Doc Altemus. Doc Leaird Altemus was a widow's son who lived on a farm four miles from Cowley's home and who had run the farm since he was fifteen. He very much wanted to follow the example of a prosperous uncle and become a doctor;

eventually he succeeded, by dint of hard work. As a boy Cowley had spent many a night at Altemus's mother's house. Doc Altemus, he had written Burke in an early letter, provided one with "an agreeable insight into the life of a dashing young buck. He drinks, fucks, swears, works like hell, is popular with girls, makes a good fraternity at Bucknell, and is sure of an average of 92 in his studies. His philosophy is the unconscious acme of the double standard, and he always plays a fellow square, and is honorable to a decent girl." Now, for a fortnight, gossiping, drinking, and keeping late hours, the two were never apart for more than a few hours. "Intellectual conversation none. Simply smut and profanity and reminiscence and personalities--and action." After such a round of "senseless dissipation," Cowley was again left to himself, lonely, "girlsick," and desperate for "a couple of French kisses."⁵⁴

The one book he read during the summer that elicited a modicum of literary enthusiasm was Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks. "Mon Dieu, what a colossus of fiction!," he exclaimed after a struggle through 450 pages of German. He was impressed by Mann's ability to create characters that were "as interesting as the people I meet, and much easier to understand." But he found that Mann was especially good on "the art-degeneracy theory." In the story of the sensitive Hanno--the last degenerate offshoot of a prominent bourgeois family, whose artistic streak undermines his vitality and eclipses his will to live--Cowley the decadent aesthete was tempted to read a portent of his own career: "I think I am even a whole generation beyond little Hanno. For generations and generations our family has nourished artists, musicians, drunks, degenerates, insanity, and worst of all, the religious spirit. I ought to be a regular genius. Unfortunately, I don't even claim to be, though I think I have a rather big talent."⁵⁵ Mann's pessimism was infectious and inculcated a mood of despondency about the brevity and transience of life. As the summer advanced, a plaintive note crept into Cowley's letters. "A hell of a lot [do] I care about my poetry after the sixth beer or the first kiss," he mocked himself on August 12. "God, Burke, am I a pessimist? Independently I am going Schopenhauer one better. Nietzsche's conclusions do not interest me much, for I am too confirmed an individualist to worry about the future of the race. And my own future--if immortality were offered me, I would not accept it, yet I do dread dissolution. Life is too short . . . we never get a chance to get

tired of living."⁵⁶

In early September, preparing to return East, he realized he had "really absolutely wasted" his summer. The one piece of writing he had undertaken was a fictive biographical sketch of Malcolm Cowley "as he might have been if born in 1860." He had spoiled that one idea of "magnitude" by simultaneously carrying forward too many strands and motifs; the story would have included several concerns "very near to me now," such as "Omar Khayyamism, drunkenness, futility, love of our section of the country, London literary life, farming and various other things." Though the sketch does not survive, by all appearances it would have exemplified the uncertainty and confusion of Cowley's aesthetic orientation. He had done little reading during the summer, written nothing worthwhile; even his letters to Burke had been but "purely extempore affairs." He had not even had an affair to boast of. "I get awfully discouraged at times, and fall into pessimistic fits not at all becoming a fat man." The only useful insight he had gained was "just how much beer or whiskey makes a comfortable souse, one with nothing but laughter as an after effect." He was becoming steeled against loneliness, however, and occasionally resented his solitude being broken into. He was relying on a meeting with Burke en route to Cambridge for some badly needed "medicine" for his moods of pessimism and despondency.⁵⁷

But rather than Burke it was the literary recognition he gained during his sophomore year that proved the most effective cure. Back in Cambridge in early October, Cowley faced the luxurious problem of having to decline one of two scholarships of \$200 each. He decided to retain the Harvard University scholarship and hoped to find a means of transferring his other grant, from the Harvard Club of Western Pennsylvania, to Burke. Faced with the hectic chaos of a new academic year and the chore of moving into his new room at 19 Russell Hall on Mount Auburn Street, he felt disoriented: "I feel lost in the midst of a thousand things I ought to be doing," he complained on October 9. Already, Cambridge was pushing back Belsano. "A life of any sort of action is becoming distasteful." For relief he spent an evening of carousal and flirtation with his new "chum" Robert A. Cunningham and two pretty girls at the Woodcock. Cunningham, a boy from Newton, Massachusetts, with a slight limp, would be Cowley's regular social

companion in his sophomore year. Though he would eventually make it to the staff of the Crimson, he had little or no ambition to write. Cowley thought him "an estimable fellow," who had "a wonderful smile" and was "the soul of decency." Both of them, he wrote on November 28, were "united in a common admiration for our college, and a common interest in feminine psychology."⁵⁸

Dwelling in close proximity to the social elite on the Gold Coast, Cowley's conceit soared to new heights and he was inclined to adopt a pose of haughtiness and social condescension. On November 1 he proclaimed:

I am a snob--hurrah, a true snob. What pleasure it gives me to think I can cut absolutely anybody I want to. What a feeling of superiority it gives me to have my boots blacked by the janitor of my Gold Coast dormitory instead of by an ordinary Dago. And just think--I hope to be invited to join a fraternity, and I am going to refuse--not because I don't want to join a fraternity, but because this one isn't good enough for me. Could anything be farther from the boy who used to associate with the social outcasts of a socially outcast high school[?] I bought a fancy vest yesterday.⁵⁹

But in the rigid social hierarchy of Harvard college life more was needed than a room on the Gold Coast and a pose of social snobbery to be accepted as an insider by those at the pinnacle of the social pyramid. Cowley realized as much. He had by no means been proclaiming himself as one of the "ins," he protested to Burke. On the contrary, he knew how thoroughly his friend disliked his "show of snobbishness," but loved to irritate him with it. To be an "in" was a matter of birth, clothes, speech, training and money, Cowley instructed Burke. Contrary to what bitter skeptics thought, money alone was no guarantee of admittance; he could point to millionaire's sons who were "decidedly not in the running." To be an "in" at Harvard was an "awesome thing beyond my ambition."⁶⁰

Cowley was well aware that the crucial division in the student body was between those from privileged social milieus who had attended a private preparatory school, and boys from middle-class or poor families who had attended public high schools. The former immediately enjoyed privileged social standing in their freshman years. "The Grotties talked to the boys from St. Marks, who talked to the boys from St. Paul, who talked to the boys from Middlesex and Milton, who didn't talk to boys

from high schools," Cowley remembered in a letter to his old roommate Jake Davis fifty years later. A boy from a public high school would continue to be treated with social condescension. Even if his academic record commanded respect and even if he was successful in literature or athletics still he would be made to feel socially inferior. In 1974 Cowley recalled how George Brownell, one of the "big" men in his class, had one day tried to give him a piece of advice for his own good: "He said that I should bathe everyday and always wear a clean shirt. I thanked him. The fact was that I did bathe every day, usually twice, and I did wear clean shirts, but other people don't see us as we are; they see an idea of us that persists in their mind. I was a high-school boy from Pittsburgh and hence unclean."⁶¹ It was not until his senior year that Cowley would come closest to being ostracized; then he experienced the rigidity of the social stratification in full force. He came through his first two years relatively unscathed, if coated with a veneer of gentlemanly snobbishness.

Prerequisites for success in the Harvard club system were sharp and complicated.⁶² Though Cowley, doubtless aware of the hopelessness of his case, claimed that the club system was beyond his ambition, he could not refrain from toying with the possibility. He scorned fraternities and refused membership with a grand flourish of snobbishness: they were "just another method of sinking the individual into society." But the Dickey, he granted, was "a fine thing." It would even interest Burke to make the Dickey, he thought, "just to prove that you can be something else than a student of literature. 'Scholar and gentleman' is the charming phrase." No one had ever been known to refuse admission to the Dickey, and Cowley was aware that much better men than either Burke or himself had been in a position to.⁶³

Rubbing elbows with the social elite on the Gold Coast, Cowley could not help feeling uneasy about his own social status. It was common knowledge that, among the socially eligible, it was considered a "major catastrophe" not to make the Dickey, or at least the Institute, and that "to be chosen in the top tens meant assured social success in College, a lion's role in Boston debutante society, prompt election to the best clubs of New York and Boston after graduation, and a job at Lee Higginson's or a New York brokerage house."⁶⁴ Knowing himself barred from these avenues--he made neither the Institute nor the Dickey--Cowley

was tempted to adopt the manners and modes of those inside the club system, as if to compensate for his sense of social inferiority. Since he was neither an "in" nor a complete outsider, his social position at Harvard remained uncertain and amphibious.

Loneliness was less of a plague now than before. He had Bob Cunningham for social companionship and no longer moved so shyly on the margin of the meetings at the Harvard Poetry Society, which served him much in lieu of a club. As a sophomore he was a full-fledged member of the circle of poets gathering under the eaves of the Harvard Union; soon his contributions in prose and verse were appearing regularly in The Harvard Advocate. Meeting many of the Harvard Aesthetes in their own den and being exposed to their poetry, however, hardly filled Cowley with unqualified enthusiasm. The Advocate and Monthly he found but "cowardly, castrated sheets," and he was only moderately impressed by the poets he met at the Poetry Society. His only real "find" was Royall H. Snow, a freshman from Chicago, "pleasing of face, not troublesomely moral, and a capable poet." Snow had been published in Scribner's and possessed a wonderful collection of rejection slips from The Smart Set, which pleaded in his favor. Though Snow had not read what he should, Cowley judged him "a sound critic" and thought he would "pass every test for membership in our coterie." He was anxious for Burke to meet Snow and promised to escort him to New York over Christmas. On October 24, after attending a meeting of the Poetry Society, Cowley arrived at a higher estimate of the Harvard poets: "there has been poetry at Harvard in the past, and there is poetry there now. Norris, Paulding, Snow, Raisbean, Cutler--lord, you'll hear of them all some day." Their tastes, however, collided with his own. He had tried the experiment of reading out some of Burke's poems, but, he regretfully reported, "il n'est allé pas." He had been forced into explanations and apologies and, he feared, had left his audience with the fatal impression that Burke was "a most interesting fellow who wrote most interesting, amusing poetry." Yet he himself remained convinced that Burke was "a genius" and he applauded his friend's "temporary defection" from free verse.⁶⁵

At the time Harvard poets were divided into two warring factions. On the one side were the Ancients, represented most eloquently by Robert Hillyer, who would later hold the Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory then held by Dean Briggs, and develop into a staunch literary

conservative. Polished and sonorous, Hillyer's poems were modeled after Keats and Spenser; they were technically competent, but quite conventional. On the other side were the Moderns, represented by poets like Cummings, Damon, Dos Passos and Wheelwright. Whereas the Moderns believed that poets ought to write in their own language about things they had seen or felt, Cowley observed in retrospect, the Ancients were content to write about what they had read "in the language of Lord Alfred Keats-Rossetti." The aesthetic direction of his own poetry was still far from certain, but critically and temperamentally Cowley was already firmly entrenched on the side of the Moderns. Soon he would ridicule his opponents for holding that poetry should express "the daydreams of a twelve-year old girl in words of one syllable."⁶⁶

Many of the Harvard poets of Cowley's day, in particular descendants of old Boston families like Cummings and Wheelwright, were sensitive to (and often satirical about) the ancient cultural heritage of a university that had its roots in seventeenth-century New England. But they were also deeply attracted to the rebellious bohemianism of Greenwich Village and late-nineteenth century European Decadence. Typically, their poetry, as Alan Wald has noted, combined an awareness of tradition with a penchant for rebellion. Not surprisingly, they would develop in different directions. Poets like Wheelwright and Damon kept in touch with tradition and the classical heritage, however uneasily, and went on to write poetry marked by the classicism, urbane intellectuality and recondite obscurity of much modernist verse. Cummings and Dos Passos veered toward anti-intellectualism and romantic individualism, and felt that too much erudition posed a threat to spontaneous and intense self-expression.⁶⁷ In 1917 Stewart Mitchell, a poet-editor of the Monthly, took the initiative in bringing together some of the best Harvard verse, Modern and Ancient alike, in a book. Eight Harvard Poets, published with the financial help of Dos Passos's father, featured the work of Cummings, Damon, Dos Passos, Hillyer, Stewart Mitchell, William A. Norris, Dudley Poore and Cuthbert Wright. Norris, the son of a banking family from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and head of the Signet Club, had been brought in at the request of his friend Hillyer. He reputedly was so horrified by his appearance in such questionable company, that he bought up and destroyed every copy of the book he could find. As a result, Cowley remembered, Eight Harvard Poets became almost "as rare as the first edition of Leaves

of Grass."⁶⁸

Cowley's own work was now beginning to attract attention. On October 10 the Advocate published the first of three fictional sketches to appear during his sophomore year. "Then Fear Crept in at the Window" depicted the crescendoing fright of a newly-wed farmwife, as she finds herself besieged by imaginary terrors in an isolated mountain shack on the first night of her husband's absence. Slight in itself, the sketch showed a budding talent for suspenseful narrative.⁶⁹ In early November the critic of the Advocate, writing in the Crimson, singled out one of Cowley's poems in free verse, "To a Girl I Dislike," as "the best in the issue." Taking the rural scenes of his boyhood for its setting, the poem satirized the conventional sweetness of adolescent love lyrics by undercutting a carefully built-up expectation of romantic pastoral love. Cowley acknowledged that the poem was hardly distinguished, yet relished its success.

Ever since I was a very little boy,
I have known a path that wound away through the birches
and hemlocks;
And I remember
How I always feared to follow it,
And liked to dream instead what lay at its end--
An Indian burying-ground, perhaps;
Or a cave of robbers, stored with fabulous riches;
Or a rotting cabin that had nursed some great hero.
And one day I followed the path,
Walking slowly out of fearfulness;
Starting back when I roused a covey of quail
From the maple scrub around the spring;
Only to find at the end of it,
Among the hemlocks and mossed birches,
A pigsty--
Like a piece of yellow glass set in filigreed platinum,
Or like your heart
Beneath the mysterious immobility of your beauty.⁷⁰

At the end of the month Hermann Hagedorn--"I hope you know that most distinguished poet and dramatist"--wrote an unsolicited letter to the Advocate in which he praised the "freshness" of its poetry and singled out William A. Norris, James R. Parsons and Malcolm Cowley for special mention. "In a literary line I am succeeding just at the time when my inspiration has run dry," Cowley commented to Burke. In December the Advocate published another two of his poems, both of them set in a rural Western Pennsylvania landscape. "To a Chance Acquaintance," in free

verse, recalled an amorous tryst between a dreamy, visionary lover of wide horizons and a provincial, narrow-minded girl, whose words hold out the promise of a stuffy, stunting life. "A Letter to Jim" struck a conversational tone and, freely rhyming, evoked the nostalgic delights of long hikes on Chestnut Ridge and the pleasures of physical labor in the woods.⁷¹

In mid-December Cowley attended a joint meeting of the New England Poetry Society and the Harvard Poetry Society. Now for the first time he had the opportunity to meet Amy Lowell and see the legendary advocate of the New Poetry in action. The evening itself was a modest occasion and Cowley came away with a cluster of satirical impressions and a glowing compliment. The New England Poetry Society, he reported to Burke, consisted primarily of "Amy Lowell and her enemies." Chief among the latter was Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Lionel Marks), who, as a representative of the Old Poetry, would soon try to oust Amy Lowell from the presidency of the Society. In spite of his misgivings, Cowley could not help being impressed by Amy Lowell's poetry as much as by her personality.

Last night the poetry of the Harvard Poetry Club hopelessly outclassed that of the semi-professionals, except, I must admit, Amy. But as she said, most of it could have been written twenty years ago. A large part of the New England verse should never have been written.

And My Lord, those women were ugly. Amy stood with her back to the fire, puffing away at a Fatima, and looking very much like a volcanic mountain in eruption. Accent on mountain. She advised me to smoke Alfred Dunhill pipes. She had found, she said, that the vulcanized bits didn't bite through. Sometimes as I look at her, I seem to see dear Miss Ruswinkle [his high school teacher]. I like Amy, and because I like her, I am beginning to like her poetry.

Some of his subjectively colored admiration may well have been roused by Amy Lowell's complimentary observation that Royall Snow and Malcolm Cowley were "the only two poets who wrote modern verse among the members of the Harvard Poetry Society." Over the years Cowley would owe Miss Lowell a large debt of gratitude, as he became one of several young poets who received her criticism and encouragement. Her Six French Poets (1915) helped to introduce him to French poetry and, acting as a literary agent of sorts, she would be instrumental in selling some of his poetry to Poetry and The Dial. In a 1936 review of S. Foster Damon's monumental

biography of Amy Lowell for The New Republic Cowley paid her tribute as "the commanding general of the new poets." Though by then he had grown skeptical about the merit of her poetry, he continued to admire her strength of personality and praised her "genius for organizing, genius for human relations, genius for command."⁷²

Cowley's first book reviews appeared in the Advocate of November 22. Hardly substantial essays, they are remarkable in that from his very first piece of criticism, a review of Constance Garnett's translation of Anton Chekhov's The Darling, he found an approach that established a basic pattern for the hundreds of reviews to follow. After giving the necessary factual information about the book, Cowley discussed Chekhov's subject matter and his characters, branched out into a consideration of the writer's outlook on life as exemplified by his fiction, analyzed the special reasons for his appeal to an American audience, and concluded with a discussion of the contemporary literary scene in America in the light of Chekhov's example. His book review thus placed the specific book under consideration in the context of the current literary situation in America in a manner that would become one of the characteristics of his later criticism.

Cowley's earliest reviews displayed the conventional belief that art should first and foremost be judged as a representation of real life. Thus, he praised Chekhov's characters for their "surprising reality" and the author for rivaling Chaucer as a master in depicting the feminine soul, but objected that Chekhov seemed incapable of portraying "a woman we can admire." This inability to create "heroines" he related to Chekhov's "view of life," a variety of post-Schopenhauerian pessimism. It was an attitude, Cowley implied, which could easily lead to unhappy literary results: "A writer of tales can believe that life is useless if he will; he can believe that tedium and disappointment is the common lot, yet he cannot lose interest in life, or else he will lose his ability to depict it." Such an insistence would prove axiomatic, but in 1916 Chekhov's pessimism was hard to resist: "The belief that life is useless seems to have an evil attraction which has kept man toying with it from Epicurus down. It has the subtle fascination of certain drugs." Though we had come to recognize Chekhov's view of life as peculiarly Russian, Cowley observed, many Americans shared a similar attitude towards existence. Why, then, was there no American Chekhov? The answer must be

sought in the nefarious effects of American journalism, Cowley thought, which demanded that the writer "view everything in the light of the story it will make. No American writer," he declared, "can take life as it is and tell about it. Everyone of them, even the tedious Mr. Dreiser, insists on twisting life in the attempt to form an organized plot." He concluded by pointing up the role of the publishers in this, but despaired of a cure: "Only stories with skillfully antithetical plots have any market, and editors and public seem to forget totally that life has no skillfully antithetical plots. What is the remedy? At present there seems to be none."⁷³

In an accompanying review of W. Somerset Maugham's Of Human Bondage Cowley took up some of the same issues and deepened their meaning. Unlike Chekhov, Maugham managed to inspire his readers with admiration for his characters: "admiration is a feeling often present in life. And just as it is present in life, it is present in this novel," the naive critic observed approvingly. He praised Maugham's novel for possessing "an unmistakable air of reality," but this time defined his criterion of realism more precisely. What he admired was not the minute external verisimilitude of the naturalists--Maugham had "avoided Theodore Dreiser's great mistake"--but a degree of behavioristic or psychological realism: the air of reality in Maugham sprang from "the author's careful observations of the actions that characterize a person," the details of behavior that laid bare a character's "soul."⁷⁴ Earlier, he had preferred Schnitzler to Dreiser for similar reasons. His next review, of William McFee's first novel Casuals of the Sea, appeared in the Advocate of January 17, 1917, and applied similar criteria, without developing or defining them further. McFee's "knowledge of life and people" gave the novel its principal value. Because he possessed "an uncanny faculty of showing the way things take place in life," McFee was able to create "an impression of reality which none of the members of the so-called realistic school could ever attain."⁷⁵

These early reviews, though minor pieces in themselves and full of irritating vagueness, yet pointed the direction in which Cowley's talents would develop. They displayed a capacity for singling out a writer's virtues and weaknesses in a few sharp phrases, showed an emerging interest in a writer's outlook on human existence, suggested a basic humanism in his demand of a correlation between art and life, and

revealed a gift for lending a book immediate dramatic relevance by placing it in the context of the present. They also showed that his talent for conceptual thinking and exact theoretical definition was not strong.

In a letter to Burke Cowley acknowledged the slender theoretical basis on which he had approached the novels and granted that "the theory of the novel" was "of infinitely greater importance" than the criticism of specific works of art. Burke's and Cowley's ideals of the novel, however, for the moment seemed essentially different: where Burke swore by Dostoevsky, Cowley advanced Chekhov (and later Turgenev) as his model. "I think the ideal novelist would know one character very well and several characters fairly well." Typically, Cowley's early speculations were predicated on assumptions about art and the literary life that were instinctive rather than theoretical. He agreed with Burke that "the novelist's art [was] the highest," but demanded of the writer a broad experience and a wide acquaintanceship with people and was inclined to see his own gregariousness as better equipment for the writing life than Burke's comparative isolation: "a novelist has to know people. And to know them, he has to meet people. I think at present I have a better knowledge of many kinds of people than you have, although your mind is more naturally bent to character analysis."

If he had come closer to his ideal of the artistic life than Burke, he believed he owed his advantage to Harvard, since Harvard was the only university with "a really distinctive attitude." "You can always tell a Harvard man," he reminded Burke, "but you can't tell him much." With renewed fervor he proposed his ideal of Burke and himself together at Harvard. Since Burke especially needed to meet others, Cowley speculated, they would stay apart for the first year, except for "occasional séances" and frequent walks. Cowley promised to "boom" Burke, introduce him to all the "literary lights" and help him around the Advocate office. Most importantly, he wanted Burke to face Harvard life independently and "get reactions from it." The year after, Cowley would be willing to enter upon a "Zweisiedeln" and bury himself with Burke in the "wilds" of Ohio State: "You and I together and a library close at hand--what does it matter whether we are in Paris, Petrograd, Columbus or New York?" Meanwhile, he triumphantly announced, his literary sterility had disappeared, since he had discovered "a subject of infinite interest. I am writing my own

history."⁷⁶

Over the Christmas break Cowley voyaged to New York, accompanied by Royall Snow, whom he introduced to Kenneth Burke. He spent a day with Burke in New York, then journeyed on to Pittsburgh, where he saw old friends from high-school days, and to Belsano, where he found James Light and Susan Jenkins visiting his parents. Together they made sandwiches, mixed a rum punch and played poker until far into the night. Later, Cowley met some of his friends' fellow students from Ohio State and seized the opportunity to boast of the Advocate and flaunt his Harvard sense of superiority by proclaiming "a lot of childish socialism."⁷⁷

Back in Cambridge Cowley made every effort to help smooth Burke's path to Harvard. Pulling as many strings as he could, he consulted with the Dean, discussing Burke's chances of obtaining a scholarship and of entering Harvard without taking entrance examinations. He urgently advised Burke to apply for a scholarship from one of the regional Harvard Clubs, in New York, New Jersey, or Western Pennsylvania, as well as for a Price Greenleaf fellowship. He wrote a glowing letter of recommendation to a potential sponsor in one of the Pittsburgh banks and even tried to find a suitable roommate for Burke. Sensing the latter's hesitation, he stressed the importance of an orientation visit to the college. Burke visited Cowley in Cambridge in late January. Cowley did his utmost to present the university in the best possible light. In one of his anticipatory letters, he proposed to arrange a meeting with the Dean and suggested they would attend a Monday night lecture by Charles Townsend Copeland, "the English professor of great ego," roam the "very picturesque town" of Boston, and get a taste of the city's cultural offerings by taking in a theatrical performance--he mentioned Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest as a luring possibility.⁷⁸

Cowley's efforts did not pay off. He repeatedly urged his friend to send in his scholarship applications, but Burke let deadlines pass and spent the remainder of the academic year at Columbia. The year after he would leave a promising scholastic career--he had hopes of being appointed to the faculty--and room with James and Susan Light in the bohemian's paradise of Greenwich Village.⁷⁹ Cowley deeply regretted the

failure of his endeavors and gave vent to his disappointment in a letter:

Damn it, I don't want you to stay down at Columbia. And the Harvard Poetry Society has no patron saint on the faculty, and is provided with much better beer, I wager my life. And the Advocate is faulty enough to need a hell of a lot of improvement. And I think I can get you on it, and in Copey's course (he has turned out remarkably interesting) and maybe in more things. And finally there is Foster Damon, and there is [Malcolm] Vaughn to dislike (for his poetry) and Royall Snow to talk to, and lots of stupid girls to shock with French novels, and more that can't be shocked with French novels or with anything else, and good food, and bodily comfort, and the most interesting city in the United States (something I discovered after you were here).⁸⁰

When Burke seemed determined to stay in New York, Cowley urged him to try and get on the board of the Spectator, Columbia's college paper. He tried to be instrumental by recommending Burke to Cunningham, who served on the staff of the Crimson and one of whose Columbia friends was "slated" to be editor-in-chief of the Spectator.⁸¹ Cowley's exertions on behalf of Burke, even if they came to naught, were typical of many such future endeavors on behalf of writers in need of financial support or literary recognition.

Cowley's writings were now beginning to appear in little magazines published beyond the boundaries of Harvard. Though he could boast rejection slips from five magazines, "ranging from The Seven Arts to Saucy Stories," two poems he had written the previous fall—"Wistfulness" and "The Harbor at Night"—were printed in Slate early in 1917. Slate, "a magazine for teachers who are not dead; and for their friends," meant to stir up interest in educational reform. It was edited from New York by Jess Perlman, who managed to keep the magazine afloat for the first five months of 1917. Besides spirited editorials and cartoons in the style of The Masses, it published essays by Floyd Dell and Scott Nearing and poems by Louis Untermeyer, Haniel Long, Witter Bynner, Royall Snow, Burke and Cowley. At about this time, too, Max Lincoln Schuster published some of Cowley's earliest verse in an intercollegiate little magazine called Challenge.⁸²

Cowley himself showed more enthusiasm for a new avant-garde venture by some of the undergraduate students from Ohio State he had met over Christmas. In the fall of 1916 they had laid plans for the foundation of a collegiate magazine with a "red revolutionary title," The Sansculotte.

Its moving spirit and editor-in-chief was James Light; among the associate editors were Louis Rich and Louis Lozowick, both of whom had a streak of fiery radicalism. Lozowick, who served as the art editor, went to Russia after the Great War, became a leader of the Russian Constructivists and disappeared in the Great Purge. Sansculotte, derisively called "No Breeches" after the most radical supporters of the French Revolution, represented the orthodox avant-garde opinions of the time: it stood for "pacifism in politics, bold realism in fiction, and hurrah for free verse."⁸³ The first issue of January 1917 contained an editorial statement proclaiming the magazine's commitment to a radically aesthetic position; its language was enthusiastic, but shrouded in vague and somewhat inconsistent generalities:

Our faith is in the essential goodness of man's powers, in the worth of his purposes, in the value of art for full and satisfying life. We attempt to envisage ourselves in respect of the living controls of the past, and to appreciate our position in our time. We are individuals speaking each for himself, but speaking each with a definite relation to the others. We believe that the underlying reality in life is given meaning and force by art, that art and literature are the interpreters, the coordinators of what meaning there is in men and their surroundings, that they absorb, assimilate and nourish the foundational sense and purpose of human existence. . . . Our care is for literature for its own sake, as far as possible. Our aim is an artistic one purely.⁸⁴

Sansculotte ran for three issues only, in January, February and April of 1917, and, following the fate of numerous little magazines, folded when the United States declared war on Germany. It was not suppressed, Cowley remembered, "though it might have been if further issues had been planned; it simply stopped when the money ran out." The second issue carried some poems by Ludwig Lewisohn, then on the faculty of Ohio State and a sympathetic mentor to the venture. Another amused but somewhat bewildered observer of the magazine, though he did not contribute, was James Thurber, then a student at Ohio State. He was already contributing funny pieces and pen-and-ink drawings to the Sundial, the college magazine, and would be its editor the year after. Thurber, who was "strictly establishment," was "outraged" as well as "challenged" by Sansculotte. George Bellows and John Sloan saw enough in the venture to contribute a free cover drawing each. Mostly James Light called on his friends to fill the magazine's pages. Apart from contributions by the

editorial board, the bulk of its contents was made up of the writings of Burke, Cowley, Royall Snow and Susan Jenkins. The principal contributors to Sansculotte, as one critic has pertinently observed, revealed themselves to be "extremely young artists whose minds [were] not yet made up, and whose aesthetics [had] not yet been formulated." There was "considerable immaturity" in their writings, but also a remarkable "breadth of intellectual interests."⁸⁵

Cowley followed the magazine's fate with a good deal of skeptical interest. He would have subscribed to most of its editorial articles of faith, in particular its general emphasis on the value of art for life and on the independence of its individual contributors within the context of a group, but would have boggled at the language in which the statement had been couched. The first issue filled Cowley with strongly qualified enthusiasm. Rich's contributions, he felt, showed a capacity for thought, but needed to be translated into English; Lozowick engendered mere revulsion. Burke's poems he rated "far and away the best things published," though he could also muster some appreciation for Light's "circumambiently genial style." The second issue elicited greater praise, even if he complained that "as usual, Ohio State is represented by one piece of bad prose" from one of the associate editors.⁸⁶

Cowley himself was represented in all three issues of Sansculotte. His contributions numbered a total of six: five poems and a prose sketch. One poem was rejected by Light because it "sounded like a sophomore Villon;" since Cowley had written the poem at Peabody, he preferred to take the criticism as a compliment. The prose sketch, "The Author of His Being," was set in Cambria County. Evoking a grotesque mood of ghostliness and horror, the story explored the brutal underside of life in the Midwest and related how the illegitimate son of a shiftless drunkard, out of a mixture of fear and resentment, refrains from saving his father from death by freezing.⁸⁷ Among the poems was "Kisses," which had moved Amy Lowell to praise the modernity of Cowley's verse; it revealed a penchant for precise, imagistic notation:

Like fox-grapes after the first frost,
Lucy's kisses are wholesome, and fragrant and a little tart.
Clara's sweetest kisses are sticky and ostentatious--
Like shoeblacking.⁸⁸

To Cowley's delight, Light also printed one of his earliest poems, "The

Oldest Inhabitant," a tribute to his pioneer ancestor Thomas Duncan written at Peabody. The poem, in free verse, lovingly evoked the vanished woodlands of Chestnut Ridge, but showed a tendency towards prose-like diffuseness that was to mark even some of Cowley's more successful poems. The last lines of the poem read:

You were my own kin, Thomas Duncan,
And I sometimes wish that instead of bending over my desk,
hour by hour,
I could trudge like you beside my wagon over the timbered
Alleghenies,
To carve new empires out of the eternal hills.⁸⁹

Cowley's poems in Sansculotte were hardly distinguished; apart from an occasionally felicitous phrase or image, their final impression is one of awkwardness and immaturity.

Several poems appearing in The Harvard Advocate in February 1917 showed greater sophistication. Cowley continued to make excursions into free verse, but his predilection was for strict, regular forms, in particular the sonnet and the ballad or other stanzaic narrative verse. "Ragtime," published side by side with "Ante Mortem," an experiment in vers libre, was a characteristic effort to counterpoint a conventional form with the wild and primitive rhythms of contemporary music:

These tunes they hum today are ages old.
Shushan and Babylon were in their might
When once they played them in the fire-light
That reddened lost glades of the Congo wold.
They made the seething jungle blood run cold,
Until the warriors stole into the night,
Lusting for blood, to slay in secret fight,
While tom-toms pulsed in rhythms manifold.

The battle dance around the fire is gone;
The warriors' very bones have bleached away.
But though their open savagery is done,
The savage rhythm of their chants lives on;
Lives in the frantic tunes the fiddlers play
To drunken mummers in the cabaret.⁹⁰

Another poem, "An Old Fellow to his Friends," struck a typical pose of world-weariness, as it speculated upon the possible effect of the poet's death on his friends. A "philosophical discussion" in verse, it was inspired by a conversation Cowley had conducted with Burke over Christmas and had subsequently turned into blank verse; it tried to integrate a

tone of conversational ease with the formal restraint of iambic pentameters. The second stanza will suffice as an illustration:

Forget the silence and the darkened room,
Old friends, when I am dead. Perhaps instead
You all might meet as we all used to meet;
With cards and glasses and a haze of smoke--
And then the time to jest and jibe at me.
Then tear apart my poems as of old,
Show their essential weakness; take my prose,
That never could grow up, and jeer at it.
And when all that is criticized enough,
Turn to my person, laughing louder still;
Bring forth my foibles and my prejudices . . .⁹¹

In March Cowley's hopes for literary success were fulfilled. His contributions to The Harvard Advocate had now been sufficiently frequent and impressive for its author to be elected to the editorial board. He was admitted to the board at a ceremonial banquet on March 20, "along with a couple of social lions," he reported to Burke. He had had a "good time," his only regret being that Burke had not been elected with him; "we might turn it into a jolly sheet then in a couple of years, if tradition didn't prove too strong." At the festive occasion of Cowley's election the Harvard litterateurs had been particularly impressed by the reading out of one of his sonnets. "From the Diary of a Restoration Gentleman" had been "a grand success;" it was traditional enough to elicit Barrett Wendell's comment that it was "literature" and to earn the glowing (if drunken) praise in French of Robert Hillyer--as well as the sober applause of many others.

We passed a stupid night at Lanterloo,
and afterwards, when day did first approach,
Sir Reginald advised a hackney coach.
Then home to sleep, and glad the night was through.
At twelve, I to the Mall, where there were few
Wenches who did not flee at my approach,
Or who shewed pleasure if I cared to broach
A quiet supper at the Rose for two.

Then to the play. The boxes were all full,
The pit was jammed, but I could not forgive
A clumsy cast, and Lord! the lines were dull.
Then wine and cards and home I know not how . . .
I wonder if such fops as I will live
Such stupid lives two centuries from now?⁹²

Reflecting Cowley's reading in Restoration and Augustan literature, the poem displayed a penchant for satire that marked several of his early writings.

Though Cowley's satirical propensity did not immediately produce further poems--he was again "sterile now as a dried-up water hole"--its spirit informed one of two short stories published in the Advocate early in 1917. In "The Wages of Death" the satire was aimed at Cowley's own ambitions as well as at the standards of the magazine and publishing world. The story explored the conflict between public success and artistic integrity, a theme that soon enough would come to haunt its author's own career. "There were only two things in this world that Harold du Ve wanted--a literary success and the hand of Doria Crashaw. There is reason to believe that he valued literary success above Doria Crashaw's hand." Rejected twice, the young protagonist turns to his fiction with redoubled efforts. He dreams of writing bestsellers, but makes the fatal mistake of choosing the wrong models: "Instead of reading Edna Ferber and Robert W. Chambers, he read Pater and Max Beerbohm." One after the other his stories are rejected: the editor of The Romantic, a magazine of popular trash, finds them too classical, pompous and witty; for another, the conservative editor of The Arctic Monthly, they are too ephemeral, frivolous and colloquial. Then Harold learns that Doria Crashaw has been foully murdered, the perpetrator of the crime being unknown. In a flash of inspiration the young writer decides to give himself up to the police for the murder of his beloved. Publicity immediately surrounds him and he is offered "gratifying royalties" by three publishers:

Any volume of tales written by such a notorious criminal was bound to be successful. Respectable matrons read it instead of divorce proceedings. Flappers thought him more wicked than Verlaine. Old maids gave up their favorite Oscar Wilde. When an officious librarian barred the book from the Boston Public Library, its sales redoubled.

Blinded by the glitter of his fame and the stunning sales of his book, Harold basks in glory and the safe knowledge of his true innocence. He sits through the boring courtroom proceedings speculating on the literary uses to which the scene of his trial can be put. On the day before his execution, found guilty of murder in the first degree, he receives a

check for 50,000 dollars from his publisher.⁹³

Cowley remembered several of his Harvard teachers, especially Dean Briggs and John Livingston Lowes, with great fondness. But the one teacher who, more than any other member of the Harvard faculty, made a lasting impression was Charles Townsend Copeland. "Copey," as he was familiarly called by friend and foe alike, was a legendary Harvard character, whose advanced composition course, English 12, attracted scores of young talented writers, many of whom would go on to a distinguished career in letters. One of his most devoted disciples, John Reed, remembered how Copeland, under the pretense of teaching English composition, "stimulated generations of men to find color and strength and beauty in books and in the world, and to express it again." Known as a sympathetic mentor and friend to undergraduates, Copey was less the scholarly intellectual than an excellent lecturer and teacher. Failure to publish and lack of appreciation from his colleagues (some found him mean-spirited and shallow) kept him in the rank of instructor for years; a graduate of 1882, he was not promoted to Assistant Professor until 1910. Yet few teachers gathered such a dedicated following among students, many of whom, with Cowley, remembered him as their "favorite English instructor." Before joining the Harvard English department Copey had been an actor, had written a biography of Edwin Booth, dropped out of Harvard Law School and worked for some seven years on the staff of the Boston Post. Giving free rein to his histrionic talents, Copey loved to perform while teaching. He impressed one student, Norman Foerster, as "a ham actor." His public readings of Poe, Twain, Kipling and Dickens were famous; in the opinion of Samuel Eliot Morison they managed to give even "the most illiterate a taste for the English classics."⁹⁴

Cowley took English 12 in his sophomore year. The course turned out to be "remarkably interesting," he confessed to Burke. Copey purposely kept his composition course limited to about thirty students, whom he would meet in his own rooms in Hollis Hall. He was known as a devastating critic of students' work, who had a keen eye for detail and could infallibly distinguish good from awkward prose. Years later Cowley remembered the sessions with his teacher:

Then there were those awful moments in the afternoon when one went to Copey's room by appointment to read aloud one's latest theme, while Copey dozed in his chair, perhaps with the dying sunlight reflected from the south window on the polished membrane that covered his enormous skull. At the end of the reading he would dictate his comments for the student to copy on the folded back of the theme. Once when I had described the swirling dust in a downtown Pittsburgh street, he dictated slowly, without unfolding his hands, "Don't you remember the smell of dried horse dung? Why didn't you put that in?" And once when I read him a sententious article written for the Advocate, in which one wondered how the country knew who . . . he shook his head and groaned, "Malcolm, when are you going to stop using those knew-whoings and one-wonderings?" I stopped that afternoon.

He may have been referring to the same theme, in a scathing voice, when he said, "It's good enough for a New Republic editorial. B-minus." Did he guess where I was going to end up?⁹⁵

Though some resented Copey's favoritism of the talented and handsome, to most students his praise meant the acme of success. When Copey gave Cowley his first two A's at the end of March, he was exultant: "I began to feel so much like a successful poet that I was going to write immediately and tell you that you weren't more a genius than I after all," he observed to Burke. When his friend seemed skeptical about the value of Copey's praise, Cowley explained its importance: "Copey is almost a parent of present day American literature. Our writing today is done by Harvard men, and Harvard men of prominence in literature always take Copey's course." Still, he acknowledged Copey's limitations and granted that he had "no different mind, and only a little better rounded personality" than some of his high school teachers.⁹⁶

Copey's instruction was not restricted to his classes. For almost forty years he kept "open house" one night a week after ten. To be admitted to Copey's inner circle was a much-coveted privilege and it was with appropriate pride that Cowley announced to Burke in March 1917: "Copey has finally opened his gates to receive me." One of Cowley's early unpublished pieces of verse evoked the atmosphere of the evenings in "Copey's Room" on the eve of America's entrance into the First World War.

A low-beamed ceiling, and a glowing fire;
Old photographs that peer out of the gloom;
Pamphlets and books invading everything;
Chairs deep as death; the calm that calm minds bring:

Call it a vision of the student realized
If you like words--or call it just a room.

The current of life has passed it by--it seems
Two doors shut out the world and what it says;
A murmuring fire makes reminiscences
Of waves along the beach--wind in the trees;
And now the gloom is live with memories:
An old man's memories--and a young man's dreams.

The minutes pass in clockticks--I forget
That through these double doors young men have come
As old as life--bowed down by fear of living;
That they have talked as I talk--and then some,
Having felt unknown worlds in your advice,
More than you meant to say--Truth, Sacrifice--
Have stridden through the doors some minutes later,
With a set smile, and saying banal things,
To die for God and kin--and dreams much greater.⁹⁷

One of Copey's class assignments was the submission of 500 words of translation from any language every week, together with one's original essays. Rumor had it that Copey never read them. As if to confirm the rumor Cowley once submitted 500 words of sheer "gibberish." They elicited no comment. Copey's recalcitrant pupil, however, would gain a reputation as an expert translator of French literature in the 1920s and would always be impressed with the value of translating for the beginning writer. In 1958, outlining his own proposal for an advanced writing course in the Hopwood Lecture at the University of Michigan, Cowley recommended a course in translation as an ideal preparation: "translation is a most effective means of learning the spirit and resources of one's own language. There is no better way of acquiring a prose style, except possibly the writing of verse. . . . The emphasis of the course would not be on an accurate rendering of the original, though a reasonable degree of fidelity would be expected, but rather on the value of the translation as English prose."⁹⁸

Copeland did not exert any demonstrable influence on Cowley's aesthetic notions, but his flair for showmanship and his capacity for playing on an audience helped Cowley understand that a communicable art must depend to a large extent on the spoken voice. The leading principle which Copey inculcated in his pupil was that "good prose should be speakable prose;" Cowley would pursue the goal as his lifelong ambition.⁹⁹

On the whole, there is little in Cowley's writings or his correspondence at this time to prepare us for the interpretation he would put upon his Harvard experience in Exile's Return. Only poems like "On Rereading Wordsworth" or "To Certain Imagist Poets" vaguely, and to a large extent implicitly, lament the absence of a meaningful correlation between art and life. In "Copey's Room," one of the few poems anticipating the argument in Exile's Return, the professor's study metonymically represents the entire university, which it pictures as a stagnant, lifeless world of art and learning in opposition to the "current of life" outside its protective walls. This discrepancy between two worlds would constitute one of the pillars of Cowley's reinterpretation of his Harvard years from a new perspective in the 1930s; the poem is one of the few indications that the germs of Cowley's radicalism were latently present at the time, though as yet effectively dormant. Mostly, during his student days, Cowley's understanding of the social and economic determinants of his Harvard experience was limited and hazy at best. It was not until his awareness of them had deepened and accelerated under the impact of the Great Depression that he developed a coherent vision of his own cultural and social position at Harvard. Though that vision would be inspired by a personal need to fit the disparate parts of his past into a meaningful framework and though it would be steeped in his newly intensified social consciousness, the evidence available confirms that it was founded on a substantially correct understanding of his experience. However, since one of Cowley's objectives in the original edition of Exile's Return was to develop a reading of his past that would make his radical commitment appear as an inevitable and logical outgrowth of his generation's experience, he was tempted to overplay the importance of social and economic factors and to underplay the intensity of his youthful ambition to make an impact on Harvard's literary scene. There is, also, relatively little in his letters to indicate that he actually felt as alienated or uprooted from his native background as his later understanding of those years suggests.

In college, Cowley argued in Exile's Return, the process of deracination that had started in high school continued relentlessly. Seeking "a key to unlock the world," he was initiated by his professors

into an "immaterial" world of scholarship and learning that was "timeless, placeless, elaborate, incomplete" and that bore "only the vaguest relationship to that other world in which fortunes were made, universities endowed and city governments run by muckers." Little or nothing of what he was taught in the classroom seemed to have any connection with the rapidly changing urban-technological society outside the university walls or with the intellectual upheavals of the years between 1912 and 1917, a period which was to put an "end" to "American innocence." To an impressionable student like Cowley the university appeared a "high disembodied realm" of books and ideas, in which raw human experience was refined into "the dead material of culture." In such a cultural and intellectual ambience he could gain little or no understanding of the historical roots and the socio-economic forces shaping the university. Nor did the full significance of Harvard's New England legacy dawn upon him as it did upon Cummings and Wheelwright. "All these things, Emerson, doorways, factory hands and fortunes, the Elective System, the Porcellian Club, were bound together into one civilization, but of this I received no hint. I was studying Goethe's Dichtung und Wahrheit and the Elizabethan drama."¹⁰⁰

Such a milieu, in which regional and ethnic differences subtly blurred into a cultural and intellectual universalism with a distinctly elitist flavor, induced young writers like Cowley to neglect the wealth of literary capital that lay waiting to be explored in their own personal backgrounds and experiences. With the exception of a poem like "The Oldest Inhabitant," which seriously explores the young poet's roots in the Pennsylvania pioneer past, Cowley's early verse supports the thesis he developed in Exile's Return. Typically, his Harvard poems would exploit "the dead material of culture," derived from books or other forms of secondhand observation, as in "Execution" or "From the Diary of a Restoration Gentleman." At most, as in "To a Chance Acquaintance" or "A Letter to Jim," they would use a Pennsylvania landscape for backdrop.

Cowley's overriding concern at Harvard was with literature. There was little in his university experience to contradict and much to foster the idea that the world of art and learning and the world beyond the walls of Harvard Yard were irreconcilably separated. With Burke he might exult over the city "as a work of art," in his poems he might evoke the picturesque qualities of its commercial "bustle," its "multitudinous

noises" and "woes," but he could not penetrate its colorful surface to its social, economic or political underpinnings.¹⁰¹ Nor did he gain much understanding of the human and social reality behind the picturesque façade of Boston or Cambridge. As a student at Harvard he admittedly had "every chance to combine four years of sound classical discipline with a personal observation of city morals and sociology and politics in action," but Cowley consorted mostly with his literary friends and acquaintances at the Harvard Poetry Society and on the board of the Advocate. His letters display little or no interest in the kind of social and political problems that preoccupied Harvard students like John Reed or John Dos Passos. Rather, the effect of his Harvard education, he later felt, was to foster a blindness to such forces. The Harvard "salesrooms and fitting rooms of culture," Cowley would write in Exile's Return, were "not ground-floor shops, open to the life of the street. They existed, as it were, at the top of very high buildings, looking down at a far panorama of boulevards and Georgian houses and Greek temples of banking--with people outside them the size of gnats--and, vague in the distance, the fields, mines, factories that labored unobtrusively to support us. We never glanced out at them." Harvard's "penthouses of culture" were but "mansions in the air."¹⁰²

Because college standards were largely set by students from well-to-do families who had attended "half-English" prep schools and who, as if by natural right, had advanced to membership in one of the prestigious clubs, it was primarily for their benefit that Harvard appeared to be run. The standard values instilled in Harvard men, Cowley later observed, were essentially "leisure-class ideals"--the virtues of "good taste, good manners, cleanliness, chastity, gentlemanliness (or niceness), reticence and the spirit of competition in sports." A student of Cowley's educational and social background, indeed, might run "the risk of losing [his] own culture, and of receiving nothing real in exchange." To resolve the discrepancy between both worlds and to counteract the feeling of social uneasiness Cowley was inclined to accept the "unspoken doctrines" of the socially privileged with whom he consorted and allowed some of their social and ethnic prejudices to color his own attitudes. He tended to wear his culture, not as something organic or endemic to his native background, but as an expensive suit of foreign clothes; his culture was not homegrown, but consisted of imported goods. In college, Cowley later

wrote, he "never grasped the idea that culture was the outgrowth of a situation." Instead, he learned to regard it as "a veneer, a badge of class distinction--as something assumed like an Oxford accent or a suit of English clothes."¹⁰³

Under different historical conditions, he felt in retrospect, a normal graduation might have forced him to seek new roots in the real world outside the university. But history did not permit him to calmly and undisturbedly finish his college education. As the First World War dragged on in Europe and American participation became increasingly imminent, Cowley would be moved to act and, in the process, be further severed from his native culture, as "the winds would tear us up and send us rolling and drifting over the wide land."¹⁰⁴

In the spring of 1917 a majority of the Harvard population openly and strongly supported the Allied cause. Few were not convinced that this was going to be a just and righteous war. As Harvard's share in the national "preparedness" program, President Lowell had from the first urged students to enroll in the Plattsburgh training camps, where civilian volunteers were instructed in modern warfare under regular army officers. In the spring of 1916 a course in Military Science was offered by General Leonard Wood for Plattsburgh graduates, who were to form the nucleus of the Harvard Reserve Officers' Training Corps. In April 1917, upon special request from President Lowell to the French government, a number of disabled French officers were welcomed at Harvard to instruct the R. O. T. C. in the methods of trench warfare. Their reception at the Harvard Club of Boston was "a memorable and uplifting occasion," with speeches full of high hopes for an enduring peace. Special finals were held in April and May of 1917, allowing students to leave for active service or to join the R. O. T. C.. Most undergraduates of proper age and fitness partook in some form of wartime service; by May 1918 enrollment had dropped to one-fifth of the normal.¹

At Harvard, as at other universities, the attitudes of apprentice writers towards the war were by no means uniform or unambiguous; in effect, as Cowley later wrote, they ran "the full gamut from pacifism to jingoism." On the staff of The Harvard Monthly a furious debate between pacifists and patriots split the members of its editorial board into two opposing camps of equal numbers. Unable to find a compromise, the editors were forced to suspend publication in April 1917 because of "existing circumstances," as an editorial carefully explained. Fortunately for Cowley, the staff of The Harvard Advocate was not riddled with such dissension. The magazine continued publication, in spite of wartime

shortages and the pressures of conscription. The editors felt that, as the oldest Harvard publication, it was a special wartime duty of the Advocate to maintain "a sane continuity in the artistic life of the college." The Advocate, they proclaimed, had "kept the lamp burning in dark times before this, and fortune being willing, she shall be the last to die."²

Whatever their attitudes, in the spring of 1917 virtually all of the young Harvard writers were eager to get over to Europe and be personal witnesses of the war. Many of them found an attractive alternative to formal enlistment in the U. S. army by volunteering for ambulance or military transport service in a foreign army. Even if they rebelled against the war in principle, they were still conscious of emotions pulling them towards participation in a great experience. Cummings's mild interest in the peace movement and the scorn he had felt for the mounting war hysteria around him did not prevent him from volunteering for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service on the day after Congress declared war; typically, his decision was inspired by a desire to direct his own fate and a fascination with the new experience in store. S. Foster Damon shared Cummings's pacifist ambivalence about the war, but promptly exchanged his role as captain of the Harvard fencing team for that of bayonet instructor at the Plattsburgh training camp. Neither Dos Passos's fierce pacifism nor his fiery, radical sympathies could prevent him from attempting to enlist in the army and, when disqualified on the grounds of defective eyesight, he volunteered for ambulance service with Norton-Harjes and later the Italian Red Cross. By the end of the spring, indeed, most of Cowley's literary consorts at the Harvard Poetry Society were assisting in the war effort and wearing some sort of uniform.³

The prospect of American intervention had also set off a fierce debate between militarists and pacifists at Columbia University. Kenneth Burke was drawn into the debate and was inclined to view the war as irrational. Burke's skepticism about the war, however, seemed fed as much by his disturbance at the desecration of a beloved German culture as by actual pacifist opposition. Cowley, too, was appalled at the contradiction between the high German culture of the past and the nation's current barbarism; but unlike Burke's, his disturbance did not foster much apparent skepticism about the war. In his last review for the Advocate before his departure he wrote: "That Germany, often called in

the past the most civilized of all nations, has murdered, plundered, turned pirate, and broken all human obligations, is apparent to all observers. But how her actions harmonize with her peculiar culture has up to now remained a puzzle to the solving of which Red Book, Blue Book, and Yellow Book have contributed as little as the vaporings of Mr. Chesterton." In his correspondence with Burke, too, Cowley gave few or no indications that he shared his friend's ambivalence. In early May of 1916 he had already become convinced of the rightness of the Allied cause and had pronounced his intention of joining the Harvard Regiment and entering the Plattsburgh training camp. A year later, on March 31, 1917, he announced that he was "definitely signed up with the regiment."⁴ Caught up in the prevailing and contagious mood of patriotism, Cowley was prepared to don a military uniform, without evidently giving much conscious thought to the larger purposes of the war.

For Cowley, as for many, the war was a call to excitement and adventure sanctioned by the rhetoric of heroism and idealism.⁵ In "Ballade of French Service," a poem written in anticipation of his French venture, Cowley expressed his relief at being able to exchange the boredom of his Cambridge life for the color and excitement of wartime France. Even his friends' pacifism, the poem implied, could not dampen his conviction of the rightness of his move. With Burke, Damon, Light and Wheelwright staying behind, Cowley must have felt he was taking a historical lead.

No more to stroll for half the day
Along the careless Avenue;
No more to doze the night away
Reading of deeds that others do.
Cards, wine, avaunt! Get out! I'm through.
I'm going to drive an ambulance--
A Ford, mind--for a year or two
Along some shell-swept road in France.
 . . .

L. L., my friend, just now you stay,
And you are quite in earnest, too.
"War is stupidity," you say,
And--"It is folly to imbue
A land with hate,"--all very true.
But--though you call it petulance
Of mine--I feel I'll meet with you
Along some shell-swept road in France.

Yes, publican and priest and Jew

And Actor shorn of radiance
Will go a-marching--so will you
Along some shell-swept road in France.⁶

During his first two years at Harvard Cowley had repeatedly run up against the limitations of his experience and had despaired of becoming a writer on such a slender diet. Now the war held out the promise of firsthand observation of the reality of danger, injury and death, a rich store of personal experience to be mined in future writing.⁷

Shortly after Congress declared war upon Germany Cowley enlisted as a volunteer in the American Ambulance Field Service. His gesture of commitment received cordial endorsement from his senior mentors. When Charles Townsend Copeland learned of Cowley's enlistment, he presented him with a book inscribed with a Latin motto--solvitur ambulando--that perfectly fitted his student's pragmatic bent; Cowley would cherish it all his life. One of his high school teachers, G. B. Kirk, the "tyrant" of Peabody High, wrote him a letter of recommendation and sent an accompanying note full of self-pitying regret at being unable to go over and fight the Germans in person. Cowley was particularly pleased with a "most flattering commission" he had received from one of his Harvard instructors, Frederic Schenck, who was impressed enough by Cowley's writing skills to give him a "soft-soaping" to the head of the Ambulance Service. As a result Cowley was commissioned to write letters about his war experiences with the understanding that, if they were good enough, Schenck would publish them.⁸

Pending his departure, Cowley spent a few days in New York, where he was introduced to a new comrade of Burke, Matthew Josephson. In his memoirs of the 1920s Josephson has recalled how, upon first meeting Cowley, he was impressed by his incisive insights into poetry and by the elegance of his verse; Cowley, he remembered, was then "not much more than eighteen, ruddy and chubby-faced, and looked like a big overgrown country boy. . . . But within this awkward rustic-looking youth with the broad smile, there was a keen student of poetry who wrote with grace and clarity when he put pen to paper." Josephson, two years younger than Burke, was the son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, who had settled

In Brownsville, the Jewish section of Brooklyn, in the 1890s. By dint of hard work and an indomitable ambition his father had worked his way up from a successful career as a printer to the ownership of a bank and a position of civic leadership in Brownsville. Josephson scorned the banking career that his parents expected him to pursue and, like Burke, had resisted his elders' expectations by becoming a defiant poet-rebel. Callow and precocious, the young Josephson would go on to a distinguished career in journalism and biography. He was to become one of Cowley's lifelong friends.⁹

Burke and Josephson had first met in the fall of 1916 at a meeting of Columbia's literary society. Shortly after, Burke described his new comrade-in-letters to Cowley:

I have met a most admirable jew here, who is anything but a jew religiously, but claims to be very proud of his nationality. . . . He is quite well read, and what delights me most of all, seems honestly attached to some of the old writers. He knows neither French nor German as well as I do, makes me howl with laughter when he dives, gets quite sore when I laugh at him, and has almost as stupid an expression as you, all of which endears him to me.¹⁰

At Columbia Burke and Josephson were regular companions: "we were quite vigorously involved in a constant muddle of intimacy and scrappiness," Burke recalled. Burke's sharp and complex mind challenged Josephson's adolescent literary opinions and helped to expand his intellectual horizons. With Cowley, they were given to posing as world-weary decadents or vulgar cynics, but were filled with literary idealism and motivated by the determination to be great writers: before long, the three would consider themselves the hard-core triumvirate of the younger literary generation in America. But while Cowley was preparing to face the battlefields of Northern France, Burke and Josephson continued to try and impede the American war effort. During the summer they joined the Guillotine Club, a Greenwich Village group of pacifists and socialists opposed to the war. Soon, however, they turned away in disgust over the organization's autocratic procedures.¹¹

Cowley sailed from New York in the afternoon of Saturday, April 28. On board the Touraine, a French passenger liner, were E. E. Cummings and William Slater Brown, who struck up a close friendship during the voyage. Cowley would see much of them during the 1920s, but did not meet them

during the crossing. The ten-day passage was "unexciting," he reported to Burke, with the exception of the rumor that the captain had sighted two U-boats and that 45 of them were in pursuit of the ship. As the Touraine steered safely through the submarine zone, the atmosphere on board was one of "assumed carelessness." After disembarking at Bordeaux, the volunteers entrained for Paris, where the American Field Service men got off at the Gare d'Orleans.¹² On May 11 Cowley was writing to Burke from the American Field Service Headquarters at 21 Rue Raynouard, a château set in a five-acre park at the top of a hill at Passy, and looking down past terraces and formal gardens, through old chestnut trees, to the Seine. The château had been loaned to the Service by a French countess and served as a social center and mail office for volunteers on leave from the front.¹³

From its inception the Field Service was, as many have observed, "an enterprise of a strongly literary, or academic, nature." In Cowley's section were a future advertising man, an architect, a lecturer and novelist, an editor, a dramatist, a Rhodes scholar and a poet. In other sections there was an even higher percentage of writers; literary friends sometimes pitied Cowley for serving among "such a bunch of philistines."¹⁴ Among college students the Service rapidly rose in prestige. Harvard men, in particular, dominated the volunteer units with 325 participants, followed by Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth with 198, 181 and 118 men respectively. Among private preparatory schools Andover could boast the largest delegation. Many who enlisted in the volunteer service expected to consort there with their former cronies. As Charles Fenton has observed, "membership in the Field Service was on the whole an extension and a renewal of the acquaintanceship one had made at prep school and college, with a fraternity aspect that included hazing of new men and the celebration at the front of Yale's upset victory over Harvard in 1916." Thus, Cowley's interpretation, in Exile's Return, that the ambulance and transport units served as "college extension courses for a whole generation of writers" must be seen in a social as well as a literary light. If he had suffered a sense of social uneasiness at Harvard, he would predictably encounter much the same experience in the Field Service.¹⁵

Upon his arrival in Paris a reorganization of the Field Service caused a delay in the assignment of volunteers to specific camps and

units. Cowley was thrilled at being able to spend some time in Paris. A wartime city, Paris was nevertheless "quite colorful, its streets crowded with blue and red and khaki--and black." The girls at the Folies Bergères and the Olympian Music Hall were "quite as gay and plentiful as ever." With Bob Cunningham, who had enlisted in the Service with him, he wandered amidst the jostling crowds down the boulevards, after Maxim's closed at half past nine and attended a French cabaret. The show, he reported to Burke like a genuine American innocent abroad, was only "a little above the level of one of your Weehawken vaudeville shows." To his surprise, nothing in the program was indecent even by Pittsburgh standards. Instead, a great deal of nationalist poetry had been recited in glorification of La France. Later, with the cafés closed, the two recruits strolled up the Boulevard des Italiens, where "mysterious girls stole past us in the darkness," and, before diving into the subway, shouted back obscenities at a crowd of Englishmen whom they overheard insulting Americans. Much of his time in Paris Cowley spent in buying, and boggling at the high cost of living in a wartime city. A uniform had cost him all of 230 francs, an extra coat 32, a steamer trunk 29, a cap 14 and a broad leather belt 20 francs. "If you think things are costly in New York," he grumbled to Burke.¹⁶

Cowley had come over with the intention of driving an ambulance, but fate decided otherwise. Soon after U. S. entry into the war Commandant Doumenc, the Head of the Automobile Service of the French Army, had put in an emergency request for help to the American Field Service, hoping to secure the assistance of American volunteers in the transport of munitions and materiel for the French troops. He was in need of 7,000 camion drivers. Helped by the fact that in the early months of 1917 enthusiasm for the Ambulance Service was so high that the service stood in danger of becoming overrecruited, the Inspector General of the Field Service, A. Piatt Andrew, decided to enlarge the function of his volunteer units and responded affirmatively to what he considered "a new request for help, a new opportunity for service."¹⁷

Thus the Franco-American Military Transport Service, known as the Réserve Mallet, was launched. The new need for camion drivers was explained to the new contingents of volunteers who arrived in Paris in early May with the expectation of driving an ambulance. Urged to join the newly formed transport units, they consented almost to a man. Cowley and

Cunningham agreed to join the new branch "chiefly because we thought we could be of more use there."¹⁸ The Service could eventually boast a considerable achievement. In two months the Mallet Reserve grew to 800 volunteers. In the period of Cowley's service, between July and October 1917, the Reserve, carrying ammunition, engineering supplies and shells on a 24-hour basis, played an important role in the Allied victory of the Chemins des Dames attack. In later battles, too, the transport units rendered essential help. As A. Piatt Andrew, evaluating the service of the volunteers in March 1919, observed:

Their work was often hard and fraught with difficulties. It sometimes seemed to its participants inglorious and uninspiring, though never to those who observed them toiling through crowded traffic and endless clouds of dust. But like prisoners in unexplored regions they . . . built better than they know [sic], . . . and helped substantially in blazing the way towards victory.¹⁹

Cowley and Cunningham were assigned to T. M. U. 526 (a somewhat peculiar abbreviation of Transport de Matériel Etats-Unis) and were placed at first in a transport section of forty volunteers, eighteen of whom, Cowley wrote to his parents, were "young buds of Yale's chief preparatory school--Andover." By the third week of May Cowley was in training camp at Dommiers, a village eight miles southwest of Soissons and fifteen miles behind the front lines. Here, volunteers were given military schooling, including setting-up exercises, elementary infantry drill, lectures about the organization of the French Army and practical training in the handling and repairing of cars.²⁰

On May 18 Cowley started to jot down his observations in a war diary, expecting to rework his notes into publishable reports.²¹ "Well, we're out of it and into it," he mused, surveying his trip from Cambridge, which he had left in a springtime drizzle, to New York, where flags were waving along Wall Street, through the submarine zone and the busy traffic of Bordeaux and Paris, to his camp behind the lines. For the moment, surrounded by contradictory information, no one in camp seemed sure of his immediate destiny. "From a milieu of rumors and uncertainties I have come into a milieu of other rumors and uncertainties." For all he knew, they might stay at Dommiers for ten days or for a month. "All I know is that I can ask no questions and that there is work ahead." The volunteers were entitled to seven days' leave every three months, were issued a

ration of pipe tobacco every ten days and received a daily allowance of a quart of sour pinard and two francs from the French government, the rate of pay for regular poilus. "I suppose we are real soldiers now," Cowley observed in his diary.²²

Cowley's naiveté was startling. Born in 1898, his sense of what war was all about derived from a time when his mother held him, a little baby, against the window to watch the files of soldiers march through the avenues of Pittsburgh, as they returned from "That Splendid Little War" which had sent Frank Norris and Richard Harding Davis scampering off to Cuba in search of titanic adventure and romantic glory. Cowley's innocence about wartime military life soon received its first dent. On his second day in camp his lieutenant halted midway through a lecture on the construction of the motor truck and marched the volunteers over to the road to watch a contingent of ragged soldiers in blue returning from the front. The fresh recruits observed a cavalry that was dirty, unshaven and sat lolling on their horses, a poignant contrast with the "prime dragoons" they had seen marching through the streets of Paris--"we wondered a little about the empty saddles." The infantry troops followed: "Route step, no order, little gaiety. Just dirt and the indifference bred of three years in the face of the enemy." These, reputedly, were some of the finest soldiers of France, men who had shown great courage and endurance at the front. "Would we be anything like them in a year?" In the rear the troops were still marching in rank. As the flag came by, the lieutenant-instructor saluted and a military band struck up the Marseillaise. "We were evidently important enough to deserve attention," Cowley observed in his diary, with as yet only the faintest inkling of the political and psychological impact the mere presence of American volunteers was having on a dispirited French army.²³

The day after, Cowley had his first collision with military discipline. Wearing a shabby old coat to morning drill, he received a stinging reprimand from his chef, a Yale graduate from Cambridge, and was roughly shoved out of one rank into another. Inwardly boiling, Cowley felt humiliated by the complacent air of military authority with which his chef had addressed him and involuntarily made a gesture of rebellious defiance. He deeply resented his chef's arrogant assumption of superiority and in his diary indulged in fantastic dreams of future vengeance.²⁴ His response on this occasion was informed by a puerile

pugnacity and a streak of Pennsylvania stubbornness, but Cowley would always be quick to resent encroachments upon his personal liberty and resist attempts to subject a precious individualism to the straightjacket of discipline and authority, be it of a military unit, a literary faction or a political party.

Cowley was hardly "a blooming success" at driving an unwieldy five-ton Pierce-Arrow truck; for a while he had to be satisfied with being only a second driver. His awkwardness as a motorist exposed him to much ridicule and pestering, especially from the Andover boys in his section. For two weeks, until he was transferred with Cunningham to another section consisting largely of men from Harvard and Yale, the Andover boys managed to make him feel uncomfortable and "unhappy;" they were "conceited young puppies" inclined to be "gossipy, malicious and quarrelsome." "Man, I was in for it at first," Cowley later confessed to Burke. "I was perhaps the poorest driver in camp, and everybody came to regard me as a general nincompoop. But a little judicious profanity and a great deal of silence, and above all our old friend Time have worked very well together." Except for his ineptness, indeed, Cowley was "quite satisfied" with life in his particular section. He had run into Robert Hillyer and Elisha Whittlesey of the Advocate and Monthly and rejoiced in having, for the time being, "some literary company." He enjoyed talking with the poilus, whom he found "remarkably jolly and companionable" and from whom he received "sidelights about French life that I think the average tourist misses."²⁵

One of the noteworthy events of Cowley's period in training camp, which was located near territory evacuated by General Hindenburg in the spring retreat, was a visit to the abandoned German trenches and dugouts. Cowley described the visit in a report for the American Field Service Bulletin, which upon his return to the United States he rewrote and expanded for the Pittsburgh Gazette Times.²⁶ The visit left a deep impact on the young soldier's impressionable mind. Not only did it give him a deeper insight into the nature and meaning of wartime occupation, but it helped him to develop an understanding of the organic nature of culture that would remain fundamental with him.

During his visit Cowley had occasion to note how on the side of a narrow ravine the Germans had built an entire "dugout city." Compared with the makeshift abris of the French, the German dugouts were veritable

"palaces." The French and German attitudes toward the war, indeed, seemed radically different: whereas the former, in their eagerness to end the war, appeared to welcome any hardships they might encounter "without great effort to lighten them," the Germans accepted war as "the normal state of affairs" and made the best of it. The latter, moreover, had left little question about the permanency of their occupation: "Everything seemed constructed to last a hundred years."

As a first step in the methodical process of Prussianizing the French country the German invaders had attempted to annihilate everything indigenously French. Everywhere Cowley was struck by the sights of "total destruction:" graveyards despoiled, houses dynamited or razed by shells, orchards chopped down. In a nearby village only the outlines of walls still stood erect and "heaps of crumbling stones, all dazzlingly white, lay in the May sunshine," making the ruins resemble "the picked skeleton of some great beast on a tropical beach." Everywhere he noticed "the same attempt to rear a civilization exclusively Germanic, compounded of dugout palaces and diminutive beer gardens," on the ruins of France. This "Kultur" seemed also "childishly anxious to justify itself" with copious inscriptions glorifying the German God, King and Nation, and blaming Great Britain for the present destruction:

1914

Der Boden ist geduengt mit blut
Vernichtet Euer Hab und Gut.
Ihrer Franzosen denkt daran,
England hat dies all' getan.

"That must be great consolation to the French peasants for their destroyed apple orchards and poisoned wells," Cowley mused scornfully.

As the convoy returned to camp through the Aisne valley, a splendid sunset drowned the West: "The reed-bordered river curved majestically among the meadows. Here and there was a clump of poplars such as Corot loved to paint." With a sudden surge of affection for the French landscape and the art it had engendered, an epiphany came to Cowley as to the futility of the German attempt: "And it seemed to me suddenly that even if the invader did succeed in destroying every vestige of past civilization in the country and killed every human being, they would hardly succeed in their work of Germanization. In the end the land itself would conquer them, just as it had conquered Celts and Romans, Franks and

Northmen in past centuries, making them over into its own spirit." Independently and without knowing it, Cowley had begun to feel his way toward a conception of culture as the organic "outgrowth of a situation," as something rooted in the land, that was to be a keystone to his literary thinking.

Many of Cowley's diary entries, likewise, hold the germs of the interpretation he would retrospectively put on his wartime service in Exile's Return. A large number of them imply the spectatorial attitude Cowley later posited as the quintessence of his war experience; they are written from the perspective of an observer witnessing an impressive spectacle without fully comprehending its precise scope or nature. Verbs like "watch," "see" and "observe" proliferate, as Cowley, mindful of his commission to report on his experiences to the homefront, is inclined to view his personal impressions as representative of his coevals and unawares slips into the habit of adopting a plural "we" for his narrative point of view. The use of a diary phrase like "we of the Camion Service" anticipates Cowley's use of the generational "we" in Exile's Return. In his diary entries and his pieces of reportage for the American Field Service Bulletin Cowley first developed a sense of himself as the recording instrument of a communal experience; it would grow into his characteristic narrative voice---that of the spokesman, chronicler and interpreter of a specific generation of American writers. Even a poem like "Poilus," which registered Cowley's impressions of the hardships and endurance of the French soldiers, evinces the spectatorial, communal perspective that we find explicitly in a representative passage from Exile's Return:

Regiments at times pass through our village
And, filthy with the caked mud of the front,
They lie along the roadside, or else hunt
Their billets in damp cellars, or in stables;
And there, forgetting their abandoned tillage,
Their mining, or their clerking, or their law,
They sleep like beasts together in the straw.

Sometimes at dusk they crowd around cluttered tables,
And tippie sour Gascon wine and such;
Remember girls they left behind in Paris;
The pucker of their lips; the things they said;
Talk of them eagerly, and laugh too much.
Jolly, indeed, but if one looks as far as
Their eyes, the sparkle in them is quite dead.

("Poilus")²⁷

. . . Sometimes for three days at a time, a column of men and guns wound through the village where we were quartered. Chasseurs slouching along in their dark-blue uniforms, canteens and helmets banging against their hips; a regiment of Senegalese, huge men with blue-black faces, pink eyeballs and white teeth; then a convoy of camions in first and second gear, keeping pace with the moving files. Behind them, dust rose from an interminable line of seventy-fives drawn by great bay horses, with very blond Flemish artillerymen riding the caissons; then came a supply train; then, in horizon blue, an infantry regiment from Provence, three thousand men with sullen features; then rolling kitchens and wagons heaped with bread the color of faded straw. The Annamites, little mudcolored men with the faces of perverted babies, watched from the ditches where they were breaking stone; the airplanes of three nations kept watch overhead, and we ourselves were watchers. It did not seem that we could ever be part of all this. The long parade of races was a spectacle which it was our privilege to survey, a special circus . . . given for our benefit . . .

(Exile's Return)²⁸

Before leaving training camp Cowley paid a visit to the aviators of the famous Lafayette Escadrille, which "fortune picked up" and set down in hangars within two miles of his camp. The spirit of reckless, heroic adventure he encountered in the Lafayette Escadrille stood in poignant contrast to the mood of fatigue and exhaustion that prevailed in the French army. The French, Cowley wrote home, were "quite tired" of the fighting. "No militarists over here," he observed to Burke early in June. After three years most soldiers had lost whatever idealism or exhilaration they had felt at the outset of the war. What had remained was a sense of numbness and waste, a "dead nausea" hardly relieved by the meager hope of an early end to the war and the good fortune to return home only passably mutilated. There had been several mutinies, Cowley reported to his parents, such as that of the 168th and 169th regiments, which had refused to go into the trenches.²⁹ In an atmosphere of widespread discontent the appearance of fresh American troops not yet discouraged by years of fighting gave a tremendous boost to Allied morale. "The United States army was certainly received here enthusiastically," Cowley wrote to his father on July 9. "And you may believe me, it is needed." He was sure that the young American conscripts would see "a deal of bloody fighting." It was not until he came to write Exile's Return that Cowley realized that American volunteers were also serving a political purpose: they were used to mitigate the mutinous mood

and were "displayed as first-tokens of victory." "We were treated well, that was all we knew. We were seeing a great show."³⁰

Cowley left training camp at Dommiers on June 12. From Dommiers he was transferred to Jouaignes, a little town almost due east of Soissons, where the first four volunteer sections of the Camion Service were stationed. Camp there was "within range of the German shells," he wrote with proud excitement to his parents. Yet for the first few weeks life in camp was slow and relaxed, the work not overly arduous or dangerous, and soldiers had a relatively easy time of it. Around three each afternoon the section would proceed to the shell depot to load the camions. "We carry seventy-fives--the shells, not the guns; occasionally asphyxiating shells, some fuses, and for the most part barb wire and trench flooring," he wrote to his father. The real work did not start until after ten o'clock, when night had fallen and the convoy wound itself, in pitch dark without lights, along muddy or dusty roads to the front. At a place from one to three kilometers behind the frontline trenches they would rest, while their camions were being unloaded by French territorials; then they would return to camp and to sleep.³¹

Cowley reported on his first camion trip in an article for the American Field Service Bulletin entitled "On the Road with T. M. U. 526."³² His reportage was saturated with the "spectatorial attitude." On this particular trip, it was past midnight before the camions were unloaded and they could return by a totally unknown road in the chaotic confusion of the dark. As Cowley and Cunningham, his relief chauffeur, slowly made their way back under the constant noise of explosions, a heavy marmite exploded just ahead of their car. "Some of the red hot pieces fell very near and lay smoking in the road. Immediately the American craze for souvenirs came to the fore; and a half-dozen of the boys were racing for the fragments, and picking them up gingerly in their helmets." Some miles ahead Cowley was poignantly confronted with the harsh human reality beneath the touristy spectacle of the war:

. . . Right by the bridge I saw something lying across the road. Bob, who was driving, swung out. As we passed, I turned a flashlight toward the obstruction. A middle-aged Territorial in the nondescript clothes of those old warriors, who serve as laborers along the front, was lying there in a little spot of bloody mud. A fragment of shell--probably from the very last--had torn a great hole in his side.

I turned the light away, and we went on in silence. . . .

Then other ruined villages we passed, and other marching troops; all the time, star-shells rose and flamed over the lines. I was not watching them much, however. I was remembering the man at the bridgehead. For, after all, the dust and the galloping batteries . . . marching troops, and star-shells formed only the panoply of war; that middle-aged Territorial lying in his own blood was its immediate reality.

Such moments left their impact. Gradually a deeper and more realistic estimate of the awful nature of the war began to supplant Cowley's naive enthusiasm. "[I]n America we don't realize exactly what it means to be at war for three years," he wrote to Burke in early June. "These wars of today are no longer the toy wars of the middle ages." Cowley's more realistic perspective derived from personal observations as well as conversations with peasants, poilus and "women of the street." In the process he learned much about French culture, without at first being overly impressed by its reputedly superior riches and refinement. From the perspective of a war-ridden France, America seemed hardly inferior. "The chief thing I can see is that America is the best country in the world. France, Germany and England are simply busy cutting each others' throats. The fabled universal education and culture of France is fabled. But what is not a mere fable is their courage and endurance."³³

The war, he now began to be aware, was senselessly destroying what had for centuries been defended as the good and noble and permanent in Western culture. On one of his expeditions Cowley passed the walls surrounding the immense park of the Château de Soupir; they were broken by shell-holes and bordered by abandoned dugouts. Within he witnessed an emblem of the cataclysm that was sweeping the monuments of an entire cultural heritage, in particular the neo-classical splendors of eighteenth-century France, towards destruction:

We caught glimpses within the walls of a landscape once as well ordered as a New England parlor. Fauns and nymphs, gods, kings, and philosophers were grouped at appropriate intervals; an artificial lake had been fixed just where it was needed to break the monotony. The château itself, in harmony with its park, had been of that ornateness which is somewhere between mere ostentation and real splendor.

At present, it was only a gutted shell. Half the ornamental poplars and yews were shot down; the busts had gone, many of them, to form parts of abris, while those that remained were peppered with shrapnel. Quite unfeelingly, the German artillery had scattered about shell-holes without any regard for decorative effects. Yet in all its ruin, the park was

unconquerably polite and rococo. It reminded one strongly of the powdered marquises who preserved on the scaffold the manners of the drawing-room.³⁴

The formal gardens of Soupir, destroyed by trenches, shell-fire and machine guns, formed an image that stuck in Cowley's mind. It surfaced again when he wrote Exile's Return and, some years after the war, inspired one of his finest poems. "Château de Soupir: 1917" appeared in the January 1922 issue of Broom; a comparison of the poem with the 1917 prose passage is illustrative of the changes in the postwar temper:

Jean tells me that the Senator
came here to see his mistresses,
and having passed the gilded door,
was ushered regally--Jean says--
past genuine Flemish tapestries,
velvets and mahoganies,
to where the odalisque was set,
the temporary queen, Odette.

. . . An eighteenth-century château
rebuilt to meet his lavish taste,
painted and gilt fortissimo;
the Germans, grown satirical,
had hidden a machine-gun nest
underneath the banquet hall.

The trenches run diagonally
across the alleys and the lawns,
and jagged wire from tree to tree;
the lake is desolate of swans;
in tortured immobility,
the deities of stone or bronze
await a new catastrophe.

Phantasmagorical at night,
yellow and white and amethyst,
the star-shells burn, and Verey lights,
and silent waters of the mist
submerge the landscape, till we feel
like drowned men, tragical, unreal.

And recent ghosts appear: Odette,
in skirt ballooning at the hips,
tosses a hasty kiss and slips
away to taunt the Senator
who, strong with marc and anisette,
his red beard wagging in the wind,
pursues her like a matador.

The mist creeps riverward. A fox
barks underneath a blasted tree.

An enemy machine-gun mocks
this ante-bellum comedy
and then falls silent, while a bronze
Silenus, patron of these lawns,
stands riddled like a pepper-box.³⁵

In the prose passage the tone is objectively descriptive, the perspective spectatorial, and what little irony there is is directed first of all at the senseless indifference of German destructiveness, and only secondarily at the overly refined exquisiteness of the "powdered marquises;" the overall effect is one of regret at the tragedy of destruction. In the poem the stanzas describing the château are embedded in a context satirizing the decadence and tasteless pomposity of eighteenth-century French aristocracy. The war is still seen as a colorful, "phantasmagorical" spectacle, affecting the men with its tragic unreality. This time, however, the whole poem is not only heavily ironic, but also its target has shifted: the German enemy now have "grown satirical," like the poet, and the principal thrust of the poem is against the civilization being destroyed by the war, the "ante-bellum comedy" whose patron stands "riddled like a pepper-box." After the war Cowley, with many others of his generation, would adopt a sardonic and ironic point of view towards the old order of things, for the preservation of which the war was supposedly fought, but which had become effectively discredited in the eyes of a younger generation.

In 1917 Cowley's letters from France were as yet devoid of any such sardonic skepticism. Instead, he sometimes struck a note of ironic flippancy which made his war experiences seem curiously trivial. At times he complained of the absence of any real peril in his war work--there was "not enough danger to frighten a cotton tail," he observed to his father--or joked that he hoped to get wounded just badly enough to receive the croix de guerre and avoid the croix de bois. At other times he prided himself on his fluency in French and his command of obscene words--"we have a wonderful opportunity to learn the language"--or boastfully gave Burke the "dope" on Paris: he sketched the bookstalls along the Seine, snorted that the river was hardly bigger than the American Yonghiogheny, described the elegant women of Paris, related how Cunningham and he had picked up two girls "of great charm" on the Boulevard de Clichy, and in adolescent pride outlined precisely on what streets the concentration of prostitutes was thickest.³⁶

Not surprisingly Cowley's letters and reports exposed him to the ridicule of his friends back home, who received the impression that his French venture was little more than a mere holiday trip. Irritated by such responses, Cowley was prompted to formulate his motives more precisely. Coming over, he confessed, he had at first been "in the midst of a little throe of militarism;" but actual service as a camioniste had turned him into "as much of a slacker" as James Light. But, so he reasoned, whereas Light was trapped in a distasteful domestic and professional routine and by working in a munitions factory was paradoxically advancing the very militarism he claimed to hate, Cowley at least was in a new country, doing work he found congenial ("I always did like big lumbering things like camions") and was having his daily routine "very faintly spiced with adventure." Most importantly, he was aware that he was the eyewitness to "the events that [were] going to dominate the history of the world for the next century." Aware that the war was "destroying the old order of things," he realized it was illusory to hold that a postwar society could actually resume life on its prewar foundations or be built on the social and political ideals for which the war was nominally fought.

For all we Americans realize too little that at the end of the war every nation--yes, even the United States--will be too exhausted in men and money, too much in need of quick recuperation, to go on with the old happy-go-lucky state of affairs. We Americans are fighting for personal liberty, and yet after the fighting is over, out of sheer need of efficiency, we shall have to forego it.

The very thought of a German victory sickened him and visions of the brutal regime that would ensue filled him with horror. "In the captured portions of France they are making even the little children work in the fields from five in the morning until seven at night. Imagine a regime like that for the world." Though French morale was low--militarists were "practically extinct"--Cowley continued to hold that the conflict was "about as clearcut between right and wrong as any war ever is."³⁷ If Cowley's analysis of the war was neither profound nor sophisticated, still it was important as the first expression, however nebulous or simple, of his social and political ideas.

The war was also having a liberating effect on his personal life and character. "I thank God constantly that I have crossed the water," he

wrote on July 31. "Not that my soul has been transfused with wonder, but just that I have been drawn out of my fixed orbit." The war filled him with a desire for travel and adventure; he had visions of Russia, Spain and American wheatfields and lumbercamps. "There are so many sides of life which no one can afford to miss. Paris is one, and a dose of horrible, hectic Greenwich Village is another, and Chicago yet another." But over and above all loomed Cowley's awareness that participation in the war was the crucial formative event of his generation, a watershed moment in history which a young ambitious writer could afford to miss only at the risk of finding himself an alien in the postwar world. "At present . . . everyone should serve his time on the western front. That is the great common experience of the young manhood of today, an experience that will mould the thought of the next generation, and without which one will be somewhat of a stranger to the world of the present and the future. That," he urged Burke, "is the real reason I should advise you to get over here."³⁸

At other times his tone was pert and defiant. "Why not become a blooming slacker yourself and join our nobly lazy service," he challenged Burke on July 12. Camp, indeed, gave him plenty of opportunity for loafing and literature. In France he read Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, then still regarded "a neglected masterpiece." Among the books he digested in the first months were Dostoevsky's The Idiot, W. L. George's The Stranger's Wedding, and two novels by Arnold Bennett. He began to make serious explorations of French literature and was anxious to remain informed about the literary situation at home. In early June he asked Burke to send him current issues of Poetry, The Little Review and The Seven Arts and, if still extant, the last issue of "Sans Breeches." A few weeks later he announced his discovery of a "splendid" anthology of French verse from 1866 to 1888, in which he found much to relish: Rimbaud, Verlaine and "bawdy" Baudelaire, whom he accepted "at the current estimate," as well as lesser-known French Symbolists like Léon Valode and Catulle Mendès, whom he preferred. In early July he read a three-volume anthology of contemporary French verse in the Librairie Delagrave, which altered his appreciation of French culture. Though he was still persuaded that France was "no more intellectual" a nation than America, in poetry the French achievement made all the difference. Cowley was deeply impressed by the sheer quantity of good verse written in

France between 1866 and 1914. His Delagrave anthology amounted to 2200 closely printed pages of verse, none of which he found bad and much "unsurpassed in English." He doubted whether, "just as a matter of mere statistics," that could be duplicated by America, England or even the two together. His discovery was the more significant in that, for the first time, it made him realize, if hesitantly, that many of the avant-garde tendencies in modern Anglo-American poetry had their aesthetic roots in nineteenth-century French Symbolism--a commonplace of literary history today, but a startling discovery to an American apprentice poet on the Western Front in 1917. Discussing "the matter of artistic innovation," he disclosed his discovery of the tentative link to Burke:

As one reads from Baudelaire to Mallarmé, one gets the origin of all English verse movements, averaging ten to twenty years later. A lecture of Amy Lowell's on Vers Libre and the strophe--I saw where she stole it; from an excuse for his own methods written by Gustave Kahn in 1897.

Art movements, he thought, "would show an even more startling sameness in their origins," but he lacked the knowledge to substantiate what was as yet a mere hunch.³⁹

For all his "intellectual admiration" for French poetry, however, Cowley's cultural allegiance remained with America. Gradually his ambitions were assuming less nebulous forms. He had now "almost definitely" abandoned prose, except for an "unquenchable" if "not too ardent" desire to write a novel modeled on John Galsworthy, W. L. George and W. Somerset Maugham. The ideal literary life he envisioned was that of a gentleman farmer-poet, who would own his hundred acres, write "reams of verse," get drunk on his own hard cider and live with a congenial woman. Though conceived in irony, the ideal would stick.⁴⁰

Cowley's immediate literary concerns were more modest and pragmatic. He had discovered that Le Journal daily published war stories which were "timely" yet had no American copyright. He proposed that they be translated by either Burke or himself and be sold to the smaller American papers by Light. Cowley began by sending over four of them, but Burke did not rise to the bait. Despite several urgent repetitions of Cowley's proposal, the project never came off the ground.⁴¹

Nor did he abandon prose as definitely as he reported to Burke: he continued to write up the more colorful incidents of his experience. At

the end of July he finished an article on the festive celebration of Independence Day in camp, which he intended for publication in The Outlook. Platt Andrew liked it so much that he persuaded Cowley to let it be printed in the American Field Service Bulletin.⁴² The article read almost like a piece of propaganda for the Field Service. Though it made occasional references to the grim reality of the war, Cowley's account was filled with the proper sentiments of patriotic pride and evoked an atmosphere of jovial solidarity and international camaraderie that made the Field Service seem jolly and ideal: "The American flag was waving proudly in the breeze, borne by a color-bearer, who shared with every American there a thrill of patriotism as each passing French officer paused to give the emblem a graceful salute." In Cowley's youthful imagination the Fourth of July celebration, which included games and sports of various sorts and ended in a veritable "banquet," took on "a truly medieval tone." Both participant and observer, he was overwhelmed by a double sense of the war as something both horrendously real and curiously unreal: "One rather missed the torchlights and smoky rafters. Except for these, it was easy to imagine, looking down the long, littered tables, that one was at a banquet in some Norman castle when Edward III was king. Always, however, when the laughter died down for a moment, the guns that were defending Craonne or Moulin de Laffaux would drown the lesser clatter of the tinware." There would be moments, indeed, when the war itself seemed exactly such a theatrical "spectacle" as the exotic revelries on Independence Day.⁴³

Cowley described another such moment in his next piece for the Field Service Bulletin, "The Luck of Green Americans." Towards the end of July violent German attacks, aiming to recover a recently conquered French vantage point near Craonne, put an end to the volunteers' "unhappy loafing" of the last few weeks. "We have been busy as the deuce lately," Cowley told Burke on July 24. The American camions were helping to supply a thirty-five-mile stretch of front and the volunteers were kept "on the march" virtually without interruption. "Recently I have been rising at anywhere from three to ten and retiring anywhere from eleven to five. It certainly wears one down," Cowley lamented. He was badly in need of rest from the irregular hours and the physical exertion and looked forward to lots of sleep on his military furlough in early August. On July 28 Cowley's convoy found itself at a munition parc, waiting to be unloaded

of its cargo of shells by "seedy" territorials wearing gunny sacks over their heads. To relieve the weariness from driving since four o'clock in the morning, Cowley and five of his companions--without permission--decided to watch a nearby German bombardment at close range. For a while he relished the picturesque effects of shells bursting six thousand feet in the air, "leaving white puffs of smoke like giant chrysanthemums." As the explosions drew nearer, Cowley and one of his consorts, "veterans of three months' standing," calmly watched, affecting "a boredom they did not feel." Not until the shells began whistling past their ears did they seek refuge in an abandoned trench. After a short silence a new bombardment burst forth close by. Cowley reported on the scene in a passage he later revised for Exile's Return:

[As the bombardment burst forth] everybody crowded back into the shelter of an overhanging bank on one side of the road. Now shells were falling at regular intervals of time, approximately every two minutes. Each time one exploded, a few red-hot fragments would fall into the road in front of us. Then would ensue a wild scramble after them as souvenirs, and many burnt fingers were the result. A minute later everybody would rush back under the bank to wait for the next shell. The territorials, who had seen too much war to risk their lives for thrills or souvenirs, had, in the meanwhile, disappeared into dugouts.

Later, the platoon received official felicitations "for the coolness and courage they displayed during the night of July 28, 1917, while unloading trucks in a dépôt subjected to heavy bombardment." When he came to rewrite the passage for Exile's Return, Cowley, much in the spirit of Alan Seeger's "Rendezvous with Death," pointed up the spectatorial aspect: "our lives were charmed. Spectators, we were collecting souvenirs of death, like guests bringing back a piece of wedding cake or a crushed flower from the bride's bouquet."⁴⁴

Even at the time Cowley realized that his reaction to the war might seem disappointing, even callous and insensitive, to his friends back home. In a near-apologetic tone he wrote to Burke that he had "not yet seen piled corpses. Here behind the lines one gets more the pictorial effects of the war." At the end of July he reported that a nearby hospital seemed to receive "especially favorable notice from our German friends. Three nights ago one of its barracks was reduced to kindling wood and sausage meat--I mean the patients." If such horrifying scenes

stirred Cowley's pity and humanitarian concern, he mostly kept such sentiments to himself and refrained from expressing them in his letters. His indignation focused more readily on the stupidity of fellow volunteers from rival colleges, some of whose "innocent pranks" had resulted in the gratuitous deaths of scores of French poilus.⁴⁵

In the first week of August Cowley went on leave in the expectation that the war would "doubtless last a year or more." So much he had deduced from newspaper reports on the situation in Russia, where the revolutionary embers that would flare up in the November uprising were already smoldering. Cowley expected to be home at the end of six months, but was not certain if it would be for good or for a three-week leave. There was a chance that the Field Service would be taken over by the U. S. army and in that case enlistment would be "very tempting," since it meant receiving anywhere between thirty and fifty dollars soldier's pay. For the moment, however, his thoughts were all of his impending furlough. Unless he could borrow some money, he feared he would be "very poor for [his] seven days in Paris." He badly needed additions to his outfit and had promised Burke to locate some books; moreover, he wanted to present his friend with his "vaunted" anthology of French verse.⁴⁶ Most of his leave Cowley spent enjoying the luxuries absent at the front: food, beer and featherbeds. With Cunningham he traveled to the coast at Trouville, where the British army was stationed in force, visited Le Havre, and relished Paris. Though, by his own admission, Cowley spent "some of the best days of [his] life" there, he realized none of his dreams, principal among which was his plan to rent a room in Montmartre and, uninterrupted by Americans, read French poetry for a week. But he did speak French to his heart's content and, much to his delight, could now conduct a conversation with more ease than Burke, who had already devoured French novels when Cowley's command of the language was as yet "non-existent."⁴⁷

Cowley's wartime service in France intensified his awareness of the uniqueness of his literary friendship with Burke. "Our differences, great as they are, are really insignificant compared with our similarities," he had reminded Burke in late June. "I think . . . we sometimes came as near to perfect frankness as one can get." But Burke, he now felt, had also "rather spoiled" him for new friendships. Since leaving Peabody and his Pittsburgh comrades, Cunningham was "the nearest to a real friend" he had had, and Cunningham, he was beginning to realize, was "holding him [back]

intellectually." He compared their relation to that of a young married couple: "when we are together, we are together continually. . . . Naturally we fight constantly, but we have had too many good times together to think of separating." Despite many shared enjoyments, Cowley continued to feel "intellectually imprisoned" with Cunningham and purposely avoided other friendships. Though there were congenial mates in his section, he mostly consorted with the French, which was "productive of much information, but not of much real companionship."⁴⁸

A young poet, Cowley felt different from the herdlike mass of his military companions, yet was uncomfortable with the concomitant feeling of separateness and loneliness. A desire to belong and be one of the boys often prevailed over a desire to assert his individuality and independence. Life in camp thus sharpened his insight into the tension between the seemingly inevitable alienation of the writer and the desire for social integration. Set apart yet drawn towards companionship, he felt uncomfortably pulled in opposite directions. At the end of August, after nearly four months' absence from home, he came to "the sudden acute realization" that he did not have a single friend among the two hundred men in camp. He confessed his ambivalent feelings about himself to Burke in an incisive piece of self-analysis:

I have really decided that I am an out--I mean an intellectual--by nature. All of which makes the last two years a blank in my life. But not an utter blank, for I certainly had need of finding out just what the companionship of his fellows--social, not intellectual--means to the artist. It means a constant struggle with his own nature; a constant repression of his impulses; and a[n] acceptance of standards, which, while true to others, are false to him. The mere discovery of this fact cannot annihilate instantly the desire to stand well with my fellows. It can annihilate, however, the possibility of standing well with my fellows, since it further complicates my actions and makes inconsistency the rule rather than the exception. All this has a retroactive effect on the social desires. . . . Behold in me in a few [years] a hermit like yourself.⁴⁹

His discomfort was aggravated rather than relieved over the next few weeks, as boredom and demoralization took their toll. Throughout September Cowley was caught up in a dull routine of sleeping, eating, driving, cleaning and repairing camions. On September 18 he observed: "The wastage of lives in war seems infinitely less important just now

than the wastage of time." For weeks on end his letters to Burke were merely perfunctory and were filled with complaints of spending profitless hours lying around the barracks or shooting craps. Camp, he reported, had turned into a veritable "gambling hell." Soon he had run out of money and had to refuse invitations to play. "Christ, I'm demoralized . . . I can't help it--give me time and I always prove myself one of the crowd: average."⁵⁰

To put an end to boredom Cowley contemplated several alternatives promising greater danger, but, for the time being, he remained vague in his plans. One moment he was tempted to enlist in the U. S. army, the next he inclined towards an adventuresome career in aviation as a "machine-gunner" or "bomb dropper"--"The mortality in that branch of aviation isn't much higher than in the trenches. As far as I can gather, however, every pilot on a one-man fighting plane gets killed sooner or later, unless he has the luck to be taken prisoner. Oh what a life while he lives however! Permissions bountiful, quarters luxurious, pay relatively enormous. In some ways I envy those young devils who are scampering off to this highest of high adventures."⁵¹

When, towards the end of September, the Field Service was about to be taken over by the U. S. army, Cowley decided not to enlist but to spend some time in Paris after his release at the end of October. Afterwards he would try to get into aviation, though he had every expectation of failing on account of his "blessed heart." Five days later his plans changed again. When Cunningham's new section--he had made it to ambulancier and been transferred to Section 66--happened to pass through a nearby village, Cowley "mutinied" to pay him a visit and discuss the rumor that a new ambulance section was recruiting volunteers for service in Italy, Switzerland and possibly Russia. The vision of a trip to Russia excited him--"Travel and adventure, but not an adventure in which the chances of death would be above sixty percent, as in aviation." Should the new Ambulance Service materialize, Cowley and Cunningham decided they would enter it; otherwise, after failing his aviation tests, he would in all likelihood come home to be Secretary of the Advocate, he wrote to Burke on September 23. "Curse the whole life, and the preoccupation with little things, and the half-assed discipline. I hope to get to Russia and see things. Boy, wouldn't you envy me a trip like that?" For a start he ordered a Russian grammar and was soon immersed in the Russian alphabet

and learning the declensions. His morale about the war had hit rock-bottom: when Burke—who was apparently reading Randolph Bourne's diatribes against the war, as they appeared between June and October in The Seven Arts--sent him a letter disparaging "the poor war," Cowley was "so lazy and dispirited," that out of sheer lassitude he agreed with most of its sentiments.⁵²

Despite his inertia Cowley managed to write. Indeed, though his experiences presumably lacked the color and heroic glamor he craved, his prose sketches and poems for the American Field Service Bulletin reveal him as "the most prolific and polished of the truck-driver writers." In September Cowley reported to Burke that "as usual" he had been unable to "escape publication." Platt Andrew had printed some of his "bad poems" in the bulletin, "thereby advertising my shame;" he had also contributed to an American page in Le Poilu, a French trench publication.⁵³ One ballade, which Cowley planned to send to Life, was typical in its attempt to mythologize his war experiences; by casting them into the form of a conventional ballad, he managed to surround them with an aura of timeless heroism.

We Had Great Argument

After a tardy sun had set
We four untried lieutenants chose
The back room of the town buvette;
And there, until the next sun rose,
We each discussed, in meaty prose
The meaning of the firmament
And all such things that no one knows.
That night we had great argument.

It was no trouble to forget
Dress and society and pose;
The girls we knew; Marthe and Odette;
Marie and Madelon and Rose;
We did not give a thought to those;
Or other things; War, or the Rent;
Our lives; the price of furbelows.
That night we had great argument.

A crimson sun came like a threat;
We drained our glasses and arose;
Roused the good folk and paid our debt;
And rode off northward toward our foes.
Our feckless youth was at a close
And hell grew nearer as we went;
Yet life seemed good to us--because

That night we had great argument.

A German trench on the Ailette
Next day cost half our regiment,
And all my jolly friends--and yet
That night we had great argument.⁵⁴

Cowley's weeks of "absolute boredom" in camp during September yielded at least one rather successful poem. "To a Dilettante Killed at Vimy," besides expressing Cowley's self-ironic awareness of the immature idealism with which he had gone off to war, also evinced an incipient sensitivity to what Paul Fussell has called the "potential of ironic meaning" inherent in the war itself.

Years of small sorrows and of small endeavor;
Years of great plans, and mental cowardice;
And we that hoped they would not last forever:--
That's all. To cut the whole thing short, came this.

And yet the petty muddle you made of it;
The pose; the brave dreams foundered in a sea
Of idle talk, now seem to us resolved
Into clean metal by catastrophe.⁵⁵

As his French venture drew to a close Cowley continued his explorations of French writing. Perhaps under the impact of his weariness with the war, he now viewed the "decadent" writers of the 1890s with considerably more ambivalence than he had shown at Harvard. Joris-Karl Huysmans's A Rebours (1884), sometimes described as "the breviary of decadence," in particular fostered an incipient skepticism about the whole movement, Oscar Wilde, a one-time favorite, not excluded. His ambivalence seemed directed mostly against Huysmans's esoteric affectation and, by implication, against the trivial escapism at the basis of his art. Cowley's objections were moral as much as aesthetic:

A Rebours is Wilde exposed. Huysmans is terrible in his hates and his disgusts. Authors he doesn't like, he gives to his servants for toilet paper. He likes childish things, however, the pictures of Gustave Moreau, Poe, Baudelaire, trite English expressions because they are English. He demonstrates the banality of the whole decadent movement. There is some difference between him and the youth who smokes Fatimas instead of Camels because they are 'distinctively individual,' but not much. He is the sort of person who would have one wife in Turkey and eight in Massachusetts; who would read Arsène Lupin in the original French, if he is English, and Victor Hugo, and Dumas; he is, in other words, an ass.⁵⁶

Rather than a valid criticism of Huysmans's work, Cowley's objections reflected his own uneasy struggles to dissociate himself from the ideals of the literary life implied in Huysmans's book. Despite such skepticism, he continued to cherish many of the Symbolists and early Moderns. His literary preferences, indeed, at times disclosed the inconsistent and contradictory premises of his taste. In September he sampled several of the writings of Henri de Régnier (1864-1936) and found them models of stylistic elegance, "polished like a gem; as brilliant and as limited." In October he read Education de Prince by the French playwright Maurice Donnay (1859-1945), which he thought "excellent" and relished for being "perfect Schnitzler." In early November, he discovered Romain Rolland (1866-1944). The recipient of the 1915 Nobel Prize for Literature, Rolland was a writer deeply involved in the major social, political and spiritual events of his time; he had taken a controversial stand in opposition to the war and in the 1930s would be a leading spirit on the international radical scene. On the verge of his departure from France in 1917, Cowley considered Rolland's epic cycle of novels Jean-Christophe (1904-1912) "the one book to which I am giving my approbation today."⁵⁷

By early October demoralization among the volunteers was such that recruiting officers of the U. S. army were not very successful: most men in Cowley's section refused to enlist. "You can't imagine with what a feeling of absolute negation I play cards," Cowley wrote Burke in the depths of his indifference. Even the nighttime manoeuvres with faulty camions in cold, wind-driven rain now seemed "conventional," when set against the "thousands of war diaries" he had read. Once the Field Service had been incorporated into the American army and American authorities were in charge, Cowley expected "real strictness" in the matter of censorship and the maintenance of military discipline. He resented the American "business-like" attitude towards soldiering and denounced the strict enforcement of military rules as "a form of Prussianism". It made enlistment in the American forces seem repulsive.⁵⁸

By the middle of October Cowley was slowly climbing out of the depths, as the end of his service approached. He expected to be released on the 28th and was already dreaming of an armchair in Cambridge. Anticipating his return, Cowley expected to appear "outwardly unchanged or little changed" and to burst in upon his friends "fresh and bustling

as a wind from an abattoir." He felt skeptical about how much he had profited from his French trip and thought he had "more of a past than of a future." He expected to resume the old life and talks with Burke and to meet Josephson again. While he admitted he had thought little about Jews recently, the mere thought of returning to Cambridge was sufficient to resuscitate his snobbish racial prejudice: "I often wonder if a complete elimination of the Hebrew race would not be the best solution of the problem."⁵⁹

Before his release from actual service the AFS volunteers were engaged in full force to support the big Aisne offensive along the Chemins des Dames. For months Cowley had been slightly ashamed at having so little to report that he felt all his letters had been but "masterpieces of futility;" now there was news to tell. Ever since the German offensive in July, elaborate preparations for a French counteroffensive had been in progress. During August and September new gun bases, roads, bridges and munition depots had been constructed and the camions had transported immense quantities of ammunition to the new depots, until eventually the Aisne front had been "clogged with batteries---all sizes." In early October Cowley reported to his mother that work had been "difficult lately, even exciting." The first two Americans in their section had been wounded, but this did not worry Cowley much: "No one ever heard of a camion driver ever being killed."⁶⁰

Every thought of boredom vanished, as work became more strenuous and even dangerous. In addition to the threat of German shelling, perennial rain and fog made for hazardous driving along slippery, muddy roads in the pitch-black of the night. As preparations marched ahead, tension rose and rumors multiplied about the date and aim of the actual attack. "On tire sur Malmaison," whispers ran. The artillery preparations, it turned out, had been "the greatest on record." When the Malmaison attack finally broke, it lasted for more than a fortnight without letup. "Sixteen days and nights we had our ears battered and our sleep disturbed," Cowley told Burke at the end of October. German prisoners admitted they had spent five days without food under French barrage fire, and had traded gold watches and field glasses for a loaf of bread. Cowley wrote an account of the "push" in his Camion Service Notes, parts of which were later published in The Harvard Advocate:

For us the offensive meant work from twelve to twenty hours every day in the disheartening rain that accompanied every artillery duel. More than that, we often had to pilot our five-ton camions through the mud of narrow roads to ruined villages immediately behind the front. There, where no autotruck had ever penetrated before, we helped pile the trench flooring and the barbed-wire we carried in the shelter of crumbling walls.

When our convoy crossed the Aisne the evening of October the twenty-second, the racket of the artillery was more intense than ever before. Every clump of trees, every bush, it seemed, concealed a battery. Thing unheard of, there were gunboats in the narrow river, spouting fire every one. At Vailly we passed a battery of tanks going towards the line with an enormous rumble of machinery. We had great difficulty getting home, I remember, because the constant flash of cannon made the darkness treacherous. Next morning at daybreak the French went over the top.⁶¹

By October 29 Cowley had been released and was writing from the University Union in Paris, basking in idleness and luxury. He was aware, however, that now he could no longer procrastinate and must decide whether to return to the United States for good or only for a few weeks' leave. The decision, he thought, would be "very important in [his] life." He carefully weighed the three options open to him: "If I should go into aviation, I should really be making a sacrifice, for even if I came out alive, I feel I should be out of place at the end of the war. If I should go to Italy, I think that would start me on a career of roving. Finally, though, if I return to college for half a year, I may find the old life again--and the old life a little broadened." For the moment he inclined towards the last alternative.⁶²

But before going home, Cowley was determined to enjoy Paris while his money lasted. For a start he bought a preventive against venereal disease at a chemist's and took a room at the Royal Palace Hotel, a pension near the Luxembourg Gardens, at a ten minutes' walk from the crooked streets and cheap restaurants of the Quartier Latin. To cut expenses he shared a double room with Don Tarpley, a taciturn painter-sculptor from Seattle, whom he described to Burke as "that rare thing, a civilized Westerner." Tarpley introduced Cowley to the artists' world of Paris. In a café at the corner of the Boulevard Montparnasse they met Gaby, an attractive prostitute alias artist's model. In early November, lapsing into his pose of decadent vulgarity, he boasted to Burke of his adventures among the French cocottes at the Café du Dôme and La Rotonde, famous rendezvous for artists and bohémiens. Compared to American street

women French cocottes struck Cowley as "a superior type"—Gaby had shown an interest in books, recommended a performance of The Merchant of Venice and expressed her approval of Jean-Christophe. Cowley was so impressed by the prostitutes he met that he told Burke he felt like making "all my correspondence about them," and promptly launched into the dramatic life story of "Olga of the Olympia." He was looking forward to a meeting the very next day with Gaby, with whom he had arranged to have tea at her studio, followed by dinner in the Quartier and a visit to a cabaret in Montmartre.⁶³

But the expected tryst fell through. After waiting at the Dôme for an hour, Cowley, feeling "gypped," at last sought consolation in La Rotonde, where the scene was "more gay" and where "harlots and greasy Serbian artists passed me laughing." He talked to some Russian poet-painters and learned about the prewar fame of the place, when Serbians, Russians, Japanese and Americans made it a redoubtable meeting place for the international avant-garde; compared with those days, he was given to understand, the Rotonde in 1917 was relatively "sad." Cowley's first taste of international bohemianism did not immediately fill him with delight. Instead, he felt somewhat intimidated and out of place, "awkward and aimless," among the older and experienced inhabitants of Bohemia.⁶⁴ Soon he would make the acquaintance of American Bohemians in Greenwich Village and register a similar ambivalence. For the moment, however, he had acted as a true vanguard scout for the hordes of expatriates who would follow to Paris in the 1920s.

Looking back upon his six months in France in the early 1930s, Cowley had reason enough to think of his service as "almost ideal." Certainly it had been, in the words of John Dos Passos, "a de luxe way" of seeing the war. As a gentleman volunteer Cowley had been endowed with privileges and a degree of freedom and prestige unattainable to regular soldiers. Serving under the relaxed conditions in the French army, he had been spared "the severe and stupid forms of discipline" imposed on American soldiers. Since he was on noncombatant duty, he had been relatively safe from the dangers of war, yet close enough to be thrilled by them vicariously and romantically. He had been able to afford a certain

irresponsibility about his livelihood, having been fed and clothed and lodged by a foreign government to which he did not owe allegiance. He had had "a minimum of choices" to make and been able to "let the future take care of itself." Having no real personal stake in the cause of the war, he had yet learned "the virtues of men at war"--courage, extravagance, fatalism. If he had suffered the hardships of arduous labor, physical exhaustion and inclement weather, they had yet been "exhilarating" to endure and been compensated for by reasonable food, "congenial" work, frivolous furloughs to Paris and stays at luxury hotels. He had been welcomed and respected by the native French population and been allowed to consort freely with civilians and poilus alike. He had made the acquaintance of Paris, "the capital of world culture," and had had his first taste of Bohemia. He had been introduced to a foreign language and a foreign culture for which he would cherish a lifelong affection and which would leave an indelible mark on his literary and cultural thought.⁶⁵

Cowley's service behind the lines had instilled in him a fear of boredom and a taste for excitement that would persist in postwar civilian life. The experience, he later felt, had given "a keen, precarious delight" to his perception of reality. In Exile's Return Cowley posited this new sense of life as one of the more important literary consequences of the war:

The war created in young men a thirst for abstract danger, not suffered for a cause but courted for itself; if later they believed in the cause, it was partly in recognition of the danger it conferred on them. Danger was a relief from boredom, a stimulus to the emotions, a color mixed with all others to make them brighter. There were moments in France when the senses were immeasurably sharpened by the thought of dying next day, or possibly next week. The trees were green, not like ordinary trees, but like trees in the still moment before a hurricane; the sky was a special and ineffable blue; the grass smelled of life itself; the image of death at twenty, the image of love, mingled together into a keen, precarious delight. And this perhaps was the greatest of the lessons that the war taught to young writers. It revived the subjects that had seemed forbidden because they were soiled by many hands and robbed of meaning: danger made it possible to write once more about life, adventure, death.⁶⁶

Cowley's sense of the war as a potent drug stimulating the senses and whipping life up to a climactic pitch of intensity is borne out by

similar experiences of his coevals. That Cowley was justified in making such a personal sensation into a representative experience--his basic strategy throughout Exile's Return--is corroborated, for example, by the memory of John Dos Passos, who recalled that in France "the chance of death sharpened the senses. The sweetness of the white roses, the shape and striping of a snail shell, the taste of an omelet, the most casual sight or sound appeared desperately intense against the background of the great massacre." Dos Passos typically found himself possessed of "a curious hankering after danger" and observed in his diary that he constantly felt "the need of the drunken excitement of a good bombardment. I want to throw the dice at every turn with the old roysterer Death . . . and through it all I feel more alive than ever before. . . . I have never lived yet. You can still see the marks of the swaddling clothes. Tomorrow I shall live to the dregs or today I shall die." Many, indeed, craved greater dangers and sought out graver risks; Hemingway is the classic example: in July 1918 he visited an observation post behind the lines, "like a spectator invited to gossip with the actors behind the scenes," and came close to death when a mortar bomb exploded nearby.⁶⁷

The historical record suggests that Cowley was mostly a detached observer, whose understanding of the war was naive and rather superficial, whose occasional twinges of conscience and humanitarian concern were inadequate to stifle his "monumental indifference" towards the cause for which Americans were dying, and who, even at the time, was aware, if with an undertone of shamefaced apology, that he was witness to "mostly the pictorial effects of the war." Still, limited as his experience may have been, it enabled him to intuit with remarkable precision what many--volunteers and conscripts, spectators and participants--have acknowledged as the essence of their experience in World War I.⁶⁸ There is, indeed, ample evidence that Cowley was justified in presenting his personal, "spectatorial" sense of the war as exemplary for the writers of his generation. The writings of Cummings, Hemingway and Dos Passos, but also those of Faulkner, Fitzgerald and MacLeish, as Cowley has been quick to grasp, can be used effectively to support the thesis he developed in Exile's Return.⁶⁹

Still Cowley's account of the war in Exile's Return must be seen in the light of his radical sympathies of the early 1930s. His emphasis on

his volunteer service as a frivolous and irresponsible flight of adventure, "a goddam crazy Cook's tour of Western Europe," fitted in with the self-critical mood of the times. Not only was the book written "in the midst of a violent [literary] reaction against the 1920s," historians, too, by 1934 were inclined to believe that the U. S. had been "tricked into war in 1917 by the twin forces of profiteering and Allied propaganda." They were reinforced in their conviction that the war had been a tragic blunder by the findings of the Nye Committee, which early that year had turned up startling evidence that economic interests had largely determined American intervention in 1917.⁷⁰ In September and October of 1933 Cowley had conducted, in the pages of The New Republic, an acrimonious debate on the war with Archibald MacLeish, in which he had discredited the war in unmistakable terms. Measuring President Wilson's aspirations against the world they had helped to produce Cowley had concluded: "It is time for us to admit that you, MacLeish, and I, Cowley, and Hemingway, Wilson, Dos Passos, Ramon Guthrie, our relatives who crashed in airplanes or died by machine-gun fire, our friends who were crippled--that all of us fought in vain."⁷¹ In such a mood it was not uncommon to mock what seriousness of commitment American volunteers may have felt and to sneer at their service as "a comfortable, rather ridiculous sinecure." Cowley's account in Exile's Return, too, has been felt to display a touch of casual deprecation.⁷²

In Exile's Return Cowley, intentionally or unintentionally, played down the degree of commitment and patriotism he had actually continued to feel despite his growing ambivalence about the war. On the whole, work in the Field Service was perhaps more arduous and dangerous, and morale consistently higher, than Cowley's account suggests; out of some 2100 AFS volunteers in France 127 were killed, a death rate of more than six percent, 230 received the Croix de Guerre and five the Médaille Militaire.⁷³ Such minor flaws of emphasis, however, do little to impair the general accuracy of Cowley's interpretation of his war experience in Exile's Return. When, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the American entrance into the war, Cowley returned to the subject, his view of his and his generation's sense of the war had proved its validity and could be maintained without substantial modification. Though from the perspective of half a century he was then "tempted to postulate a death wish in an entire culture," Cowley saw no reason to revise his earlier

diagnosis of the spectatorial attitude--"You went to the war and it was like going to a theater that advertised the greatest spectacle in history." American volunteers, even in the face of death, had remained "the spectators of somebody else's war" and death itself had largely been "a spectacle . . . with aesthetic properties."⁷⁴

In Exile's Return Cowley's strategy was highly selective: he aimed to use his personal experience only insofar as it could be made exemplary and representative. Though on the whole Cowley displays a remarkable degree of self-awareness, it is only in a limited sense that the book can be trusted as accurate autobiography. By choice of narrative form, tone and critical intention, Cowley's account in Exile's Return underplays elements that are crucial for our understanding of his development as a writer. In France he had had his first hesitant intimations of the aesthetic origins of modernism in late nineteenth-century French symbolism; but if he had sampled Baudelaire and Rimbaud, he had also relished a writer of social vision like Romain Rolland. He had made the first intuitive and incomplete steps towards formulating a conception of culture as a living human, social and historical organism, which would crystallize into a fundamental assumption of his literary practice. In his awareness of the war as "the great common experience" of his generation he had evinced a dawning capacity for intuiting the historical importance of the present moment, which would grow into a remarkable sense of living in history and serve to make him the superb literary chronicler and historian not merely of his particular age-group, but of his literary times. He had been made aware of the ineluctable alienation inherent in artistic and intellectual life, as his literary sensitivity and individualistic temperament had clashed with the uniforming social pressures of the group; he was convinced, he told Burke on October 3, that his decision to be an "out" would affect him "always." In his wartime writings he had, for the first time, begun to adopt the perspective of the spokesman for a generational experience and to write on the tangent plane of the idiosyncratic and the representative, the personal and the communal.

It was only by hindsight that Cowley could see his French venture as the next step in the process of deracination that had started in high school and continued through college. It was then also that he located the "honest emotion" behind what he deemed a "pretentious phrase," the

Lost Generation. The war, Cowley concluded in Exile's Return, had "physically uprooted" his age-group, "plucked" it from its native soil "as if by a clamshell bucket and dumped, scattered [it] among strange people." Behind the "curious attitude of non-participation" in the war, Cowley contended, had lain the continuous awareness of "another country, a real country of barns, cornfields, hemlock woods and brooks tumbling across birch logs into pools where the big trout lay. Somewhere, at an incredible distance, was the country of their childhood, where they had once been part of the landscape and the life, part of a spectacle at which nobody looked on."⁷⁵ It was this awareness of the urn of native soil in his wartime baggage that in 1917 had directed Cowley's nostalgia towards Belsano rather than Cambridge and that had set him dreaming of the ideal literary life as that of a farmer-poet.

At the time of his return to America in November 1917 Cowley underestimated the impact the war would have on his subsequent life and career. He was skeptical of the benefit of his French venture and, though he vaguely felt he might be "out of place" in a postwar world, considered himself not profoundly altered or affected. Yet six months of "organized Byronism" behind the French lines had infected him with the "poison" of irresponsibility, of travel and adventure, of excitement and intensity that would predictably disqualify him from resuming life on its old terms. With many others he had "accumulated" a store of "nervous energy" that would demand release and inevitably frustrate any intention of returning to a prewar mode of existence. A spectatorial attitude would be carried over into civilian life as Cowley, like many of his coevals, assumed a cynical and disillusioned stance of social disengagement and political noncommitment, a stance for which the absurd spectacle of the peace treaty would yield only ampler justification. It was, as David C. Duke has noted, "a most paradoxical turn of events that activism abroad ultimately led to social detachment rather than commitment." Cowley's commitment, for at least a decade, would be mostly to his dream of becoming a poet, to the trials and tribulations of being a practising professional writer in America. Coming home, he embarked upon a difficult and disenchanting period of adjustment that would only end temporarily with a renewed acquaintance with his "second country."⁷⁶

In November 1917 Cowley disembarked in New York. He was wearing his "gorgeous" Field Service uniform, carrying a collection of souvenirs from the front, and had fully sixty-five cents in cash. Friends met him at the dock and immediately carried him off to their favorite hangouts in Greenwich Village: the experimental little theater of the Provincetown Players and the backroom of the Hell Hole, at the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue and West Fourteenth Street. Notoriously tough and dirty, the Hell Hole stayed in Cowley's memory as "the grubbiest drinking parlor west of the Bowery." Eugene O'Neill was a regular customer, but mostly the place was patronized by a crowd of small-time gamblers and petty criminals as well as by the actors and writers of the nearby Provincetown Theater. Here Cowley launched into stories of his adventures behind the lines. Years later Matthew Josephson recalled the pride with which Cowley had narrated how, on furloughs in Paris, he had much improved his French "with the help of some little poules he met, who corrected his accent when he read Baudelaire to them." The friends had been duly impressed. "Hearing him," Josephson wrote, "we were all the more highly resolved to get to France, war or peace."¹

Cowley's war stories, however, had failed to diminish Burke's and Josephson's skepticism about the war. Neither had his friends persuaded Cowley to change his attitude; in early December, back in Pittsburgh, he grumbled that the "pages of pacifist literature" they had advised him to read struck him as so many "tergiversations and peripaties." "Again I am one of the lick-the Germans-first crowd," he wrote to Burke, adding a week later: "If you had normal hearing, 20-20 vision, were six inches taller, and weighed fifty pounds more, I imagine you would be no more indifferent to the war than to a keg of powder on which you were sitting--especially if the fuse was lighted." Nonetheless, Cowley felt

uncomfortable with the atmosphere of patriotic heroism in which he had been welcomed back in Pittsburgh. When his high-school professor had showered him with praise ("We all know it takes guts to do what you did"), he had had to struggle to keep "a straight face." Besieged with questions, making the rounds and telling his stories, he soon grew disgusted with the role that was forced upon him: "This being a bunk hero sickens me." Cowley remained disturbed by the thought of a possible German victory, but his experiences in France had made any form of regular enlistment "a bitter pill." To dodge being drafted he applied for balloon service with the aviation corps, a service that seemed to him "as ideal as any war work:" it would spare him the "enforced companionship of barrack life" as well as the hateful "subserviency" of the private; it would give him the privileged status of an officer, yet relieve him of the necessity of commanding others, for which he felt "an incurable dislike." Moreover, he reasoned, the balloon service was "dangerous enough to be honorable, yet hardly suicidal." His hopes were shattered when he failed his physical examination because of a weak muscle in his right eye, a result which left him "much irritated and dispirited."²

The war provided Cowley with both a new stimulus for writing and a handy subject. In Pittsburgh he spent several afternoons in the reference room of the Carnegie Library, writing up his war experiences. What he wrote, Cowley felt, was "valueless" and "junk," but the mere fact that he was writing was important and made him "happy enough." In January he tried to peddle several of his war stories, and managed to place the account of his visit to the abandoned German trenches with a Pittsburgh newspaper. Decked out in his "handsome" camion driver's uniform he carried his manuscript and photographs to the offices of the Democratic Post and the Republican Gazette Times. Impressed by his photographs as much as by his writing, the editor of the Gazette Times accepted the story. It was run on January 6, 1918, as a full page in the Sunday paper, under the caption: "U. S. Volunteer Tells of French Battle Front Visit--No Union Hours." The article was lavishly illustrated with five pictures, the centerpiece displaying Cowley in his military uniform, with a trench coat draped casually over his arm; another showing "Mr. Cowley driving giant truck at high speed in France." A patriotic editorial honored Cowley as a veritable Pittsburgh hero. Cowley expected to receive ten dollars for the article; he was paid only five, but the sum stuck in his

memory as the first money he had earned by writing for publication. That same month the Advocate printed his report on the Aisne offensive in October, "The History of a Push."³

The war also inspired new poems. In mid-December Cowley sent Burke "Ostel 1917," a poem subsequently published in the American Field Service Bulletin and later reprinted in Youth: Poetry of Today. He announced that he had again "turned vers librist just to show that I can write the nasty stuff. I even do it well." When he surveyed his total production in verse, however, Cowley was disappointed: even when he exercised "a very catholic judgement," he was still "shocked and surprised" at the scant number of poems worth keeping. He now saw that even his most individual poems, like "The Oldest Inhabitant," still owed too much to his "various preceptors," in particular Edgar Lee Masters. A month later he made a critical estimate of his achievement and realized that his penchant for the innovative and unorthodox was kept in check by his predilection for formal control.

The whole series [of poems] shows a procession formatically towards and away from the sonnet. I am always form-conscious. Even the last two or three things I have done in vers libre are as organic as a sestina. Yet always I am striving to be unorthodox. I think however that my tendency towards organization and regularity is more fundamental than my heterodoxy. And even this latter is only formatic, and hardly ever extends to the substance of what I write.⁴

Typically, Cowley oscillated between experiment and convention, being both attracted to and pulled away from the more extreme experiments of modernism; in similar fashion he would be drawn to both Dadaism and Classicism without giving to either one his unambiguous allegiance.

By the end of December Cowley had grown "desperately bored" in Pittsburgh--except for Jake Davis and Russell Farrell he had found most of his former companions "rather ordinary"--and was eager to "escape" to a room on the South side of Washington Square before returning to Harvard. Discussions with his parents, who were not particularly charmed with his plans for the Village, postponed a definite decision, but on January 13 he announced his imminent arrival in New York to Burke. In Pittsburgh he had felt "a bit drab and discouraged." He had sunk into a mood of mental lassitude which had precluded a proper intellectual response to Burke's letters. He hoped the Village would prove the tonic

he needed, even if money or a job were not forthcoming. One of his "chief ambitions," he ironically observed, had always been "to starve in a garret for my Art."

Notwithstanding such Bohemian aspirations Cowley was not prepared to make Burke's radical sacrifices for the life of art: Burke had failed his mid-year examinations at Columbia because he had been too deeply engrossed in the letters of Gustave Flaubert. Cowley, who thought Burke "quite an ass" for throwing away "the tangible proofs of a semester's hard work," insisted that his friend's propensity was for scholarship as much as artistic creation. Only a doctoral degree, he advanced pragmatically, would yield Burke a guaranteed income. Cowley's objections could not keep Burke from dropping out of college and independently pursuing a career in literature and criticism; soon he was at work on the experimental stories of The White Oxen (1924). "I've burned my bridges," he proclaimed. He borrowed money from his father and rented a small room in the Village, where he lived sparsely on rations of oatmeal and milk. Burke's drastic steps, Cowley granted, succeeded in "touching the imagination."⁵

Before returning to Harvard Cowley spent several weeks in New York. Over the next three and a half years he would regularly resort to the Village, alternating his last two semesters at Harvard with forays into New York Bohemia. Thus, while still a Harvard undergraduate, his literary horizons were already expanding beyond the confines of the Advocate and the Poetry Society. In New York he moved in the circle of writers, artists and actors gathered about the Provincetown Players--George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, Hutchins Hapgood, Edna St. Vincent Millay. He had been introduced to them by his old Pittsburgh friends James and Susan Light, who had moved to New York from Ohio in October and shortly after had attached themselves to the experimental theater group. Light, a versatile youth of handsome, intellectual appearance (he was once described as a "sad-eyed, dreamy young man with a faint mustache, heavy eyebrows and a futuristic expression") stayed on with the Players, as both actor and director, until the group's dissolution in 1921. Susan Jenkins Light, a "vivacious and comely" woman, who wore her hair in the newest bobbed style, helped out by reading unsolicited plays and assisting at the box office. In the early 1920s, after her divorce from Light, she earned an independent income as an editor at Telling Tales, a

pulp magazine catering risqué fiction and "true confessions," a job at other times held by Hannah Geffen, Matthew Josephson's wife, and for a while by Allen Tate.⁶

Shortly after coming to New York the Lights moved into a rambling seven-room apartment at 86 Greenwich Avenue. Their home was nicknamed "Maison Clemenceau" (or "Clemenceau Cottage"), after the French premier who had lived there in exile before the revolution of 1871. Burke had a little cubicle there, which later was taken over by Josephson. Other roomers included the painter Charles Ellis, the writer Djuna Barnes and the photographer Berenice Abbott. Soon Clemenceau Cottage grew into the informal gathering place for a group of kindred artistic spirits. Jim Butler, stepgrandson of the painter Claude Monet, was a regular visitor, as were Eugene O'Neill, Floyd Dell, Dorothy Day, a newspaper reporter and militant suffragist, and her friend Peggy Baird, recently divorced from the poet Orrick Johns. The place, Josephson recalled, was a veritable "Village gristmill."⁷ It was to Clemenceau Cottage that Cowley most naturally gravitated whenever he came to New York. It was his stepping stone to Bohemia, the place where he could consort with old Pittsburgh friends as well as meet numerous new Village inhabitants, respectable and disreputable alike; it was there that he would meet his first wife.

In mid-February Cowley was established in his new Cambridge quarters at 20 Randolph Hall, one of the better private dormitories on the Gold Coast. After the excitement of wartime France and his first acquaintance with Bohemianism in Paris and New York, he returned to college with slight trepidation. Afraid of sinking back into a stunting routine of studying much and writing little, he decided to direct his Harvard existence as much as possible towards literature. Though he still toyed with the idea of going to Italy as a volunteer in the Red Cross Ambulance Service, he was more than ever committed to the writing life and determined to take steps towards its realization.

As he scrutinized his old environment with a fresh eye for its artistic possibilities, Cowley was less disappointed than he had feared. "Boston isn't a bad town if one decides what he wants and then goes out to hunt for it," he told Burke soon after his arrival. There was a good French bookstore, which would allow him to continue his explorations of French literature, but the Boston Public Library and Harvard's own Widener he found "criminally" deficient in modern novels. To quench his

thirst for Bohemia, however, he might seek out the city's Italian quarter, which boasted several restaurants resembling those he had been shown in the Village. There were saloons which served Bass and Guinness stout on draught for a nickel a glass and even one "Bolsheviki joint."⁸

To meet his college requirements Cowley took on a load of five courses: a course in Elizabethan drama with George Pierce Baker, a history course on the age of the Tudors and Stuarts with Roger B. ("Frisky") Merriman, a course in French with Louis Allard, in ethics with William Ernest Hocking, and Dean Briggs's famous course in poetry. He made straight A's in all five. A sixth course in German he soon dropped out of sheer frustration; having steeped himself in the "beautiful clarity" of French, he found it hard to appreciate the "inversions and perversions" of German. Authors like Mann and Schnitzler, whom he admired, existed for him "in spite of the language they write in;" German was "a tongue fit only for Kant and for lyric poetry." Cowley's comments, emotional and not very sophisticated as they were, nevertheless showed that his aesthetic tastes were developing in the direction of clarity, discipline and precision:

Just now I am studying French literature [he observed on February 25]. As I go along, I see brought out clearly what a consciously developed medium is the French language. Germany never had a Rabelais in the XVIe century to introduce all sorts of Latin words, Greek words, technical words, manufactured words; or a precise school in the XVIIe century to purify it; or an eighteenth century Voltaire to make clarity a deity. The chauvinistic attempts to make German a "pure" language, and the retaining of the declensional forms, are not the characteristics of a language of the highest development. Chaucer's English was structurally as advanced as modern German. And there was no imperially supported set of professors to forbid it to dip into the rich stores of other languages. Grillparzer has been compared to Racine. My God to read the two at once! G[rillparzer] is wildly beautiful at times, it is true, but his diction sprawls all over itself like an adolescent elephant.⁹

As a first step towards realizing his hopes for the literary life, Cowley set out to meet the poet Conrad Aiken. He had just read The Jig of Forslin (1916) and was deeply impressed. He recommended the volume to Burke as "a study in form" and praised Aiken's ability to "infinitely" modify his polyphonic verse with the demands of each new mood. Aiken's poems, he observed in an unpublished review a year later, were

"symphonies, divided into movements, connected by recurring themes, diversified by a complicated counterpoint." This search for a poetical analogy to musical form Cowley saw as "one of the great modern tendencies in the arts. Form has been recognized as the common language of the artistic world; music comes nearest to being pure form." Musical theory, he noted, had invaded poetry, drama, fiction and even painting. It was Aiken who illustrated the tendency par excellence.¹⁰

There were other than formalist reasons for Cowley's enthusiasm for The Jig of Forslin. He was aware that Aiken was one of the first to use Freudian psychology as a poetic framework and was thus able to deal with subjects not commonly considered suitable for poetic treatment: hence, Cowley noted with ironic approval, the profusion of rapes, suicides, vampires and prostitutes in Aiken's verse. Nine years later he understood that such ingredients were part of Aiken's exploration of the subconscious, his "search for the dark countries that lie inside of Man." Here lay a source of distrust, however, for despite his admiration, Cowley disliked what he called the "hot-house atmosphere" of Aiken's verse: "it is as if we were looking through the windows of a greenhouse at a world of strange plants, richly green, beaded with moisture; a world of serpents and lizards, unholy blossoms, and sudden death." Even upon first reading The Jig of Forslin he had felt that Aiken had "so involved himself in the circle of illicit love, boredom, and sudden death, that only by luck could he come out of it into the air of heaven that poets are supposed to breathe." Aiken, however, had partly avoided a suffocating egocentrism by viewing "any one man as representative of his race" and "our smallest acts under the species of eternity."¹¹

Cowley's appreciation of Aiken's verse is important as one of his earliest explorations of the aesthetics of modernist poetry. Predictably, his attitude was ambiguous: he admired its formal innovations and technical accomplishment, but distrusted its self-enclosed subjectivism. The latter was a basic element of the modernist creed, with which he would never be entirely comfortable. Cowley would not fully grasp the theoretical implications of Aiken's poetics until much later, but his early understanding carries the seeds of what, from a perspective of sixty years, he termed Aiken's "religion of consciousness." Aiken's work, he then understood, was unified by a central principle of "candor," which the poet had evolved into a complete "system of aesthetics and literary

ethics."¹²

In 1918 Cowley's enthusiasm for The Jig of Forslin sent him to the little bookstore near the Back Bay railroad station run by Aiken's publisher, Edmund Brown, to request the poet's address. In response to a letter from Cowley, Aiken proposed they meet for dinner in the lobby of the Hotel Touraine; the young apprentice was to look for "a man in an orange necktie who wasn't a fairy." Years later Cowley recalled his first impressions upon sighting the older poet: "On that unseasonably warm evening in February 1918 I saw the necktie as he came in the door; it was brighter than his Valencia-orange hair. For the rest he wore the Harvard uniform of the period: white button-down oxford shirt and brown suit. His forehead was high . . . his jaws square and his eyes were set wide apart. The impression he gave me was a mixture of shyness and pugnacity." Cowley was fascinated. Aiken was nine years older, he had resigned from Harvard in 1911, shunning a public performance as Class Poet, and fled to Europe. He was a good friend and admirer of T. S. Eliot and a poetic rival as well as champion of his verse; in 1914 he had carried a typescript of "Prufrock" to London and had been instrumental in launching Eliot by introducing him to Pound. In 1918 Aiken was married, had two children, and had already published four volumes of verse. He was then living on "the unfashionable side of Beacon Hill," but would move to South Yarmouth on Cape Cod the year after, choosing to put a "skeptical distance" between himself and the literary coteries of Imagists and Vorticists he had found in Boston and London.¹³

Cowley was excited about the meeting but also, admittedly, a little "scared." Aiken, he told Burke, turned out to be "a development, a successful development, of most of my present tendencies." He had found him wholeheartedly devoted to the writing of "remarkable poetry that doesn't sell." To his surprise Aiken was, like himself, an "enthusiastic admirer" of Louis Wilkinson's two novels, The Buffoon and A Chaste Man. Years later Cowley recalled that Aiken and he "both liked Boston in decay, we admired the French symbolist poets, we wanted to achieve architectural and musical effects in our poems (I in theory, Conrad in practice), and we were fascinated by the political manoeuvres of the poetry world without wishing to take part in them." Several weeks later a second meeting was arranged; upon that occasion their "charming conversation," Cowley told Burke, had been "all about How to Sell

Poetry." Aiken had provided Cowley with inside information on a number of Boston publishers and Cowley had been "entranced." He had taken to reading Aiken's poetry criticism for the fortnightly Dial and was exultant: "He rips everybody to pieces; you must read him. He is getting so unpopular that he can't get anything published in a magazine."¹⁴

In Conrad Aiken Cowley encountered his first ideal of the literary vocation. He admired the older poet's critical independence of mind, his disdain for literary commerce and his refusal to compromise his standards. Above all he admired Aiken's complete and exclusive dedication to the life of letters. In retrospect Cowley realized how lucky he had been to have gained admittance to a poet who "seldom opened himself to literary strangers," shunned writers and editors on principle, refused to partake in literary politics, and lived his artistic life, as he said in his autobiography Ushant, "off-stage, behind the scenes, out of view." Cowley's 1918 meetings with Aiken--"the shyest man I knew"--were the beginning of a lifelong literary friendship. Over the years Cowley proved one of the few consistent champions of Aiken's verse and engaged in numerous efforts to remedy the neglect of his work by the larger public.¹⁵

At Harvard, however, Cowley's hopes for the literary life were not effortlessly fulfilled. At times he relapsed into his former moods of disillusionment and was frustrated with the "unfortunate life" he was leading. On March 2 he lamented that he was either locked in isolation or so preoccupied with trivialities that he could neither think nor create. "Half the time I am segregated. I grow morbid; wish I had something to do; hope for companionship. Half the time I am uproariously occupied with useless things, and think as much as do the elands and the fleet gazelles." But such moments of despondency were growing scarce, and ultimately Cowley would look back upon his junior year as "a very happy semester." On March 25 he acknowledged he was "damned glad" to be at Harvard and felt that it did not interfere with any writing he "might want to do." Towards the end of the semester he was experiencing "the pains and joys of Creation" and self-ironically wondered if his vernal productivity might be the result of his "repressed sexuality." He had not written very much, he granted, "but then writing is so difficult with me that I mull over forty lines for three months, and get pleasure out of them all that time."¹⁶

A regular literary companion and, after Conrad Aiken, perhaps the most influential literary mentor of Cowley's early years was S. Foster Damon. Damon was Cowley's senior by five years; he had graduated in 1914 and was still in Cambridge doing graduate work. Damon served as an important catalyst in awakening the relatively staid and conservative literary milieu of Harvard to the delights of modern art and letters. A poet and musician, he was an editor of The Harvard Monthly and The Music Review, and a founding father of the Harvard Music Society. The year before he had appeared in Eight Harvard Poets. Cowley had seen and met Damon at meetings of the Poetry Society in his sophomore year and had joined him on excursions to Boston for sessions at Jake Wirth's German saloon on Stuart Street. Once, he had been warned against Damon's "pernicious influence" by a conservative literary friend.

In a tribute written in the late 1960s Cowley recalled Damon at Harvard as a most "adventurous reader" who, like a knight errant of modernism, rode to "the rescue of neglected books as if they were maidens immured in a donjon keep." Damon liked to act as a pioneer and guide his coevals to new discoveries. It was through Damon that Cowley first became acquainted with the early works of Ezra Pound, the poetry of Stephen Crane, Melville's Moby Dick, the less familiar poems of William Blake, the poems of the obscure Thomas Holley Chivers, the work of Gertrude Stein, and, perhaps Damon's outstanding gift, the poems of Jules Laforgue. Though Cowley never ventured far into Blake's prophetic books and did not share his mentor's enthusiasm for either Stein or Chivers, he was indebted to Foster Damon for exposing him to numerous modern authors still outside his youthful ken.¹⁷

In 1918 Cowley consorted with Damon most frequently. Several times he visited Damon's room above the Western Club, where he lived with Philip Hillyer Smith, later Cowley's neighbor in Sherman. In early March he attended a session of the New England Poetry Society with Damon and Royall Snow. With Amy Lowell's departure and the accession of Josephine Preston Peabody to the Society's Presidency, however, the New Poetry had abdicated to the Old and the society could no longer muster Cowley's enthusiasm. Its new president represented all he opposed: "her pet aversion is Aiken; my pet aversion is her."¹⁸ For comfort Cowley might pay his respects to Amy Lowell, to whose house he gained admittance through Foster Damon, who in turn had been introduced to Lowell by John

Brooks Wheelwright. More than once that year Amy Lowell invited Damon, Cowley and sometimes Royall Snow to Sevenels, her big house in Brookline, for dinner. Inside there would be warmth and laughter, as the youthful poets read aloud their manuscripts and were "praised and scolded" by their patroness or, puffing away at her Manilla cigars, sat listening to Miss Lowell demolish her literary enemies. Foster Damon also led Cowley into Boston society circles he might otherwise not have entered and gave him glimpses of the fashionable and dilettantish world of the Cambridge debutantes.¹⁹

Though Cowley was critical of Damon's "decadent ideas," his feelings for him approached adulation. Whereas Royall Snow struck him as a "wild, fruity aesthete in theory and a damned bourgeois in practice," in Damon he discovered "a very sound poetic workman," who wrote "tons of late-Elizabethan verse." When at the end of April Damon spent a week in Greenwich Village, Cowley arranged a meeting with Burke and anticipated the visit as follows:

No doubt you will find him irritatingly aesthetic and disgustingly supercilious. He has regular spiels which he repeats without much regard to the person with whom he is talking. On the other hand, he knows everything there is to be known. If you want to find out something about obscure Venetian poets of the eighteenth century, ask him. He'll tell you. He will also demonstrate the sexual perversions of the thousand most illustrious men in history, and set you hunting a boy favorite. So don't miss him.²⁰

After Foster Damon, Cowley's closest friend at Harvard was John Brooks Wheelwright. Wheelwright was a highly unconventional Boston Brahmin, an Anglican High Churchman who would become a modernist poet, an architectural historian and, during the last years of his life, a fierce devotee of revolutionary socialism. An eccentric dandy, a convivial bachelor and a fastidious dresser, Wheelwright gained a reputation as an obstreperous nonconformist with a quirky sense of humor. His "elliptical and often wilfully unmelodic verse" made him, in Cowley's words, perhaps "not an easy poet . . . but one of the very few whose poems demand and reward second reading." For Wheelwright, as for Cowley, the literary life at Cambridge was "a round of high excitement." Wheelwright's contentiousness led to his expulsion from Harvard in his senior year, reputedly for misspelling a word. His poetry was long unappreciated. Upon

his premature death--in 1940 he was run down by a drunken driver on Massachusetts Avenue in Boston--he was commemorated in one of the media as "the most famous unheard-of poet of his time."²¹

It was the exhilarating company of "moderns" like Aiken, Lowell, Damon and Wheelwright which made life in Boston intellectually exciting for Cowley. For the rest, he was appalled by its literary and political conservatism. The city was a "hotbed of Toryism," he told Burke. "Can you imagine a place where people wax violent still over *vers libre*? Or a place where the mere mention of the words Socialist or Bolsheviki or Radical must be in a whisper?" But if he was skeptical of Boston's Tories, Cowley likewise looked down upon the high esteem in which Village bohemianism was held in certain Cambridge circles. At The Common Cupboard, a restaurant he frequented, he was irked to find that "anyone who has lived in Greenwich Village . . . is a little of the hero." Already, he took but a dim view of the countless "miniature Greenwich Villages" that were mushrooming all over the nation and drawing into their orbit countless artists, socialists, anarchists and syndicalists, not to mention "students from the nearest university come to see Life."²²

Between Tory conservatism and the various manifestations of would-be bohemianism, Cowley sensed, truly "modern" writing was left in a vacuum. Looking back to James Light's venturesome if immature *Sansculotte*, he regretted its demise and wished for its resuscitation. "There is a tremendous need for a magazine, not merely wild and Hebraic like the Pagan; not run by a temperamental woman, like the Little Review, and not inspired with nothing but love of the masses and other dirt, like the Liberator, but [one] which would print decent stuff by (us) new men." He was persuaded that Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, and William Stanley Braithwaite, the popular anthologist of contemporary poetry, must be quietly conspiring "to stifle the new poetry at birth." Indignant that poets like Aiken, John Gould Fletcher and William Carlos Williams were passed over "in silence," Cowley was ambitious to remedy such a debilitating situation. Williams's *Al Que Quiere!* (1917), after all, he had found promising as "the framework and the suggestion of much good poetry, much excellent, superexcellent poetry." Ultimately, he was persuaded, only a magazine that published new creative work yielded "the best sort of critical encouragement."²³

Dovetailing with his critique of current publications, Cowley sent

Burke a blueprint of a new literary magazine, "a post-bellum Sansculotte." His motives for the magazine were both disinterested and self-serving. The new periodical would fill the need for a forum for "our circle," thus serving to advance the general cause of avant-garde writing; but Cowley was also personally ambitious to get published. The magazine he projected was to be run by some ten editors, each of whom would be a shareholder. In return for their financial support they would be allowed to use the paper as an outlet for their personal work. As potential editors Cowley suggested acquaintances whose taste and judgment he respected or whom he expected to be sympathetic to the project: Damon, Aiken, Snow, Wilkinson, Lowell, Edna Millay, Floyd Dell, Charles Ellis, Jim Butler, the artist Stuart Davis, Burke, Light and himself. In matters of editorial policy, Cowley felt the magazine was to have "no political creeds, and damned few artistic." He expected to find a willing publisher in Edmund Brown of the Four Seas Company, who had already demonstrated his sympathy for modern writing by bringing out books by Aiken and Williams. Cowley had personally found him receptive to new ideas. A low subscription price was to guarantee a large circulation. Publishers' advertisements, to be encouraged by "a corking good set of book reviews," were to keep the magazine afloat financially. Even numbers would be made up of "the best contributions we can find;" but the crucial feature lay in the odd numbers, which would serve to introduce a new young writer (like Damon, Cowley or Burke) by yielding up an entire issue to selections from and critical discussions of his work. Such an issue, Cowley dreamed, would be "practically equivalent to publishing a book," and that in the cheapest possible way. He had already solicited support for the project from several people in Boston (including Aiken and Snow) and was convinced the venture was "both serious and feasible."²⁴ In the end, however, as Cowley's energies were channeled into more profitable directions, his interest in the project petered out and nothing came of it. But the ambition was symptomatic and would rear its head in the near future.

From Cambridge Cowley kept one eye on New York and remained eager to be informed of the personal and artistic vicissitudes of his friends in the Village. Meanwhile, he was discovering a congenial aesthetics in the verse of Alexander Pope, with whose satirical wit and strict yet elegant diction he felt affinity. On March 25 he announced that he was

"meditating the establishment of a new classicism;" it would consist of a set of maxims related to, yet also "in direct opposition to" Pope's. As yet Cowley's conception of a new classicism remained imprecisely defined, and chiefly a matter of emphasis on formalist aspects. It would involve "a certain attendance to form," in particular a "perfect abandonment" of conventional poetic diction and rhetorical devices. Classicism to Cowley was not "a matter of any particular rules, but just of Rules:" "No more wild flights of fancy, no more exaggerated ego."²⁵

To exemplify his "theories"--in reality less an aesthetic theory than a rationalized poetic tendency--Cowley set to work on a unified sequence of poems which, in ironic tribute to Masters, he conceived of as "a Cambridge Spoon River." The series was to be opened by "From the Diary of a Restoration Gentleman," a sonnet winking at Dryden and Pope, the ending of which would serve as an ironic epigraph to the entire sequence: "I wonder if such fops as I shall live / Such stupid lives two centuries from now." He projected a poem on The Common Cupboard, on student life in Randolph Hall, and one entitled "C₂H₅OH," the chemical formula for ethyl alcohol. In March 1918 the Advocate printed two poems from Cowley's "Boston Anthology." The first was an ironic dramatic monologue on Louisburg Square, the place Robert Lowell later would describe as "the cynosure of old historic Boston's plain-spoken, cold roast elite--the Hub of the Hub of the Universe."

Tonight we'll climb the slopes of Beacon Hill
Among the elms of other days, and see
Where the staid houses of our elders still
Are sleeping in colonial chastity.²⁶

The second poem placed the whole ambience of Cambridge student life in a wider, global perspective by contrasting its carefree irresponsibility with the reality of the war in France. Mingling nostalgia for the peaceful atmosphere of Cambridge with an awareness of its ultimate triviality in the light of the war, the poem was planned as the concluding one in the series.

Sentimental
Jouaignes, June 1917

In Cambridge now, the late spring recitations
Are closing, and the freshmen seek the Nip,
Or hang around the Widow's for a tip

On how to pass the June examinations.

Some find excuse for parties, but the wise
Study within the fastness of their room:
Girls pass in couples through the Cambridge gloom
And make one restless with their questioning eyes.

One laughs today, and thinks that anyhow
Next week he'll straighten up and be more sober.
One's friends are making plans for next October,
And packing endless trunks in Cambridge now.

Outside my dugout, starshells flame and sizzle,
And near the lines a few stray shells are falling;
I try to sleep, and slumber off recalling²⁷
The elms of Cambridge in a summer drizzle.

While Cowley was struggling to rekindle a new classicism, his enthusiasm for French poetry was fanned by a pioneering article by Ezra Pound. In The Little Review of February 1918 Pound introduced fourteen French poets to an American public, mostly by copious presentations of their work--Jules Laforgue, Tristan Corbière, Arthur Rimbaud, Rémy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Emile Verhaeren, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Stuart Merrill, Laurent Tailhade, Francis Jammes, Jean Moréas, André Spire, Charles Vildrac, and Jules Romains. Of these Pound judged Corbière, Rimbaud and Laforgue to be "permanent," De Gourmont and Tailhade "permanent, or at least reasonably durable," and Romains "indispensable, for the present at any rate." Cowley had already made the acquaintance of most of these poets in France or through Damon and owned Poètes d'Aujourd'hui, a two-volume collection of contemporary French verse by Van Bever and Léautaud. But Pound, Cowley recalled, was "a marvelous impressario" and had "an assured manner that overwhelmed his readers." His 1918 article for The Little Review, Cowley felt, had "a lasting influence on younger American poets." Spurred on by Pound, Cowley tried to obtain the works of several of the French poets in Boston. Finding most of them unavailable he appealed to Burke to make a "pilgrimage of New York" for him and, "at any price," buy copies of Tailhade's Poèmes Aristophaniques, Jammes' Le Triomphe de la Vie and the complete works of Rimbaud. Rimbaud and Tailhade, he eulogized, had "a tremendously dirty view of life" and delighted in the sacrilegious, the perverse and obscene. He described Tailhade as "a poet of barrooms, old women with ulcers on their anuses . . . old men whom the exhilaration of a shower bath sets running after little girls, the third sex, and other matters of

the sort." Such, Cowley felt, were "quite legitimate poetic subjects" and not at all irreconcilable with his demand for a classical control of form.²⁸

In April 1918 The Harvard Advocate printed a long poem by Cowley which suggested that his criticism of modernity in American writing easily took the form of parody. In "A Theme with Variations"--its very title implied an Aiken-like effort at musical analogy--Cowley treated the same poetic theme in four different ways, each of them parodying a specific "modern" mode. One section ridiculed the rank and luxuriant Oriental mysticism of "the Spectric School," another recast the poem in a mode of free verse favored by Joseph Kling's Greenwich Village magazine The Pagan. A third section parodied the treatment the theme would have received at the hands of William Carlos Williams, though it did so "with apologies:"

I wish I could pass out
lie with my toes towards the daisies
it must be cool even now
down there.

Next autumn
there'll be wind, frost,
biting rain.

I'll be peppy.
August is like last night's
Stale Pilsener.

The parodic sting of the opening section ("As Written by Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay on Her Typewriter") was not assuaged by any such apology:

My thoughts had festered in the heat
Three months; I could not do a thing.
The pavement boiled beneath my feet
Three months; I could not even sing
And wondered what the fall would bring.

But yesterday at dusk, the lost
North wind sprang up after a rain,
And when I woke, I saw the frost
had patterned lacework on the page,
And on my lips were songs again.²⁹

The poetry of Edna Millay, Cowley wrote to Burke at the end of April, was "tremendously overrated . . . she borrows her freshness from the modern Celts and her charm from Sara Teasdale." Her verse struck Cowley as little more than an effusion of "baby talk;" what intellectual substance

it possessed disappeared "with a little analysis." Millay's poem "Renaissance," which in 1912 had won the Lyric Year poetry prize, he sneered at as "pantheism grown senile." Cowley saw a good deal of Edna Millay and her sisters when he moved in the circles of the Provincetown Players, but he had little or no "intellectual contact" with her. "Her great admirers were somewhat older or younger," he recalled. "'We' regarded her as a conservative in poetry, and ourselves as radicals."³⁰

Cowley had reason enough to be happy at Harvard. In Randolph Hall he lived "en gentilhomme" and among the Harvard littérateurs he was attaining a position approximating prominence. One of his professors, Roger B. Merriman ("a swell and an Anglophile"), having invited his class to his home on Brattle Street for an evening of formal discussion and drinks, had been impressed by Cowley's gift of the gab. Merriman's assistant, Frederic Schenk, who had earlier been instrumental in arranging Cowley's commission to write war reportages, continued to feel "a great enthusiasm" for his work. Schenk was a man "very strong in the social world" of Harvard and acted as a kind of advisor to the Signet Society, a prestigious literary club; he now passed down word that Cowley was to be cultivated. In late February Cowley was taken to lunch at the Signet by Tim Whittlesey, a young Harvard poet who had been with him at Jouaignes, and introduced to "the sons of various millionaires, who talked of going horseback riding just before tea." Though he did not expect to be nominated for membership, the event brought home to him that the snobbery he hoped to have "conquered" was still "quite powerful." During the semester he attended various social affairs, including two punches given by the Lampoon and the Crimson, at which the alcoholic consumption resembled "the bowsing of the ancient Saxons." The private plays performed by the new candidates for membership catered to Cowley's taste for vulgarity; they contained, he told Burke, "some of the wittiest smut I have ever read."³¹

Moving in Harvard's social and literary limelight, Cowley eventually "passed muster:" in April he was elected President of The Harvard Advocate. During his absence in France the Advocate had suffered a crisis which had led to a fight on the board and the resignation of four of the editors. Though it had managed to stay afloat, upon his return to Harvard Cowley had found the magazine "in a bad way" and hardly up to the level of his high-school literary monthly. With most of his former editorial

colleagues serving in the army Cowley was one of the few writers left who possessed "somewhat of an established reputation," and the remainder of the Advocate board, including its secretary Jake Davis, now looked to him as its potential savior. At a meeting of the Advocate board on April 26 Cowley was deputized to run the paper and offered the Presidency. "The whole affair made me feel a hundred percent more cheerful," he reported to Burke. "I always wanted to run a paper. No doubt it will be just as rotten as ever, but inevitably my opinion of it will go up."³²

By early May he was firmly in the Presidential seat. To breathe new life into the magazine Cowley enlisted the help of Foster Damon and John Brooks Wheelwright. With their assistance he "struck a blow for the Moderns" by inviting Amy Lowell to read her latest poems at a smoker given by the Advocate on May 2, 1918. Some weeks later Miss Lowell recalled the meeting in a letter to Richard M. Hunt: "I was, as usual, smuggled into an upper chamber, and kept quiet with cigars while they heckled me in true undergraduate fashion. I think I held my own; I tried to." One of her chief challengers was Donald B. Clarke, a homosexual poet who, under the pseudonym of Richard Ashton, would later occasion a notorious controversy among the editors of Secession. Joseph Auslander read his poem "Whither?," which had just won the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize, an honor for which Cowley had also unsuccessfully competed. Miss Lowell, Cowley recalled, was undaunted by any of the attacks: "wreathed in smoke, [she] crushed the hecklers as if with bolts from a fat thundercloud."³³

Editing The Harvard Advocate suited Cowley perfectly. It fitted his pragmatic bent and gave him an opportunity to develop his talents for organization and critical selectiveness. Moreover, it taught him the habit of watching out for new and potentially exciting poets. Years later he recalled how, as editor of the Advocate, he "kept one eye cocked" for Stephen Vincent Benét, then "the bright star not only of Yale but of all the Eastern colleges" and the proud producer of two undergraduate books of poetry. Though he continued to correspond about his projected postwar Sansculotte with James Light and Royall Snow, his enthusiasm for the venture was mostly transferred to the concrete problems of running a Harvard paper. By May 25 the earlier project seemed to have lost most of his interest: "I think the Advocate promises more fun, even if it is a priori condemned to be no Seven Arts." Still, he was determined to make

the Advocate into "a whooping good paper."³⁴

Cowley's plans for the summer included a rural walking trip and a few weeks of fishing and canoeing in June with Kenneth Burke, before going off to six weeks of military camp on July 1. In mid-June Cowley hiked with Foster Damon to a small hilltop cabin near Candor, New York, where Burke would join them later. Unexpectedly, the cabin, which was owned by Jim Butler, became the location of a literary hoax, one which brought into play all of Cowley's and Damon's talents for parody and had an amusing aftermath involving three of America's most distinguished poets at the time. It originated as a countermove to the Spectra hoax, a literary sensation of the year 1916, which had reached the frontpage of several newspapers. A book called Spectra had purported to present the work of a new literary school founded by two Pittsburgh poets, Emanuel Morgan and Anne Knish. For a while the book was considered a serious contribution to American poetry. It was solemnly reviewed in The New Republic by Witter Bynner and some of Morgan's and Knish's verse appeared in Others and The Little Review. The secret was let out by Martyn Johnson in The Dial for April 25, 1918, and the names of the poets were disclosed as the pseudonyms of Witter Bynner and Arthur Davison Ficke; they had cast their objections against modernism (in particular the Imagism of Amy Lowell) in the form of a parody of its experimental poetic techniques. An interview with Bynner in the New York Sunday Times for June 2 had proclaimed the complete success of the hoax. Judging the joke to be "a victory for the Ancients," Cowley and Damon plotted a Modern counterattack, thinking "it would be fun to see if the hoaxer couldn't be hoaxed."³⁵

In a single day, June 15, 1918, they ground out the complete works of an imaginary poet, variously dubbed "the plowboy poet of Tioga County" and "the bard of the rushing Catatonk." Cowley invented an appropriate name, Earl Roppel, and provided the country background of what approximated a poetic alter ego. Adopting the colloquial rhythms and clumsy syntax of Roppel's unsophisticated country speech, they composed a letter to Witter Bynner, then a member of the English Department at the University of California at Berkeley:

My dear Mr. Bynner: I venture to write you to express my profound admiration of your book Grenstone Poems [1917]. . . . I got your book out of the free library at Owego and read it all through that night and I like it very much though I do not understand it all. It gives you such a picture of life. Now, Mr. Bynner, what I want to say is this: I write some and I feel I write different from most. . . . There is no one here who I can show my poems to. All my friends would laugh and their not the kind of poems to show the preacher because sometimes I fear I am not as strong in my faith as I should. . . . I always hoped someday I would get to the city for the schooling I need. But I felt that I had to stay on the farm and help out my folks.

And now I am drafted and have to leave next week. This seems to cut off all that my life has been. Before I go I would like to have the opinion of someone I feel knows what poetry is on my poems. . . . Please say what you think because I know they are not as elegant as they would be if I put more time on them but I feel I should write about what I know.

The letter was accompanied by a sheaf of Roppel's poems. His ghostwriters, Cowley later recalled, had tried to "adumbrate the utterly inane" and to burlesque the "false innocence" of Bynner's lyric poetry. Each wrote about half of the poems, though Cowley retrospectively rated Damon's contributions higher than his own, on account of Damon's "gift for mischievous parody." One of Roppel's poems, "Moonlight," opened with one of Damon's startling images--"This one I wrote after reading your book," Roppel commented to Bynner:

Last night when I was in our surrey,
Driving home with my best girl,
I saw the moon run down the fence-row,
Like a fat squirrel,

The horse stopped at the darkest turning
When no one that passed by could see
Although the moon hung like a lantern
From a long branch in the tree.

And when the cold snowflakes are falling
I'll think of that fair eve in June,
When we three were alone together,
I and Lucy and the moon.

Another poem, "Memories," comprised a quasi-imagistic vignette of the rural poet's mother:

I think of my mother

As moving toward the kitchen door,
The dirty water circling in her dishpan
Yet I find she possessed
A book with flower-stained leaves.

Still another poem showed the poet philosophically musing after a long,
toilsome day on the farm:

At night I sit beside the stove,
So tired I cannot see.
But at my plowing all the day
The great thoughts come to me.

They say that men have dreamt [sic] strange dreams
In mansions in the city,
And I am not as rich as they,
Nor am I half as witty.

Yet all the day in the hot sun
Visions come crowding strong as death,
As sweet as those that Jezus had
When he was young at Nazareth.

Shortly after the rural bard had been conceived, his begetters were joined by Kenneth Burke and Berenice Abbott. Judging that the latter's handwriting carried exactly the "unformed, ingenuous" suggestion of Earl Roppel's, Cowley and Damon enlisted her in the poetic plot and persuaded her to copy out the plowboy poet's verse and letter. They revised the letter to Bynner on minor points and on June 28 sent it to Amy Lowell, shifting their target from the Ancients to one of the Moderns. In addition to such fine specimens of the modern pastoral as Bynner had received, Miss Lowell was the recipient of a poem written by Foster Damon as a pastiche of her free verse style, entitled "Venice"--Roppel's comment: "I wrote this after reading the City of Falling Leaves which I liked."

O Venice!
Venice of the seventeen hundreds!
Cocked hats and carnivals and sonnets in strange pattern.
Did they use steel plows
in Venice?
Or did the peasants scratch the ground
With wooden sticks?
I am forgetting that only the gondolas
Plowed the canals
There was no stoney soil
that you tilled
Only the still sea

I wish for the city of waters
All day at work in the
 parched cornfield
And for the freedom of the carnival,
At night in the shifty kitchen
Venice! Masks! Stilettoes!

A similar letter was sent to Conrad Aiken. There the jokers left off and soon after the company scattered, Cowley to enter military camp, Damon to carry out an assignment with the Red Cross, Burke to work in a shipyard. Any letters for Earl Roppel, they instructed the postmaster at Candor, were to be forwarded to 86 Greenwich Avenue in New York, Burke's address in the Village.³⁶

If part of Cowley's purpose had been to put his older mentors' literary judgment to the test, he achieved a greater success than he had bargained for: all three of the recipients of Earl Roppel's verse were wholly taken in. Aiken's was the first response to reach them; he expressed "a measured critical appreciation" of Roppel's talents, recommended Keats and Tennyson, and enclosed a copy--inscribed "Earl Roppel from Conrad Aiken, July 8, 1918"--of Palgrave's Golden Treasury. Amy Lowell's response evinced more excitement and may well have come as a shock to her Harvard protégés, both of whom entertained a high respect for her critical faculties. On August 20, 1918, she wrote to Earl Roppel offering detailed criticism of the poems, which she found "most excellent for a beginner" and "distinctly of the modern type." She seriously separated out the original from the weak and commonplace elements and urged Roppel to study the principles of versification and "modern" poetry criticism such as could be found in her own Six French Poets and Tendencies in Modern American Poetry. She asked Roppel's permission to submit the poems to Poetry and felt confident Miss Monroe would accept them.³⁷

Witter Bynner's response exceeded all expectations, though at first, with no letter from Bynner forthcoming, the hoax seemed to have miscarried. Finally, in July 1920, Cowley revealed the nature of the joke in an article for the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post, entitled "The Real Earl Roppel--The Brief and Meteoric Career of the Genius of the Catatonk." The hoax, he explained, had been born of the "happy boredom" of a rural summer, its parents two young poets wishing to "bamboozle" the authors of the Spectrist school and eager to expose their

common poetic abuses: a false simplicity, easy quatrains and facile rhymes ("roses" and "posies," "flowers" and "bowers").³⁸ It was upon reading Cowley's revelation that Bynner wrote him a letter, returning Roppel's poems and disclosing the full extent of his efforts to locate Earl Roppel.

Upon receiving the poet's oeuvre Bynner had written several letters to Roppel in Candor, New York, offering criticism and advice on how to get the poems printed, but his letters were returned from the Greenwich Village address to which they had been forwarded, marked "No such person." Bynner persevered and wrote for information about the poet to the Postmaster at Candor, the Authors' League of America, and the Librarian of the Free Library at Owego, ten miles from Candor. At the end of November the Librarian informed Bynner that no Earl Roppel had ever borrowed books from her Library and that her enquiries with the superintendent of schools at Candor and several local residents had yielded no result.³⁹ Bynner proceeded undaunted and showed Roppel's poems to his colleagues in the English Department at Berkeley, who agreed that their "freshness" and "simplicity" might have been worthy of Robert Burns. Professor Arthur Farwell of the Music Department was so charmed by one of the poems, "Sunset," that he was eager to secure Roppel's permission to set it to music.

Flag of our country, strong and true,
The sky is rosy with your bars;
But as they fade it turns to blue
And radiant with your stars.

And as I watch the setting sun,
I call to God apart,
"Give me the soul of Washington,
And give me Lincoln's heart."

Bynner again wrote to Roppel, asking permission on Farwell's behalf and suggesting that the poet stipulate his share of the monetary returns. In April of 1919, with as yet no sign of Roppel's existence, Bynner solicited the help of Louis J. Stellan of the San Francisco Bulletin, which soon featured a story about the case: "Bynner Seeks Lost Mystery Poet in N. Y.." The article included several of Roppel's poems, Farwell was quoted characterizing "Sunset" as "the best patriotic song-poem in America" and Bynner came out with the verdict that "Earl Roppel's letter

and verses have a freshness and sincerity which make it impossible for me to believe someone is trying to play a joke on me." The writer of the article agreed that "a marvelously clever man alone could counterfeit them." Though a closer look at the New York address led Bynner to suspect that one of the Washington Square bohemians was trying to get even with the originator of the "Spectrist" school--for a while he suspected Edna St. Vincent Millay--he continued to believe that the poems were "the genuine products of unspoiled bucolic genius." Bynner reputedly was "losing sleep over the ethics of the thing" and Farwell was "tearing his hair" over the moral right to proceed without Roppel's permission, but the poem (retitled "The Flag") was set to music and sung by a chorus of 3000 trained voices to a huge San Francisco audience. The San Francisco Bulletin continued to cherish its mystery poet--soon a writer named Zoe Burns orated in its pages: "Ever since I read the story and some of the work of Witter Bynner's lost poet, I've been wondering about the lad who had such a freshly interesting outlook on life from the narrow confines of a little New York hamlet and to whom the great dreams came thronging while he plowed the fields. . . . And I'm wondering if the war took that fresh fine almost-girlish sweetness out of him and made him bitter as it has so many of our youths. . . . Was the heart of him smitten by the thunder of war? And the melody of his spirit silenced by its horrors? Was perchance his very life blown out like a candle in the blast?"⁴⁰

Through 1920 Witter Bynner pursued the plowboy poet. In January he wrote to the War Department in Washington, D. C., explaining that Roppel's verse was "of such remarkable beauty that I could not believe it the work of the country boy he purported to be." He hoped that the boy could be identified from records in the War Office, but no record of Roppel's enlistment in the army within the last six years could be found. Undaunted, Bynner wrote similar letters of inquiry to the Commanding General of the U. S. Marine Corps, the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation at the Navy Department, and finally to the landlord of "186" Greenwich Avenue--all to no avail.⁴¹ When, soon after, Bynner read Cowley's disclosure in the New York Evening Post, he communicated with Cowley in a spirit of good sportsmanship and confessed to having found the entire affair "extraordinarily amusing." A good loser, Bynner expressed his appreciation of Cowley's own verse and formally invited him to join the Poetry Society in New York which, as its President, he was trying hard to

revitalize. As appears from a letter Cowley wrote to Amy Lowell upon hearing from Bynner, he was pleased with the belated success of his hoax. Bynner, he told Amy Lowell, had "fallen" for Roppel's verse "like ten tons of lead off the top of the Woolworth Building. . . . Earl Roppel, I think, is becoming a huge and legendary figure." Some years later Bynner confessed that he had "never ceased regretting" the plowboy poet's death; he felt that Cowley, in spite of his satirical intentions, had produced "some damn fine poetry." Roppel, Cowley agreed in 1923, was "a nice experiment and he deserves to be resurrected."⁴²

In July and August of 1918⁴³ Cowley spent six weeks in the Harvard barracks of the R. O. T. C., taking a summer course in military science which consisted of "mostly sham battles and bayonet drill." In the fall he returned to Cambridge, but was prevented from taking up his regular studies when the increasing demands of the war persuaded the U. S. government to put all college students in uniform. As a result Harvard opened in the fall with "everyone but the near-sighted, the flat-footed and the very young" in the Students' Army Training Corps.⁴⁴ Released from serious study Cowley spent the last two months of the war in what appears to have been a frolicsome mood of carousal with Foster Damon and Jack Wheelwright. One evening in September Wheelwright was arrested for driving his Model-T Ford in the streetcar reservation on Commonwealth Avenue and Cowley spent a night with him in Brighton Jail. For a week he stayed with Damon and laid plans for the Advocate. On September 23 the S. A. T. C. demanded his presence, "shutting off all joy and leaving lamentation in its stead." Two days later Cowley was a corporal and shortly after handed in his application for the Field Artillery Officers' Training School at Camp Taylor, near Louisville, Kentucky. On October 19 he learned he had been accepted at Camp Taylor. That afternoon he wandered about Boston with Wheelwright and Damon, drunk. They fell asleep in the upstairs lounge of the Harvard Club and, the next morning, had breakfast at the Copley. In late October, before entering military camp, Cowley spent an "ecstatic" week with Damon, Wheelwright and Susan Jenkins in New York, sleeping little, dancing, and drinking so much that his nerves were "positively susceptible to the slightest sensation." He

attended a performance of Tolstoy's Redemption, frequented Luke O'Connor's saloon in the Village and for most of the week felt "very much the genius and the mystic."⁴⁵

Cowley's elation was intensified by news from Amy Lowell. Since the summer Miss Lowell's literary patronage had taken the pragmatic form of an endeavor to place some of Cowley's poems with literary magazines, a service she performed for several of her youthful satellites. At the end of July she reported her failure to sell Cowley's poems to Elizabeth Cunning of the North American Review and announced she would try to place them with Poetry or The New Republic. Should she fail, she promised to go to New York in person and read Cowley's verse aloud to the respective editors, a practice she had found "an efficacious way of placing things" ("Amy could read pretty good poems as if they were masterworks," Cowley observed in 1936). On October 24 she informed Cowley that Harriet Monroe had accepted three of his poems and advised him to accept Monroe's suggestions for changes as the most expedient way of getting into Poetry. Once Cowley had attained an "established position," she reasoned, he could afford to refuse such suggestions. Cowley promptly wrote to Miss Monroe, expressing his pleasure at her acceptance of his poems and giving her "carte blanche" for any changes. That same day, on November 1, he dashed off a short note to Miss Lowell from the Wallace Building in Pittsburgh, congratulating her on her "ability as a salesman. You have sold the impossible--namely three of my poems to Harriette [sic] Monroe. She offered only twenty dollars, which seems niggardly, but no poet seems able to make his own terms--with one conspicuous exception."⁴⁶ On his own strength Cowley managed to get two of his war poems printed in Youth : Poetry of Today, a magazine started in October 1918 by Royall Snow, Jack Merten and Donald B. Clarke. Besides Cowley's verse it published contributions by Aiken, Fletcher, Lowell and E. A. Robinson. In November The Harvard Advocate printed "Bayonet Drill," a page of verse consisting of a sonnet by Cowley and one by Damon, a former bayonet instructor. Cowley's sonnet, despite its occasional crudities, effectively satirized the fake battles fought in the S. A. T. C.:

Our bayonet instructor told us that
A short two inches of cold steel was plenty
To kill an enemy--I felt thereat
Like a young hero out of G. A. Henty.

"The throat, the stomach"--he went on--"one thrust"--
Scowling at us ferociously, and bunching
His adjectives like bullets, till the lust
For blood came on me, and for gristle scrunching

And the sour smell of men at exercise
Poisoned my nerves and passions, and I grew
Into a savage, who, with bloodshot eyes
Charged at the signal for some harmless Jew,

That, with a crazed dependence on his gun,
Stood glaring at me like a fat-paunched Hun.⁴⁷

Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, found Cowley at Camp Taylor. At first he was caught up in the exhilarating sense of relief that came with the end of the war. "We had come through, we were still alive, and nobody at all would be killed tomorrow." For a while it actually seemed possible that democracy had really triumphed and Wilsonian ideals been realized. Soon, however, as the mood of joyful intoxication passed, the debacle of Versailles and Wilson's Fourteen Points would bring home to Cowley and his literary friends that the "composite fatherland" of international democracy was rapidly "dissolving into quarreling statesmen and oil and steel magnates." Awaiting formal demobilization, Cowley was prevented from resuming his Harvard studies. Instead he drifted to New York, "the homeland of the uprooted."⁴⁸ For the next ten months he resided in Greenwich Village, before returning to Cambridge to complete his university education in the fall of 1919. The time he spent in the Village--"The Long Furlough" as he dubbed it in *Exile's Return*--was anything but an academic vacation or a professional sinecure. The period marked his first confrontation with the practical and social circumstances attending the artistic life, with problems which, in the sheltered milieu of Harvard, had barely existed. College had habituated him to the decorum of the literary life by fanning and focusing his ambitions, providing easy outlets for publication, allowing him to test his poetic and editorial talents and permitting him to relish, within the limitations of its literary ambience, the joys of a certain prominence as a writer. The next ten months would confront Cowley with the necessity of finding a congenial social position as an American writer. His endeavors would take the form of a painful struggle to strike a balance between the distractions of bohemian living and the professional practice of the writer's trade, of an attempt to accommodate his ideals of the literary

life to the practical realities of living in American society.

Freshly demobilized, Malcolm Cowley joined the bands of young aspirants in the arts who came flocking to Greenwich Village in the immediate aftermath of the war. In 1919 the maze of crooked streets and alleyways to the south of West Fourteenth Street still retained much of its prewar reputation as a laboratory for new values and free life-styles; a veritable "caravansary for young talents seeking the promised land," it remained the best springboard to the larger literary world.¹ When Cowley went to live in the Village, he did so without any intention of becoming a bohemian Villager. He went there, in effect, because the Village seemed to offer a most congenial and contagious ambience for the life of literature. Living was cheap and rents were low; Cowley recalled one could "occupy a hall bedroom for two or three dollars weekly and rent the unfurnished top floor of a rickety dwelling for thirty dollars a month." The Village, also, promised the companionship of literary friends committed to modern writing and persuaded of the need to consort together in the face of hampering social and moral conditions. New York, moreover, seemed "the only city where a young writer could be published."² Countless little magazines mushroomed in and around the Village, providing aspiring writers with an indispensable outlet and a sustaining sense of an audience. New publishers like B. W. Huebsch, Mitchell Kennerley, Alfred Knopf, Albert and Charles Boni, Horace Liveright, were showing an increasing hospitality to modern writing.

But the immediate reality of life in the Village was inglorious and discouraging. Though Cowley had come to pursue his literary apprenticeship, it took some months for him to adjust to the practical realities of postwar life. The war had left him with "a vast unconcern for the future and an enormous appetite for pleasure." Released from active service, he lingered in the intoxicating mood of an extended

soldier's leave and plunged headlong into the distractions of Village life. The cost of living having doubled because of wartime inflation, Cowley became, in his own words, a member of "the proletariat of the arts," subsisting on scanty meals and borrowed money, meanwhile feverishly enjoying himself and jeopardizing his health.

You woke at ten o'clock between soiled sheets in a borrowed apartment; the sun dripped over the edges of the green windowshade. On the dresser was a half-dollar borrowed the night before from the last guest to go downstairs singing: even at wartime prices it was enough to buy breakfast for two--eggs, butter, a loaf of bread, a grapefruit. When the second pot of coffee was emptied a visitor would come, then another; you would borrow fifty-five cents for the cheapest bottle of sherry. . . . Dinner provided itself, and there was always a program for the evening. On Fridays there were dances in Webster Hall attended by terrible uptown people who came to watch the Villagers at their revels and buy them drinks in return for being insulted; on Saturdays everybody gathered at Luke O'Connor's saloon, the Working Girls' Home; on Sunday nights there were poker games played for imaginary stakes and interrupted from moment to moment by gossip, jokes, plans; everything in those days was an excuse for talking. There were always parties. . . . Eight hours' foresight was sufficient.³

That spring of 1919 Cowley suffered badly in the notorious epidemic of Spanish influenza, which the year before had carried off Randolph Bourne as one among its many victims. His physical resistance drastically weakened by a life of poverty and hunger, Cowley was hit hard by the flu; for a while his health was in a critical state. Years later he recalled how Lionel Moise, a reporter on the New York American, had virtually saved his life when he was "delirious" with influenza: "he cradled me in his arms as if I were a rag doll and carried me into the hospital."⁴ The flu left Cowley "weak in body, clear in mind, revolted by humanity" and by the life he led. Out of the hospital, he surveyed his "blank prospects" and realized he could not go on living "on borrowed money, on borrowed time, in a borrowed apartment." There was no longer an army or university to shelter him from the responsibilities of an independent life. A young writer possessed of literary dreams but without money, Cowley was out on his own and would have to pay for his next meal himself.⁵

Such considerations received a special urgency from a change in his personal situation. During the spring he had fallen in love with a

Greenwich Village artist, Marguerite Frances Baird. He had first met Peggy Baird around Christmas 1918 at a party at 86 Greenwich Avenue, the home of James and Susan Light, and soon after had moved into Peggy's Village apartment, where the two began "living in sin without paying the rent for our room."⁶ Peggy Baird was born in 1890, the daughter of an impecunious jeweler in Babylon, Long Island. After attending the Art Students League, she had married Orrick Johns, a one-legged poet from St. Louis, who in 1912 had caused a poetic tempest when The Lyric Year, an annual anthology of outstanding verse, awarded its \$500 first prize to his poem "Second Avenue," bypassing Edna St. Vincent Millay's superior "Renascence." Johns' arrival in the Village coincided with Floyd Dell's and for a while they shared a room on the south side of Washington Square. Johns later consorted with the circle of poets gathered about Alfred Kreymborg's Others.⁷

Peggy Johns, as she was familiarly known among the artists of the Village, had been much at home in the flexible and open climate of the prewar Village. By nature a free and independent spirit, she sided with many of the causes championed by the New Women, fighting for freedom and equality and wilfully breaking through middle-class conventions by smoking in public, drinking heavily, and dressing in "masculine" clothes or exotic, loosely flowing robes. Emancipation seemed to come naturally to the opinionated, easygoing Peggy Johns. Reputedly one of the first Village women to bob her hair, she mocked conventional notions of femininity and, without being a radical feminist, insisted on woman's right to economic independence. "A woman in these days can't afford to be feminine unless some nice kind of man has an income of ten thousand to spend on her," she wrote to John Brooks Wheelwright in 1921. "A good majority of the present day women have got to be ready to face any emergency and to stand on their own feet at any moment."⁸ In the autumn of 1917 Peggy Johns and Dorothy Day, her closest friend, had gone to Washington, D. C., with a band of representatives of the National Women's Party, to picket the White House. They had been arrested and imprisoned in a Federal jail for several weeks, during which they had gone on hunger strike and had been treated brutally.⁹

Though Peggy had shown some talent as a student under Robert Henri at the Art Students League, she appears to have been more at ease with the disorderly freedom of bohemian living than with the discipline of art.

She had a wide acquaintanceship among the writers, editors and artists of the Village and was a popular drinking companion to many of them, including the reticent Eugene O'Neill. "She never really learned to draw," Cowley recalled, "but she met everybody in the Village, all the best artists." A cartoon by Herb Roth, picturing a session of the Liberal Club in 1914, shows Peggy Baird in the company of Floyd Dell, Alfred Kreymborg, Orrick Johns, Becky Edelsohn, Bernard Gallant, Grace Potter and Paula Holladay.¹⁰

The woman Cowley started courting in the winter of 1918 was a dyed-in-the-wool bohémienne, "tiny and curved with a tilted chin," eight years his senior, whose marriage had just drifted to a close and who seemed perfectly at ease in the new, somewhat intimidating freedom of Greenwich Village. To a pink-cheeked fledgling writer recently released from the shelter of college and the army, an experienced young woman with the tender charms and easy vitality of Peggy Baird must have appeared "frightfully knowing," simultaneously daunting and appealing. To Peggy Baird, a recent divorcee struggling to make an independent living as an aspiring painter and watercolorist in the Village, Cowley must have seemed an ambitious young writer on the make, whose fresh charm and bumptious naivety could not conceal a stubborn determination of purpose and an attractive solidity of character. Possessed of a thick mane of dark hair, a small moustache and shiny, intelligent blue eyes, Cowley made a handsome appearance in the Village--a "burly farm boy who wrote with a very light touch and a pleasant turn of wit."¹¹

What started out as a casual affair in the feverish excitement of demobilized existence grew into a serious commitment over the spring and summer. On August 12, 1919, Malcolm and Peggy were married. Early marriages were not uncommon among Cowley's literary friends. That same year Kenneth Burke married Lillian Mary Batterham, a girl who had come to Greenwich Village from North Carolina. The year after, Matthew Josephson met and soon married Hannah Geffen, a young reporter on the New York American. For a younger generation never really steeped in the rebellious mood of the prewar Villagers the early marriage, so Matthew Josephson believed, was in part "a concerted movement of reaction against la vie de bohème."¹²

Living with Peggy demanded adjustments that threatened to interfere with Cowley's commitment to writing. From the first it was difficult to

find a workable balance between Peggy's freewheeling bohemian habits and the discipline required to fulfill Cowley's ambitions for the literary life. In Life Among the Surrealists Josephson has provided an entertaining glimpse of Cowley's new living conditions as a young, married apprentice writer in the Village:

In her younger days the amusing Peggy was very pretty. Malcolm, as it happened, had very tidy personal habits bred in him by his (partly) Pennsylvania-Dutch forebears. Peggy, however, liked to live in charming disorder. If they were forced to borrow ten dollars in order to eat, she might spend most of it on flowers. She also loved to keep all-night poker games going on in the kitchen of their cold-water flat, which was also its living room. On occasion, I would come in to see Malcolm in the evening and find his home in complete disarray, a noisy game of cards in progress, and soiled dishes, empty wine bottles, and also flowers everywhere about. But in a corner of the kitchen, Malcolm had set up a small table with a portable typewriter and his papers and books. Here everything was beautifully neat and clean, so that his little writing corner was in marked contrast with the rest of the place. At times, he would go to his corner and set to work doggedly—for he had great resolution—while the poker game raged around him all night.¹³

Peggy's frivolous temperament and flexible notions of marital fidelity easily collided with Cowley's need of an orderly life and the more conservative ideas about marriage derived from his middle-class upbringing. Though he had long since taken his distance from his father's Swedenborgianism, Cowley entered upon marriage with a strong sense of responsibility and a deeply ingrained belief in "conjugal love." He felt he was taking upon himself the traditional role of the provider, the responsibility for keeping two persons alive. Never entirely at ease with the sexual experimentalism rampant in the Village, Cowley clung to more conventional notions of married life. Despite Peggy's drinking, her irregular personal habits and her "notoriously unfaithful" behavior over the years, it was only after twelve years that Cowley could bring himself to divorce his first wife.

But if their domestic and marital situation was at times harassing, Peggy Baird was not, Cowley loyally recalled, "a bad wife for a young writer." Inclined to take everything in her stride and to accept people as they came, she did not lay any exorbitant claims on her young husband, but allowed him to pursue his ambitions and inclinations in the way he thought best. Moreover, she was content to share the financial

insecurities attending Cowley's struggles to live by the fruits of his pen and for years got along on "a very meagre family income." It was Peggy, also, who helped Cowley gain a wide literary acquaintanceship in the various circles and coteries in and around the Village.¹⁴

Late in the spring of 1919, while Cowley was slowly recovering from his nearly fatal bout with influenza, Peggy took him on his only visit to Grantwood, New Jersey. There a new locale for the New York avant-garde had begun to spring up around the magazine Others; by 1919 the place was rapidly developing into a full-fledged artists' colony. Since the foundation of their magazine in 1915 Alfred Kreymborg and William Carlos Williams had habitually consorted there with some of the leading poets, painters and critics of the day: Man Ray, Orrick Johns, Walter Arensberg, Marcel Duchamp, Mina Loy, Robert Sanborn and Maxwell Bodenheim. In his Autobiography William Carlos Williams recalled that Cowley, too, was an occasional visitor and even "lived there for a while" with Peggy Johns. Though Cowley was never formally a member of the Others group--none of his poems appeared in the magazine--it was through Peggy that he came to know most of them, with the exception of Arensberg and Emanuel Carnevali.¹⁵

It was again Peggy who helped launch Cowley on his professional reviewer's career by introducing him to persons holding strategic positions in the commercial art and magazine world of New York. "I got started in the trade strictly from hunger," Cowley later wrote. Once a week he visited the offices of The Dial, then still a fortnightly magazine devoted to politics and economics rather than literature and the arts, under the editorial patronage of Martyn Johnson. One of the literary editors was Clarence Britten, a friend of Peggy's; perhaps as an act of homage towards a former girlfriend, he agreed to let Cowley try his hand at reviewing half a dozen novels in fifty to a hundred words a piece. Upon publication the reviews would yield a dollar each. In Exile's Return Cowley has related how he would carry the books to a bench in Union Square, hastily leaf through them, make his notes and, after two or three hours, sell the novels to a secondhand bookseller for thirty-five cents each--"more than the novels were worth." That night the hard-earned meal and cigarettes would be shared with a landlady as destitute as her renters. Next morning he wrote the reviews, then started out "on the search for a few dollars more."¹⁶

Fortunately, the staff of The Dial were hospitable to young poets and reviewers on the make and Cowley was allowed to write a substantial number of what he later regarded as "deservedly anonymous" brief criticisms. Over the year he also wrote a number of longer but still unsigned reviews, as well as surveys or omnibus discussions of the new books of the publishing season, which were printed under such headings as "Notes on New Books," "Books of the Fortnight," or "Casual Comment." Robert Morss Lovett, who had started his term as editor of The Dial in 1918, remembered Cowley as "one of the most engaging" young writers to come to the Dial offices in 1919. Lovett's memory suggests that Cowley may well have been the fastest reviewer on record: "[He] sometimes appeared early in the day to collect no fewer than three volumes for review. At noon the reviews were on hand, the pay check issued, the volumes exposed for sale at Frank Shay's bookshop--and Malcolm was lunching."¹⁷

Cowley's earliest review for The Dial appeared in April 1919, a consideration of The Poets of the Future, an anthology of student verse from ninety-six American colleges. He came down hard on his fellow undergraduate poets. The review forms virtually a compendium of Cowley's critical touchstones at the age of twenty. Except for the verse of Stephen Vincent Benét and "a good piece of Imagism" by Royall Snow, Cowley looked in vain for "the lyrical realism" of Aiken, the "whimsical realism" of Eliot and the "starker realism" of Masters. He complained of the poets' "almost universal conservatism" and their unpardonable "technical carelessness." They were victims, Cowley held, of a mistaken and juvenile conception of poetry, "the theory so assiduously spread abroad by Sara Teasdale and H. L. Mencken--that poets are best when young, and require almost no training." Instead of the sound workmanship of Swinburne and Tennyson Cowley found an epidemic of nursery quatrains, sloppy rhymes and "loose" rather than free verse.¹⁸

If chance occasionally brought Cowley a book or topic that truly commanded his interest, more commonly he was forced to write on subjects not of his own choosing. Though he always approached even his slightest reviews in a spirit of honest workmanship, striving to make them into miniature critical narratives with a life of their own, their interest was necessarily ephemeral and limited. Once in a while an evaluative phrase, an introductory paragraph, or a concluding statement would lift

the review above the merely perfunctory and provide a glimpse of the young critic's maturing insights and opinions. An omnibus review of war novels revealed Cowley's impatience with an exclusive treatment of the "pleasant," "heroic" side of the war; it showed that by 1919 he had come to share his generation's bitterness about the war and unequivocally demanded an unromantic and sincere account of events. He spoke admiringly of Siegfried Sassoon's indignation at "the system that lets war come to pass," but apparently cherished no hopes for a revival of the reformist zeal of the Progressive Era. In another review, discussing a novel by Ida M. Tarbell, he dismissed the muckrakers of those days as a "courageous but rather priggish set," a "gallant lot of crusaders who acted on the assumption that America was Holy Land and Big Business the infidel in possession thereof, but who today seemed as far off and abortive as the *Jacquerie*."¹⁹

Just as in fiction Cowley demanded an "uncompromising truthfulness," honesty of workmanship and "the power to visualize" characters and "make them live," so in poetry he made similar demands of craftsmanship and precision. He applauded the appearance of "a more exact curiosity" about poetry to counteract the damage he felt had been done by the Romantics. "Since the laws that Pope laid down in his *Essay on Criticism* were definitely and successfully broken by the Romanticists, the science of poetry has been hazy and fragmentary. Most people, in fact, have refused even to think of it as a science, and have viewed poets with much the same awe that they would show whales, and have considered them as fortuitous as ambergris." What was needed, Cowley argued, was a professional and scientific study of the principles of poetry and poetic criticism. He observed that "a course in writing poetry . . . still remains to be given" and hoped that a serious study of "poetic exactitudes" would help to furnish "that much-needed article, a new saddle for Pegasus." In January 1921, reviewing a book of verse by Robert Hillyer, Cowley reiterated his plea for a course in what he termed "practical poetics" as indispensable for a proper and mature conception of the art of poetry.²⁰ By repeatedly expressing such sentiments over the next years Cowley helped to swell the chorus of critical voices that ultimately led to the publication of I. A. Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism (1925) and, a decade after Cowley's first plea for such a book, his influential Practical Criticism (1929), which helped to

revolutionize the teaching and understanding of literature and laid the groundwork for the emergence of the New Criticism.

In the early summer of 1919 Cowley's endeavors to keep two persons alive by his pen led him to the offices of The New Republic, where Francis Hackett, its literary editor, was heading a strong and lively book section. Cowley had for some years been an avid reader of The New Republic and, if he seems to have been mildly indifferent to its political concerns, he could not have been unaware of its intellectual prestige.²¹ With as yet no way of knowing how crucial a role the magazine was to play in his future professional career, Cowley carried a square brown notebook filled with clippings of his total oeuvre to date to The New Republic's downtown offices and there confronted Francis Hackett, his precursor as an editor:

Hackett, a big, red-faced Irishman looking like Jupiter in pince-nez glasses, is seated behind a pile of books at a scarred enormous desk that will be my desk ten years later. . . He glances at my little collection of press clippings, reads the brief notices from The Dial, then calls to his assistant, "Miss Updike, perhaps you can find a book for this young man." Taking off his pince-nez, he gives me a lordly smile of dismissal. Miss Updike looks at my cracked shoes, then picks out a novel by Reginald Wright Kaufman that she thinks might be worth five hundred words--or ten dollars, I calculate, at The New Republic's two cents a word. She gives me the book as if she were pouring a saucer of milk for a starved kitten.

By an ironic twist of literary history their relations would be reversed more than a decade later. In the early 1930s Mary Updike worked for some time as assistant to the then literary editor of The New Republic, Malcolm Cowley, until her resignation in 1934. In 1937 Cowley, who as early as 1919 had been impressed by Hackett's gifts as a "stylist," invited him to write for The New Republic in an effort to "re-establish continuities."²²

Cowley's first signed review for The New Republic dealt with Reginald Wright Kaufman's Victorious, a novel about the First World War. Faced with a subject he could speak on with authority, the young reviewer adopted a tone of grandiloquent condescension not wholly warranted by the relative lack of sophistication displayed in the review. He began by accusing contemporary American novelists of timidity: "Even with a subject like the war in front of them, our novelists are cautious. As a

rule the tasks they choose are easy; they confine themselves to the experiences of the individual or the small group. Or if they do select a larger subject, they skim surfaces, hesitating to venture into the deep waters of the epic." Capitalizing upon personal experience Cowley measured the accuracy of Kaufman's picture of the war against his own firsthand observations and found the novel "a signal and magnificent failure." He criticized it as a rhetorical falsification and factual misrepresentation of reality and condemned its hastiness of execution and shoddy workmanship. Kaufman's novel betrayed the sensational muckraking journalist rather than the artist committed to the truth of his vision: "He sees the world through yellow glasses."²³

An occasional review, even if signed and remunerated, was hardly sufficient for two young people to subsist on. Cowley's free-lance efforts yielded at best a single meal a day, and one rather "deficient in proteins and carbohydrates" at that. One morning, crossing Sheridan Square on an empty stomach, he fainted on the sidewalk--all of a sudden the pavement rose and hit him in the face. He scrambled to his feet, spent his last money on a roll and a cup of coffee, and took the incident as a warning. Years later, casting a romantic and nostalgic aura over the reminiscence, he recalled that his sidewalk collapse made him surrender his "pride in living on the underside of society and [his] dream of being a free artisan working at his typewriter as if it were a cottage loom." As he looked back upon his younger self, Cowley was inclined to mythologize his beginnings as a writer by visualizing himself as a worker at the writer's trade, analogous to the words of an old ballad:

When I was a bachelor I lived by myself,
And I worked at the weaver's trade,
And the only, only thing I did that was wrong
Was to woo a fair young maid.

Even though he had done his best to shield his Peggy from "the foggy, foggy dew," as the ballad says, Cowley felt he had been "remiss" as a provider of daily necessities and minor comforts. To make matters worse, his parents, ill-pleased with their son's early marriage to a Village bohémienne, had stopped sending checks. Peggy's friends, too, no longer seemed willing to extend credit and lend her money. Cowley saw himself forced to compromise and find a job.²⁴

Answering want ads he found hack writing jobs of various sorts. They

yielded a meager salary, but they enabled him at least to keep the wolf from the door. Thus, he wrote an occasional article for the New York Central Magazine, a house organ of the New York Central Railroad. For a time he worked as theater editor for The Official Metropolitan Guide, a give-away weekly, for \$12.50 a week; as its dramatic critic he wrote a regular column, "The Week in the Theatre," a job that must have strained his talents for improvisation, since he wrote the reviews "without ever seeing a play, for my boss kept all the tickets." In June he found himself working for Iron Age, a New York industrial magazine, at \$42.50 a week, "a mere bagatelle." Peggy was adding to their income by acting as agent to Clara Tise, an illustrator living with the Cowleys, and collecting a royalty of twenty percent on the proceeds. "We are both of us on the make," Cowley reported to Burke, who had left the city in disgust and gone to spend the summer in Jim Butler's rural cottage in Candor, four hundred miles upstate; "[we] rush about all day, write an hour or so at night, and spend the remaining two hours before bedtime in floundering deeper into debt."²⁵

While Burke was enjoying the pleasure of rural living, Cowley tried hard to reconcile himself to life in his cold-water apartment in an old brick "rat-infested" house at 107 Bedford Street, where flora and fauna were limited to a tiny backyard with "one potato, three rose bushes, a spirea and a Spanish onion," and the stalking presence of three cats. Lionel Moise and Dorothy Day were regular visitors and companions in revelry. When Dorothy Day received a \$100 advance on an unfinished novel about Greenwich Village (The Eleventh Virgin, 1924), the occasion was celebrated riotously. One night a street murder took place in front of the Cowleys' place. Another evening he attended a dancing wake to mourn the approach of Prohibition; among the mourners were Harold Loeb, Alfred Kreymborg, Harold Stearns, Norma Millay, Ivan Opffer, Laurence and Clotilde Vail. On "Prohibition night" he broke the glass door at Luke O'Connor's saloon. Meanwhile, Cowley reported with self-mockery, The Dial had published three of his short reviews, with four more to follow: "Cowley rampant."²⁶ But between domestic disorders, a hectic social life--Peggy's friends, some of them artists, others bums, continuously drifted in and out of the apartment--the demoralizing drudgery of work at Iron Age, and the easy distractions of the city on the eve of Prohibition, it was hard to find time and energy for serious writing.

Between November 1918 and November 1919 only two of Cowley's poems reached print.²⁷ As literature was more and more pushed into a corner, Cowley grew discouraged with the intellectually stunting life he was forced to lead. "Above the eyes, I am a dead man. A little drink, a little sex; kaffeeklatsch and nine hours a day for \$42.50 a week; all that is the round of my existence." As a positive side-effect of work at Iron Age he was beginning to take an interest in the mechanism of printing and could converse "glibly" on linos, monos, widows, shys, pied pages, forms and pica m's.²⁸ Cowley's early interest in the practical processes of printing would grow into a firm belief that the mechanical and economic factors of bookmaking were a legitimate area of concern for the man of letters. His experiences as a struggling writer in the Village helped him gain an understanding of bookmaking as a craft involving the special expertise of an artisan. Throughout his career Cowley would often find occasion to write on the "business" of literature, to review conditions in the publishing world and report on new phenomena (such as the emergence of cheap mass-market paperbacks) affecting the mechanics and economics of what he had learned to think of as "the writing trade."

The immediate prospects of a literary career, however, were dim and disillusioning. What little relief and encouragement could be found came from discussions and communications with his literary friends. Cowley, Burke and Josephson drew sustenance from common miseries and shared ideals. Together, Josephson recalled, they formed a so-called "Anti-Logrolling Society," as a challenge to "the vices of puffing and mutual admiration" rampant in the literary world. The three would compete with each other in writing a sonnet upon a common theme within a fixed time limit and make it "as banal or mock-sentimental as possible." Then they would read aloud and criticize each other's efforts without mercy. Burke, Josephson remembered, was "a master of this vinegarish sort of criticism." He recalled Cowley as "the most resourceful in writing occasional or light verses on a selected subject." Such meetings, jocular and frivolous as they may have been, helped to crystallize the direction of their aesthetic ideals and served to cement their literary friendship: all through their lives, despite occasional fallings-out, they would remain "a trio of loving little friends, who never failed to say their worst for one another."²⁹

When Cowley, from the sober perspective of the 1930s, came to write his semi-autobiographical account of his time in Greenwich Village, he did so in terms that have helped to foster the myth of Greenwich Village as a place of frivolous, irresponsible living, a seat of social and artistic revolt, and a storehouse of avant-garde values and fashions that were later adopted by large segments of the American middle class. But as one who had lived among the rebels and artists of the Village, written a widely accepted account of the history of Bohemia and analyzed the unwritten code of life and culture in the Village, Cowley has perhaps too easily been identified as a full-fledged member of Bohemia, one in accord with the Village ethic of rebellion against middle-class provincialism.³⁰ Though Cowley's account in Exile's Return may have helped to popularize a glamorous and romantic conception of Bohemia, its tone was actually more complex and ambivalent, as he managed to clothe his retrospective analysis in both nostalgia and irony, infusing it with an undertone of emotional endorsement while taking his critical distance. In effect, Cowley was careful to differentiate the mood and experiences of his own age-group from those of the prewar Village rebels. His correspondence of those years reveals his own time in the Village as by no means a happy period. Rather, it was a time of painful and uneasy accommodation to debilitating and frustrating conditions of life and work, a period when the possibility of failure loomed large.

When Cowley first came to the Village, the place was undergoing a metamorphosis which profoundly changed its character and made it less of an ideal refuge for impoverished writers and struggling artists. Not only did wartime inflation force up the cost of living, but greater accessibility increased the Village's commercial potential and drove up the rents and value of real estate. With the Village rapidly becoming a hangout for fakers, eccentrics and exhibitionists, and Prohibition turning it into a place of continuous revelry, the serious artist and old-style bohemian felt increasingly uncomfortable and ill-at-home there. Floyd Dell was representative in lamenting the vulgarization and commercialization of the Village and its reduction to what he called "a sideshow for tourists."³¹

Before the war Village life had been marked by a contagious spirit of

challenge and change. Political radicalism and artistic experimentation had gone hand in hand with a festive ease and flexibility that would be the envy of radicals in the 1930s. "Bohemians read Marx and all the radicals had a touch of the bohemian," Cowley observed. The two strands of rebellion had mingled easily and many had seen no conflict in championing the causes of socialism, anarchism, free love, imagism, birth control, syndicalism, futurism, feminism and free verse alike. The prewar Village, indeed, had a cultural cohesiveness that was lost when the war and the Russian Revolution drove a wedge between the political and aesthetic currents of rebellion. "People were suddenly forced to decide what kind of rebels they were," Cowley observed in Exile's Return; "if they were merely rebels against puritanism they could continue to exist safely in Mr. Wilson's world. The political rebels had no place in it." By 1919 old-style bohemians were speaking nostalgically of "the good old days;" radicals who stayed on were either defeated by the political conservatism and reactionary backlash of the war, or forced to go underground to reemerge at the end of the 1920s.³³

As one of the new arrivals in the Village Cowley was made acutely aware of the difference in mood and outlook between the artists, radicals and bohemians who had lived in the Village before 1917 and those of his own age-group. His generational consciousness, born of his wartime experiences in France, was reinforced as now, for the first time, he began to think consciously of the two age-groups as "they" and "we." In 1919 Cowley found the Village full of what he called "former people," those who had once fought with fervor and idealism against war and for labor, social justice, and female equality, but who now seemed spent and weary, reduced to inactivity and "lamenting the time's decay." The older Villagers, in turn, took a dim and ironic view of the young arrivals, whom, in contemptuous mockery, they dubbed "the Half-Villagers." Cowley's awareness of a generational difference may well have been sharpened by his marriage to Peggy Baird, friend and companion to many of the "former people." A New Villager married to an Old Villager, Cowley's perspective was bound to be amphibian, helping him to gain an inside knowledge while enabling him to retain an outsider's critical distance--a doubleness of perspective that helps to explain the tone of ambivalence in Cowley's treatment of the generations in Exile's Return.³⁴

Cowley was first of all struck by a difference in costume, age and

mood. The older Villagers wore "funny" and unconventional clothes, aiming to deviate defiantly from middle-class standards of dress and decorum, hoping to express a rebellious individualism. The younger Villagers were a fairly homogeneous age-group, all of them in their late teens or early twenties; the "former people" might be anywhere between twenty-three and sixty. Most of the latter had stayed in New York during the war, a choice which, Cowley retrospectively granted, involved "a greater moral strain" than enlistment. As a result, the prevailing mood among the older Villagers, he felt, was one of discouraged cynicism and joyless "middle-agedness"--in 1919 the Village seemed "a conquered country."

From a perspective of the early 1930s, however, Cowley could not help casting an aura of admiration over the older Villagers. He admitted that they, in effect, had been the men and women of true revolt, who had attempted, at the cost of personal suffering and defeat, to "break new trails" in politics, art, morality and religion. They had shown the courage of their convictions and had wanted "to change the world, be leaders in the fight for justice and art, help to create a society in which individuals could express themselves." From a radical perspective, their conjunction of social and artistic ideals had come to seem unexpectedly attractive.

In retrospect Cowley found it difficult to credit his own age-group with similar virtues; by contrast, they seemed conventional and inconspicuous, unadventurous and undefiant. Having worn army uniforms, they were now "content" to wear the unglamorous uniform of the middle class. Instead of the path of revolt, they had "followed the high road." Never having rebelled against authority, whether of parents, church or school, they had rather "avoided issues" and gone their own independent ways without forcing a violent break with their elders. Politically, their opinions were "vague" and posed no revolutionary threat to capitalism; their "belief in political action" destroyed by the war, they held that "society could never be changed by an effort of the will." Though they came out of the war with "an unexpended store of energy," there seemed no dreams or illusions left towards which it could be channeled. Even so, their mood of postwar disillusionment was different from the earlier rebels' bitter cynicism and admixed with a new sense of release and reckless confidence.

We had lost our ideals at a very early age, and painlessly. If any of them survived the war, they had disappeared in the midst of the bickerings at Versailles, or later with the steel strike, the Palmer raids, the Centralia massacre. But they did not leave us bitter. We believed that we had fought for an empty cause, that the Germans were no worse than the Allies, no better, that the world consisted of fools and scoundrels ruled by scoundrels and fools, that everybody was selfish and could be bought for a price, that we were as bad as the others--all this we took for granted. But it was fun all the same. We were content to build our modest happiness in the wreck of "their" lost illusions, a cottage in the ruins of a palace.³⁵

If, as Cowley suggested in Exile's Return, he and his coevals had early lost their illusions, their disenchantment was less the result of the war than of the moral and political debacles of its aftermath. The year 1919, Cowley observed in the late 1920s, signified nothing less than a "crisis" in the history of American civilization. "It was the time when our national credulity was finally exhausted. We were asked to believe that each of us had individually won the war, and thereby made the whole world safe for democracy. We were asked to believe that the country would suddenly become sober and infinitely richer by act of Congress. That bearded communists were the root of all economic evil. That we should pay ten dollars for a hooded nightshirt, and thereby save America for the white Protestant blondes. That great corporations existed only for Service. All this, and a great deal more, we managed to accept. But somehow in the process our whole capacity for belief was damaged beyond repair. An age of disillusionment began, and shows no signs of drawing to a close"--so Cowley felt in 1927.³⁶

From a later perspective than the 1920s and early 1930s, Cowley became increasingly skeptical of the widely current image of his generation as "lost" and "disillusioned." The postwar disillusionment with which his generation so often has been credited, he suggested in A Second Flowering, was, in effect, a badge of dubious distinction more justifiably bestowed on its English and European contemporaries. It was they who, after years of trench warfare, were truly entitled to tragic desperation, who "had a right to be tired and cynical." Paradoxically, Cowley continued, the sense of loss or dislocation felt by his American coevals was "chiefly an attitude to be proclaimed in a style full of bounce." Rather than properly disillusioned Cowley later preferred to see them as "disaffiliated," writers whose "capacity for illusion had not

been destroyed, but merely displaced." They were disillusioned at most in the sense of having lost faith in the possibility of social progress through human control. With the political and moral beliefs of an older generation effectively discredited, they turned from social and public ideals to personal and artistic aims. A whole generation, Cowley felt, retreated into a "new illusion:" that success could be achieved in individual life "without any thought of society," by making money, attaining to fame or creating enduring works of art.³⁷

As Cowley's differentiation between the Older and Newer Villagers suggests, rather than to his own age-group the term "lost" or "disillusioned" was more applicable to an older group of writers, artists and intellectuals. It was they who, in organs like The Masses, The Seven Arts and The New Republic, had been most vocal in their rebellion against a stunting materialism, puritanism and provincialism and who, affirmative in their very dissent, had idealistically exposed the failure of American culture. It was those one-time believers in the possibility of social and political reform and the emergence of a cultural renaissance, who would in time become the truly "disillusioned" of the 1920s.³⁸

In 1919-1920, Cowley later saw, Greenwich Village was already hardening into a bohemian cult, complete with rituals and costumes, a cult which, if it did not actually create the revolution of morals and manners of the postwar years, provided the forms, fashions and standards of conduct that, cleverly exploited by commerce and industry, set the tone for the reckless and gay 1920s. In 1919-1920, indeed, Greenwich Village was fast on its way to become a caricature of its former self, a "doctrine" or "system of ideas"--with a history that could actually be traced to the nineteenth-century France of Théophile Gautier and Henry Murger's glamorizing Scènes de la Vie de Bohème; with adherents that could be ironically listed as a horde of "designers, stylists, trade-paper sub-editors, interior decorators, wolves, fairies, millionaire patrons of art, sadists, nymphomaniacs, bridge sharks, anarchists, women living on alimony, tired reformers, educational cranks, economists, hopheads, dipsomaniac playwrights, nudists, restaurant keepers, stockbrokers and dentists craving self-expression;" most importantly, with underlying assumptions that could be analyzed and summarized, in frivolous mockery and ironic oversimplification, as an itemized list of ideas. The "Greenwich Village Idea," in Cowley's analysis, encompassed

such notions as salvation by the child, self-expression, paganism, living for the moment, liberty, female equality, psychological adjustment and salvation by exile.³⁹

But if such were the ideas and ideals of Bohemia that soon would be claimed as a birthright by the children of the middle class, Cowley and his literary consorts were not at first deeply affected by them. The majority of such ideas they regarded with boredom, skepticism or indifference. Only the hope of "salvation by exile" was one they would soon come to share. In retrospect Cowley was careful to distinguish the inhabitants of "bohemia" from the dwellers on Grub Street, the territory of those struggling to eke out a living with pen or pencil. Bohemia, he observed in Exile's Return, constitutes "a revolt against certain features of industrial capitalism and can exist only in a capitalist society. Grub Street is a way of life unwillingly followed by the intellectual proletariat; bohemia attracts its citizens from all economic classes. . . . Bohemia is Grub Street romanticized, doctrinalized and rendered self-conscious; it is Grub Street on parade." Having come to the Village not to be rebels but to pursue a writing career, Cowley and his friends were first of all "young men on the make, the humble citizens not of bohemia but of Grub Street."⁴⁰

Though 1919 was, in the words of Robert Morss Lovett, a year of "yeast-like fermentation"--the general strike in Seattle had failed, but strikes among the Boston Police, the steel workers and the coal miners had come in its wake and soon led to the eruption of the Red Scare, the Palmer Raids and the deportation of radicals--Cowley appears to have been largely unaffected by the nation's political turbulence and its unsettling social atmosphere. It was not until much later that he saw that, taken together, the events of 1919 constituted a cultural "counterrevolution, one that affirmed the moral dictatorship of congressmen from rural districts and left political power in the hands of businessmen with narrow aims." Reactionary politics, failed moral leadership and general conservatism, Cowley felt in retrospect, had made for a cultural atmosphere in which young writers felt like "an oppressed minority, orphans and strangers in their own country."⁴¹

If, however, during the time he lived in the Village in 1919, Cowley felt alienated from a cultural and social reality he experienced as hostile and uncongenial, he gave only vague and inarticulate expression to such feeling in his correspondence of the time. "And God I am dissatisfied with life," he typically complained to Burke in July. In 1919 Cowley seemed relatively indifferent to politics. The Treaty of Versailles, he felt, was "so monstrous that it was hard to decide--it scarcely seemed worth the labor of deciding--whether or not the treaty should be signed." He did not entertain much hope of altering society and aimed rather to preserve a personal integrity in the realm of art. If he or his friends gave any serious thought to society at all, they regarded it as "a sort of self-operating, self-repairing, self-perpetuating machine . . . an engine whose course they could not direct, whether to glory or destruction." Rather, they found a new hope in the "privilege" of art--"to write a poem in which all was but order and beauty, a poem rising like a clean tower above the tin cans and broken dishes of their days." Vaguely dissatisfied with prevailing cultural and societal conditions, Cowley could thus hope to attain a vicarious sense of mastery and control in the creation of a perfect poem, in the realization of significant form.⁴²

Such impulses drew Cowley more firmly into the orbit of the French Symbolists, whom he had been reading for some years. What attracted him in French Symbolism was partly its high ideal of conscious craftsmanship, partly its anti-social, aristocratic aloofness from the world. Gustave Flaubert, in particular, was quickly appropriated as a new literary hero; in July 1919 Cowley was reading Madame Bovary. Disdainful towards the very reality he was raising into art, Flaubert impressed an always form-conscious Cowley with his "mania for style, architectural form, le mot juste . . . and aesthetic perfection." Flaubert respected his art so highly that he made it into "a sacred calling, a priesthood devoted to the religion of art."⁴³ Flaubert's example--"Art is vast enough to take complete possession of a man"--inspired Cowley to dedicate his best energies to the cultivation of his talents and infused him with an almost sacred sense of literary vocation. Feeling at odds with his native culture, he sought in art the emotional and psychological sustenance, the meaning and direction in his life, which others found in tradition, faith or church. The creed of Symbolism thus provided him with more than an

aesthetic ideal; it also represented a literary ethics and an implicit guide to conduct. Like Josephson and Burke, Cowley, for the time being, was content to model his ideals of the life of art on those of Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Laforgue.⁴⁴

It was in Cowley's poetry that the influence was most apparent. He had already been exposed to French Symbolism during his first two years at Harvard. Ever since the days of what Cowley, taking his clue from Yeats, has called the "tragic generation" of forgotten Harvard poets of the 1890s (George Cabot Lodge, William Vaughn Moody, Philip Henry Savage, Trumbull Stickney), there had been an undercurrent of interest in French Symbolist poetry at Harvard. The interest had been kept alive in part through the efforts of Pierre de Chaignon La Rose, a Harvard instructor and member of the Signet Society, who, Cowley remembered, was "a fairy so notorious that he was still being talked about in 1916."⁴⁵ But it had been the example of T. S. Eliot that had done most to enflame young Harvard poets with enthusiasm for French Symbolist verse. Eliot, after all, was writing the sort of modern poetry they all hoped to write. In December of 1908 Eliot had picked up, in the library of the Harvard Union, Arthur Symons's The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), which had put him on the track of the poets he would strive to emulate. He owed Symons's book "a great debt," he wrote in The Criterion of January 1930: "but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have heard of Corbière." Laforgue, in particular, became for Eliot "the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech." Soon after, Eliot was publishing poems in The Harvard Advocate--"Nocturne" (1909), "Humouresque (After J. Laforgue)" and "Spleen" (both 1910)--that clearly reflected the new influence of Laforgue and that would prompt countless young Harvard poets to desert their former models Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, for the "modern" virtues of Laforgue. In 1915, the year Cowley entered Harvard, Eliot had published perhaps his most distinctly Laforguean poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in Poetry; sixty years later its "tangent" ending still impressed Cowley as "one of the great moments in twentieth-century English poetry."⁴⁶

In the summer of 1919, in particular, Cowley seems to have come under the spell of Jules Laforgue (1860-1887), an early Symbolist poet whose works he had been shown in early 1918 by S. Foster Damon. Partly through

Damon, partly through the writings of Eliot, Pound and Lowell, Cowley had thus made the acquaintance of Laforgue some time before the French poet began to exert a noticeable influence on his verse. In a retrospective essay from 1963 Cowley, taking himself as a historical case in point, recalled how his enthusiasm for Laforgue was shared by many of his fellow poets at the time. Kenneth Burke, for one, for years had been exploring modern French poetry; since leaving Columbia he had been composing "Laforguean complaints and moonstruck rhapsodies in free verse," thus inevitably drawing his closest friend and correspondent towards Laforgue. Though Cowley was yet to meet them, he later learned that Allen Tate, Hart Crane, Louise Bogan, Rolfe Humphries and Yvor Winters had independently been making similar discoveries of Laforgue at approximately the same time. Laforgue's influence on Cowley, however, was markedly strong--"Perhaps I was more enthusiastic than the others." As with Eliot's Laforguean Harvard poems, the French poet came to him as a "liberating force," a style and a voice to be absorbed, imitated and transformed into a voice of his own.⁴⁷

In part Cowley was indebted to Laforgue for a new sense of language: an unorthodox amalgam of Latinate erudition and casual colloquialisms, a combination of "learned words from philosophy, medicine and the natural sciences with familiar expressions, street slang, and newspaper phrases beautifully misapplied." In 1919 Laforgue's language seemed refreshingly innovative and modern. Cowley admired the poet's ingenious verbal playfulness, his surprising neologisms (like *violuptés*), his "free but singing rhythm," and his experiments with stanzaic and metrical structure, such as the use of snatches from popular songs and the device of a short rhyming couplet as a refrain or comment on a preceding stanza.⁴⁸ Such technical qualities he aimed to reproduce and emulate in his own verse.

But Cowley found more in Laforgue than a new style and technique. His fascination came largely from his discovery of a congenial sense of life, an affinity of poetic sensibility. Laforgue's influence, Cowley later wrote, was based on "an instinctive sympathy amounting almost, at the time, to an identity of spirit." Struggling to leave his own adolescence behind, Cowley found in Laforgue a poet who dealt with adolescent emotions "ironically, but, *au fond*, with as much respect as if they were mature emotions." Laforgue actually raised the ambivalent yearnings and

ironic insecurities of a bookish adolescent to the level of high art. His poems thus suggested "a style, a literary attitude to life," exemplified in "irony, paradox and a parade of learning." His coldly aloof yet yearning adolescents, his ironic disdain for the very world which fascinated him, his mixture of levity and seriousness, gave Cowley a tone, a pose, a strategy, in life as in art.⁴⁹

A number of poems he wrote at this time unmistakably reflect the influence of Laforgue, in technique and sensibility. When, from a perspective of more than forty years, Cowley came to discuss some of these poems, he took them, in apologetic modesty, as representative historical evidence rather than as poems worthy to be judged on intrinsic literary merit. Yet he had been capable of producing "two of the best English renderings of Laforgue."⁵⁰

"Sunday Afternoon (After Jules Laforgue)" was the first of Cowley's poems to be accepted and published by Margaret Anderson's The Little Review. The magazine had status and prestige among the young avant-garde writers--it had published Anderson, Pound, and most of all James Joyce, "the prophet-king of that age"--and Cowley, eager to make his appearance in such company, had carried his poem to its office on the top floor of a red-brick bow-front house on West Sixteenth Street. Margaret Anderson, "beautiful, the woman of the couple," and Jane Heap, wearing tailored clothes and "savagely bobbed hair," together read his poem and, as he later recalled, "accepted it on the spot." It was printed in the summer of 1919. A deft adaptation of Laforgue's "Dimanche," the poem assimilated Laforguean elements of technique and sensibility in its evocation of the bored and weary state of mind of a languishing bohemian artist. The first two of its seven stanzas will serve as an illustration.

Sunday in my bedroom staring
Through the broken window pane,
I watch the slanting lines of rain,
And since I have an empty purse
Turn to philosophy again:
The world is a potato paring
The refuse of the universe
And man excrescent,
Adolescent.

Oh for some drunken luxury,
For a divine intoxication,
For love that rises suddenly -
The ordinary dull flirtation

That lasts a day
And dies away
Leaves life too barren of sensation.⁵¹

"Nocturne," likewise, accommodated much of the form and spirit of Laforgue. Written about 1919, the poem was not published until 1926, when an early version appeared in Modern S4N Review as "Romance in a Major Key." Revised as "Nocturne," it was published again in The Hound & Horn in 1929. Collected in Blue Juniata (1929), the poem struck Yvor Winters, always one to call a spade a spade, as "almost a paraphrase of Laforgue's Complainte des Pianos; it embodies the decidedly unsatisfactory adolescent emotion that is the basis of all of Laforgue's work but not the two great Laforguean virtues of style--speed and rhythmic outline. The Complainte des Pianos has the dazzling rapidity of a first-rate xylophone performance: Nocturne is slow and limps." Besides striking the adolescent note, Cowley's poem, in true Laforguean fashion, alternated two voices in dramatic counterpoint--that of a young woman longing to be released from a dreary and confined life by a princelike, gallant lover, and that of a young man, meditative and aloof, resisting her advances. As a key Cowley later inserted an epigraph from Laforgue:

Ces enfants, à quoi rêvent-elles,
Dans les ennuis des ritournelles?⁵²

"Time," published in 1920 in The Little Review as one of "Four Horological Poems," was retrospectively singled out by Cowley as an example of "how Laforgue's practice encouraged us to experiment with a Latinate vocabulary." It was in such poems, he later felt, that he was "breaking through into modernism." The middle section of the poem, here quoted as collected in Blue Juniata (1929), reads:

Twilight. And still the clock
ticks viciously at every second;
the minutes walk
slowly across the field of consciousness;
an hour is a time unreckoned;
precise and categorical,
the seconds hammer on the wall.

At their touch, the flesh disintegrates:
the mind is a cerebrum, a cerebellum,
in tangles like a ball of cotton waste,
like bundles of dirty linen or bales of shoddy.
The seconds drip from a great height,

exploding one by one against my nerves,
against the broken armor of my body;
each second is eroding like the rain
its bit of flesh or deliquescent brain.⁵³

Not until 1963 did Cowley, with some embarrassment, publish another juvenile poem as historical evidence of Laforgue's influence on young American poets of the time. Laforguean in its very title, "Variations on a Cosmical Air" was written in 1919. It used, amongst others, Laforgue's device of incorporating snatches from popular songs in ironic counterpoint with the preceding stanza; it also featured the self-indulgent adolescent philosopher-poet, wearily masking his yearning for love in a pose of mock-alloofness and a show of erudition.

Love is the flower of a day,
love is a rosebud--anyway,
when we propound its every feature,
we make it sound like horticulture,
and even in our puberty
we drown love in philosophy.

But I'm coming around in a taxi, honey
tomorrow night with a roll of money.
You wanna be ready 'bout ha-past eight.

As celibates we cerebrate
tonight, we stutter and perplex
our minds with Death and Time and Sex;
we dream of star-sent, heaven-bent
plans for perpetual betterment;
tomorrow morning we shall curse
to find the self-same universe.

Frankie and Johnny were lovers--
Lordy, how those two could love!
They swore to be true to each other,
just as true as the stars above.⁵⁴

. . .

It was Laforgue who suggested important new ways of dealing poetically with a mood of disenchantment and a squalid and disorderly urban setting, who hinted that one way of coming to grips with unhappiness and disgust for one's environment was to cloak one's feelings in irony, "a sort of crooked sentiment, a self-protective smirk." If, to an older Cowley, such sentiments seemed "questionable," they yet formed an authentic ingredient of the young poet's voice. It was under the influence of poets like Laforgue that Cowley and his fellow poets were

inclined to "erect the sordid into a kind of religion. We worshipped the cluttered streets, the overflowing ash-cans, the houses full of people and rats; we felt something like veneration for the barrooms then in the last months of their legal existence; and our writings, too, had the smell of sawdust, youth, squalor and Luke O'Connor's beer-and-stout."⁵⁵ A poem he wrote on Luke O'Connor's saloon, published in January 1920 in The Pagan as "One O'Clock at O'Connors" and later retitled "Kelly's Barroom," illustrates the degree to which Laforgue's spirit and technique were perfectly attuned to life in Greenwich Village. It also suggests that Cowley's unhappiness easily turned into nostalgia for the country of childhood from which he now seemed irrevocably severed.

Always I felt a love for sordid things,
alleys and courtyards, airless tragedies,
whispers in closets, poverty, amours
in the live darkness, swift and sinister.

These groups parading, drunken, pale, these girls
who meet their kind like cats in areaways,
these cluttered streets of theirs, and filthy rooms,
and death around the corner I have found
voluptuous.

The crowd is here tonight;
the nickel-in-the-slot piano plays
Oh, take me back, please take me back to--where
do broken-voiced pianos hope to go?
A floozie sobs tonight, "I'm awful lonely,"
and Arthur humming as he mops the bar.

Tonight I too am lonely for the soil:
Oh, take me back, please take me back--to home,
innocence, the family, marriage, these
ancestral dreams, these melodies of the race.⁵⁶

In 1919-1920 Cowley's enthusiasm for Laforgue was at its height. Though Laforguean echoes are audible in several poems written in the course of the 1920s--as in "Translucent Fingers" (retitled "Angelica")--by 1923 Cowley's fervor for his French master had waned. By that time Laforgue had exhausted his service as a catalyst of Cowley's imagination, a liberating force on his style and sensibility and a provider of a congenial strategy in life.⁵⁷

In August 1919, antecedent to his return to Harvard for a last semester, Cowley spent several weeks on the family homestead in Belsano. He went by himself, leaving Peggy behind in the noise and squalor of New York. His first extended stay in the Village had made him anxious to reestablish contact with the country. Sitting in the sordid, shoddy ambience of Luke O'Connor's saloon, he had been "lonely for the soil" and had felt "mastered by a love of clean youth and chimeric innocence."⁵⁸ Back in Belsano he rested and relaxed, caught up with his correspondence, fished for trout, helped out on the farm, and pruned young pine trees. Unfailingly, the country proved refreshing and invigorating.

Cowley's weeks in Belsano were much like a retreat; away from New York, alone in the country, he was able to arrive at a clearer perspective on himself, his marriage, his hopes for a literary career, his friendship with Burke. What he found was not wholly encouraging. His twenty-first birthday--"having suffered everything else in this damned world, I must now suffer my majority"--was an extra inducement for stock-taking. But the immediate occasion was a disappointing week he had spent with Burke, en route to Pennsylvania. The meeting forced him to conclude that their present responsibilities as married men struggling to make a living interfered with their writing ambitions and stood in the way of resuming their friendship on its old level of frankness and intimacy. Their talks had centered on "wives and sustenance" and their "intellectual engines" had seemed, for the time being, to be "running on different tracks."⁵⁹

In response to Cowley's comment Burke, in mock-Romantic fashion, sent him a poetic lament for a lost friendship, "Lines Written in Dejection near Weehawken on the Occasion of Receiving a Letter from a Friend." The poem triggered a five-page letter from Cowley analyzing what he felt to be a painful moment of crisis in their friendship. It was a lengthy document of despondency. Needing Burke's friendship for emotional and psychological sustenance as much as for literary self-confidence, Cowley urged that their friendship be given a chance to survive its present crisis.

We have not lost the faculty of talking to each other. If we had anything to say, we could still say it--anything such as we once mumbled for hours. We haven't got it; measured by our ideals of adolescence, we are failures. . . .

Not on the basis of the work we have done, which is

Promising, as anyone would tell us; rather because we have been caught up in the machinery of life. . . . In the same mail that brought your letter, I had an almost parallel communication from Peggy. She is having her troubles and discouragements and depends on me to carry her through. Little Does She Know that she is leaning on a Hollow Reed. . . .

We are failures in each other's eyes, and that makes us uncomfortable. However, we can still seek out some Sub-Matty [Josephson], who won't see through us and who will admire us as accomplished litterateurs. . . . But such companionship--as far as writing and discussing the Universe goes--won't satisfy us forever. Some day we are going to be able to talk again, and I think that the thing which now makes us uncomfortable is the high standards of past discussions. We haven't those things to say today; the platitudes stick in our throats. . . .

I don't know how much faith you have left in me, but I still believe that you are going to pull through. And if either of us becomes a success--even in his own eyes--our relationship can get back on a more comfortable basis. Meanwhile beer and poker and kaffeeklatsch; smuttitudes on married life and discussions of salaries. I have a great feeling for institutions which you lack; our relationship had become institutional in my eyes, and even if I knew quite well it was hollow, I refused to speak. Now I suggest that we leave it on an institutional basis for a little while, counting on the chance--which is a good one--that it will swing around. Personally I don't feel capable of cutting apart from you. It would be too much of a blow at my self-respect. However if that is what you want, don't answer this, and we'll meet in a year with a little fresher outlook.⁶⁰

It soon appeared that their literary friendship was less in danger of dissolution than in need of reestablishment on a different and maturer basis. Cowley was deeply, even fraternally attached to Burke. Since childhood he had learned to think of their destinies, in life as in art, as inseparably intertwined. Seeing them almost as mental and emotional twins, he had repeatedly insisted on the virtual interchangeability of the different stages of their intellectual development. Though Cowley continued to see the future course of his literary career as closely interlaced with Burke's, a greater degree of distance seemed a necessary and inevitable step towards a healthy independence of perspective.

Cowley's frustrations came less from uncertainty about his work, which he trusted was "promising" enough, than from being "caught up in the machinery of life"--the round of innocuous writing jobs, the pressures of a domestic, married life, a thwarting cultural environment. The search for a congenial artistic milieu would eventually lead him abroad and inspire efforts to help create, in America, a cultural ambience in which writers and artists could work in freedom and

responsibility to their art, without being hampered by difficult living conditions. He early was persuaded, from a personally felt need, that the creation of a sense of literary community might form an important prerequisite for the emergence of such a cultural ambience and the growth of a mature American literature. Cowley's future endeavors on behalf of such institutions as the artist's colony Yaddo and the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters find their motivating impulse in his personal difficulties as a struggling apprentice writer in the Village.

In October 1919 Cowley returned to Harvard, while Peggy stayed in New York. He was determined to round off his studies and earn his degree, a feat that had to be accomplished in a single semester, even if it meant taking on an academic overload of six courses, including biology, philosophy (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Raphael Demos) and literature (John Livingston Lowes and Dean Briggs). Now that checks from home were no longer forthcoming, Cowley had trouble enough finding the money to subsist on for even one semester. He managed to obtain an insignificant scholarship, but depended for most of his expenses on small loans from Harvard College.¹

At first Cambridge brought relief. The harassing problems and frustrating conditions of a life of poverty and hunger in the Village seemed far away, now that he was once more established in relatively luxurious living quarters on the Gold Coast, at 24 Mount Auburn Street. "College is all that I hoped of it," he wrote to Burke in late October. "Not intellectually, I mean; the advantages are all physical and economic." He had found "a charming little room with green painted walls and a student lamp;" located under the roof of the house, but furnished and including maid service, it rented for \$7.00 a month. By alternately taking his meals at the Signet Club, the Harvard Union and Memorial Hall, at an average of \$1.25 a day, he managed to get by with a minimum of money. "No leisure, but at least comfort, and assurance that my next meal will be waiting for me at six o'clock with a napkin ring beside my plate, a waiter at my elbow, and a flood of dull conversation sweeping over me, soothing as a bath in Lethe." Coming in the wake of "one serene month" in the country, the resumption of his Harvard life made Cowley realize that neither he nor Peggy were "made for unhappiness." The comforts and allurements of a quiet domestic life away from New York were strong

enough for him to seriously consider settling down in or around Boston: "Existence is cheaper here; the air is purer, and there are trees." For the moment his longing for domestic and marital stability was such that his literary ambitions became subordinate: "A few tugs from Pegasus, tethered in the closet with a pile of dusty books, but the household cat will purr him to calmness." Even his dreams, he found, were becoming "circumscribed--Pegasus vs. Peggy, and a horse was never a match for a woman."²

Cowley was less divorced from the values of his middle-class background than he may have thought. True, he had early chosen to pursue a career as a poet, in itself an act of defiance and filial disobedience: even in high school his mother had used to reproach him for wasting his time on poetry and held up to him the example of a cousin who had managed to become a prosperous jewelry salesman. His marriage to Peggy had further severed him from his parents, though there was never a radical break.³ But what persisted were deep-seated cravings for a rural life of middle-class comfort, economic security, marital happiness and professional recognition. Like others of his literary generation Cowley was at heart as much "bourgeois" as "bohemian."⁴ The effort to reconcile divided loyalties and longings was an important impetus behind his early career. Typically, it would draw him both towards and away from New York. Through the 1920s and 1930s he tried to strike a workable balance by maintaining an apartment in the city, the seat of his operations as a professional writer, editor, poet and translator, while settling down to a quiet, domestic life in rural surroundings.

Despite Cowley's initial relief he was not permitted to resume his Harvard life on its old terms of comfort and success. Whereas he had been cultivated in the spring of 1918, his months in Greenwich Village now proved to have serious repercussions for his social and literary standing at Harvard: he was greeted with hesitation and suspicion by his former friends on the Gold Coast. But his cordial good spirits and warm-hearted friendliness quickly seemed to win the day and soon Cowley felt more or less reestablished among the social elite.

College has incidentally been a study in snobisme, with myself as one of the principal actors. When I returned everyone seemed to hesitate a little before speaking to me. After all, you must know, I had been entangled in shady dealings . . . there were whispers of a woman. But my greetings were so artless and

frank, my heartiness so aggressive, that really . . . and I am once more a member, even though humble, of the Ruling Class.⁵

Cowley, however, was not as fully accepted or reintegrated into social life as he was at first tempted to believe. In retrospect he recalled his last semester at Harvard as a time of bruised feelings and social humiliations, a painful confrontation with Harvard's conservatism and snobbish exclusiveness. In addition, some of his cherished friendships suffered. Foster Damon was one who disapproved of Cowley's first marriage; though they kept in touch and remained on speaking terms, their friendship cooled and they saw considerable less of each other after 1919.⁶

It was in the Signet Society that Cowley experienced the full rigidity of Harvard's social stratification. During his months in the Village he had received a letter from the secretary of the Society informing him of his election as an honorary member. Though Signet was somewhat outside the complex social club system--less a social club than a society of members with shared literary interests--most of its members were "clubbies." The majority were chosen from the staffs of the Crimson, Lampoon or Advocate; the editors of the Monthly were bypassed on the grounds of social and political deviation. On the whole its membership was staid, aristocratic and conservative, recruited largely from prep-school graduates--with an occasional exception like Cowley, elected because of his literary standing as a former president of The Harvard Advocate.⁷

Having to subsist on little money Cowley was glad of the opportunity to eat at Signet, where he could sign chits for his meals. But coming from the Village he was now barely tolerated in Signet's reactionary circles. "I was treated as if I had smallpox," he wrote years later to his old Harvard friend Jake Davis. During meals at the Signet "ice formed in the fireplace." Two of its members had come to see Cowley in the Village and had brought back reports of a disreputable life and a disreputable wife. An editorial he had written for the Advocate in 1918, in which he had "made the mistake of praising wartime socialism," now opened him up to suspicions of cherishing Bolshevik sympathies. Merely to have lived among the artists and bohemians of the Village was enough to be branded a radical revolutionary among Signet's "doughty warriors for capitalism." Yet Cowley had little choice but to sit through the social

chill "with an obstinate look on my usually beaming face." His Greenwich Village friends had named him "the Beamish Boy;" his table companions at the Signet now dubbed him, less cordially, "the decayed cherub."⁸

Cowley's treatment at the hands of Signet members, a "royal freeze-out" falling barely short of social ostracism, left bruised and bitter memories. Yet, painful and humiliating as the experience had been to one with a deep need for social acceptance and a strong impulse towards companionship, it had also been instructive: it helped him shed some of his social innocence and gain a subtler understanding of the politics of human relationships. In a letter to Jake Davis Cowley acknowledged he had reason to be grateful: "I said to myself, 'That's the way the world is. I'm glad I learned that at twenty instead of being an innocent all my life.'" But the experience also made him look back with renewed warmth and nostalgia to his happier years at Peabody.⁹

If Cowley's last semester left him with a residue of ambivalent feelings about his alma mater, throughout his life he remained a critical but loyal son of Harvard. He remained faithful to the many literary friendships he first formed there, to his cherished teachers (Copeland, Lowes, Briggs) and to the intellectual traditions of the college. But he was distrustful of its spirit of snobbish and social elitism and was not left with any deep love for his class of 1919. Among his later friends and acquaintances in the literary world were countless Harvard men, but relatively few or none from his class. Though the class of 1919 was, in Cowley's estimate, "moderately brilliant," its members distinguished themselves in finance, business, law or engineering rather than in literature.¹⁰ For most of his life Cowley refrained from attending class reunions. When, after a quarter of a century, he made an exception and attended its twenty-fifth in 1944, he felt painfully out of place and suffered the same social exclusion as before. "It was grisly," he recalled in a letter twenty years later. The event brought home to him once again that the class of 1919 had "never jelled;" all the "pectin" had dissolved when the class was dispersed by the war. Illustrative of the lack of social cohesiveness of his class, Cowley felt, was that two of his friends, Jake Davis and Bob Cunningham, barely knew each other. It was not until the fiftieth class reunion in 1969, that Cowley became a regular attendant, and even then he did so "partly from morbid curiosity." In 1974, as if to heal old wounds after more than half a

century, the Signet Society honored Malcolm Cowley with a testimonial dinner.¹¹

Notwithstanding an academic overload and various social antagonisms, Cowley persisted in his efforts to get started as a writer. In November he made it into the pages of Poetry, when Harriet Monroe finally published the three poems Amy Lowell had sold to her thirteen months before. In August an impatient and destitute Cowley had tactfully inquired of Miss Monroe about the fate of his poems. He confessed that he was "very hard up" and was anxiously awaiting "the grand-'n-glorious day" when the check of \$20 should arrive--"it will be the first money my poetry has ever brought me." His letter proved to be effective. At the end of September he learned that his poems at last were "nearing the light." In his enthusiasm Cowley reported to Miss Monroe that in his spare hours he was working on a "war phantasy, which, though a trifle surannée, is probably the best thing I have ever done." Once his three poems had been "published, patronized by my friends, and consigned to a respectable oblivion," he promised to send her the longer war poem (eventually the poem became "Château de Soupir: 1917" and was printed in Broom in 1922). In mid-October Cowley received the proofs of his poems; he thought they looked "inexpressibly beautiful." In November the poems appeared in Poetry as a series of "Three Portraits."¹²

Written before the influence of Laforgue made itself felt, the poems marked a belated tribute as well as a symbolic gesture of farewell to an earlier model, Edgar Lee Masters. Two of the poems had a Midwestern pastoral setting of country dances and bucolic carousal; both dealt with amorous trysts, presented in ironic counterpoint. "Danny," the third poem, dealt with the frustrated idealism and the sense of displacement of a naive soldier returning home from the war. Cowley was thrilled at the publication of his poems, which, so he told Miss Monroe, "looked much better in print than they had ever appeared to me before." Besides eliciting praise from Conrad Aiken and Haniel Long, a poet he had recently met, two of his poems, "Barn Dance" and "Danny," were reprinted by the New York Sunday Tribune. Encouraged by this "very flattering" reception of his verse, Cowley submitted another batch of poems to Miss Monroe, including "Château de Soupir: 1917" and "About Seven O'Clock." He reported on work in progress, once more hoping to muster the editor's enthusiasm for "a Fantastic Etude, a long, sinister poem that interests

me more than anything I have done for ages."¹³

But a thirst for experience and a desire for involvement in the world about him proved to match the private pleasures of poetic creation. Early, Cowley distrusted the hermetic isolationism of the modern artist. A direct engagement with a wide range of experience would for him become an important prerequisite for the creation of a living and human art. The tension between withdrawal and involvement also surfaced as a theme in his early verse. Two poems, in particular, both written during Cowley's last Harvard term, explore the opposite poles of the artist's dilemma. A poem published that November in The Harvard Advocate suggested that Cowley was struggling to incorporate the larger social world into his verse. "Nantasket" showed that, since the writing of "Three Portraits" a year before, Cowley's diction, control of tone and sense of form had grown more complex and sophisticated. The poem mocked the fashions and pretensions of postwar youth, flaunting its new manners and sexual mores, under the not too compassionate auspices of a sardonic Nature, on Nantasket beach near Boston.

Denise, the manicure, strolls on beside
Her lover, who is working on the Street.
They talk in broken words, and watch the tide
Come sedulously licking at their feet.

This is her Day. Her glances go a-roving
Among the bathers, searching every feature.
This place, she thinks, is made for pleasant loving
And not uncomfortably close to nature.

And now Society comes marching by,
Young Kuppenheimer gods in bathing suits
And flappers with their bonnets stuck awry:--
Sand filters into patent leather boots;

The sun is scorching painted cheeks; the sea,
Growls at the littered beach complainingly.¹⁴

"Colloquy with Himself," an inferior poem first published in February 1920 in The Pagan and reprinted in the Boston Globe in early March, expressed Cowley's ambivalence more directly. The impulse of the modern artist to renounce social and public life in favor of the privacy and freedom of a spiritual existence, the poem seemed to imply, might well demand too high a price of unreality, lifelessness and loneliness.

I have lived too long in the marketplace;
for a time I shall retire into the house of my spirit,
lock the door and double-lock it,
close the shutters and sit by candle-light.

Here are old books . . . pictures . . .
music that echoes and re-echoes in the grey corners;
for company, the ghosts of women I once knew,
dim and beautiful . . . See! I will approach them,
touch them . . . they crumble, leaving a fine dust on my fingertips.

I have retired into my own house; no man
can follow to distract me with talk, no living woman
to overpower me with her flesh;
I am free . . . But how it is musty here!--
and Lord! how lonely! . . .¹⁵

A struggling young writer ever up against financial trouble, Cowley found a welcome, if modest, complementary source of income by writing occasional brief reviews for The New Republic at two cents a word. Written during the fall in Cambridge, they were published in the winter and early spring of 1920. "I must have been the only undergraduate who was a fairly regular contributor to The New Republic," Cowley recalled with pride.¹⁶ The short reviews, impressionistic and subjective pieces of criticism at best, are marked by worldly-wise presumptuousness paraded in a tone of unearned maturity. But despite their imperfections, Cowley's early efforts yet carried the germs of the writer's maturer sensibility. The apprentice reviewer clearly endeavored to engage and keep the reader's attention, if by somewhat flippant and transparent means; he also evinced a characteristic inclination to criticize in images and metaphors as much as by sustained intellectual analysis. A concern with "truthfulness" and precise and "honest workmanship" already ranked with a demand for profound and subtle insight into human nature as important touchstones of his critical judgment.¹⁷

Not surprisingly, none of Cowley's earliest writings contained an extensively developed poetic or aesthetic theory. Yet it is possible to find in them the germs of ideas and critical tenets that would evolve into the basic assumptions of his criticism. Among his papers is an undergraduate essay, written for English 72, and dated December 19, 1919, in which Cowley aimed to analyze the poetics of Romanticism and the aesthetics of Imagism by contrasting Wordsworth's preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads with Richard Aldington's introduction to Amy

Lowell's Some Imagist Poets. These two documents, Cowley argued, were "the most important pronouncements of a century and a half of English poetry." He insisted that they could not be seen as "independent phenomena," dissociated from their historical, cultural and social context: "they grew out of the conditions of their times and cannot be understood without some reference to those conditions." The one generality to be concluded from both documents, he felt, was that "poetry is valueless detached from reality, that by one means or another [both Wordsworth and Aldington] wished to rescue it from the grip of the salons or the Browning Clubs, and bring it back not so much to The People in the abstract as just to people." Besides a distrust of abstractions and a demand that poetry deal with a living human reality, the paper expressed Cowley's wariness of doctrinal dogmatism and its fatal interference with poetic practice: "Aldington & Co. are dogmatically (and fantastically) rustic. These [theories] are pet hobbies; the poets who hold them sin by attachment to them, ride them to death."¹⁸

Cowley's last reviews for the Advocate included a discussion of J. C. Squire's Poems, First Series and a cocky report on a number of theatrical productions presented by the English 47 Workshop at Agassiz House on February 6, 1920. The latter review was one of his rare performances as a drama critic. Though he was personally ambitious to be a playwright, occasionally acted, composed a number of one-act plays, and gained a profound admiration for seventeenth-century French drama, in his long career Cowley never ventured deeply into drama criticism, nor was he ever an inveterate theatergoer. From the first it was poetry, fiction and criticism which held his primary interest. Cowley's last poem to appear in the Advocate, "Eighteenth-Century Sonnet," pursued the conventional mode of satirical verse that had earlier made him popular with the Ancients at the Harvard Poetry Society. Written along the lines of "Diary of a Restoration Gentleman," the poem marked a fitting moment of farewell to the kind of verse Cowley was leaving behind to deal with the contemporary reality of urban life in a more modern mode: "Mine is a city muse; I tune my lyre / To sing no triumphs of a fox-mad squire."¹⁹

Through Cowley's last term at Harvard his friendship with Burke, seemingly near collapse during the summer, continued, if somewhat precariously. "I grow more attached to you as time goes on," he confessed to Burke, realizing that, paradoxically, the value of their friendship

increased as they were further apart. Meeting Burke in the flesh Cowley was inclined to become "inarticulate, puffing stolidly and wondering what to say next." But away from Burke in Boston he found himself conducting "many imaginary conversations." Back at Harvard the thought of being "failures at twenty-one" was less disturbing and Cowley reached out beyond present frustration for success some twenty years from now: "At forty we shall be Somebodies, n'est-ce pas? Mediocrity never struggled harder than with me; its victory is still far from assured."²⁰

Through the fall and winter his discussions with Burke and their evaluations of the shifting terms of their friendship continued. They resumed their old habit from Pittsburgh days of swapping grand philosophies of Life, God and the Universe, Cowley responding to Burke's erudite and witty speculations with a mixture of smutty banter and ironic seriousness. There were moments of painful discovery--"Kenneth, I fear my affection for you is alas greater than yours for me. Perhaps I need a friend more than you."²¹ At other times their discussions were filled with comical misunderstandings. In February, realizing that their misunderstandings resulted less from the incompatibility of their opinions than from a fundamental difference in personality and mental makeup, Cowley reached out to Burke with a gesture of reconciliation, evoking the memory of their common Pittsburgh adolescence.

Remember Pittsburgh and the walks up Ellsworth Avenue? One scene comes to my mind especially clearly; it was on a long driveway in Highland Park; you had just developed another new Weltanschauung as all-embracing as Kant's and founded, I believe, on a sentence in Diana of the Crossways. We fell from world generalizations to theories about us twain and decided that you progressed by revolutions, I by sane, steady development. And now by sane steady development you have reached the logical resolution of your attitudes; I have lost most of my pimples, grown a moustache, and had a revolution. I feel offended because you don't understand me but I don't know why. For both you and I realize that your discernment has always been brilliant and microscopic. You would sympathize with the biologist who builds a theory of the descent of man on the number of chromosomes in the male reproductive cell; everything depends on whether there are 23 or 24. Or to put it another way, you see one facet of every personality, and build a theory of every personality on that facet; you[r] universe reminds me of a Jonsonian comedy of humours. But now I am building a theory of you on one facet of a very complex personality. . . . Every once in a while you shock me. I shall never for a moment forget the time I sent you some platitudes of Herbert Kaufmann's for a joke, and you took them seriously

and questioned my mentality. Or again this last time that I made out my long, irrelevant catalogue of Neoplatonists, taking great pains to make my sentences illogical and to end with shitass and magoochey. It might have been supersophomorish but it wasn't merely sophomorish. But what t'ell. . . . I continue to write you because for all our disagreements I never learned how to talk to anybody else, and I don't know why you continue to write me.²²

The bond cemented in childhood had weathered its first--minor--crisis. Despite Cowley's repeated, at times sentimental insistence on their affinities and common interests, their friendship flourished by the grace of their substantial differences as much as by their similarities.

Cowley's last weeks at Harvard were hectic, rushed and far from pleasant. After Christmas he was joined by Peggy from New York. Together again after more than two months, they took up living quarters in a shabby old house near Central Square, where they had the "privilege" of cooking their meals on a little gas burner. It was hardly an idyllic reunion. With his final six examinations coming Cowley was swamped with work. To make matters worse, Peggy had fallen seriously ill in New York and continued in frail health for the rest of their stay in Cambridge. For several weeks, Cowley remembered, "I led a rather desperate life, shopping for dinner, cooking it, serving her in bed, then going back to my books." During January he immersed himself in the Elizabethan dramatists--Marlowe, Webster, Tourneur, Ford, Middleton--and, for pleasure, reread Shakespeare; he was "agreeably surprised" to discover the germ of Laforgue in Hamlet. At the end of the month he was steeped in the literature of Romanticism, reading Goethe, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Between struggling to write, nursing a sick wife, running the household and studying like mad, Cowley had difficulty readjusting to married life. At one point in his studies he plunged into the biographies of Goethe and Shakespeare to learn about "their marital difficulties." But he failed to find there the clue to a workable balance between being a devoted writer and a dedicated husband: "What's the moral: I'm not Goethe or Shakespeare either."²³

When his six examinations came, Cowley, who liked to pride himself on his "knack" of getting high marks, went "breezing through them." Years later he was still proud of his record, achieved in what he would think back on as a "heroic period:" he made four A's and two B's--enough to earn his Phi Beta Kappa Key; it was mailed to him after he had left

Cambridge.²⁴ In February 1920 Cowley was graduated from Harvard "as of 1919." He earned a regular B. A. degree but had reason enough to be satisfied with his academic performance: despite several long-term interruptions, he had finished his college education in a little less than six full semesters (his sophomore year having been ended prematurely by his departure for France), scattered over five calendar years.

Cowley's departure from Harvard in early 1920 coincided with the beginning of an important literary connection. In November 1919 the fortnightly liberal Dial under the editorship of Martyn Johnson was put under new editorial direction. Some months before, Clarence Britten, one of the associate editors, had gained enough confidence in Cowley as a regular contributor of anonymous brief reviews to ask him to undertake a more substantial signed critical review. Cowley was honored, wrote the review, submitted it for acceptance shortly after his return to Cambridge and heard no more. In the late autumn the old political Dial was permitted to die, but was immediately resuscitated as a new monthly magazine by two men dispassionately devoted to art and literature and in possession of considerable wealth. Under the editorial and financial direction of Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, both Harvard graduates, the refurbished Dial would grow into the leading, most prestigious literary journal of the decade; it was, Cowley felt in retrospect, "the best magazine of the arts that we have had in this country." The Dial, Scofield Thayer wrote to John Brooks Wheelwright in June 1920, was to be "a literary magazine without precedent in America;" not only was it going to be "exclusively devoted to the arts," but it also aimed to present the finest examples of the old and the new in art and letters side by side--"it proposes to combine in one magazine everything that is best in both the accepted and the unconventional forms of expression, without prejudice to either."²⁵

Virtually from the moment of its transformation Cowley and Burke were present in the pages of the "new" Dial, representing the youngest, up-and-coming literary generation, one with an outspoken, if not unambiguous, interest in modern, avant-garde writing. The Dial, indeed, was a crucial factor in the formative phase of both men's careers. From

the very start both writers were ambitious (and competitive) to be associated with the magazine. In January 1920, when The Dial's first issue appeared, Burke claimed priority of achievement: one of his stories was accepted for publication, promising a miraculous remuneration of \$100. "Congratulations," Cowley wrote his friend and literary rival; "with a little skillful handling of this Dial notoriety, you should arrive. . . . In your success, don't forget your poor relatives." In ironic celebration of his friend's attainment Cowley composed a "magnificent" satirical ode--"On the Occasion of My Being Printed in the Dial, by K*nn*th B*rk*." The fourth stanza will serve to illustrate the spirit in which Cowley received Burke's success:

Some day he too may leave the bench of scholars
 And live with men
 Some day he too may earn a hundred dollars
 And I shall treat him with a father's kindness, when
 He comes at last through the supremest trial
 And sees his poems printed in THE DIAL.²⁶

Cowley's association with The Dial was in the nature of "a long and close collaboration." Though he never served in any editorial capacity and his opinion of the literary taste and merit of the magazine fluctuated with changes in the literary atmosphere, Cowley remained eager to write for The Dial for most of its life-span. Indeed, it was largely (but not exclusively) through his contributions to The Dial that Cowley was able to establish his position as a serious critic and poet in the 1920s. He respected the magazine's high critical standards and struggled hard to meet them. In 1923 he praised The Dial's "standards of serious work and decorum" in a letter to Burke, then one of the editors; the level of reviewing in The Dial, he felt, was "encouragingly high"--indeed, he observed, "I am not the only one to believe that the book-reviews are the liveliest part of the Dial," a remark he repeated in print in The New Republic eleven years later.²⁷ Writing for The Dial Cowley consciously tried to write better, to go beyond the ephemerality of a mere review and to reach a seriousness of consideration, a catholicity of taste and a sophisticated cosmopolitanism worthy of the magazine. Not counting the numerous "briefers" Cowley continued to write for the new as he had for the old magazine, his best and most substantial pieces of criticism in the 1920s, over twenty-five of them, were written

for The Dial, as were some of his better poems.²⁸ In general Scofield Thayer could muster more enthusiasm for Cowley's critical writing than for his poetry; considerably less of Cowley's verse appeared in The Dial than in other (mostly "little") magazines--Poetry, The Little Review, Broom, Secession, transition, to name only the more important ones. Where Thayer could be "highstrung and moody," Watson's was a more endearing character marked by modesty and tolerance; for the Cowleys he came close to being a personal friend. "If you meet Watson of the Dial, you will like him immensely," Peggy wrote to John Brooks Wheelwright in 1921. "We both grew very fond of him in the short time we knew him, but he is horribly shy--without affectations." On the whole, Cowley's relationship with the editors of The Dial--Thayer and Watson, but also Gilbert Seldes, Stewart Mitchell, Alyse Gregory and, of course, Burke--was a good one. Only Marianne Moore, who assumed editorial responsibility in 1925, rubbed him the wrong way and irritated his professional pride with her perennial demands for alterations in his manuscripts. In late 1928, a year before the magazine's demise, Cowley became so irked by her editorial habits that he decided to stop writing for The Dial.²⁹

For Cowley the literary tone and ambience of The Dial seemed not so far removed from the spirit of his Harvard days. Over the years he continued to think of The Dial as a latter-day reincarnation of The Harvard Monthly. In a 1932 review for The New Republic he first advanced his opinion that the attitudes of the Harvard Aesthetes were "often embodied in The Dial, which for some years was almost a post-graduate edition of The Monthly." In 1934 he claimed again that The Dial was one of many magazines which had sprung "more or less directly" from the Monthly and maintained that "the aesthetic tradition of The Harvard Monthly was later revived by the Dial" under Thayer and Watson. Cowley's association of The Dial with the aestheticism of the Monthly may in part have been inspired by Thayer, who not only had been active on the Monthly, but also looked the Harvard Aesthete incarnate--in the words of Alyse Gregory, he was "slender of build, swift of movement, always strikingly pale, with coal-black hair, black eyes veiled and flashing, and lips that curved like those of Lord Byron." As late as 1973 Cowley still wrote about the refurbished Dial as "the unexpected sequel" to the Monthly and, with certain qualifications, restated his conviction that, "in some ways and in some contributors," The Dial "carried on the

tradition of The Monthly, this time with a national audience." Though Cowley would at times feel as ambivalent about The Dial as he had about the Harvard Aesthetes, to write for The Dial may well have seemed an indirect mode of allegiance to the literary traditions of his alma mater.³⁰

Cowley's association with The Dial had a curious start. The first signed piece of criticism he had done for Clarence Britten proved to be the only item from the old Dial's "barrel" (the stock of accepted but as yet unpublished manuscripts) to be retained by the new editors as "worthy to appear in a magazine of the highest literary standards." Thus, Cowley recollected, his article served as "the only link between the old and the new" Dial.³¹ But if, as Cowley seemed to hold, The Dial represented a contemporary cosmopolitan variant of Harvard aestheticism, his very first contribution began with an expression of his impatience with the introverted aestheticism of too much of modern art:

Modern art subsists to a remarkable extent by taking in its own washing. Novelists adopt poets for heroes, who write sonnets on pictures, for which musicians compose orchestral settings. Painters contribute fantastic portraits of all these folks and become in turn the heroes of new novels; the circle is complete. . . . It is true of course that an occasional hero is free from the taint of art; he is always different, however, from the mass of men, having at least the artistic sensibilities. Sometimes an author dives into the sea of life and grasps an authentic, unliterary experience; at such occasions we have reason to be grateful. Sheila Kaye-Smith has made the plunge and returned tightly clutching a bit of soil.

Cowley's relief at finding an author who dealt with the reality of "life" and explored "authentic, unliterary experience" is a measure of his literary conservatism at the time. If he was modern in his insistent concern with formal and stylistic perfection (Kaye-Smith's sentences were "hammered in bronze; each one perfect, each sufficient to itself"), he was old-fashioned in his demand that art be humanistic, realistic, mimetic.³²

In his next review for The Dial Cowley expressed a similar wariness of the exclusive aestheticism and narrowed range of experience of the modern artist. He praised Romain Rolland's mastery of large-scale forms and structures--"Rolland is a monumental architect, . . . not an intaglio worker or even a sculptor"--but went on to voice his disappointment at

Rolland's choice of a sculptor-artist for his protagonist: "you had hoped for one hero at least not sicklied over with the pale cast of art."³⁴ It is interesting to note that Cowley's early impatience with the subjectivist, introverted aestheticism of modern art foreshadowed his ambivalence about the merit of what, in the 1930s, he called the "Art Novel." His early reviews for The Dial make clear that this ambivalence (though politically colored in the 1930s) was less the result of a conversion to radical politics than a natural outgrowth of a persistent literary attitude.

By the middle of February Cowley was ready to leave Cambridge. "The exams are finished," he announced on the ninth; "One short thesis and my connection with the college will be severed definitely." But between an empty purse, an ailing wife and "no destination except, vaguely, New York," Cowley's prospects for the immediate future were black. It was on the verge of his departure that an unexpected act of generosity from one of his favorite Harvard mentors brought relief. Two days before the Cowleys planned to leave, a young stranger appeared at their upstairs landing, knocked at the door of their attic room, and delivered a sealed envelope containing ten dollars and a message from Charles Townsend Copeland: "I thought you could use this." Copey's parting gift was a precious gesture of encouragement upon Cowley's entrance into life as an independent writer, a mode of existence in which money was to be a constant worry and ends could be made to meet only by scraping together just such small amounts of it. Copey's ten dollars helped to pay the Cowleys' way to Grand Central Station, where they arrived with just enough left to pay the taxifare to Greenwich Village. Their former landlady, Katherine Tyng, had offered to put them up, if "without enthusiasm," for two or three nights in her basement room. Back in New York, with nothing left to do but to resume a precarious existence as struggling artists and Grub Street dwellers, the Cowleys, "holding hands," rode to their temporary lodgings, their prospects on the threshold of the 1920s hardly less bleak than the city street "still heaped with grimy snow from a storm two weeks before."³⁵

The seventeen months Cowley spent in Greenwich Village between his graduation from Harvard and his departure for France were marked by alternate waves of personal, marital and professional unhappiness. The good moments of exhilaration, encouragement and even happiness could only intermittently dispel a persistent feeling of frustration and despondency; the prevailing tone in the scant correspondence surviving from those months is one of lamentation and distress. Always an inveterate complainer and self-deprecator in his letters and notebooks, Cowley yet had reasons to be unhappy. A loose and unstable union from its inception, his marriage to Peggy was further strained by her recent serious illness. Though as a poet and professional free-lance reviewer he was productive enough and managed to become sufficiently known to be assured of a modest income, he grew progressively ambivalent about success. Discouraged by the gap between his literary dreams and the conditions of his life, he felt increasingly skeptical about the role of the artist in America. Eventually, a combination of professional and personal motives propelled him to seek salvation abroad.

Shortly after their return to New York the Cowleys found new lodgings with the help of one of Peggy's friends, Bessie Breuer, later an amateur novelist and Cowley's editor-to-be at the New Jersey magazine Charm. Miss Breuer's brother was moving out of a small three-room apartment on the top floor of a tenement at 88 West Third Street; it was situated over the Elevated, could be reached by climbing five flights of stairs smelling of Italian cooking, and it rented for sixteen dollars a month. What with some sparse furniture begged or borrowed and a writing desk purchased for a song at a Salvation Army store, the Cowleys were soon reestablished in the Village. They would live there until their departure for France.¹

There was little in the recent past or immediate future, however, to

provide much encouragement. Surveying the period since his release from the army, Cowley had reason enough to feel despondent in the face of experiences that took their toll and demanded to be digested over the next few years. He had suffered badly in the notorious flu epidemic of 1918 and had lived through an ensuing period of poverty and starvation. He had courted and married a disreputable bohémienne, an occasion for painful quarrels with his family and a cause of further estrangement from his parents. He had been nearly ostracized at Harvard and virtually abandoned by his prosperous Cambridge friends. During his last semester at Harvard he had lost the nearest equivalent to a sister, when Ruth, the girl adopted by his mother when Cowley was twelve, died of diphtheria at the age of nine, leaving an "appalling vacancy" in his mother's life, which the son could no longer be depended on to fill. In "The Pyre," a late poem commemorating the painful experience of selling his ancestral Belsano home and its appurtenances upon his parents' death, Cowley retrospectively acknowledged his profound attachment to "his little sister" and transformed her death into an emblem of the demise of his own boyhood.²

Moreover, marital problems had seriously strained his relationship with Peggy. The episode left Cowley with painful and humiliating memories that were slow to heal. More than fifty years later he could still recall the moments of isolation when he had felt estranged from the remainder of humanity, moments when he had felt initiated into an underground world of suffering, pain and darkness, a world such as he had witnessed in the free medical clinics of Manhattan. "Free Clinic," a poem first published in The Little Review of April 1920, in a detached yet immediate fashion registered Cowley's retrospective feeling that through his experiences in the Village he had been extended a "passport into the underworld." The witness to pain and suffering, Cowley felt as if he had become "the comrade in spirit of all the horribly diseased people I saw."³

The poem opens with a coldly precise image of the clinic's waiting room; it pictures a dehumanized world of straight lines and right angles, a walled-in, dead-end world, from which all playful variety of form has been banished. From among the "rows of soiled faces" on the benches in the waiting room the poet, like a Whitmanesque observer, selects a few for sardonic presentation. Between the image of Mrs. Magrady, suffering from cancer and "dumped on the seat / like a barrel of ashes,"

and that of two perfumed shopgirls, "one with a rose / stuck in a ragged buttonhole, and one with a petaled sore," the poet finds it hard to preserve a sense of human dignity and cynically mocks the notion of a benign providence--"God is an old woman / with dropsy-- / or perhaps / you were not created / in His image?" The poem ends with an evocation of the cruel paradox in the poet's suffering:

Against a colorless skin the brazen
 loveliness of a tumor
fistula, chancre, chancroid--
 it is not
because I admired their beauty,
 no, tormented
by the search for the white absolute,
by the nostalgia of the immaculate
conception. . . . I therefore⁴

In the course of time his early experiences helped to shape and deepen Cowley's conception of the creative process and gave a new dimension of human understanding and compassion to his criticism. More than twenty-five years later he discovered that a similar saison en enfer lay at the heart of the art of Hawthorne and Whitman and helped to explain the sudden flowering of their genius. Both writers had been wrenched out of a necessary spell of loneliness and alienation to learn to reconnect themselves to humanity at large and win a new, darker sense of human community. If such perceptions were given special urgency by the literary climate of the 1940s, the terms in which Cowley described their "descent into the underworld" suggests that he was writing in the remembrance of the painful, yet illuminating experiences of his early years:

There is a period or phase in the lives of many great writers that might be described as their descent into the underworld. At some moment, perhaps very early, they are crippled or stricken by disease (how many epileptics and syphilitics!), or they are made conscious of their social or sexual inferiority, or they become involved in a scandal or go to prison--there are scores, hundreds of paths by which they may descend; but descend they do, until they see their world from beneath and until they feel, as Dostoevsky did in his youth when he was led to execution, a double sense, of their isolation first and then of their brotherhood or identity with all the outcast and diseased and rejected of the earth. Later they emerge into sunlight, but for a long time they walk the streets as if in disguise and continue to feel that they belong with the secret

people of the caves--among whom they number, as time goes on,
more and more of humanity.

There had been a time when Cowley, too, had suffered a "double sense" of isolation and identity with "the secret people of the caves," had emerged from darkness into daylight and had walked the streets of Greenwich Village with a feeling of belonging to "a confraternity of the damned." From a later perspective he could only regret that such a hard-earned spirit of human comradeship had to be achieved at the cost of pain and suffering and that only rarely did it come from writers who had not passed through a private season in hell.⁵

Read as chapters in a spiritual autobiography, several of Cowley's poems help to illuminate aspects of his inner life during his Village days in 1920. Apparently his belief in the sanctity of "conjugal love" was profoundly shaken. "William Wilson," a poem envisioning the poet's newly discovered shadow self as a "man of straw and many fires, / Iago doubled with Othello," ends with an image of the crumpled pillow on the poet's bed, "where once, immortal as a stone, / true love lay strangled by Othello." Two other poems recreating Cowley's life with Peggy in "The Crooked Streets" of the Village deal with the demise of marital love and describe the puncturing of an illusion--"our love that we had thought so holy." Both "Interment" and "Winter Tenement" envision the death of love as an act of strangulation by a vengeful angel and end with an image of disillusioned loneliness and separation.⁶ Other poems recapture moments when Cowley, walking the streets of Greenwich Village, was beset with visions of death and felt entrapped in a relentlessly advancing cancer-like disease. Such moments made him want to lash out in rebellious fury against the cruel "tyranny" of Time--"Each second is eroding like the rain / its bit of flesh or deliquescent brain." "So Perish Time," one of "Four Horological Poems" published in The Little Review in the summer of 1920, is a plaintive, quasi-philosophical meditation on Time and Death, written in the mode of Jules Laforgue and indicative of Cowley's mood.⁷ Other poems, such as "Deathbed" or "Mortality," reveal a similar obsession with death or picture life as a protracted and potentially disgraceful process of dying.

Death is an accumulation of infirmities: hairs fall, a tooth
decays, and death; a spot of eczema returns each year
with spring; death hides itself in a pimple, a bruise,

a sty,
or lurks beside the lips in a parenthesis that deepens no
longer; death is rigid, being the achievement of a
pattern; death is a finished pattern of wrinkles round the
eye.⁸

At times even the pursuit of poetic beauty lost its urgency, its
significance dissolving in the face of death and decay.

Beauty too white,
too perfect for this mind infected with
all the venerealities of sense!
O all-sufficient loveliness:

I cling
vainly to the marble of your flanks,
vainly to the knees of beauty, knowing
before the ecstasy that my clenched fingers
will loose their perilous grip, that I shall fall
awkwardly to adjust myself about
my skeleton.⁹

The majority of poems recapturing Cowley's inner life in this period
breathe an atmosphere of bleak despair and radiate a mood of emptiness,
sterility and imprisonment. They are written out of loneliness and pain,
from a new awareness of the reality of death, by a poet who not only has
lost many of his illusions about Love and Beauty, but who has surrendered
the vestiges of his childhood's faith in a Divine Providence and is no
longer sure of the possibility of salvation.¹⁰

Notwithstanding his personal and marital malaise, Cowley was soon writing
again. Reserving his more respectable work for The New Republic and The
Dial, he was occasionally prepared to engage in hackwork, if reluctantly
and ever clinging to the standards of honest workmanship. Thus, in the
spring of 1920 he turned his recent experiences as a house hunter and
lodger in the Lower West Side to advantage in an article composed for the
magazine section of the New York Evening Post. It described how Manhattan
house hunters, discouraged by the increasing commercialism and the high
rents in the region around Washington Square, had begun to invade the
terra incognita of the Lower West Side, until recently the domain of

streetgangs like the Hudson Dusters and the West Side Butchers. As a result, Cowley observed, "respectability settled like a pall" over the district, reducing a former artists' paradise to just another section of the "exclusive suburb" of Manhattan. In this, one of his first performances as chronicler of the changing conditions in the writing life, Cowley did little to discourage or correct the image of the Village as a place of bohemian revelry and affectation, an image given currency by such a bulwark of middle-class decorum as The Saturday Evening Post. For the moment the serious writer seemed to have stooped to a form of middlebrow bourgeois journalism--some such realization, indeed, may have prompted Cowley to adopt for once a pseudonym: David Malcolm.¹¹

Another assignment for the Post was an article on Laurence Housman, younger brother of the famous poet, who was then concluding an extended American tour. Cast in the hybrid form of the portrait-interview, the piece combined conversational informality with the detachment of serious criticism. Cowley developed a special fondness for the form and over the next few years wrote several of such pen-portraits, each of them the occasion for meeting a prominent American or European writer. Adopting a tone that was serious yet light and geared towards informing as well as entertaining a large audience, he presented Housman's confident prediction that American poetry would "progress along national lines," but that it had "not yet risen out of self-consciousness." Housman proved a poetical conservative beside whom Amy Lowell seemed "a poetical radical." Yet Cowley could not help but sympathize with Housman's critique of Imagism as lacking distinction of style and quoted the English writer with approval: "There is something sacramental about the process of getting hold of the absolutely right word; there is a final mystery of form which one cannot analyze." When he considered Housman's career in the light of his own struggles as a beginning writer, Cowley was struck by the former's success in fashioning a unified whole out of the discordant elements of his life. Such a unity, Cowley thought, was "perhaps the only mark of a successful life;" it was a feature conspicuously absent in his own.¹²

The few letters that passed between Cowley and Burke during the summer months of 1920 confirm that Cowley was suffering from a disorienting lack of focus and direction in his life. A letter he wrote to Burke in early June, representing "the history of an evening," was

chaotic, fragmentary and haphazard in the way it drifted from subject to subject and oscillated between conventional spelling and "fonetty Kinglish" in the experimental mode of Cummings's poetry. Ashamed at having frittered away an evening in booze and empty gossip, Cowley "could not even dare a signature." Style and form were an appropriate reflection of his life at the time--meandering, confused, filled with trivial details, plagued by frequent interruptions, submerged in the rush and routine of a hectic Manhattan existence, but lacking clarity of purpose and progression. He complained of feeling paralyzed by inertia and intellectual numbness--"My mind moves torpidly like a lizard in a stagnant pool"--and occasionally engaged in the experiment of automatic writing, hoping to trick a recalcitrant subconscious into producing "pearls" of poetry.¹³

What effort he made at serious writing seemed destined to be thwarted by any one of Peggy's Village friends, who were assiduously drifting in and out of the apartment, holding out a perpetual invitation for carousal and distraction in the form of drink, gossip or an all-night poker game. Such temptations could not always be resisted and often enough Cowley participated in the Village revelries, playing "penny ante" on Saturday nights, cards held close to his chest, hoping to win perhaps ten dollars if the game lasted long enough. There were good times galore--"We ate, we had shelter, we even got drunk"--but soon enough distaste outweighed exhilaration. In several letters written in June he poured out his disgust at the crowd of assorted Village bums, artists, sculptors, poets and abstract painters with whom he found himself consorting. He seemed repelled as much by their indiscriminate sexual behavior and the ruthless ease with which they disrupted each other's marital and familial lives, as by their fake and fraudulent pretensions in the field of art. He was disturbed to find that the new Village mores of freedom and independence were too often attained at the cost of human decency and consideration and despised the crowd of Villagers for deriving their tentative "group identity" from the cheap and artificial bonds of alcohol and gossip.¹⁴

Two older Harvard writers, both of whom would become inveterate Village dwellers, at about this time represented the worst and the best possibilities of the artistic life in Greenwich Village. Joe Gould and E. E. Cummings seemed emblematic of the two poles of a dilemma that plagued Cowley with increasing urgency. A shrewd wit and pithy observer of

bohemian life, Gould was supposedly engaged in composing a gigantic Oral History of Our Time, a manuscript at one time reputedly seven feet high and counting eleven million words. It purported to be a truthful record of the conversations overheard on Gould's peregrinations through New York, which he was perpetually jotting down in a pile of greasy notebooks. Though his quasi-historical endeavors were fated to remain unpublished, Gould managed to become a legendary part of Village lore. A redoubtable vagrant and notoriously sloppy eater and drinker, he was one of the few to make a career out of bohemianism. Eventually he ended up in a hospital for the mentally ill and died abandoned and forlorn. Though an endearing character and a man of gentle disposition, in 1920 Joe Gould embodied exactly the kind of mad eccentricity and exhibitionistic pseudo-artistry Cowley had come to despise. In June he observed in a letter that Gould, a regular visitor at 88 West Third Street, seemed to be "straining even nearer to insanity" than at any previous moment in their acquaintanceship.¹⁵

By contrast, E. E. Cummings, a one-time classmate of Joe Gould at Harvard, stood aloof from the hordes of Village writers only too eager to reap the benefits and privileges of the artistic life without possessing the requisite talent, endurance and commitment. Ironically enough, it was Gould who was "almost the medium of my making friends with Estlin Cummings," Cowley observed to Burke. Though he mildly ridiculed Cummings's unconventional mode of spelling in a letter, Cowley was sufficiently impressed with the poet's serious artistic commitment to want to become "more than an acquaintance of Estlin; people who are producing anything are so rare in this town."¹⁶

In the early summer of 1920 Cowley made a twofold proposition to Burke, clarifying his ambitions in "Art" as well as "Life." In the realm of art he agreed to join in the foundation of a "school," provisionally called The Curve, a neologism supplied by Burke. It was to be dedicated to the expression of various modes of spatial and temporal motion and aimed to integrate experiments in seemingly disparate branches of art--poetry, painting, sculpture.

Up to this time, practically all the motion expressed in art has been the motion of the object; the motion of the observer and its curious effects remain practically unwritten and unpainted. Also double motions and triple motions, as, for example, a subway express passing a local while the posts seem

to stride backwards at a terrific rate. Or the unrolling of a landscape like a reel of film. Or the queer going sour of a sound as your train moves away from it. . . . We should have one or two poets, one or two prosateurs, a sculptor, a painter. And then hold an exhibit. The prose and poetry would be cast by the sculptor; for example a poem expressive of spiral motion would be engraved on a sort of circular staircase. . . . The sculpture would concern itself with moving trains, and perhaps we would even have a few pieces of real machinery. Man Ray's revolving doors should certainly be part of the exhibit. Also there is opportunity for a plentiful use of fonetty Kinglish. Notice how well this new school would fit in with futurism and unanimism.¹⁷

Conceived in a half-satirical spirit of Dadaist extravagance and freakish sport, the school seemed to embrace the whole range of experimental modes from Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and E. E. Cummings, to Jules Romains and F. T. Marinetti. Several months later Cowley proposed to preempt an issue of The Little Review for "our little movement," to be filled with poems and a satirical play by Cowley and Burke, drawings by the painter Charles Ellis, and a "Manifesto against Manifestoes."¹⁸ Though the "school" never materialized, the notion of a group manifesto would surface in a few years' time in more effective form. For the moment the idea itself was most important as belying Cowley's earlier skepticism and bespeaking rather an unambiguous allegiance to modernist experimentation. The proposition was indicative of Cowley's efforts to find ways of incorporating the new contemporary realities of city life, technology and the machine into a radically modern art.¹⁹

Conjointly with his plans for The Courve Cowley launched a proposal for "Life" which resuscitated his old dream of living as a writer in the country, surrounded by a community of kindred spirits and maintaining his commercial and professional contacts with the city from a distance. He had spent several bucolic weekends with Peggy in and around Haverstraw, in the southern tip of New York State, fishing for "legendary trout." Though too far from New York for regular commuting, the farming country near Haverstraw was within thirty-five miles of 42nd street and Cowley toyed with the idea of renting a house there, he to raise a vegetable garden, Peggy to sell flowers. "The little money necessary for existence can be raised through a carefully cultivated typewriter and one or two trips a week to the city." This "vita nuova" was to begin early in the spring of 1921 and combined "all the best features . . . mountains,

woods, groundhogs, trout, literature." Cowley hoped that Burke would want to share in the venture with him, but he was adamant in his aversion to "communal living We might run a community garden but the houses should be separate."²⁰

Dreaming of Haverstraw, he found himself still mired in New York, "scratching for money like an old hen" and occasionally finding "a grain or two." During the spring and early summer he wrote a handful of reviews for the New York Evening Post, including a consideration of Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub by Theodore Dreiser, whom he denounced for being "still obsessed by moral standards rather than aesthetic." The free-lance market might yield a modest income, but it was hardy and uncertain work at best and hardly remunerative enough to permit full-time residence in the country. For a while Cowley struggled to complement his earnings by engaging in a variety of odd jobs. On a fairly regular basis he wrote for Export Trade, a commercial-industrial New York magazine. For two weeks he worked as a stagehand at the Provincetown Playhouse, at twenty dollars a week. During several performances he made an appearance on stage, playing a black ghost in Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and a white ghost in a revival of Where the Cross is Made, all of which yielded ten dollars a week. "I made a rather substantial wraith," Cowley remembered, "even with streaks of aluminum paint over my ribs to make them look as if the flesh had rotted away." These performances marked the beginning and end of his acting career, but the experience may have stimulated him to write several one-act plays. One of them, entitled "Barn Dance," was seriously considered for production by the Provincetown Players. Written early in 1920, the play was intended as a "throwback to 1915." Owing much in spirit to Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters, "Barn Dance" explores the dilemma of a bright local boy whose opportunities for rising above the deadening dullness and narrow morality of small-town life in the Midwest are threatened by his sense of human obligation to a girl he has gotten "into trouble." With gruesome irony the play exposes the reality of sexual passion and man's latent capacity for brutal violence underneath the complacent surface of local pride and moral self-righteousness in the provinces.²¹

In June 1920 Cowley was offered a salaried position as copywriter at Sweet's Catalogue Service, Inc., at forty dollars a week. Unwilling to surrender his freedom and independence as a writer, yet equally reluctant

to stand in another person's debt ("I had from my mother that German sense of always wanting to pay my way"), Cowley held out against accepting as long as possible. In the end he consented, expecting the arrangement to be temporary and to resume full-time free-lancing in the fall. However, he stuck it out for a full year. From June until his departure for France the following summer he worked for seven hours daily at the office, while writing poems and reviews at night and in the weekends. In the process he grew progressively discouraged about the possibility of doing serious work as long as he remained in Greenwich Village.²²

Copywriting for Sweet's was neither enervating nor inspiring. Over the summer business was slow and, reading The American Machinist and contemplating the "artistic use of turret laths and slotters," Cowley occasionally found time to write poems during working hours. But soon enough he felt trapped in a dull routine of office work and complained of leading "a spiritually uneventful existence." "Curious how we fight constantly against events; fight to maintain the integrity of an undisturbed life, and then find that the lack of disturbance gives us nothing whereon to meditate." A month after accepting the job at Sweet's he gave in to temptation and rented a \$10-a-month five-room house at Haverstraw until November. Though it left him "quite penniless," he could at least take comfort in the bucolic splendor of the chestnut blossoms ("like long drooping fingers") and the plentiful meadow flowers ("Queen Anne's lace in the barren fields, butter and eggs along the fence rows; in the deep woods Indian pipe growing among the rotting leaves ghostly pale"), while Peggy exploited their commercial value by selling them to the Greenwich Village Flowershop at a profit of half the proceeds.²³

If Cowley's spirits invariably revived in the country, they sunk whenever he was in New York. He missed the company of Burke, who was spending the summer in Maine, and was occasionally peeved by the irksome and presumptuous behavior of Matthew Josephson, who seemed to delight in speaking of Burke in an offensively proprietary manner, thereby feeding Cowley's fears that a cherished friend was slipping away from him. On July 20 he found it necessary to remind Burke once again of their shared Pittsburgh past and evoked the nostalgic memory of the "bucolic billboards" along Ellsworth Avenue. "I tell you there was something fine in the spectacle of two adolescent egos rubbing each other's fur and

reciting philosophies like alternate phonographs." Cowley looked back sentimentally upon a time when they had been "like young priests confessing one another;" now, he could already taste "the proud isolation of the coffin."²⁴

His despondent mood persisted over the summer. Several of his poems recapture the feeling of leading a death-in-life existence, of having lived "too long in windless exile from the meadows." Here is the opening stanza of "So Perish Time:"

Nothing lives here, he says in the darkening room,
except a clock that ticks its heart away
brassily on a nickel-plated breast.
Everything else is dead that lived by day,
and dust seeps down on the worn bedspread, dust
sifts in through torn lace curtains, making queer
gratings of sunset, like the bars of a tomb,
Be very quiet, the dead are sleeping here.²⁵

Plagued by such gloom, Cowley was inclined to seek relief in memory and nostalgia. In late August he admitted to Burke that his "fit of Viennese melancholy, this lavender-and-old-rose regret for other days" was largely the result of his inability to adjust to his precarious financial condition. "This week Peggy lost seven dollars, and as a result I had to hock four cameos and wrap the pawn ticket carefully around the fountain pen ticket and the ticket for my Phi Beta Kappa key." Working on an architectural catalogue might yield a modest income; it still kept him "the width of a bank vault from the nearest savings account" and made his dream of living in the country recede beyond realization. Forced to keep working for Sweet's, he was discouraged by the scant amount of writing he got done and regretted having surrendered his free-lance independence. The market, he now saw, had been "excellent," and would have enabled him to make as much as forty to fifty dollars a week; "it was only my inability to stick it out that dished me."²⁶

That summer Cowley gratefully accepted an offer from Henry Seidel Canby to review on a regular basis for the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post, a weekly literary supplement which Canby had started early in 1920 as part of an effort by the paper's new owners to restore its moral and literary prestige. The opportunity to launch a new review dovetailed with Canby's own concerted efforts to advance the cause of American writing. Assisted by a distinguished staff--William Rose Benét,

Christopher Morley and Amy Loveman--the new editor showed himself receptive to young reviewers. Soon Cowley was offered a modest position as a book reviewer at a salary of ten dollars a week, a welcome supplement to his earnings at Sweet's. For this fee he was to consider the weekly supply of leftover books and decide if any were deserving of a brief review. The arrangement, Cowley believed, for a while made him "the only salaried book reviewer in New York." For the moment he could feel that, in his modest fashion, he was "breaking a path for many famous professionals" to follow. Though over the next few decades Cowley and Canby would often find themselves on opposite sides of literary disputes--Canby speaking up for the prewar generation of Frost, Lewis, O'Neill and Cather; Cowley taking "slingshot in hand" for the postwar writers of his own age-group--he owed the older editor and critic a lasting debt for personal tolerance and generosity.²⁷

From July through December of 1920 the majority of Cowley's reviews appeared in Canby's Literary Review. They considered a wide array of topics, ranging from books of poetry by John Gould Fletcher, Robert Hillyer, D. H. Lawrence, Haniel Long and Francis Brett Young, to a book of plays by Alfred Kreymborg ("the Dickens of the New art"), a volume of Argentinian plays edited by Edward Bierstadt, the diaries of court ladies in eleventh-century Japan ("an age of aesthetes and delightful artificiality") introduced by Amy Lowell, and a book on "the world's timber" (an early indication of Cowley's interest in arboriculture and the conservation of natural resources). Two reviews--one of Youth and Egotism by Pio Baroja, a member of the prewar European "generation of the disillusioned," the other of a contemporary history of modern French writing--were informed with Cowley's nascent awareness of the concept of literary generations and the social, historical and literary forces responsible for their emergence. A later review (of Roland Dorgelès' war novel Wooden Crosses) displayed an early distrust of propaganda in fiction, praised the writer for realistically setting down military cowardice and heroism side by side and observed that after four years the war already seemed "haloed with antiquity."²⁸

Recalling his combined life as a salaried copywriter and hand-to-mouth literary journalist and poet, Cowley has felt that in those days he exhibited a "somewhat special cast of mind." He was ambitious enough, yet wary of success and fearful of becoming "a celebrated writer appearing in

glossy magazines." Rather, he was content to "live obscurely, limit [his] needs, and preserve [his] freedom to write something new and perfect at some moment in the future." In the light of that expectation he deemed hackwork permissible, provided it was "honestly performed" and did not necessitate a compromise of integrity. Setting higher standards for himself than his wages warranted, he could hope to realize in his writing those qualities conspicuously absent in his personal life--"punctuality," "neatness," "logic" and progression.²⁹ If the chances of realizing his ideal of the literary life seemed increasingly slender, he could at least feel a redemptive pride in work well done and poems published.

Cowley's aesthetic development during this period was reflected mostly in his more substantial review-essays for The Dial. With each new review he struggled to define his attitude towards various tendencies in modern literature. In a review of Romain Rolland's Colas Breugnon for the April 1920 Dial he expressed his ambivalence about what he saw as the excessive search for originality in modern writing and its concomitant tendency to overcultivate the subtleties of private consciousness at the expense of bolder universal themes. Winking at the classicism and humanism of the eighteenth century, he upbraided modern literature "since Verlaine" for exemplifying "a morbid fear of the platitude."

Truism, cliché, commonplace, bromide, banality: the synonyms flock and tumble in the vocabularies of recent critics. Writers have a tendency to reverse the eighteenth century; to shun the general and confine themselves to individualities. No longer does colour exist; there are only shades and nuances; tones merge into overtones, and all definite metres are lost in the theoretical existence of Rhythm. One obvious drawback exists to such a theory. About the important matters of life: about birth, time, love, death, there is little to be said that does not verge on the banal--even this. Authors of the species described must confine themselves to smaller themes when they wish to be satisfyingly original.³⁰

On the threshold of the 1920s Cowley's sharpest and most buoyant criticism was reserved for the English Georgian poets. In several reviews he lashed out at their poetic abuses or used them as occasions to present his own ideals in poetry. At the inception of their movement the

Georgians had played a constructive role in the poetic revolution of the years between 1912 and 1915. With Imagists, Vorticists, Futurists and Post-Impressionists the Georgians, albeit in a less radical fashion, had helped to liberate English poetry from the excesses of decorative Victorian verse, archaic diction, rhetorical flourish and fin de siècle weariness. In these early years "Georgian" had connoted modernity, spiritual euphoria, poetic vitality, freedom of poetic diction, anti-Victorianism, realism; after 1917 it no longer stood for "vigor, revolt, and youth," but rather implied "retrenchment, escape and enervation." In the postwar years, with their poetic idealism hardening into a coterie spirit of inflexibility and their poetry deteriorating into glibly competent verse lacking emotional intensity and imaginative force, the pastoral lyricism and rustic simplicity of the Georgians seemed increasingly out of step with the temper of the times. More and more their spiritual buoyancy appeared ironic and irrelevant to a disillusioned and cynical younger generation.³¹

In The Dial of May 1920 Cowley spoke out against the Georgians in unmistakable terms:

Eight years ago when the Georgians first appeared as a group, it seemed that they were discovering more strident harmonies, subtler dissonances. But with the publication of each new anthology, the disappointment is cumulative. Every two years a volume bound in fresh brown boards, printed on fresh paper, but with the contents so familiar, so delicately trite, reaching with such skill to new heights of inanity. Out of all the group, one metaphysician who slips between the boundaries of the unreal and the real; one passionate consumptive; one forthright satirist--Siegfried Sassoon--and the rest nightingales.

He mocked the Georgians as the last in a dominant but worn-out pastoral tradition: "O nightingale! . . . O feathered pedant! O banal rhapsodist confused by the tic-tac of iambics! You leave me, O ecstatic bore, homesick for the hoot-owls and whippoorwills of an Ohio dusk, or for one moment of lucent quiet in which to forget all the nightingales that sang from Chaucer to John Drinkwater." If Cowley was guilty of simplifying the Georgian ideal and indiscriminately grouping the Georgians together as stereotyped larklovers exclusively concerned with misty moonlight and the trilling notes of nightingales, he did so with an ulterior motive. Under the cloak of his attack he was advancing a well-considered plea for

poetry as a "mature art." Cowley held the Georgians responsible for debasing poetry and giving currency to an infantile and naive conception of it in the "theory" that poetry belonged to "the childhood of the race and the individual."

Too much of contemporary verse expresses the emotions of a girl of twelve in words of one syllable. It throbs too insistently, and seems intended for recitation over a guitar, or in accompaniment with the querulous allegro of an automatic piano. Work of this sort was confined for a long time to the popular magazines; one accepted it without a murmur. But when the Georgians erected this throbbing naiveté into a sacrosanct school, they were striking at the fundamentals of their art. Accept their premise, and poetry takes rank as a medium of expression somewhere between the movies and fancy needlework.³²

Cowley's attacks on Georgian poetry were hardly prescient or radical, but rather representative of the general impatience of a younger generation with the literary products of its elders. By 1920 to lash out at the Georgians had ceased to be shocking or revolutionary; T. S. Eliot, Middleton Murry and Edith Sitwell had preceded Cowley in exposing Georgian deficiencies. By the time of Cowley's Dial attack, with modern poetry moving towards obscurity, privacy and intellectuality, Georgianism was, in effect, "a dead poetic movement" and considered by many of the newer writers as "positively anti-modern."

Cowley's critique of the Georgian poets, however, did not imply wholehearted approval of more modern modes in poetry. If he objected to the facile charm of Georgian pastoral verse, he was equally uncomfortable with the tendency of modern poetry towards wilful obscurity and the exclusive cultivation of the private sensibility. The burden of his complaint against the Georgians was that they had left the poetic premises from which they had started: precise craftsmanship, lucid and concrete expression, vigorous realism and freedom from what Pound had denounced as "emotional slither."³⁴

Only Siegfried Sassoon was exempt from Cowley's critique: he received praise for daring to move against "a whole tradition of vapidty" and for going back to Donne and Swift rather than to the Elizabethan lyricists, Wordsworth and Keats. Sassoon possessed the one poetic virtue that was "unqualifiedly positive:" his "honesty" lifted him above his models and followers and allowed him to remain "the leader of a movement for which he had acted as a scout." Peacetime had left the English war poets

"gasping in the face of a disillusionment worse than the boredom of the trenches" and Cowley now exhorted them to "demobilize" their intellects and utilize their knowledge of modern techniques to write civilian verse that dealt honestly with social reality in peacetime: "Even in a world at peace there are common thoughts waiting for some one bold enough to express them and there are abuses that stink to heaven as much as the corpses along Bapaume Road."³⁵

Cowley's slashing criticism of the Georgians extended to their novelists--Arnold Bennett (the "Stepfather" among them), J. D. Beresford, W. L. George, Compton Mackenzie, Hugh Walpole, H. G. Wells. The Georgian novelists, Cowley felt, were "reporters" whose work was "information rather than literature." Their outstanding weakness was a lack of "honesty"--"They seem to offer some solution of the difficulties of modern life, and they offer none. They claim to probe deep into the sores of civilization and yet do not reach to the profundity of the editorials in the London Nation. Their authors are determined pamphleteers on Sex or Peace or Education or Feminism. A certain air of quackery is discernible about their treatment of these problems, for they come of a generation notoriously incapable of solving problems."³⁶ In March 1921 Cowley collaborated with Ronald Levinson, a Village acquaintance of Peggy's, on "a most amusing burlesque" of H. G. Wells's History of the World, in rhyming couplets; Canby liked it well enough to print it in the Evening Post.³⁷

As we have noted above, not all forms of reaction against Georgianism automatically held Cowley's sympathy. In September 1920 he passed verdict on the 1919 issue of Wheels, a poetry anthology edited by Edith Sitwell and published annually between 1916 and 1922. Wheels was an early harbinger of the "modern" postwar spirit. Self-consciously avant-garde, it aimed to overthrow poetic convention and to épâter le bourgeois, hiding a mood of bitterness, cynicism and flippancy under a cloak of studied insolence and sophisticated brilliance. The magazine, Cowley felt, amounted to "a poetical house party" of the Sitwell coterie. Once the rustic simplicity and facile innocence of the Georgians had grown into "a fixed and imitable mannerism," a reaction was inevitable, but Cowley was not happy with the form of that reaction under the leadership of the Sitwells. Though he granted the importance of the Sitwells' appearance on the English literary scene, he was ambivalent in his

appreciation, seeing Wheels as an unfortunate return to "the harlequinades and harlotry" of 1890s decadence. Technically up-to-date and more sophisticated than its Yellow Book predecessors (the Wheels poets were "intelligent enough to laugh at their own antics"), the Sitwell phenomenon represented to Cowley a "less malignant form" of the "malady" of the 1890s; it might be called "a new disease," but it remained far from a healthy or mature conception of the art of poetry.³⁸

In another review, for Canby's Evening Post, Cowley contrasted the "senile innocence" of the Georgians with the "diapered sophistication" of Wheels. Comparing the poetry of Francis Brett Young, a recent Georgian arrival, with New Poems by D. H. Lawrence, he disapproved of Young's facile and conventional smoothness ("nightingales melodize insinuatingly") but did not unambiguously endorse Lawrence's more experimental verse. Young, Cowley charged, seemed impervious to all the "uncomfortable poetic upheavals" since Tennyson; his poetry was far from a "dangerously acquired taste like absinthe"--too immediately likable, it "slips down like some familiar sweet wine . . . it is all quite perfect and far-off, and a trifle inconsequential." Lawrence, by contrast, hoping to avoid such flaws, went "far astray among the trivial and the grotesque." Most unforgivably he lacked a proper respect for language. Though Cowley detected in Lawrence the spirit of Rimbaud's "cosmic indignation," the modern poet was at a disadvantage in "the actual mastery of the tools of his craft," an expertise gracing the Georgian poet. But whereas Young went striding "rapidly and gracefully along the path beaten by his predecessors," Lawrence was at least struggling, laudably if awkwardly, "to extend the scope of his medium."³⁹

In the winter of 1921 Cowley continued his examination of the tendencies of modern poetry in a review of Aldous Huxley's Leda. His review was implicitly a personal investigation of the validity of the ironic adolescent stance in poetry he had first encountered in Jules Laforgue and had been imitating for some time. In the wake of his personal experiences its validity was now no longer so apparent and Cowley was clearly struggling to move beyond "the dead hand" of his French master. Adolescence, in Huxley's words, was "a chinless age . . . an age feebly skeptical, profoundly unhappy." In Cowley's definition it encompassed "the stage at which one measures the traditional precepts into which one has been educated against the immoral realities of

experience; depending on which force proves the stronger, one becomes idealist or realist." A third path open to the artist was the one recommended by Laforgue: the refinement and indefinite prolongation of the stance of adolescence. Following Laforgue's path in Leda, Huxley had successfully used "the incomplete gestures of adolescence as material for a work of art." But Huxley's future achievement, Cowley thought, was staked on his ability to forsake the guidance of Laforgue. He urged Huxley to let Leda stand as his "obituary" to adolescence and to "strike out in a totally new direction." Huxley's adolescent poses, satirical inclination and somewhat banal attempts to draw up an independent aesthetic were like a mirror in which Cowley saw his own endeavors. As much as a critique of Huxley's poetic development the review reflected Cowley's uneasy efforts to proceed beyond the ironic sensibility of Laforgue to a more serious, critical, and emotionally mature art.⁴⁰

Cowley's position on modern poetry during this period is further illuminated by two reviews he wrote for Canby's Literary Review. In late December he applauded Haniel Long's return to metrical and formal regularity after experimental excursions into vers libre. In Long's new verse he discovered a quality of "strangeness" retained from his free verse experiments, which he would shortly single out as a characteristic ingredient of the aesthetics of the "younger generation." The "unlabored artificiality" and "inscrutability" of Long's vers libre had been carried over successfully into his metrical stanzas, giving them a touch of fin de siècle aestheticism which Cowley, rather inconsistently, seemed to relish.⁴¹

In his early reviews Cowley displayed a special adeptness as a critic of poetry; his critical talents were displayed most advantageously when focused on the genre closest to his heart. Not infrequently, his criticism reflected problems encountered in the writing of his own verse. In January 1921 Cowley reviewed Alchemy, a third book of poems by his Harvard acquaintance Robert Hillyer. He was impressed enough by the book to make a special visit to John Dos Passos, urging him to review the volume for The Freeman.⁴² Cowley's own review was important as his most elaborate and explicit early statement on modern poetry; it advanced assumptions that remained basic with him and showed that Cowley, like others of his generation, was moving independently along aesthetic paths first marked out by Eliot and Pound. Where before he had lashed out at

the Georgians, he now turned against H. L. Mencken for advancing a wrongheaded but fatally influential conception of the "ideal poet" as one who was "adolescent, instinctive and untaught." In contradistinction to Mencken Cowley envisioned the poet as a supreme and conscious craftsman, whose "tools"--an expert knowledge of techniques and forms, of metres, rhymes, assonance, alliteration--were as essential to the poet's craft as the files and wrenches to the plumber, and whose craftsmanship was acquired "only at the end of an apprenticeship that is usually long and arduous." Robert Hillyer's poetry existed as a living contradiction of Mencken's outmoded, Romantic "theory of the poetic genius as being naive and untutored." Cowley advanced Hillyer as the example of a mature, professional artist, "one not ashamed of his profession," whose verse was guided by "skill" and critical self-awareness as much as by the mysterious workings of "inspiration." Hillyer's verse was "at least as workmanlike as a piano étude or as a good novel." Cowley was impressed by Hillyer's technical accomplishment and his skill in employing a great variety of verse forms. His book, Cowley thought, could be used as "a textbook in some course in practical poetics that still remains to be given." If Cowley's language often remained that of impressionistic criticism, his primary focus was on poetic technique. A formalist emphasis on technique over content, he claimed, was a badly needed corrective: "In this day we have had almost too much of writers with Messages; we are in need rather of poets whose knowledge and whose training are thorough enough so that they can set down simply and melodiously what they think and feel and what their eyes see."⁴³

Though Cowley's aesthetic notions were essentially homegrown, emerging from his practice as a poet and his discussions with literary friends like Burke and Josephson, they ran roughly parallel to the poetic principles which Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot had been advancing for some years.⁴⁴ Cowley's affinity with the aesthetics of Eliot and Pound appears from a combined review of John Gould Fletcher's Breakers and Granite and Conrad Aiken's Punch: The Immortal Liar for The Dial of June 1921. Masquerading as a review, the article constituted in effect a brief treatise on the question of poetic influence, the importance of tradition and the futility of striving for artistic originality. Though inferior in depth and complexity, it was Cowley's nearest equivalent to Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."⁴⁵ In part the essay was a rebuttal

to Babette Deutsch's review of Aiken's House of Dust in the March 1921 Dial; Deutsch had discovered disturbing echoes of T. S. Eliot in Aiken's verse and had juxtaposed fragments from The House of Dust with parts of "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Taking the poetry of Fletcher and Aiken as a case in point, Cowley argued the admittedly "banal" truth that "poets learn from their contemporaries as well as from their predecessors." Harking back to his attacks on Mencken and the Georgians, he exposed the falsely romantic conception of poetry underlying Deutsch's criticism: the assumption that poems might "spring, fully adorned, from the forehead of any casual Jove" and that the poet was "a modern St. Simeon Stylites, who, standing aloof on a pillar, draws masterpieces from the wells of Inner Consciousness." Reverting to his metaphor of the poet as a master-craftsman, Cowley repudiated such an idea of the poet as an isolated genius searching for absolute originality and driven, in the words of Poe, by "a species of fine frenzy . . . an ecstatic intuition." Instead, he pleaded for a recognition of the validity of conscious imitation and the overriding value of tradition:

The whole question of authorship and originality has been ridiculously overemphasized during the last century. The results are upon us in an epidemic of bad grammar and bad workmanship, and, curiously enough, in a great deal of unconscious plagiarism.

Far better if the imitation be conscious. The poet is a workman to whom a certain task has been set, and it is no dishonour if he calls on his fellows to aid him. Or he might be compared more specifically to a builder at work on the unfinished edifice of literature. He contributes an arch or a nave or the portion of a wall, and passes on; the important question is not his identity but whether he has done his work well. The workman who succeeds him builds further upon what has already been constructed, as Laforgue built on Baudelaire and as T. S. Eliot has built on Laforgue. There are periods of general demolition--and they are very necessary--in which the false work of several generations is torn down, but never is one forced to begin again on new foundations. For to be completely original, one would have to invent a language of one's own; even the idiom in which we work is a sort of crystallized poetry. . . . These things are banal, but they are irritatingly true.

Typically, Cowley already saw the advancement of literature as largely a collaborative venture. Aiken and Fletcher, he thought, recognized this axiomatic truth: "In a generation so proud of its independence that it

gets nowhere, they have been content, for a little while, to work together towards a common aim."⁴⁶ Cowley would always look upon writers and poets as a community of individual craftsmen, each devoted to his or her own special talent and vision, yet all engaged in a common literary endeavor and each building on and in turn transforming the cultural accretions of the past.

Cowley's review of Aiken and Fletcher had an unexpected aftermath. On June 23, 1921, Fletcher wrote to the editors of The Dial disclaiming that he and Aiken had incurred any mutual poetic debts and maintaining that both passages quoted by Cowley to illustrate Fletcher's indebtedness were written long before he had either read or met Aiken. A second letter to The Dial reached Scofield Thayer in Paris and demanded rectification. The editors "cheerfully" obliged, advertising the Cowley-Fletcher controversy in their September issue and quoting from a letter written by "the penitent Mr. Cowley" from Paris to Fletcher in London. Cowley explained that his inferences of Fletcher's debt to Aiken (and vice versa) were based on--possibly imperfect--memories of conversations he had conducted with Aiken in Boston, admitted he might have strained a point in searching for poetic evidence, but assured Fletcher he had acted "in good faith." Both Fletcher and Cowley, concluded the editors, were "masters of implication." What the editors did not reveal was that Cowley had proposed to prove his honorable intentions by fighting a duel with Fletcher. On August 4, 1921, Cowley received a letter from Fletcher accepting his explanation of the circumstances leading to the Dial review, once again denying "deliberate borrowings" and proving that Cowley was "mistaken" in his thesis. As for the proposed duel: Fletcher feared his brash opponent must be content with a "long-range bombardment" by letter. Fletcher's critique of Cowley's argument in the specific instance did little to subvert the general validity of its points, which, the editors of The Dial agreed, seemed "well-taken."⁴⁷

Cowley's early attempts to define his critical position on modern writing were rounded out by three reviews written prior to his departure for France and published during the summer in The Dial. Discussing two volumes of short stories, one by A. E. Coppard, the other by Katherine Mansfield, Cowley attacked the influence of Freudianism and related theories of psychoanalysis on contemporary fiction (and, by extension, on poetry and criticism). His skepticism dovetailed with his wariness about

the overcultivation of subjective consciousness and private sensation. Over the next few years his uneasiness would grow into a marked antagonism to the sexual mysticism and irrationalism of such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, Floyd Dell and D. H. Lawrence, or the surrealist experiments of the group of writers associated with transition. In July 1921 Cowley praised A. E. Coppard for a careful workmanship which was "not subconscious" but based on "aesthetic judgements." Unlike his romantic predecessors, Coppard had happily avoided what Cowley denounced as "the Bovarisisme of the present generation," a modern sensibility based on "neurosis rather than on false romance." The modern prototypes of Emma Bovary, Cowley felt, were largely responsible for "the novel of nerves" and "the cult of the disagreeable" rampant in contemporary fiction.⁴⁸

Bliss, a volume of short stories by Katherine Mansfield, came close to being dismissed on similar grounds as "a book of neurotics; a literary corridor of the psychopathic ward." What saved Mansfield from becoming little more than "a literary specialist in nervous disorders," was the vividness and vigor of her characterization and her discovery of a "new and necessary form." Cowley praised Mansfield for combining an openness to modern experiment with an appreciation of traditional craftsmanship, which made the best of her work "final and perfect." "She has borrowed just enough from the new experiments in prose without trying to swallow them whole."

Cowley's review was typical in its ambivalent approval. It also displayed a characteristic tendency to borrow musical terms and analogies for technical analysis--he recurrently spoke of "movements," "themes," "counterpoint," "harmony," "variations" and a "coda." His adoption of such terms derived in part from discussions with Burke, whose experiments with short stories based on theories of musical and geometrical form already anticipated his later method of "perspective by incongruity;" partly it derived from Cowley's appreciation of the musical effects in Conrad Aiken's verse. More importantly, his use of such terms signified an attempt to find a new critical vocabulary that was precise and lucid, yet could accommodate the more radical experiments in structure and form he found in much of modern writing. Employing such terms for critical analysis Cowley may be said to have responded intuitively to a quality in modern writing which Edmund Wilson, following Poe and Valéry, singled out

as one of the principal aims of a modernist, symbolist aesthetics: the attempt to approach in language the indefinite and suggestive quality of music. Katherine Mansfield, Cowley wrote in September 1921, had approached in fiction "the construction of music"--"Its form is purely literary, but it has the suppleness and some of the abstractness of music."⁴⁹

A similar use of musical analogy was evident in Cowley's review of Amy Lowell's Legends. Lowell had taken the rudimentary forms of ancient legends from several cultures and, in retelling and recreating them, had perfectly assimilated them to her own personal and contemporary vision. She had done so by writing "programme music" around the legends, using legends as "themes" and adding "harmony and counterpoint and variations." In the process she bestowed upon them "all the prodigality of orchestral detail." Cowley, speaking of "lyrical interludes" and of "narrative interspersed with choruses," admitted that his search for such analogies was prompted by a troubling "deficiency in critical vocabulary." Though he refrained from expressing a definitive judgment of Amy Lowell's verse, his concluding remarks were offered as a conciliatory gesture, correcting possibly unfair disparagements in the past:

At times I was very unjust; in a city of literary failures one mistrusts established reputations. I have come to believe that one's estimate of Miss Lowell is bound up with one's estimate of American poetry in general. The new and excellent qualities of our literature are abundantly represented in her work, as is also our national tendency to be ragged. We must wait till the indefinite time when American literature has been judged before judging her. She is, at any rate, one of the three⁵⁰ graces or nine muses upon which our poetry stands or falls.

Cowley's approach to modern literature in the years 1920 and 1921 was far from systematical. Rather, he faced each new book as a new and incidental problem in practical criticism and in each separate instance groped to define his intuitive and often impressionistic response to a new literary tendency. For the time being his attitude remained confused, fragmentary and ambivalent. The full confrontation with modernity was yet to come. Over the next two years many of Cowley's isolated and instinctive responses would crystallize into an attitude which, if it never reached the scope or profundity of a critical theory or system of thought, yet gained in clarity and depth and held the germs of all his

future assumptions as a literary critic and historian.

Cowley was productive enough and found a hospitable and respectable market for his critical writings, but his mood of discouragement persisted through the winter and spring of 1921. Between the daily drudgeries of his job at Sweet's, the easy distractions of Village life, and the pressure of grinding out reviews, he found precious little time to compose the poetry on which he put so high a premium. Only two of his poems reached print between August 1920 and December 1921, both of them published in Canby's Evening Post review. As time passed by and Cowley found himself still struggling in vain to preserve "the integrity of an undisturbed life," the dream of producing valuable and possibly lasting work was threatened by a nightmare vision of a wasted life. Several of his unpublished prose sketches reflecting his mood suggest that more than once he was afraid of losing his ambitious drive and idealism and of frittering away what talents he possessed. He dreaded the possibility of hardening into a mould and sinking into the petrified security of a middle-class existence. Other sketches radiate disgust with the atmosphere of drunken dissipation and sexual profligacy at Village parties, poker games and dances, or envision the wastage of genuine artistic talent and moral character in the reactionary social and political climate of the Harding years.⁵¹

In early May 1921 Cowley was working on two poems which suggest that he dreaded a deadening of intellectual and emotional resources as long as he continued to work and live in the margin of an uncongenial urban-industrial society, imprisoned in futile habits and stunting routines, and cut off from the possibility of a nourishing and invigorating return to the countryside. "Poem for Two Voices," a musical counterpointing of two poetic voices standing for two contradictory impulses in the poet, implied that it was 'too late now' to rediscover "the spring / that issues miraculously from the chestnut roots," since the poet was already so immersed in the alienating realities of urban-technological life that "the city turns / like awkward vast machinery in my head / like vast wheels turning in a void."⁵²

More and more it became apparent that only a drastic change in the

conditions of his life could bring Cowley closer to the realization of his literary ideals--and France beckoned seductively as spring announced itself. Before long the dream of "salvation by exile" seized hold of his imagination. In March 1921, helped by recommendations from his Harvard mentor John Livingstone Lowes and former Dial editor Clarence Britten, Cowley was awarded an American Field Service Fellowship for a year of graduate study at the University of Montpellier in southern France. The fellowship consisted of 12,000 francs (about a thousand dollars at the current rate of exchange), including a fifty-percent reduction in cabin-class steamboat fares and holding the possibility of a one-year extension. On April 30, 1921, as an act of courtesy, he attended the Field Service's Second Annual reunion at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York.⁵³

During most of that spring the Cowleys, newly invigorated by the prospect of a year abroad, plunged into a frenzy of preparatory activity. The scholarship worked as a catalyst, creating "a chaos of energy and works" in their lives. On March 17, 1921, Peggy reported the good news to Foster Damon: "It will be wonderful for both of us. Malcolm hasn't had any time to write since we have been married, which has worried me considerably. Now he will have two whole years." Peggy on her part planned to resume painting and had hopes of an exhibition at a New York gallery. In need of extra money to finance the venture the Cowleys spent hours counting expenditures and rushing about in efforts to obtain it.⁵⁴

In late April Cowley traveled to Cambridge to sell his piano and triumphantly deposited \$250 in a Boston bank. He used the occasion to visit John Brooks Wheelwright, who promised to lend money, and he paid his respects to Amy Lowell. She encountered a Cowley floating on high waves of exhilaration. In early May she wrote to tell him she had much enjoyed the visit of her one-time protégé and had found her faith in his promise as a writer undiminished: "It seemed like old times. I feared that New York had changed you, but I found it had not, unless, perhaps, for the better. You are one of the people I count on for the future. See that you do not disappoint me." She promised to announce his arrival in France to Jean Catel, professor at the University of Montpellier, and critic of American literature for the Mercure de France. She also expected Cowley to meet her literary rival Ezra Pound--"I believe he's a disappointed man living in the South of France. Poor fellow, I pity him."

Six weeks later she wrote again, agreeing to act as Cowley's literary agent for the duration of his stay in France and to help distribute his poems to various editors. To encourage him she reported that Scofield Thayer had expressed his enthusiasm about Cowley's criticism for The Dial and she urged him to continue writing for The Dial from France.⁵⁵

In the wake of his visit to Cambridge Cowley also decided to rekindle his friendship with Foster Damon. In late May he sent him a guilty letter apologizing for allowing their friendship to dissolve into silence, promising to make up for lost time and announcing his provisional date of departure: July 12. "The booze gets worse. People quarrel constantly. Gene O'Neill was in town and left. Dos Passos is en route for Constantinople. Scofield Thayer goes to Southern France. There will be a general European exodus in July." It was hard not to read such departures as confirmations of the rightness and feasibility of his own plans. A month later he wrote again, hoping to see Foster Damon before sailing and promising to set him up as a free-lance writer by introducing him to New York editors and advertising agencies--"I will give you \$25 for one advertising poem--and make a profit of it."⁵⁶

If Cowley was prompted to put his friendships in order before his departure, the prospect of a joint European adventure also appears to have had a stabilizing effect on his marriage. In late March Peggy spoke of their domestic situation as "our quiet family life;" news of the recent separation of James and Susan Light elicited Cowley's comment that soon he and Peggy would "gain a reputation of being the only happily married couple in the universe." In early May he traveled to Pittsburgh to attend at the sickbed of his father, who was seriously ill--"death prognosticated"--and stayed on for several days, until the fevers had abated. It was his last visit home before sailing.⁵⁷

Such compliments as Cowley had received from Amy Lowell and Scofield Thayer, while enhancing his confidence in his literary promise, did little to dispel the cloud of despondency that seemed to have settled over his life. In one of his last communications with Burke before departing he voiced his despair:

I have been unhappy--alas. I am unhappy--alas, alas. I don't know what it is; it resembles more than anything else the mal du siècle of the Romantics. One gets up, putters around the house, putters around the office, putters around the house, goes to bed. . . . One tells a client professionally about a

boom in building that one doesn't believe in--and while waiting for his reply wonders when the devil it is going to end. Not having any thoughts, one is afraid to be alone with them, and reads Mr. Hearst's 'Journal,' and the Saturday Evening Post, and accounts of the coming fight at Jersey City (put your money on Dempsey) and any other scrap of paper. . . . I feel as if I were . . . dying at the top; nothing can save me now short of a new life.⁵⁸

Caught up in a trivializing routine Cowley felt increasingly low-spirited. In a culture devoted to consumerism and materialism his poetic gifts might easily be turned to a profit--the advertising manager of Moon-Glo Silk had solicited a poet's services and Cowley, being recommended by the editors of The Dial, had bargained a \$35 submission price and a \$100 acceptance price for a brief poem--but the very ease of such cheapening of his talents only intensified his disgust. Finding little or no opportunity to seriously pursue his intellectual and artistic interests, Cowley could see no way out of emptiness and desolation but to join the exodus of American writers and artists to Europe, hoping, if not without some doubts, that a sea-voyage might be "a tonic." In June he listed the names of Village friends and acquaintances who were either actual or prospective expatriates in a letter to Burke--Cummings, Dos Passos, Dorothy Day, Mary Reynolds had already left, soon to be followed by Djuna Barnes, William Slater Brown, Alfred Kreymborg, Scofield Thayer, Ivan Opffer, Harold Stearns and countless others. "I can't continue the list for weariness," Cowley observed; even Joe Gould, he reflected, seemed likely to stop by in France to borrow money.⁵⁹

Expatriation was in the air that spring and summer. A mood of cultural disaffection swept over a large part of the intellectual and artistic community. Self-constituted prophet and leader of those seeking salvation abroad was Harold Stearns. A thirty-year old journalist and a Village acquaintance of the Cowleys, Stearns had probed searchingly into the causes for the disaffiliation from its native culture felt by the younger generation and had publicized his pessimistic findings in a flamboyant book, America and the Young Intellectual (1921). Faced with the repression and hypocrisy of a culture dominated by Prohibition, Puritanism and the Machine, so Stearns argued in his title essay, the young intellectual could find no outlet in the national life for the "moral idealism" he possessed in such large measure. "The whole drift and direction of our national life, under the control of a malignant and

stupid minority, fears this kind of moral idealism as it fears hell itself." Hoping to build a life on "intellectual integrity, emotional honesty, the attempt to win a moral order out of the jungle of experience without bias, without any axe to grind, without native prejudice," the young intellectual found that in the national life he was "not wanted." Asking himself "What Can a Young Man Do?," Stearns concluded that in the pursuit of literature and the arts, of "all those activities where the creative instincts of youth have freeest play," America presented even fewer opportunities; the field was virtually "closed." Stearns could see but one solution for a young writer not content to resign to philistinism and provincialism: "Get Out!" and take ship to Europe, where "life can still be lived."⁶⁰

On July 4, 1921, Stearns suited the act to the word and theatrically embarked for France, there to pursue the vigorous and challenging intellectual life he found lacking in his homeland. Hordes of Americans, talented and untalented, followed in his wake. Shortly before his well-publicized departure Stearns finished editing Civilization in the United States, a voluminous symposium by thirty prominent American intellectuals --including Lewis Mumford, H. L. Mencken, Robert Morss Lovett, J. E. Spingarn, Van Wyck Brooks, Conrad Aiken, Walter Pach, George Jean Nathan, George Soule and Ernest Boyd--which was published in 1922. A sweeping and near-unanimous indictment of the whole of American culture, it aimed at a critical examination ("without sentimentality and without fear") of American civilization. Stearns's contributions set the tone for the entire volume. America, he maintained, suffered from "emotional and aesthetic starvation;" it was plagued by "intellectual anaemia or torpor." Art had either lost out to the pursuit of materialism, leaving the nation spiritually impoverished, or it had become "an instrument of moral reform" in the custody of women. There was no opportunity for a "disinterested" intellectual life, nor were American intellectuals sustained by an institutional structure. As a result, intellectuals were forced into a position of "individualistic isolation" and eccentricity, divorced from the national life and left "déraciné."⁶¹

Van Wyck Brooks's contribution, "The Literary Life," considered a question that directly pertained to Cowley's personal experiences in the intellectual and artistic ambience of New York. Brooks's essay was a continuation and partial restatement of the critique of American culture

he had expounded in America's Coming-of-Age (1915) and in subsequent essays for The Seven Arts, where he had criticized the thwarting effects of an exploitative and acquisitive materialism on the spiritual life, lamented the withering of artistic talent in infertile soil and pleaded for a new leadership in letters. His essay probed deeply into the question of the scant opportunity for creative talent in American culture. Surveying the last fifty years of American literary history Brooks was impressed by "the singular impotence of its creative spirit" and drew a bleak conclusion: "The blighted career, the arrested career, the diverted career are, with us, the rule. The chronic state of our literature is that of a youthful promise which is never redeemed."

Shall I mention the writers--but they are countless!--who have lapsed into silence, or have involved themselves in barren eccentricities, or have been turned into machines? The poets who, at the very outset of their careers, find themselves extinguished like so many candles? The novelists who have been unable to grow up and remain withered boys of seventeen? The critics who find themselves overtaken in mid-career by a hardening of the spiritual arteries?

Cowley had personally experienced the fear of a blighted career in the Village, dreaded the waste of his talents and the deadening of his intellectual and emotional resources. He was sufficiently moved by the depth of feeling and conviction in Brooks's statement of the problem to quote the passage in Exile's Return.⁶²

But if Cowley had had firsthand experience of what Brooks had denounced as "the failure of American culture" to offer to the serious artist a congenial and sustaining cultural milieu, he did not share the mood of pessimism, cynicism and skepticism that radiated from this collective indictment by his intellectual elders. Their disillusionment with America, after all, largely emerged from their prewar reformatory hopes for the foundation of a "new republic" and the fulfilment of "the promise of American life," a cultural idealism never properly entertained by Cowley and his group of friends. Among the contributors to the symposium were few whose sense of cultural failure propelled them into expatriation; in general, they were men who had achieved established and secure positions in American society. In Exile's Return Cowley treated their symposium with mild derision and ironic condescension; from his 1934 perspective he was impressed by the "limited vision" of the

participants, found them "ridiculously ignorant" of the interests of his own age-group, and "weak and discordant" in what remedies and solutions they proposed. In Life Among the Surrealists Matthew Josephson, too, took pains to dissociate his motives for expatriation from those advanced by Stearns and his intellectual consorts; Stearns, he objected, could hardly have functioned as "a latter day Mahomet leading a pilgrimage of Yankees to the Left Bank of the Seine," because most of the younger expatriates had never heard of Stearns or his symposium at the actual hour of their departure. Cowley, in turn, presented Stearns rather ironically as a reincarnation of "Alexander marching into Persia and Byron shaking the dust of England from his feet."⁶³ Before long Cowley and his group would level volleys of attack and ridicule from France at these elder and embittered critics of culture. Brooks, Mencken and Stearns, in particular, were lampooned in verse and prose, and neither an inveterate expatriate like Ezra Pound nor an occasional Parisian explorer like Sinclair Lewis could escape the sting of their criticism.

If Cowley was in part propelled abroad by personal discouragement and disgust, he was not ready to make Stearns's kind of sweeping indictment of American life. If he went abroad in part out of impatience with the reactionary moral, social and political climate of the Harding years and if he saw his venture as a means of breaking away from the stunting influence of Prohibition, Puritanism and a pervasive cultural philistinism, he did so less as an act of cultural repudiation than as a rebellious search for positives. As he later was to write, if he shared the feeling of his contemporaries that American writers constituted "a defeated nation" within the nation, he left America less out of a feeling of being "driven into exile" than as a seeker for a more congenial "spiritual home." Like many of his coevals he came to Europe "to recover the good life and the traditions of art, to free [himself] from organized stupidity, to win [his] deserved place in the hierarchy of the intellect." He engaged in his European venture less in a mood of disillusionment than in a spirit of youthful energy and gusto. Like Josephson, who embarked in September, Cowley went first of all to expand his personal and literary horizons, to pursue his artistic and intellectual interests, and to extend his apprenticeship as a writer.⁶⁴

If he remained concerned with the larger question of American culture, his stay abroad was first of all a personal solution to a

personal situation. His last year in Greenwich Village had convinced him that life in New York offered inadequate opportunities to do serious work and to develop his personal talents and abilities. France held out the promise of a greater hospitality to the arts, congenial working conditions, and freedom to pursue his literary education. The French had a reputation for treating writers and artists deferentially, no matter how eccentric or unorthodox, and for regarding them as "useful members of the commonwealth." France, moreover, beckoned as an international center of culture, where one could profit from the stimulus of emulation and comparison, of interaction and communication with fellow artists, from across transnational boundaries, from the present as well as the past. Paris, in the words of Ezra Pound, was exactly the "intellectual and artistic vortex" that was such a lamentable deficiency in American culture.⁶⁵

From New York Cowley had been able to keep up with current literary developments in France through such reports as Ezra Pound's "Paris Letter" for the new Dial. In September 1920 Pound had already discussed the "young and very ferocious" group of French Dadaists whom Cowley would shortly meet in Paris--Aragon, Breton, Soupault, Tzara--and had wondered "how to introduce them to a society where one is considered decadent for reproducing pictures by Cézanne." The group was carrying on, so Pound reported, "the satiric heritage of Laforgue, and of symboliste sonorities" and was already "taking its place in the sun by right of intelligence, more than by right of work yet accomplished." Moreover, as Josephson has related, Cowley and his literary friends were faithful readers of current French literary periodicals like the Mercure de France and the Nouvelle Revue Française, in which they avidly followed the quarrels between diverse schools and coteries in literary France and received the impression of "a great intellectual ferment in Paris."⁶⁶

More importantly, in France the spirit of Gustave Flaubert and Rémy de Gourmont seemed still alive, promising a life of artistic integrity and an uncompromising search for perfection. As Cowley observed in Exile's Return:

France was the birthplace of our creed. It was in France that poets had labored for days over a single stanza, while bailiffs hammered at the door; in France that novelists like Gourmont had lived as anchorites, while imagining seduction more golden and mistresses more harmoniously yielding than life could ever

reproduce; in France that Flaubert had described "the quaint mania of passing one's life wearing oneself out over words," and had transformed the mania into a religion.⁶⁷

Indifferent, for the time being, to social and political purposes--his last article before sailing was a noncommittal review of a book defending the League of Nations and pleading for a liberal foreign policy⁶⁸--Cowley sought in France both an artistic method and a way of life. If he was committed to a Flaubertian or Symbolist aesthetics, it was in part because he hoped through art to find a congenial ethics of the literary life. Though he may not have been aware of it at the time, such a commitment was in essence moral as much as aesthetic.⁶⁹ For Cowley as for Josephson the application of formalist, aesthetic standards to art was to be carried over into life. If Cowley approached the search for a personal aesthetics with the fervor of a moral conviction, he did so because he hoped to find personal fulfilment through cultivating an aesthetic ideal. Since such an attitude carried all the moral, social and spiritual implications of a "religion," to move from personal and aesthetic issues to larger cultural and societal concerns would ultimately be less a radical break with than a logical continuation of such a search. Embarking for France in search of personal values, Cowley might yet hope to return with a set of ideals that had applicability beyond the personal. He might hope to carry home with him an understanding of new ways to integrate the American writer more successfully into the very social and cultural ambience he was now so anxious to leave. On July 8, 1921, a few days after the spectacular departure of Harold Stearns, with most of his friends either abroad or about to follow, Cowley and his wife unobtrusively joined the crowds of artists, intellectuals and writers who went "streaming up the longest gangplank in the world," part of "a great migration eastward into new prairies of the mind," definitely embarked on what he later felt was "almost a pilgrimage to Holy Land."⁷⁰

The two years Malcolm Cowley spent in France, from the summer of 1921 to the summer of 1923, mark a watershed period in his early career. They were years of literary fermentation and intellectual ripening, which helped to clarify his attitudes and crystallize his ideas. In part France was to Cowley what Paris was to Ezra Pound, a "laboratory of ideas," a place where "poisons can be tested, new modes of sanity discovered." It was in France that Cowley encountered the modern spirit in all its various and contradictory manifestations. Not only did it seem, as Gertrude Stein was to say, that "Paris was where the twentieth century was;" also, in the early 1920s, it was possible to believe that Paris stood fair to become "the intellectual capital of the United States." For Cowley as for Gertrude Stein France functioned as a necessary "second" country, one which helped him to understand the nature and extent of his allegiance to American culture. Unlike Miss Stein's, Cowley's expatriation was never meant to be permanent; strictly speaking he never was an "exile." Financially, culturally and intellectually, he remained dependent upon American sources for the duration of his stay. Paradoxically, but not uncommonly, his foreign venture enhanced his perspective on America, led to a revaluation of the aesthetic potential inherent in his native culture and prompted him to redefine his role as an American writer.¹

To all intents and purposes Cowley's French venture proved an "ambiguous encounter." Innocently expecting to find the France of Gustave Flaubert and Rémy de Gourmont, writers on whose aesthetics and literary ethics he had partially built his own ideals, Cowley was confronted with a "mad steeplechase" of warring and quarreling factions and schools and exposed to "the feverish intellectual development of half a century" in only a fraction of that time.² His response to the complex literary

situation in contemporary France revealed the paradoxes in his literary thinking, sharpened the ambiguity of his reaction to modernism and brought out the contradictory elements in his personality. Eventually he sailed home with a stock of values, ambitions and ideals derived from a foreign cultural milieu but of dubious validity in his own native ambience.

Cowley felt relieved to have escaped the chaotic bustle of his last fortnight in New York. He knew that his disenchanting experiences in Greenwich Village had taken a heavy toll and demanded to be digested and erased from memory if he ever was to do serious writing again. To Burke he wrote: "I really should sum up New York for myself if I want to kill it in my mind, otherwise it will live on like Harvard. And it was a much more unpleasant experience than Harvard College and needs more definite punctuation." Some weeks later, still resolved to put the recent past behind him but no longer so determined to obliterate it, he planned to "embalm" his New York impressions in a story and projected a poem as a "summing up of my adolescence." Cowley was right in his belief that after New York he needed an intermezzo of "absolute idleness" to restore his emotional equilibrium and revive his intellectual resiliency. In effect his first five months in France were a time of adjustment and recuperation, in which his productivity was at a fairly low ebb. Three months after leaving America he confessed to John Brooks Wheelwright from his "sanctuary" at Montpellier that "after another year of New York I should have been ready to saw off the part of me above the bridge of the nose and bury it." At the end of November he was still plagued and paralyzed by painful memories of New York and admitted to Burke the period had left him emotionally and intellectually drained: "I see very clearly that my eighteen months in New York were as effective as eighteen enemas. They cleaned me out." As late as September 1922 he complained that his time in the Village "played hell with me. I still haven't digested it."³ By then, however, Cowley's intellectual energies had been forcefully reactivated. Eventually his time in France proved most fertile; under its impact he published over thirty poems and developed along lines that left permanent traces on his literary and intellectual outlook.

Even on board the Niagara, a simple second-class steamer of the French Line, the economic advantages of a temporary removal to a France

in the grip of postwar inflation were apparent. For as little as 125 dollars, Cowley wrote from the ship, one enjoyed the privilege of becoming "one of the 86 aristocrats of the vessel, watching from a vantage post on the boat deck the movement of the poor cattle in the steerage." The privilege included delicious five-course luncheons and six-course dinners, with wine, cigars and cognac, at prices unheard of in New York. During the crossing he dashed off three letters to Burke on three successive days, a rare epistolary outburst, in which he criticized at length several of Burke's short stories that were later incorporated in The White Oxen (1924). Following Burke's theoretical notions, he analyzed fictional structure in terms of circles, planes and tangents, but was skeptical about the success of Burke's experiments with geometrical form and narrative constructions based on associational methods of thought and Freudian psychoanalysis. "You will build a literature on the ruins of Floyd Dell," he commented in jest.⁴

Even during the voyage Cowley could feel Paris beckoning with the promise of boundless opportunity in art and life. To express his exhilaration he vaguely planned a story on the course of a ship which never touched land but continually pushed its bow into "new seas." In retrospect Cowley described the mythical lure of Paris as that of a contemporary Olympus, the place where one could encounter the entire "pantheon" of modern artists worshiped by the younger generation, including James Joyce, "the half-blind Jove of the new age," Gertrude Stein, "its solid Minerva," as well as Picasso, Brancusi, Matisse, Pound, Valéry, Gide and Stravinsky.⁵ The immediate reality of Paris, however, proved different. For the moment it seemed as if Cowley had been transported back to rather than away from Greenwich Village. Arriving from Le Havre in a hot Paris on July 19 he made his way to La Rotonde, at the corner of the Boulevard du Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail, right in "the heart and nervous system" of American expatriate activity. There he found the painter Marsden Hartley; Djuna Barnes, future author of Nightwood, who seemed "unhappy" in France and was on her way to meet James Light in Germany; Barnes's actor friend Harrison Dowd; Arthur B. Moss, one-time editor of the Greenwich Village Quill; Percy Winner, a Village friend of Matthew Josephson's; Edna St. Vincent Millay; and, he told Foster Damon, "seemingly, everyone else who had ever got drunk at the Provincetown Players. We fled." Paris, indeed, seemed to harbor the

same atmosphere of artistic pretense, moral abandon and sexual profligacy he had reacted against in New York: "It is Greenwich Village, only much more so than the Village." Having come to France to find congenial conditions for living a writer's life, Cowley was dismayed to find Paris less a literary workshop than an extension of New York bohemia. "It is hard to describe to you the Brevoortness, the O'Connorness of the Dome and the Rotonde," he wrote to Burke; only the names of the bartenders seemed changed. At a recent soirée he had met Robert McAlmon, destined to become an influential publisher of American expatriate writers through founding Contact Editions; Mina Loy, a poet friend of Djuna Barnes, one-time member of the Others circle and a former Village consort of the Cowleys; Royall Snow, an old Harvard friend; Lorimer Hammond, a colleague from Sweet's; and Sinclair Lewis and Harold Stearns. Lewis, Cowley told Burke, talked just like the characters in his novels, "only it is better in conversation. It is Middle West, with a twist. Sometimes he forgets the twist." Stearns already seemed bent upon the self-defeating and pathetic life of dissipation, café-sitting and selling tips on racehorses to American tourists which made him the pantaloons among more serious American expatriates, who saw in him the emblematic wastrel and non-writing exile.⁶

If there were times when Cowley plunged headlong into the frenzy of Montparnassian café-life (one party, he told Burke, had ended at five o'clock with onion soup at Les Halles), and, upon occasion, would even play a leading part in the revelry, his initial response to Left Bank expatriate activity was to take refuge from the "artiness" and fakery he found there and to seek an opportunity to lead the serious life of a self-respecting professional writer. His reaction showed that he approached the writer's vocation with the strenuous work ethic, the moral discipline and the intense ambitiousness that marked the careers of the great writers of his generation.⁷

Apart from the American colony at Montparnasse the Cowleys found Paris "quite as charming as the guidebooks." They visited museums, paid their respects to Ezra Pound, were impressed by how thoroughly alive was the spirit of French history in contemporary Paris (there was a curious "datelessness" about the city, Cowley told Burke, the ghosts of Napoleon and Voltaire seeming still palpably present) and, for relief, made a trip into the French countryside to visit their Village friend Jim Butler in

Giverny, an artists' village on the Norman border, some fifty miles west of Paris.⁸

Newly stimulated by the infectious exhilaration of his first few weeks in France, Cowley was eager to get to work. His hopes were high. "Let us begin the Renaissance," he exhorted himself one afternoon in Paris. "Let us begin as if we had never begun before." His ambition to write creative prose rekindled, Cowley searched for signs of "a new path" to follow in fiction and drew up a prospectus for a story based on the long, slow journey from New York to Paris, a dramatization in three movements of the "induction" to his imminent renaissance. Rooted in an impulse to cleanse his mind of memories of New York, the story was to embalm Cowley's impressions of the "noise, bustle, hysteria" of a hot and suffocating Manhattan, the city of the "living dead," and, surrendering realism to phantasmagoria, would encompass the account of a magical trip "in search of other stars." Cowley rewrote and expanded its third movement into a full-length story and submitted it to Art Moss for publication in Gargoyle, the "improved Paris edition" of the Village Quill, as "The Journey to Paris." The story was partly intended as "an amusing satirical voyage, on the order of Dean Swift." It aimed to parody Burke's Freudian fictional experiments, but it was written with John Brooks Wheelwright more specifically in mind; it was the latter's "passion for arbitrary and non-sensical events" that particularly fascinated Cowley. Foremost, however, "The Journey to Paris" was an imaginative enactment of Cowley's personal hopes for a magical French venture. It described a Gulliver-like miraculous voyage through a surreal moon-lit seascape, past mysterious islands harboring fabulous cultures and inhabitants, all the way to Paris, the ultimate city of magic, "a city at which we marvelled much, for it was all built out of stone and brick and plaster and not out of cardboard and structural steel like the vaster city we had quitted so many moons, so many centuries before."⁹

In mid-August, after a month in Paris, the Cowleys traveled south to Dijon, there to remain six weeks, before passing on to Montpellier. Sauntering over the city's medieval cobblestones, they relished the historical splendor of Dijon, the old capital of the dukedom of Burgundy; its ancient glory was still palpable among the royal palaces and costly churches. Boarding with a French family, M. and Mme. Lachat, Cowley hoped to settle down to serious work and to make good the promise of an

oncoming "renaissance". For the time being, however, he found that his "muse" was "tethered" and attempted "no ambitious flights." Historically interesting as it was, Dijon was dull after the hectic social gaiety of Paris and soon the Cowleys felt faintly regretful about their departure from the City of Light. In Dijon, Cowley told Wheelwright, "our family Wrote and Painted. . . . There's a lot of Architecture, but one can't drink Architecture. There are a lot of excellent drinks, but no company in which to consume them. And even the excellent mustard of Dijon cannot quite fill a life. There was nothing to do but work."¹⁰

Accordingly, he corrected and revised old poems, finished his story for Art Moss, and wrote a potboiling article on American trade in Dijon, which he asked Burke to sell for him to Export Trade. He also composed three satirical odes--on Harold Stearns, Ezra Pound and Sinclair Lewis--reflecting the ironic bemusement with which he had recently observed American expatriates in Paris. He sent the poems to H. S. Canby, who published them in his Literary Review in January 1922. The poem on Harold Stearns ridiculed the discrepancy between his high-minded, theatrically expounded motives for expatriation and the bibulous reality of his Montparnassian existence.

Do I remember (it was in the Freeman,
A very brilliant article, begad)
Last March that some sophisticated demon
Told us to go to Europe and Be Bad?
"New York is ruled by preachers. Buy a ticket
For irreligious France, and there be wicked.

"The young man cannot grow who lives in fetters,
'Tis only by experience he learns;
So go abroad if you love Art or Letters."
Who wrote these lines? Could it be Harold Stearns?
. . .

But let us take his authorship for granted,
And picture Harold Stearns arrived in France,
Tasting the freedom that he so had vaunted,
Most gay, most wicked of the celebrants.
Alas, I find that there is much disparity
Between this fetching picture and the verity.
. . .

And does he then, remembering his article,
Expound to us Three Roads Proposed to Freedom!
And does he paint the town? No, not a particle;
His eyes are innocent as those of Edom.
Less bad than bashful, less in joy than fear,

He hides his glances in a glass of beer.

The poem on Ezra Pound, mixing respect with a firm dose of irony, recalled Cowley's meeting with the influential literary mentor and "schoolmaster" at the Hôtel Jacob on July 23: "here prowls the polylingual, / refractory, irrepressible / archenemy of convention-- / red fox-muzzle beard, red dressing gown-- / and growls at his guest while affably / scratching himself." His third satire was entitled "Sinclair Lewis Imitates a Member of the Gopher City Rotary Club." It mocked the comical disparity between the sophisticated cosmopolitanism of Paris and the Babbitt-like Midwestern chauvinism paraded by Sinclair Lewis on the terraces of Montparnasse. Several years later Cowley recalled how Lewis, then engaged in writing Babbitt, had distinctly relished "acting the part of his principal character: the naivety, philistinism, nasal sing-song and all the rest of it."¹⁹

The most important offshoot of Cowley's six weeks in Dijon was an article printed on the frontpage of the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post on October 15, 1921. "This Youngest Generation" was Cowley's first full-fledged literary essay on a self-chosen subject and marked his first formal performance as the champion and chronicler of his literary age-group. For the first time a critic was making a concerted effort to define the nebulous ideas and aesthetic assumptions of the generation which had come to maturity in the wake of the First World War. Part of the article's boldness, indeed, apart from its contention that such a generation existed, lay in its claim to future stature for a group of writers as yet largely unpublished and unrecognized. But the article also signified an act of personal stocktaking, undertaken at a moment of transition, when the impact of the new cultural climate was yet unfelt, but when New York already seemed "centuries away."¹² The article brought to a focus the disparate elements in Cowley's development to date. It used them synecdochically in a manner anticipating Exile's Return and combined them into a composite picture of the ideas of Cowley's coevals.

Looking for the distinctive traits of generational cohesion, Cowley found it easier to "proceed by negatives rather than affirmatives." Indeed, his personal understanding of what he had passed through and rejected was more precise than his awareness of where he wanted to go. He pointed out that the younger writers did not share the social concern and reformist idealism of their "elder cousins;" they were "not gathered in a

solid phalanx behind H. L. Mencken to assault our tottering American puritanism." They were out of sympathy with "the belated revolt of the Georgians," whether exemplified by the amorphous social documents of their novelists, the "divine journalism" of H. G. Wells, or the "fausse-naïveté" of their poets. They spurned causes like feminism, Freudianism and Communism, and did so with a grand flourish of indifference. In an ironic resumé of his own apprentice years Cowley drew up a "fever chart" of the literary childhood diseases of a representative member of his generation:

At sixteen he contracts his first bad case of Chesterton, complicated within three months by Oscar Wilde. Temperature, 105; pulse, very rapid. Before he recovers he is overwhelmed, first by Shaw, then by Schnitzler, and, finally, by the dramatic criticism of George Jean Nathan. Seventeen is the age of sophistication; he is older at seventeen than at any other time before fifty. He reads the Smart Set. He is trapped by H. L. Mencken into reading Hugh Walpole, and so is conducted into the whole world of Georgian novelists. The period that follows is one of subnormal temperatures; it is ended disastrously by a new fever of ecstasism under the influence of Arthur Machen. Shortly afterwards he learns to read French and a new world opens before him. His temperature does not return to normal . . . till he has dipped into Freud and Marx. . . .

At twenty-five Cowley's imaginary young writer has effectively adopted and disowned all the major currents in American and European writing, only to replace them with a rich store of personal literary prejudices.

On the positive side Cowley credited the younger generation with "more respect, if not reverence, for the work of the past," in particular the "modern" past of the Elizabethan dramatists, French classical drama and the satirical humanism of Swift and Defoe. The "strange modern gods" worshiped by the members of his age-group were predominantly French, he said. There was among them a clear "progression away from London" and a pronounced interest in avant-garde French writing, from Baudelaire, Flaubert and De Gourmont, through Laforgue and Huysmans, to "the most recent and most involved Parisian schools." In this, Cowley acknowledged, his age-group was less in revolt against than carrying forward a tendency initiated by its immediate elders: Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. "Pupils" of Flaubert and De Gourmont, the youngest writers displayed "a new interest in form" at the expense of matter. They rejected an "inchoate" Dreiserian naturalism to create works which would

be "at least as well composed as a good landscape" and might "even attain to the logical organization of music." Their aesthetic "catchwords" were "form, simplification, strangeness, respect for literature as an art with traditions, abstractness." The fact that such ideals were rooted in a French rather than an English tradition, he said, made its influence only "safer" since it precluded the danger of literary vassalage. This youngest generation was lucky, Cowley acknowledged, in that it was spared the fatal misfortune of American writers in the past, who had lacked "a definite and receptive public." For creating such an audience the younger generation owed much to the very writers--Mencken, Dreiser--against whom it was revolting. In an effort to name the individuals composing "this youngest generation" Cowley trod carefully, singling out those among his literary friends who showed most promise and had achieved publication, however modestly: John Dos Passos, E. E. Cummings, William Slater Brown, S. Foster Damon and Kenneth Burke.¹³

"This Youngest Generation" was an astute, if in places flippant and naive, inventory of the aesthetic assumptions of Cowley's literary consorts. The essay carefully refrained from discussing its author's personal aesthetics and underplayed the nascent misgivings about the modernist creed he had exemplified in his reviews for The Dial. As such it pointed up the uncertainty of Cowley's own aesthetic direction. With implicit self-reference, indeed, he acknowledged that "the coquetting of a young writer with various literary movements is of little value unless they cancel each other off, thus leaving room for the development of his individual talents."

Though presumably concerned with defining the aesthetic contours of a specific generation, Cowley strongly stressed the individualism of each member. He took pains to shun too constrictive a definition of the concept of a literary generation and emphasized idiosyncrasy and diversity within a loosely generational framework. If there were "common habits of thought," there was "no solidarity" among its individual components, nor was there an intellectual focal point in the form of an "official magazine" or a social gathering place in the form of a "semi-official café or tearoom." Considered as "an organized body of opinion," Cowley said, the generation was virtually nonexistent; in terms of aesthetic doctrine his was "a generation without a school and without a manifesto." Though such remarks might easily be (and would soon be)

construed as pleas for the very creation of such a school, magazine or manifesto, Cowley was in effect resisting the evolvement of any coterie or group spirit. His essay exemplified a persistent wariness of being pressed into any narrow intellectual or literary framework. In part because he knew how easily he was inclined "to take color from [his] surroundings," Cowley was cautious of any threat to a free and independent development of his talents.¹⁴

Cowley's essay, however balanced, left certain generational features undiscussed. It was not until he came to write Exile's Return that he more precisely grasped the social and political implications of the aesthetic preferences of his age-group. For the moment such implications were largely ignored, even if his growing discomfort with the feasibility of a pure formalism would surface soon enough. Likewise, Cowley failed to point out that his coevals' new respect for the past and for literature as "an art with traditions" apparently did not as yet extend to their own native culture. In this respect he unknowingly revealed how thoroughly he shared, at least for the time being, what Alfred Kazin has described as his generation's "detachment from the native traditions." It was, indeed, not long after finishing his essay that Cowley complained to Burke of feeling "out of contact with my own traditions." His sense of cultural alienation, however, was not particularly traumatic. It was, in effect, soon after departing from America that he became conscious of the "urn of native soil" in his cultural baggage.¹⁵

By early October the Cowleys were established in Montpellier, where for 120 francs a month they rented a three-room apartment at the Villa Marcel, with cooking facilities, a tiled floor, and buff wallpaper. Situated at a twenty-minute distance from the Mediterranean, Montpellier was a quiet, provincial university town, surrounded by the timeless classical beauty of a stark subtropical landscape. "Picture us here in the Midi," Cowley described his new environs to Foster Damon, "where all the forms of the landscape are different from those of the North. In the first place there are rocks everywhere, grey in the sun. The trees are twisted: stone pines, cedars of Lebanon, olives, illexes--or else they are neatly tailored cypresses. The villas have sloping roofs of red tile. The color scheme also is different: blue and grey. Blue sky, blue sea--as advertised. Grey olive trees, grey rocks, feathery grey pines. Everything very hard and unreal in the sunlight." The town itself seemed to breathe

the same classical spirit as the surrounding landscape. It was composed of "a mass of little streets, the width of one's outstretched arms, that climb tortuously up a hill. Occasionally they open out into a formal square, with palm trees and sycamores and a fountain, always with two swans. Or there will be an equestrian statue of Louis XIV, dressed as a Noble Roman." Though classes did not start until early November, students already seemed "omnipresent and of all races."¹⁶

Though the owner of Villa Marcel, an old professor of pharmacy, considered his tenants "deplorably bohemian," in Montpellier the Cowleys settled down to a calm, domestic life of regular work, study and unpretentious diversion. "Since one can't run up to Paris for the weekend, one takes one's enjoyment at home," Cowley wrote somewhat wistfully to Wheelwright in October. "Our life is a great deal quieter than in New York," Peggy added in a letter of her own; "We have been going to the movies once a week. . . . I spend the majority of my time doing housework, tending my flowers and painting. . . . My French is abominable. . . . Malcolm is writing little or nothing. At least nowhere near as much as he did in New York. I get sore once in a while about it, but actually don't think it is anything but a long relaxation after New York." At times, indeed, life in Montpellier was too quiet for Cowley's convivial tastes and he found himself thinking with "faint regrets" about New York. He missed his friends and urged Wheelwright to look up Burke, whom he thought would be lonely "with nothing to occupy him but his feuds." Burke, he said, had "a fantastic mind, usually incorrect . . . but always profound. His world exists in a bundle of theories, covering everything from hygiene to the proper way to develop a thought." At other times the university ambience reminded him of Harvard and inspired nostalgia for the thrilling spectacle of a derby against Yale--"The coonskin coats stream over the Anderson Bridge. The team comes out and runs through signals while the Stadium roars. . . ."¹⁷

For the moment Cowley found himself transported back to the time of luxurious and uncluttered freedom he had known in high school and at college. As yet undecided about what courses would be most conducive to a serious pursuit of his literary interests, he found the university curriculum open to foreigners "a mixture of erudition and puerility." For ten days he was wrapped up in the Tenth Congress of the National Union of the Associations of French Students, to which he acted as an American

delegate. Carrying a big American flag, he seemed back in more frivolous student days; if his snobbishness had worn thin, he still liked to pose and playact. "I sympathize with the French in their dislike for Britishers and swear the eternal amity of America. They know enough not to take things too seriously, whereby the game becomes amusing."¹⁸

With as yet no signs of a forthcoming poetic renaissance Cowley remained eager to establish his name and reputation as a professional critic and poet. In September he had urged Burke to keep him informed of the latest changes in the literary markets in New York, where new possibilities were opening up and old ones closing down with startling rapidity. From Dijon he had sent a "consignment of merchandise," consisting of a batch of twenty-four corrected poems, to Amy Lowell, who had promised to act as his unofficial agent, and anxiously requested her criticism: "Some of [the poems] have passed through a metamorphosis that would strain even Ovid's imagination. About the result I am very much in doubt. I, who have criticized so much, am myself much in need of a critic. . . . I quake in my boots, fearing that you personally will not like the poems I send you. Everything depends on that. . . . You are the best judge." The first results of Miss Lowell's efforts were discouraging. On October 14 James Sibley Watson of The Dial told Cowley that he had regretfully, if reluctantly, returned his poem "Day Coach" to Miss Lowell, but had asked her to send in another selection of Cowley's verse. Two weeks later Miss Lowell reported that she had mailed nine of Cowley's poems to The Dial, adding that she did not have much hope of placing many of the poems Cowley had sent her--most magazines, she thought, would consider them too free or unorthodox. In response to Cowley's request for criticism she put her finger on a characteristic weakness of his verse. Too many of his poems, she said, were "dangerously like prose" and "not quite rhythmical enough." She offered practical criticism and concluded that what Cowley most needed to learn was the skill of "teasing a poem up, and then teasing it up some more, until you have wrung the final essence out of it, all the subject will bear and all its implications."¹⁹

Cowley was disturbed by Miss Lowell's well-considered critique. He expressed his disappointment to Foster Damon, admitting he found it difficult to defend himself against the charge of carelessness, since he was consciously writing "on the border of free forms." He went on to

explain his poetic credo: "I want to write in a medium that is very simple, very direct, and at the same time very complex. I want to avoid monosyllables, which confuse the meter. I want to reduce my details to the smallest number possible, and to use each of these details more than once. . . . I think that the words themselves should carry all the burden, and that punctuation should be reduced as much as possible." In early December he defended his poetic practice to Amy Lowell, explaining that his loose and irregular rhythms were due to an affinity with French rather than English prosody:

. . . your criticism touched me more than I could ever be touched by the lack of an editor. Was it really true that I was stinting work on my verse? . . . To tell the truth, the meters that sing themselves in my head are rather against the traditions of English poetry. Since Coleridge, trimeter and tetrameter have been extremely free measures, but in pentameter there has always been a tendency to count the syllables. Our heroic line has been several times under the strong influence of the French alexandrine.

Now the measure which comes most naturally, and which carries the most force to me, is a line of five assorted accents. Even my free verse tends to fall into this pattern. To ears trained in the tradition of English poetry, the extra syllables are rather uncomfortable; the only other modern poet I can point to who uses the crowded and irregular pentameter is D. H. Lawrence. Perhaps that is why his verse has always fascinated me.²⁰

At the end of November Amy Lowell informed Cowley that she had succeeded in selling "Mountain Valley" to The Dial, his first poem to be accepted by Thayer and Watson. The poem brought a welcome check of \$10 and appeared in December 1921. It was the first of several poems marketed to American magazines from France in which Cowley returned to the Pennsylvania farming country of his childhood. The poem illuminated Miss Lowell's criticism as well as Cowley's apologia:

Mountain Valley

Lost in this mountain valley, we have struggled
Too long for bread. Here corn grows sparse and yellow.
The valley is too narrow, and we have driven
Our ploughs vainly against the flanks of the hill.

There is no more use in struggling, O my brothers;
Let us lie down together here and rest.

Some day when the crust of the earth has grown as cold

As the dead craters of the moon, these hills will wrinkle
Like the wrinkles on a forehead; they will draw
Together like a finger and a wrinkled thumb,
Squeezing the valley between them, and there will be
For us magnificent sepulture, O my kin.

Already the hills lie
Staring down at our cornfields covetously.

The sale of a poem about which Cowley had private reservations provoked some cynical reflections about the relationship between literary merit and the principles governing the literary marketplace. To Burke he remarked that an ironic side-effect of expatriation to the French provinces was that it gave one enhanced literary standing in New York. Cowley's work, indeed, had been "surprisingly easy to sell" from France. "It is the duty of any writer who wishes to sell himself to this age to travel three thousand miles away from it," he pontificated in a spirit of mockery.²¹

Cowley's speculations were fed in part by his recent experiences with Broom, a new international magazine of avant-garde art. It had been launched, shortly before, in New York by Harold Loeb, a Princeton graduate and wrestling champion, the son of a wealthy Wall Street broker, and a rebellious offshoot of the famous Guggenheim family. After a period of personal questing Loeb had committed himself to the life of literature and ideas, had bought a partnership in the Sunwise Turn bookshop in New York, and become convinced that a new literary magazine was needed to bring "the good life" a little nearer. He enlisted the cooperation and assistance of Alfred Kreymborg, the experienced editor of Glebe and Others and a well-known avant-garde poet, whose tastes Loeb held to be congruous with his own: "Both of us prized the new, the different, and the experimental . . . we both deplored the obeisance to Europe prevalent among Americans who aspired to culture." The editors decided to publish the new magazine from Rome, where printing costs were lowest, while maintaining a New York office presided over by Nathaniel Shaw and, later, by Lola Ridge and Edward Storer.²²

Cowley had been aware of the new venture before his departure for France. He had urged Burke to contribute to the magazine and had offered to submit several of his manuscripts to Kreymborg, whose departure for Europe roughly coincided with his own. In late September Kreymborg informed Cowley from Rome that Broom had accepted "Château de Soupîr:

1917," a poem Amy Lowell had been unable to sell two years before, and was eager for more. Cowley promptly sent in a "modern, complete, and up-to-date version" of the poem, which appeared in Broom's third issue. Three of Burke's stories, however, Kreymborg rejected, thereby confirming Cowley's cynical impression that a removal to foreign parts improved a writer's market value. Acting as Burke's European agent, Cowley negotiated with Kreymborg about his friend's contributions and sent Burke a letter of encouragement, pronouncing his faith in his ultimate success and speculating on the mechanics of engineering a reputation for the "youngest generation:"

Unrecognized genius is a commodity which does not exist in America. Our great problem is rather to be geniuses and to continue to be geniuses after forty. The rest comes. It does not come naturally or easily, it does not debouch necessarily into the Saturday Evening Post, but it comes. The critics have proclaimed--until they now believe it themselves--that we are in the midst of a renaissance. And having proclaimed the renaissance they look busily around--like you and me--for the other half of this youngest generation. You are one of the few young American writers who writes. You cannot long be overlooked.

Burke was the logical candidate, Cowley thought, for the \$2000 Award which The Dial had announced it would yearly present to a deserving contributor; he advised Burke to put the money to good use by coming to Europe.²³

In late September Alfred Kreymborg sent Cowley the first issue of Broom, dated November 1921, for comment. Despite its homely title, the new magazine was lavish in appearance and extravagant in size. Its format and appearance, indeed, were "the best yet," Cowley observed to Foster Damon; "Good printing, evidently, is not expensive at Rome." The contents, however, did not live up to the lavishness of its exterior or the clamor of its announcement. In a "Manifesto" written by Kreymborg and printed on the last page of the issue the editors promised to publish the best of contemporary writing, painting and sculpture--from Continental Europe as well as England and America--and to give "the unknown, pathbreaking artist . . . at least an equal chance with the artist of acknowledged reputation." Broom was conceived as "a sort of clearing house where the artists of the present time will be brought into closer contact."²⁴ To underline its international focus Broom's first issue

featured contributors of thirteen different nationalities. It contained reproductions by mostly European avant-garde artists--Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Juan Gris, Albert Gleizes, Jacques Lipchitz--but also featured two Americans: Joseph Stella and Man Ray. The majority of writers represented were Americans and included Conrad Aiken, Amy Lowell, James Oppenheim, Louis Untermeyer, Haniel Long and Lola Ridge. Not only did Kreymborg and Loeb appear to have fallen for those among a slightly older generation who had attained some national or international reputation, there was also little sign of an editorial policy which could unify the heterogeneous collection in such a way as to distinguish Broom from other magazines devoted to the American and European avant-garde, notably The Dial.²⁵ Not surprisingly, Cowley's response was tepid at best. The prose in Broom's debut, he reported to Foster Damon, seemed "a weak edition of The Dial," the art was "very modern" and the poetry "not bad." But the issue as a whole lacked potency and peppiness: "there was no wad shot." To a young writer in search of personal values Broom seemed everything and nothing. Its undistinguished eclecticism hardly made good the promise of a radical clean sweep implied in its title.²⁶

The one essay which came closest to a statement of editorial policy was an article by a Dutch writer, Emmy Veronica Sanders, in which she viewed the American "invasion" of Europe with strong misgivings and deplored the tendency on the part of "the extreme left wing of literary America" to confuse Europe with France, or even more narrowly with the "literary capering" of the French Dadaists. She disparaged the influence of technology and "the American Machine" on avant-garde aesthetics and pleaded for a catholic, inclusive and cosmopolitan approach to American culture, of which she hoped Broom might be the instrument. Cowley appears to have read the Sanders article as a disparagement of his self-chosen mode of expatriation and his strong commitment to French literature; it seemed an oblique attack on his "This Youngest Generation." In his enthusiasm for French culture he mistakenly assumed Sanders's article to be informed by a feeling of English superiority, a point on which he was promptly set straight by Alfred Kreymborg: it was The Dial, not Broom, which was guilty of "kowtowing to London, and big names."²⁷

Sanders's article largely reflected the influence of Kreymborg's catholic, internationalist approach in the pages of Broom. By contrast, Loeb's editorial and artistic orientation was rather one of cultural

nationalism; he felt that "America should find its own soul, whatever it was, before undertaking to embrace the universe." Tensions between Loeb and Kreymborg made Broom's editorial direction indeterminate from the start; conflicting attitudes on the issue of cultural nationalism and internationalism coexisted uneasily through its first four issues. Loeb's editorial stamp became clearer and Broom's nationalist focus more unified after Kreymborg's resignation in February 1922 and especially with the arrival of Matthew Josephson as associate editor during the summer.²⁸ By that time Cowley, too, was willing to give to Broom his wholehearted approval.

For the moment, however, Cowley preferred to observe the advance of avant-garde aesthetics from a skeptical distance and remained rather nebulous in his literary thinking. In a letter to Burke he admitted he felt "vague about the aims of literature and the worth of modern literature. Vague about politics. Vague, more especially, about my own intentions in art and life." At the same time he knew that such a lack of clarity could not be stretched out endlessly: "When my boat steams into New York harbor, I must know definitely what to do." More than ever he felt the need for a personal aesthetics, hoping that, as he told Wheelwright, "with a little more time for thought over here, my ideas should become less scanty than in New York."²⁹

At the end of October he complained that he had been "alarmingly empty-headed" since his arrival in the Midi. In his mood of discouragement and self-deprecation he was inclined, as often, to seek refuge in nostalgia, perhaps his strongest poetic impulse, and to dream of pastoral troutfishing moments in Cambria County, much in the way Ernest Hemingway would soon dream of the piney woods of Northern Michigan from a table at the Closerie des Lilas. On October 27 Cowley sent Burke a first draft of "The Silvery Fishes:"

From the vast of it,
from summer fields pegged flat beneath the sky,
enormous sunlight blazing out of them,
I hid myself away
under the water, under green water,
where silvery fishes nibbled at my thighs,
and heard them saying:

"We swam upstream for three days and three nights,
for three days drifted southward with the current,
and nowhere found a limit to the world.

It is shaped like a willow branch.
Heroes came forth, but none could ever swim
to the tipmost leaf."

A kingfisher cast his shadow on the water.
The fishes hid away beneath a stone.³⁰

Such incidental poems notwithstanding, the rumors of an oncoming poetic renaissance he had detected at Dijon proved "false," the expected flowering of his genius "abortive." It was not until he came to Montpellier, however, that he "reached down into the void and found it was infinite." He felt he had no intellectual concepts to measure against Burke's and could do nothing but surrender to a mental state of "undelicious idleness and chaos." His only piece of writing was "a very mediocre article" on the Rabelais fêtes held in Montpellier on November 6, 1921, at which a monument to the great satirical humanist of the French Renaissance, a sculpture by Jacques Villeneuve, was unveiled by the French President; Cowley duly reported on the event and the concomitant festivities for the New York Tribune.³¹

By the end of November he seemed to have touched bottom and began to reemerge from the depths: "In New York I built up carefully a wall between myself and all outside impressions, for the plain enough reason that most of these were unpleasant. Now I find again that one can't live in a void." Eager to break out of a self-imposed insulation, he was "beginning again to watch people." He had already met quite a few interesting people, among them Jean Catel, critic of American poetry for the Mercure de France, and was rapidly making the acquaintance of the local poets, artists, journalists and intellectuals. He followed French politics from a distance and every morning read the legislative debates in French parliament. In a letter to Burke he gave his spectatorial impressions of cultural and intellectual life in the Midi provinces:

Provincial towns are the same everywhere. The Midi hates Paris and is determined to prove that the intellectual center of France is south of the Loire. For which reason people here are aggressively intellectual. . . . They write for a literary paper published in Montpellier, which tries to patronize Picabia and Tristan Tzara equally. It is sanely progressive--you know, like Harriet Monroe. People do little sketches in Provençal or Languedoc or Catalan, and innumerable woodcuts. "Go to Paris and you gain wit in losing your own." But if they were a little richer, they would go to Paris.³²

Much of Cowley's time in Montpellier was taken up by "the mysteries of French pedagogy:" he attended sixteen to eighteen classes a week, wrote numerous French themes, studied French grammar and pronunciation and read French classical authors like Corneille, Molière, Racine and Boileau. His academic schedule was aimed at an early March examination, after which he planned to complete a thèse de doctorat, a project he hoped to turn to personal literary advantage. Already he was thinking of remaining in France for a second year, finances permitting. For the moment, despite lamentations that he was working hard enough but hardly writing, his hopes were justifiably high: chances seemed bright of having his Field Service Fellowship renewed and everything he had written in France since the summer had sold well. What with poems and articles in Broom, The Dial, Canby's Literary Review and the New York Tribune, what with occasional articles and interviews for Export Trade and the writing of advertising poems, Cowley's writings during his first half year in France earned him all of \$227.50. "My problem seems rather to write the stuff than to sell it," he observed to Burke on January 23, 1922. Finances remained precarious, however, and the Cowleys had to live cautiously and sparsely throughout their stay in France.³³

Entrenched in the provincial quietude of Montpellier Cowley seemed worlds removed from the literary ferment of cosmopolitan Paris. Geographical distance, however, also worked in his favor; it allowed him to maintain a skeptical distance from the absorbing vicissitudes of the American expatriate colony and the tumultuous internecine warfare of French literary coteries and gave him an opportunity for independent thought and study. The beneficial effect of a relative detachment from Paris' tempestuous literary life was confirmed by a letter Cowley received from Matthew Josephson in early December. Josephson had arrived in Paris in late October and immersed himself headlong in the literary excitements of the city. He consorted with the crowds of expatriates gathered about the Montparnasse cafés--he told Cowley he had met James Light, Djuna Barnes, Laurence Vail, Cuthbert Wright, Arthur Moss, Man Ray, "a very amiable person named Gorham Munson," and "a great big sullen boor named Harold Stearns who insists on playing chess with me." But Josephson was also making concerted efforts to meet the young French writers and in the process learned that in France literary fashions were changing with dizzying rapidity. French authors worshiped by Cowley,

Burke and Josephson--Flaubert, De Gourmont, Laforgue--were no longer held in high esteem; the dominant position of Gide, Valéry and Romain was being undermined by the French Dadaists, who were setting new heroes like Rimbaud and Apollinaire on pedestals. In early December Josephson ecstatically described his newfound literary consorts to Cowley and, granting their silliness, yet prophesied their future importance:

. . . we have decided to attach ourselves to the Dadaists, of whom thrills may be wrested at the lowest cost. I have found them very genial and silly. They wear monocles, play with toy balloons, refuse to discuss the secrets of their technique, but otherwise hold down regular jobs, doctors, bank-clerks, school-teachers. Tristan Tzara, a little Roumenian Jew, is their leader, but he is struggling to hold his crown. Dada is said to be dead, but there was a revival last Saturday, at which Tzara was his old imperial self. Of the crowd, André Breton and Philippe Soupault write interesting prose and drama in collaboration; Ribemont-Dessaignes does interesting plays. Louis Aragon, who is the youngest and the most brilliant of the lot, will bear watching. . . . My claim is that these young men, when they break away from the rubbish of Dada will be the big writers of the next decade. They are working at more or less the same problems that we are, although they abjure technique, and accuse each other in turn of toadying to the Academy. . . . I find it all very stimulating.³⁴

Though the provincial calm of a small university town suited Cowley well enough, news of his friends' adventures in more exciting quarters inspired occasional misgivings: "Certainly there is something reposeful about being in this backwater, paddling about idly and talking about our friends who seem strangely agitated on the shore. But won't I be small change when I get back to New York?"³⁵

An unexpected companion in Montpellier was Stewart Mitchell, who had been editor-in-chief of The Harvard Monthly during Cowley's freshman year and, with Cummings and Dos Passos, had formed part of the Harvard Aesthetes. In 1917 he had contributed to Eight Harvard Poets and three years later had become managing editor of The Dial. Like Cowley he was at Montpellier for a year of study, but came accompanied by his aunt, with whom he resided in the best local hotel. In Montpellier Mitchell lived a disciplined, rather ascetic life which earned him Cowley's mild derision. "He is here with his aunt to study," Cowley told Foster Damon, "and he studies. He doesn't smoke. He has no friends. He goes to bed early and occasionally attends eight o'clock classes. His aunt, who is fanatically

Episcopalian, can safely regard him as a model young man. I go out with him often, chaperoned." Cowley delighted in Mitchell's companionship and enjoyed his gossip account of people's foibles. Mitchell's poetry he found too "austere" for his taste; it depended almost entirely on sound, he told Burke, lacked visual concreteness and had "nothing to do with people." He liked Mitchell's personality better than his verse, even though he found him "weak and luxurious" and already sensed a tremendous strain in the homosexual Mitchell: "American. Nice boy. Suicide."³⁶

After half a year in France Cowley finally felt he had shed New York; the city had now "sunk so far below the horizon that, if I wished to write a story about it, I should have to begin by documenting myself." The calm provinciality of Montpellier, unlike the snobbish and aristocratic milieu of Harvard, relieved Cowley of social pressure and insecurity and allowed him to feel his natural self. He no longer sported a cane, he repudiated exotic liqueurs and dressed simply and soberly: "very few affectations. . . . I think I am very near to my natural." Ten days later he added: "Six months more of New York and I should have been fifty, but in this calm Protestant town I begin to drop my factitious years."³⁷

From late October 1921 Cowley's studies in French literature and history began to have a noticeable effect on his intellectual outlook and his attitude to modern art. Under the impact of his readings of seventeenth-century French dramatists Cowley was increasingly drawn into the orbit of French Classicism. Realizing that he was "one of those people who need a tradition to work in, who need (a) a form and (b) an audience before they can write," he found a critical foothold in the aesthetics of French Classicism and the practical conventions of its theater. The appeal of classicism was particularly strong in the winter and spring of 1922. Its attraction was neither surprising nor unprecedented. In the early months of 1918 Cowley had already meditated the establishment of a "new classicism" based on his readings of Pope. Over the years his aesthetic preferences had further evolved in the direction of the classical virtues of clarity, elegance and precision. His discovery of French Classicism was, in effect, less the adoption of a new aesthetics than a logical

outgrowth and confirmation of literary preferences and intuitions deeply ingrained in his sensibility. As late as 1967 Cowley still spoke of himself, in a letter to Robert Penn Warren, as "a bloody old classicist."³⁸

In the winter of 1922, under the influence of "the theories of classicism," Cowley began to draw up aesthetic maxims of his own, but, as he confessed to Burke in late January, he had trouble defining his subject clearly: the "laws" of his aesthetics still remained "in the air." He knew, however, that he was growing wary of theories of disinterested aestheticism such as were current among "amateur aestheticians" and denounced as "dangerous" Arthur Machen's "theory of ecstasy," a one-time favorite of the Harvard Aesthetes. Instead, he had recently attended a performance of Molière's Tartuffe by former members of the Comédie Française who were touring the provincial theaters. He had found the play "an utter delight." A month later he observed in a similar spirit: "I think nothing so beautiful at present as a play by Racine."³⁹

Cowley's renewed attempts to formulate a personal philosophy of art were unpretentious and hardly methodical, less the building of a theory than the articulation of an attitude. "Without the ambition of Aristotle, I try to arrive at a formula which will at least satisfy me," he had written to Burke in the fall of 1921. "I feel the need of rules, especially to break." Rather than towards Pope, he was now drawn towards the aesthetic maxims of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711). Known to his contemporaries as the "legislator of Parnassus," Boileau had succeeded in transforming the then current mode of satirical verse from a moral and philosophical genre into an instrument of literary criticism. In the four cantos of L'Art Poétique (1674), in particular, he had formulated the aesthetic laws and ideals of classicism. Taking nature and reason for his lodestars, he had presented his readers with concrete advice on writing and offered precise rules and definitions, thereby helping to make aesthetics into an exact and exacting discipline.⁴⁰

Boileau's Art Poétique admirably filled Cowley's earlier demand for a textbook of "practical poetics;" its pragmatic and rational humanism was surprisingly congenial. In early December Cowley had snapped up a second-hand edition of Boileau and in a letter copied out those aesthetic maxims which he felt still had contemporary relevance:

Aimez donc la raison: que toujours vos écrits
Empruntez d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix.
. . .

La plupart, emportés d'une fougue insensée,
Toujours loin du droit sens vont chercher leur pensée:
Ils croiroient s'abaisser, dans leur vers monstrueux,
S'ils pensoient ce qu'un autre a pu penser comme eux.
. . .

Qui ne sait se borner ne sut jamais écrire.⁴¹

Cowley found much in Boileau that suited his purposes and might serve the larger cause of contemporary letters: "There is obviously a great deal of Boileau that we can hang our hats on." To Burke he defended Boileau as the eminent theoretician of the circle of Molière, Racine and LaFontaine: "Their practice has survived where much of his theory has died; nevertheless he was alive enough so that the first two pages of the Ars [sic] Poétique would make a telling criticism of--let us say--D. H. Lawrence. His watchwords were Truth, Nature, Good Sense. We are changing all those watchwords, but we have to think carefully before denying them, and Boileau makes one think."⁴²

Cowley, indeed, felt a remarkable affinity, temperamental as much as aesthetic, with the writers of Boileau's time; their sensibility encompassed both a high-minded seriousness and a liking for satire, invective and vulgarity--to Cowley a congenial combination:

I feel at home in the seventeenth century, as if I had just been introduced to a very pleasant company of very kindred minds. The two sides of it: the grand tragedies in which one could use only noble words, and the low comedies in which one could say anything . . . there are two waterproof compartments in my mind like that, and I have always felt ashamed of their existence. How regally I should have licked King Louis' ass, meanwhile composing the satire for publication after his death.⁴³

In early January of 1922, stimulated by his readings of Boileau, Cowley began a series of notebook investigations of contemporary aesthetics. His observations reflect the uncertainty of a young critical mind in search of a literary focus. Faced with an overwhelming array of modern styles, a kaleidoscopic variety of aesthetic theories and a highly fragmented and individualized literary landscape, Cowley struggled to find his own path in the labyrinth of modernism. From the first, as much

as a systematic investigation of his own mind, his efforts took the form of an attempt to chronicle and define the literary ideas circulating among his literary contemporaries, much as he had begun to do in "This Youngest Generation." The opening entries of his earliest notebook show Cowley instinctively adopting his characteristic role of the chronicler of his age-group:

The Current of Ideas.

1. No critical undertaking is more difficult than to define the literary ideas of my own contemporaries. They are young and they have published little. Their texts are scattered through the files of unperiodical reviews in four languages and a dialect. Few of these texts are critical, for my generation has difficulty in defining its ideas; sometimes I think it is afraid to define them. Nevertheless these ideas exist, and I have been able to observe their effect on my own mind if nowhere else.

It is Stronger than the Individual.

2. It seems a little paradoxical to hunt for a current of ideas in a period which prides itself so much on its originality. And yet the current is deep enough to drown the individual mind. One can observe our writers splashing in it with a great noise as if they were successfully struggling against it, yet meanwhile they float placidly downstream.

Cowley's distrust of the modern emphasis on individualism and originality was in part a reflection of a personal inability to find an individual and original aesthetics, but also implied a recognition that to insist on absolute originality was to deny the pertinence of history and tradition.⁴⁴

Cowley's observations on contemporary aesthetics were partly inspired by a satirical desire "to hold the ideas of others and ourselves up to a mild ridicule." He himself, however, was too deeply implicated in the very ideas he wished to satirize to rise above them with adequate detachment. Before long he acknowledged as much to Burke, granting that in his notebook he was "proceeding on a confusion of thought, or a confusion of objects;" he was ridiculing both what he approved and what he disapproved of. As much as an attack on ideas held by Burke, Josephson and others, his notebook considerations were "an examination of my own mind and a denigration of my own ideas, inasmuch as I had accepted them from other people."⁴⁵ As he had admitted earlier, Cowley was perhaps dangerously inclined to adopt the protective coloring of his intellectual

surroundings. His ambivalence about modernism was at least in part an attempt to preserve a skeptical distance as a means of safeguarding his intellectual and literary independence.

In the aesthetic assumptions of French Classicism Cowley now discovered a congenial critical perspective from which to judge modernity; conversely, what he cherished in modernism pointed up the deficiencies of the classicist ideal. Measuring by the standards of Boileau, Racine and Molière, Cowley found many tendencies in modern art which were touched with "ridicule," yet which he could not bring himself to repudiate without reservations. Thus, art did not merely originate in religion, he observed; more pertinently, contemporary art was "tending to replace religion." Like the founder of a new religion, the modern artist was "redeemed by Faith," in himself and in his art. A corollary of this tendency of modern art to assume religious properties was apparent in the artist's way of life: "The Artist of the Younger Generation is an Ascetic," he observed with a good deal of self-irony. "'Dancing, cards, drink, idleness, lack of principle; let the artist follow Puritan attitudes towards such things (merely supplanting art for righteousness) and he will walk with the Chosen.' He is poor by preference; when he descends to making money his omnipresent conscience chastens him. To the rule of poverty he adds that of chastity, for he believes firmly that the energy he denies to sex can be devoted to his work. If he marries it is with the injunction of St. Paul in mind."⁴⁶

Though conceived in a spirit of irony, such notebook entries confirm that Cowley's own search for a satisfactory literary ethics and aesthetics partook of the religious. Moreover, his conception of the modern artist as a saintly priest officiating at the altar of his art or a religious novitiate taking vows of monastic obedience, poverty and chastity, suggests that his later analysis and qualified repudiation of the "religion of art" in Exile's Return was less the result of his adoption of a radical politics in the 1930s than an early and inherent part of his ambivalent response to modernism.

A corollary of this religiosity of modern art was what to Cowley seemed a deliberate cult of incomprehensibility and obscurity. It was his passion for the virtues of classicism which made him lash out in all vehemence against "the New Rosicrucians" among contemporary artists: "Do you know, I was always rather ashamed of myself because I wasn't

sufficiently unintelligible. Now I see that the most ridiculous feature of modern writing is the fear of being understood. We wish to be the priests each of our own little sect, and each sect has its rosicrucian secrets, only to be revealed to the proselyte who has passed through the seven stages of the novitiate. Meanwhile the proselytes are too busy founding little sects of their own." Too often, Cowley believed, obscurity was merely a cloak for slipshod thinking, "a mask for thought that is too alarmingly simple and too banal." Instead, complexity of meaning should lie in "the difficulty of the thought and not in the novelty of the word, in the general design of the piece and not in an individual sentence." Against the wilful obscurity and introverted aestheticism of contemporary writing Cowley posited his demand of clarity and communicability: "literature remains the art of conveying ideas and shows no disposition to adopt either Dada or Rosicrucianism. I want instead to reduce everything to its simplest terms, and to build up subtlety by the opposition of simple statements." Thus, even before Cowley had come under the influence of Dada, he was predisposed to reject at least part of its tenets. Likewise, even before The Waste Land could have come to his attention, he criticized T. S. Eliot for writing poetry that was too esoteric and obscure to make its meaning accessible: "Mr. T. S. Eliot named one of his pieces Gerontion; I never understood what he meant by it until I examined my Larousse. . . . If Mr. Eliot had named his poem 'Pantaloone' he should have carried the same meaning to several times as many people; he preferred to be rosicrucian, and I have no wish to be. I want an audience."⁴⁷

Cowley's absorption in classicism made him respond with growing uneasiness to the Symbolist aesthetics he had embraced earlier. If Symbolism, as Edmund Wilson was to write, encompassed "an attempt by carefully studied means--a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors--to communicate unique personal feelings," such an attempt was also leading, so Wilson believed, to the creation of an obscurantist poetry which was "so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable to the reader." Where the Symbolist endeavor to approach in language the "purity" of music led to extremes of individualism and inaccessibility, it could likewise count on Cowley's disapprobation. In this respect Cowley's response not merely anticipated Wilson's, but dovetailed with Kenneth Burke's, who had

pointed out not long before that Symbolism might lead to a form of "intellectual anarchism"--"If each man was his own world . . . it was inevitable that each man should have his own idiom . . . the reduction to absurdity of individualism in art is to spend one's life in talking to oneself."⁴⁸

In contradistinction to the rosicrucian implications of Symbolism Cowley stressed the communicative function of art and, in line with Boileau's respect for the reader, rejected the dissociation of the artist from his public. "I feel more than ever the need of intelligent society. Not being a romantic I have no wish for magnificent solitude. I want to write comedies and satires, and comedies and satires require an audience," he observed to Burke. The creation of such an audience was to Cowley the sine qua non of a living modern literature. The principal purpose of magazines, lectures, polemics, poetry societies and all other means of disseminating literature, he wrote in his notebook, was precisely the formation of "an intelligent public"--"An intelligent public exists to make intelligent literature possible. More distantly it exists to make a poetic drama possible, which is the highest form of literature." Believing that art did not exist in a vacuum but occurred in a context of history, society and tradition, Cowley early envisioned a primary task of criticism as one of mediation between artist and audience, between contemporary art and its historical tradition. A notebook entry entitled "Credo" reads: "A critic believes that public and artist are interdependent. A critic believes that art has a history and can progress. Otherwise why be a critic?"⁴⁹ Such elementary beliefs in the nature of art and the function of criticism would prove axiomatic.

Cowley's understanding of classicism was as yet rather naive and unsophisticated. Most typically he was inclined to define his classical ideal in opposition to romanticism:

Classicism is the product, or at least is the modern expression, of thickly-settled countries where man has influenced the landscape to such an extent that it is an expression of man's emotion. Classicism is an expression of man as a social animal.

Romanticism is the expression of man as a solitary animal, and of landscape as independent of man. It is the natural expression of the more unkempt countries; Russia, Scandinavia, the United States.

"Each time I compare romanticism with classicism," he observed in his notebook, "I am impressed with another of the hundred distinctions between them. Classicism is social, romanticism anti-social; the most convinced of classicists was the one who defined literature as a function of society. The desire to astonish is romantic, for the classicist avoids the extraordinary for the typical, the accident for the essence. Classicism can exist alone; it is total; on the contrary romanticism is a corrective doctrine since it demands a classicism against which to revolt."⁵⁰

A supporter of classicist aesthetics, Cowley felt out of step with a modern age which, he was beginning to realize, was predominantly an excrescence of romanticism: "I said once that our age was feeding from the putrescent corpse of romanticism. I was wrong; romanticism is as much alive today as the romantic nationalism which it engendered. Romanticism is as vigorous as the American Legion, and our own age must be included in any study of the Romantic Period." The fundamental principle of romanticism, he wrote in another entry, was "the subordination of society to the ego." In opposition to a prevailing romantic individualism Cowley offered the following "axioms:" "Art is a function not of the individual but of a civilization. Art is a civilization defining itself. If art is a definition of a civilization, criticism is a definition of art." Apart from its intrinsic organicism Cowley appears to have understood the classical ideal as largely the attainment of specific formal properties: "If anyone asked me what I desired, I should say that it was, in two words, a concrete classicism. Concrete by its dependence on simple and familiar objects, and on emotions decomposed to their elements. Classical by discipline, by clarity, by a dependence on the intelligence." In a later entry he defined "the highest quality of literature" as a standard of intrinsic excellence and formal perfection, which he termed "elegance:" "The quality of a work of art which is absolutely right judged by the standards inherent in it. The economy of means used to produce the desired effects. The possession by a work of art of a rhythm proper to it. In brief, the perfection of a work of art judged by its own standards. . . . Elegance, since it is a quality attached to the individual work of art, is not--like 'Satanic' or 'decadent'--a word that can be stolen by a school. It is a quality of every artist who respects his vocation." T. S. Eliot, despite his rosicrucianism, possessed it to a

high degree; Carl Sandburg was virtually devoid of it. The prototype of elegance was Jean Racine.⁵¹

Cowley conceived of "elegance" as both an artistic and an ethical ideal. His enthusiasm for a "concrete classicism," indeed, was an integral part of his search for the ideal literary life. "A focus is what I want," he told Burke. "I want standards, common principles, a certain amount of common knowledge without which a classical literature cannot exist." His vision of "the Perfect Life" encompassed a farm (preferably in New Jersey or along the Hudson, certainly in the vicinity of New York), a literary magazine (preferably not edited by himself), a theater (for the staging of contemporary classical drama), a Maecenas (to finance the theater and the magazine; he himself preferred to remain self-supporting), and "about a dozen companions" (all of whom were already living and writing: it only remained to "focus their activity"). Cowley was convinced of the feasibility of his ideal: "Merely to state the idea is to go a long way towards its realization."⁵²

Much of February 1922 was consumed by preparations for university examinations. For two weeks Cowley doused his mind with names and dates from French literature and history; at the end of the month his efforts were rewarded with a Diploma of French Studies, for which he received a Mention très honorable. In its wake he set to work on a number of articles for The Dial, hoping thereby "to keep the wolf from my open French windows." In between he enjoyed the "physical delights" of French food, while his countryman's eye reveled in the early arrival of the Midi spring. In early March Cowley made a short trip into the Pyrennees with Stewart Mitchell, Peggy and an English girlfriend. Crossing the border into Spain, they were thrilled by the barren beauty of the Pyrennean landscape, had a jolly snowfight at an altitude of 5000 feet, and sampled native oranges in the valleys. The Cowleys continued southward along the Spanish seacoast, enjoyed the "magnificent" cuisine of Catalonia and, after a "glorious" trip, returned to Montpellier in an anticlimactic drizzle. Money was going so fast they were "spending it like water;" the first of June still loomed as "judgment day."⁵³

Before setting out for the Pyrennees Cowley completed a review of Fir-Flower Tablets, a book of translations from classical Chinese poetry by Amy Lowell in collaboration with Florence Ayscough, a distinguished sinologist. No other volume of poetry affected him so deeply at the time

or came so close to incorporating his ideal of classicism. "Unfortunately for my reputation as a judicious critic, my emotions were quite unmixed," he wrote to Amy Lowell; "Perhaps [the Chinese poems] affected me so much because I was just in the state of mind to receive them." To Burke he observed in a similar vein: "Really that book of Chinese poems produced a tremendous effect on me. Obviously classicism means clarity, honesty and (as Ezra Pound added so sagely) freshness," qualities the Chinese poems possessed in abundance. He was so enthusiastic about the book that he reviewed it twice, once for Art Moss's Gargoyle and once for The Dial. Peggy shared Cowley's ardor: "For days we chanted over bits which especially pleased us, as if there were some strongly perfumed flower in the room which had to be noticed and admired constantly," she wrote to Foster Damon.⁵⁴

Cowley's consideration of Fir-Flower Tablets was eulogistic and infused with moral fervor for the new literary paths it seemed to open. His Gargoyle review was one "without shadows," he told Amy Lowell--"a thousand words of commendation." He preferred to see the Chinese poems as "the expression of a civilization" rather than as the product of individual genius. In Chinese civilization he found a "measured simplicity," a Grecian balance and calm, and a sophisticated directness that were profoundly appealing. His response, while sharpening his conception of a classical, organic culture, also pointed up Boileau's deficiencies as a literary godfather:

These poems are clear, balanced, simple, restrained. They are at the same time human and humanistic. They are the expression of a culture which extends to the smallest acts of daily life, and as a result of which even these smallest acts become poetry. Boileau himself would have admired them, for they are in accord with his three great precepts: that is, they follow Nature, they follow Reason, and they show a proper regard for the maxims of the Ancients. In other words these Chinese poems are classical in the truest sense. They are classical without ceasing to be lyric, an achievement to which Boileau never attained.

The book, so Cowley believed, appeared at a propitious moment when it could exert a beneficial effect upon a contemporary literature noticeably "in flux." It proved, he concluded his Gargoyle review, that it was possible to be "classical without being dusty" and "without pouring beauty into a rigid mould." For Cowley the book promised "a solution to

sterile arguments" and a "new direction" for poetry.⁵⁵

His Dial review reiterated the substance of his earlier consideration but focused largely on the superior merits of Amy Lowell's translations to those by Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley; it was less remarkable for its ideas, he felt, than as a polished and unified piece of English prose. In conclusion he upheld the classical ideal against "the doctrine of our romantic Freudians" and adduced that the poetry in Fir-Flower Tablets offered "a resolution of our too-favourable antinome between romanticism and classicism, for it is a literature both universal and concrete, both human and humanistic; a literature that is classical without being mummified."⁵⁶

Cowley's conclusion implied a personal recognition of the need to move beyond a mode of thought based on irresolvable dichotomies. In his notebook and correspondence with Burke he pursued with particular doggedness the question of the relative importance of form and matter. Rejecting both a monistic formalism and a monistic materialism, he demanded instead a "perfect marriage" of form and matter. Such a "dualist" position, however, remained "vague," he reflected, since it failed to recognize that "form is not one but many, and that the matter of a work of art may often itself be a form." The one way to circumvent the dilemma, he told Burke, was to decompose both terms of the antinomy into several elements and to erect a "pluralistic" aesthetic. Thus, "form" was too inclusive a term to be meaningful in critical analysis; it was "dangerously vague" and had better be dissected into its component parts. Cowley distinguished between such elements as "architectural" or "geometrical" form, "motion," "rhythm," and "expression" or "style." To Burke he explained: "Now if you proclaim that the geometrical form of a work of art is its most important feature, or if you proclaim that it should be judged by its motion, you are proclaiming something. But if you say that form is more important than matter you are adding only an individual affirmation to a dispute that has lasted since Plato."⁵⁷

Cowley was increasingly unhappy with the dominant formalism in contemporary aesthetics. In part his wariness took the form of an attempt to arrive at exact definition and to sharpen the tools of analytical criticism. If his own definition of form did perhaps less to dispel vagueness than he hoped, his "pluralistic" approach at least allowed him to remain sensitive to the formalist and aesthetic properties of modern

art, while continuing to develop his interest in literary subject matter. Thus, side by side with his analysis of the concept of form, he entered in his notebook a definition of art as "the expression of the sensibility" which opened up the way to an eclectic study of literature, one encompassing the values, ideas and sensations of the artist, as well as the social and historical context of art. Circumventing the dualism of form and matter Cowley might thus hope to embrace both: "An artist should choose a form in which he can express all of himself."⁵⁸

Cowley's thought on the subject remained rather muddled. His youthful observations on aesthetics lacked the complexity, depth and consistency to push them beyond the formulation of a personal attitude into the groundwork for a viable literary theory. He seemed to realize himself that his natural propensity was not for theoretical exposition: "It is perhaps true that by taking thought I shall add never a cubit to my stature, but by thinking I shall at least develop what I have." He linked his natural affinity with classicism to an essentially pragmatic sensibility:

My brain is a practical brain, a brain that likes to work on definite lines, a brain that thinks about means rather than ends and that can make at least A- on any subject set for it. . . . It is the classical brain which builds a perfectly proportioned edifice, which writes prose that is simple and clear, and poetry studiously incorrect. It does not question enough; it respects ability and authority. It is the brain of Boileau and Pope and Congreve; that is the real reason of my classical campaign.⁵⁹

By early April Cowley was sufficiently confident of his aesthetic direction to launch an epistolary campaign to win over his literary friends. In a long letter to John Brooks Wheelwright he summed up his position. In art as in morals, he observed, "we are living in an age of reaction." Not only were happy marriages becoming "fashionable" again, modern painters like Picasso were reverting to the classical art of Ingres, writers were resuscitating the classicism of France and England, composers were rediscovering seventeenth-century Italian music, and sculptors ("most reactionary of all") were instigating a new Primitivism and would "have nothing but Congolese idols." Such tendencies, Cowley said, formed "a wonderful opportunity for satire," but he felt "too much classical" himself to do the job effectively. "My mind is ordered, exact,

and limited. It would have been more appreciated in the age of Congreve, and therefore I must strive diligently to resurrect that age. In some ways an impossible task."

Temperamentally geared to classicism Cowley felt once again that he was going against the romanticist grain of his day and age. If his attempts at theory were confused, his analysis of contemporary culture was shrewd, containing as it did the germs of Exile's Return and anticipating the thesis developed by Edmund Wilson in Axel's Castle. Future critics, he thought, would speak of the modern age as "the logical unfolding of the romantic movement." He pointed to the work of William Carlos Williams, the Dadaists or the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven as the living proofs of a "romanticism carried to the limit of formlessness, immediacy, and unintelligibility." Romanticism he defined as "the idea that matter is more important than form, the emotions than the intellect, and complex and inexpressible concepts more than clear concepts." Adhering to such a definition Cowley could reject the "mystical nationalism" of works like Waldo Frank's Our America because it demanded "the slavery of the intellect" and could repudiate writers like Floyd Dell and Sherwood Anderson for greeting Freudianism as "a final victory over conscious thought." Granting that he possessed "a very shallow foundation" for social and political theory but felt more confident "among literary ideas," he exhorted Wheelwright to help instigate a new classical literature:

Let us demand a literature which preserves the virtues of classicism without its vices. A literature, in other words, which still possesses the sentiment of nature, which remains emotional and imaginative, but in which the emotions and the imagination are not given free license. A literature which may strive for complex effects, but which gains them with sentences and paragraphs which are absolutely lucid. An architectural literature, from which is disengaged an impression of proportion (or studied disproportion) as from a fine building. A literature, finally, which is a literature and not a theft from life.

More and more convinced that such a literature could only be advanced through a collaborative effort, Cowley reiterated his plea for the forging of an "intelligent society" and the creation of a stimulating and congenial intellectual and literary climate: "one should aim . . . at creating an atmosphere in which many ideas can be born and be polished by

rubbing against each other."

In France Cowley was increasingly preoccupied with the possibility of a national American culture. In his letter to Wheelwright he lamented the absence of clear ideas in American letters and condemned the pessimistic cultural analyses of Civilization in the United States--Harold Stearns, he felt, could easily be reduced to a single syllogism ("Puritanism is bad: America is puritan = America is bad"), H. L. Mencken had "perhaps two or three other ideas," Van Wyck Brooks reached the "complexity of six or seven," and even Edmund Wilson, though not a symposiast, seemed to have "a single-track mind." In his youthful eagerness to condemn Cowley was brashly unfair to his critical rivals and opponents. Against the "haziness of our unintelligentsia," which he blamed on their subserviency to English culture and a "too-close reading of the London Nation," he maintained that "America is not, unlike England, incongenial to ideas. It is a land of sunlight and clear forms--no fogs--and it welcomes clear ideas when it finds them." In his notebook he wrote: "The forms of its buildings are distinct and logical, and if American thought followed its natural lines, it too would be distinct."⁶⁰

The justification for Cowley's expatriation was more and more to be found in the creation of a viable cultural climate in the United States. His ideas now also began to be reflected in his published writings. An essay on "The French and Our New Poetry," commissioned by Canby for the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post, displayed a nascent literary nationalism. Studying French literature with an eye to its possibilities for American writing Cowley found that, conversely, French critics were intensely interested in modern American poetry and that a lively debate on its merit was being conducted in French literary magazines. His essay discussed the critical reception in France of the "New Poetry" of Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters, poets in whom the French discovered "preeminently national" qualities. Cowley chose to read the French response as a significant indication, not merely of the "intrinsic progress" of American verse, but of the changing status and growing international prestige of American literary culture as a whole since the war. Whereas in 1914 a comparison between American and English poetry had been "all to our discredit," the former being commonly regarded as "only an insignificant chapter" of the latter, a recent article by Jean Catel in La Criée showed that the tables

were turning. Catel, whom Cowley described as "the most constant friend of our poetry," had launched an aggressive and euphoric campaign defending American poetry against the apologists for Georgian poetry and Cowley quoted from Catel's appraisal with implicit approval: "we must greet without reserves this splendid adventure which the poets of the New World are furnishing under our eyes." It was high time, Cowley implied, for Americans to reclaim these modern poets from the French and to recognize their achievement. "It was in just this fashion," he reminded his American readers, "that our poets reclaimed Poe and Whitman from the French only a dozen years ago; this reclamation is the basis of our contemporary poetry."⁶¹ It was one of the typical ironies of Cowley's expatriation that his enthusiasm for his native culture was enhanced once it was observed through the appreciative eyes of a French critic.

Two articles Cowley wrote in the early weeks of April displayed his antipathy to current romanticism and his continued allegiance to the ideals of classicism. The first, "A Brief History of Bohemia," was occasioned by the centenary of Henry Murger, the author of Scènes de la Vie de Bohème. Intended as a "plea for classical life as a basis for classical art," it took the form of a blistering, satirical attack on contemporary bohemianism, the origins of which Cowley traced to mid-nineteenth-century French romanticism. Much of its emotional impetus derived from his personal observations of bohemian life in Paris and in New York. In Cowley's verdict it was Murger who had created a vulgarized conception of Bohemia and who had romantically falsified a historical and social reality fatally detrimental to the artist. He held Murger "responsible for an ideal of artistic life which has wasted several generations of talent; an ideal which has peopled more sanitariums, jails, and venereal wards than it has ever filled museums." Nothing was further removed from a life of classical elegance than Murger's prettified and romanticized version of a life of misery, debauchery and starvation. Today, Cowley observed, "romantic" Bohemia had become not merely "an esoteric cult, like Theosophy or New Thought," but an international and multiracial phenomenon, a vast, capitalist enterprise which, though it had started as a "revolt against the bourgeoisie," had become "as much the property of the bourgeoisie as any other business-venture."⁶² Cowley's essay formed the germ of his analysis of contemporary bohemianism in Exile's Return and was a further

indication that his social and historical consciousness antedated his conversion to radical politics in the 1930s.

The essay was a new and ambitious sort of undertaking for Cowley; it signified one of his earliest well-researched attempts to locate the social and historical origins of a contemporary cultural phenomenon and in effect constituted his first excursion into historical criticism proper. The essay was difficult to write: Cowley redid it several times and, in a painstaking effort to attain stylistic clarity, took ten days to "de-complicate" his subject matter. Obviously, the elegance and clarity he strove for were achieved only at the cost of arduous work. Having aimed to write "Voltairean prose," he took justifiable pride in his achievement: "One quality I like about my prose is the fact that it connects. It is a prose that doesn't quote easily. One cannot, without some violence, wrench a sentence out of it, or even a paragraph; everything hangs together." His tools were fine enough, he realized; all that remained was to do praiseworthy work with them.⁶³

Cowley's second article was a favorable review of a French study of the life and works of the Restoration playwright William Wycherley by Charles Perromat. Even more than his earlier critique of romantic bohemianism the Wycherley article formed a testimony to Cowley's adherence to a classical aesthetics and illustrated the historical bent of his criticism. It reflected his predilection for representationalism in art and upheld his by now axiomatic belief in culture as the organic outgrowth of a social and historical situation: "The comedy of the Restoration was perhaps as faithful a reproduction of actual manners as the English stage has ever seen. Its dramatists had a code of morals which included one virtue only, honesty: and by this quality alone they asked to be judged." Cowley praised Perromat for recognizing this organic relation between art and milieu and for viewing Restoration drama as an expression of the age which produced it.⁶⁴

Through Burke Cowley submitted both of his essays to Van Wyck Brooks for publication in The Freeman. His choice of The Freeman was revealing, but did not come as a surprise. As early as November 1920 he had written to Brooks, brashly offering his services to the newly launched magazine as "the whole of the youngest generation of critics." He had advertised himself as follows:

As a reviewer I have specialized chiefly in modern literature: French, English, German, and American. By this I don't mean Bennett and Wells and Cannan, but rather the generation that has followed them: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Jules Romains. . . . I dislike most of the Georgian poets and delight in a swashbuckling attack on them. Finally I review reviewers; in other words I specialize in what Mr. Hackett calls 'belette.'

Reviews in The Freeman had an "agreeably acrid taste," he wrote, and managed to avoid "too much formality." Where The Nation was "pompous," The Dial "arty" and The New Republic "economic," in The Freeman one seemed able "to express one's own mind rather than the personality of the editor."⁶⁵

By 1922 Cowley's essays on Murger and Wycherley could count on a receptive editorial response. By then Brooks was moving rapidly towards a position of outspoken hostility to what he saw as the sterile aestheticism and obscurantism of the contemporary avant-garde. The terms in which he would soon condemn its experimental formalism in The Freeman sounded remarkably like Cowley's earlier rejection of the "rosicrucianism" of modern art. Not surprisingly, then, Brooks accepted Cowley's articles, which appeared in The Freeman in June and July of 1922. John Brooks Wheelwright, who met Brooks in New York just before the latter took a leave of absence from The Freeman to write The Pilgrimage of Henry James, reported that Brooks had spoken enthusiastically of Cowley's essays and had praised the "Gallic clarity" of his style. Brooks had initially mistaken Wheelwright's mentioning of "Burke and Cowley" for a reference to Edmund Burke and Abraham Cowley. But once he understood that Wheelwright was speaking of "the two white hopes of his own generation," he immediately set out to enlist Cowley in his campaign against the current wave of pure aestheticism.⁶⁶

Cowley's attitude to Brooks, however, was ambivalent from the first. If he shared certain of Brooks's misgivings about modernism--its pure formalism, its esoteric obscurity, its divorce of art from society--and if he was tentatively moving towards a Brooksian ideal of an organic national American culture, there was still more to differentiate than to unite the two. It was one of the ironies of Brooks's career that, having expended the best of his critical energies analyzing the causes of cultural failure and calling for a new national literature, he should turn away from contemporary writing at the very moment when a vital new

generation of American writers was appearing on the scene. By 1924, indeed, Paul Rosenfeld could justifiably complain that Brooks had "not put in his appearance on the critical battle-line where he has been sorely wanted" and lament Brooks's "perpetual absenteeism" from contemporary letters: "With all his apparent enthusiasm for the artist, he does not appear vitally interested in art when it appears." Rosenfeld's strictures were echoed some ten years later by Cowley, who in 1934 held that in his early years Brooks had been "a good critic, but too hortatory." Brooks's generation of critics then impressed a cynical Cowley as literary obstetricians: "They gathered about the great unhappy body of the nation, they laid their spells upon it and adjured it to labor intellectually and bring forth a native American literature. When the baby was born many of the doctors were looking the other way." Brooks's absenteeism created a critical vacuum which, in the early 1920s, would be filled by the ascendancy of a younger generation of critics, among them Edmund Wilson, Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, and Malcolm Cowley, who resented Brooks's indifference to modern literature and were wholeheartedly committed to contemporary American writing. As Leon Edel has observed, whereas Brooks dissociated himself from the moderns, Cowley continued to look at them "with an open mind," even if he did not always like what he saw.⁶⁷

Over the years Cowley's early strictures against Brooks would mellow and he would become one of Brooks's most loyal, if not uncritical, apologists.⁶⁸ Though he never was a Brooksonian disciple, Cowley's critical practice ultimately owed as much to the example of, especially the early, Van Wyck Brooks as of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. He would come to share not only Brooks's conception of an organic culture, but also his concern with the creation of a vital sense of community among American writers. Both were concerned with the status of the writer in America and his relationship to the culture at large. Common purposes, indeed, would bring both men together in the 1930s. But where Brooks's attempts were largely directed at the recovery of a "usable past," Cowley's would be aimed at chronicling and interpreting the present; it was not until the 1940s that he would begin to make his own explorations of a "usable" American literary past. Where Brooks would exhort and celebrate, Cowley more soberly criticized and analyzed. Though both would gravitate towards a study of literary culture in terms of the lives and careers of leading

individuals, their use of historical and biographical materials was radically different. Where Brooks was inclined to use the work of art primarily to illuminate the artist's personality or the larger cultural situation, without considering artistic merit or technical achievement,⁶⁹ Cowley would use extraneous material, whether biographical, political, historical or psychoanalytical, primarily to illuminate the literary achievement of the writer. Brooks's critical imagination, it has often been remarked, was from the first social and ethical rather than aesthetic; his strength never lay in detailed technical criticism and his critical sensibility, unlike Cowley's, was never attuned to poetry.⁷⁰ Cowley's sensibility from the first combined a sensitivity to the social and historical context of art with the technical and formalist ideals of craftsmanship formulated by Eliot and Pound. Throughout the 1920s, the years of his literary and critical apprenticeship, he would uneasily waver between Pound's aesthetic formalism and Brooks's cultural criticism. Ultimately, in a typically eclectic and pluralistic approach to contemporary writing, he would aim to synthesize them and, with other writers of his generation, attempt to engraft a technical concern with the form and texture of modern literature onto the ideal of an organic native American culture.

In 1922 Cowley's concern with a hard-edged and rigorous "new classicism" and his concomitant anti-romanticism placed him in line with T. S. Eliot as much as Van Wyck Brooks. His understanding of the classical ideal, however, was always more secular and less metaphysical than Eliot's; for him it did not imply, as it did for Eliot, "a belief in Original Sin--the necessity for austere discipline" in a moral and religious sphere.⁷¹ Still, Cowley's search for "standards" and "common principles" in criticism, together with his need to work in a tradition, his self-acknowledged respect for "authority," and his explorations of the issues of Classicism and Romanticism, for the time being allied his efforts with those of Eliot; as he observed to Burke, his ideals were "really reactionary."⁷²

On the wave of his enthusiasm for classicism Cowley also shared Eliot's esteem for the French novelist and philosopher Julien Benda. The leader of the anti-romantic movement in French criticism, Benda persistently defended reason and intellect against the philosophical intuitionism of Henri Bergson. In a letter to John Brooks Wheelwright

Cowley denounced Bergson as a philosophical exemplary of what he most distrusted in contemporary romanticism ("formlessness, immediacy, and unintelligibility"). In correspondence with Burke he confessed he was beginning to admire Benda "immoderately" and found the "play of ideas" in Benda's criticism "immensely" stimulating.⁷³

Cowley's increasingly serious ambitions in criticism now led him to explore its nature and function more precisely. In letters and notebooks he lashed out against the fallacy that the theoretical development of an aesthetics might interfere with artistic creation. He adduced De Gourmont and Mallarmé as supreme artists who had developed a personal aesthetics and pointed to Theodore Dreiser as an inferior artist who had "next to none." Aesthetics was "an art, a science, a metaphysic," he believed, and formed a "crown" to all the other arts. "Criticism is one of the fine arts inasmuch as it is the creation of an ideal," he observed in his notebook. "Criticism which consists only in applying a preconceived ideal is certainly not an art. Criticism is an art, inasmuch as it is a philosophy; otherwise it is only a more or less skilled profession." Cowley's observations were marked by an open-minded eclecticism and a wariness of doctrinalism that would prove seminal features of his work. In the last analysis, he felt, there was "no perfect criticism. Each book requires individual treatment."⁷⁴

Cowley's practice was not wholly consistent with his theoretical observations. While in his notebook he acknowledged the restricted validity of an excursion into "psychological," "moral," or cultural criticism,⁷⁵ his actual consideration of modern poetry foreswore any such nonaesthetic divagations. In a review of two books of poetry for The Dial he ridiculed the practice of critics of the "school" of Sainte-Beuve to deviate into extraneous matters like an author's pedigree, his thumbprints or his income tax forms, and voiced his determination to approach works of art "as if we knew nothing of the authors." He reiterated his belief in poetry as "an exact art" and condemned the poets under consideration--J. C. Squire and John Freeman--for transgressing "the laws of the old prosody." They had failed to attain the quality of "inevitable rightness" which Cowley described to Burke as "an integral quality and not an external quality superimposed on a work of art . . . perfection of the work of art as judged by the standards it sets itself--I want it." Thus, Cowley was early aware of what seemed an inescapable

paradox: whereas he defined art as not merely the expression of a personal sensibility but of a whole civilization, a definition which opened the way to a consideration of extra-literary elements in criticism, he continued to judge specific works of art by a standard of intrinsic elegance and to regard them as autonomous entities. On June 2, 1922, he confessed to Burke that his formulation of a personal aesthetics had been stalled before an irresolvable difficulty: "despite the statement that art is creation and not representation, I still find that I judge works of art by their truth-to-life. . . . And I don't know whether to change my theory or my practice."⁷⁶

While Cowley was struggling to resolve the inconsistencies of a personal aesthetics, one of his essays unexpectedly provided the intellectual inspiration for the founding of a new literary magazine. In early December 1921 Gorham B. Munson informed Cowley that his article on "This Youngest Generation" had impressed him with "the feasibility of operating a review which will provide a forum for just those writers and their kin." He solicited Cowley's ideas and advice on a magazine "devoted solely to literary expression. . . . Its spirit can be indicated by saying that your essay might well be a prospectus for the aims of the venture."⁷⁷ Munson had come to Paris in the summer of 1921, after having spent several "years of muddle" in Greenwich Village, where he had struck up a literary friendship with Hart Crane, published in Joseph Kling's The Pagan, and developed an ardent enthusiasm for the work of Waldo Frank, whose Our America he regarded as "the bible of the oncoming generation." By his own admission Munson had a literary taste that was "voraciously catholic," but as yet rather indiscriminating. He had come to Europe to extend his self-education but, as so many others, had much "ambition without a clear goal." Cowley's essay apparently gave Munson the intellectual focus he needed and provided the initiating ideas for what he conceived of as a "tendenz review."⁷⁸ Though in his essay Cowley had stressed the strongly individualistic bent and the lack of esprit de corps among the members of his age-group, Munson preferred to disregard the implied warning and appears to have read the essay as a fervent plea for the creation of a group organ which might concentrate the diffuse

efforts of individual members into a single review. There were other factors which did not augur well for the future of the new magazine.

In Paris Munson had enlisted the cooperation of Matthew Josephson, whom he had met through Hart Crane, a mutual friend. Through Munson Josephson in turn met Man Ray and Tristan Tzara, the reputed founder of Dada, who rapidly fired Josephson's enthusiasm for the French Dadaists. Though Josephson told Cowley in early December that Munson and he were "fairly good friends," their relations were strained from the start. Distrusting Munson's literary taste, an opinionated and overly ambitious Josephson seems to have wanted to appropriate the lion's share of editorial control. Following the example of his French contemporaries, Josephson wanted to avail himself of Munson's "diplomatic bent" and to direct the magazine towards a militant modernism. His intention was "to raise a good deal of thunder on the left, by publishing and championing the adventurous experimenters of America, translating the work of the avant-garde in France and Germany, and vigorously assailing the Mrs. Grundies of literature."⁷⁹

With Josephson providing the necessary literary connections--unlike Munson he was personally acquainted with most of the writers mentioned in Cowley's essay--and Cowley supplying the nearest equivalent to an aesthetic platform, the new magazine was off on a propitious start. In soliciting material Munson and Josephson much expanded Cowley's list of names: in addition to Burke, Cowley, Cummings, Brown and Damon, they sent out invitations to Conrad Aiken, Wallace Stevens, Donald B. Clarke, Royall Snow, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Mark Turbyfill, and to the most prominent among the French Dadaists--Aragon, Breton, Soupault and Tzara. Such a circus parade of potential contributors diluted Cowley's concept of a literary generation to the point of meaninglessness. Moreover, it seemed dubious from the start whether either Munson or Josephson or both could muster the requisite strength of editorial management to hold such a miscellany of talents together.⁸⁰

Cowley responded to Munson's projected magazine with caution. Though Munson had plainly stated his intention to use Cowley's formulation of the aesthetic ideals of his coevals as the editorial platform for his magazine, Cowley's private endorsement of those ideals had been less than complete even at the time of writing. Under the influence of French classicism his skepticism about modernism had only grown. At this point

Cowley seemed unaware of Josephson's intentions to appropriate the magazine for Dadaist agitation and the propagation of an aggressively modernist art. Instead, he saw the new venture as feasible only insofar as it helped to advance his ideal of a "classical literature"--by providing a market for his and his allies' writings, by creating a receptive audience and by focusing the activity of its contributors without pressing them into a group or school. It was with such reservations in mind that he observed to Burke:

This magazine that Gorham B. Munson is starting may be the one we want--I don't know Gorham B. Munson, so I can't judge of it. . . . When Munson comes to New York find out whether his taste is to be trusted, and if it is entice him and his magazine into the green country. What do you know about him?⁸¹

During the early months of 1922 preparations for the opening issue moved ahead. Hoping to avail himself of low printing costs in Austria Munson traveled to Vienna before returning to New York, from where he planned to edit future issues, to be printed and distributed from Europe. In February Munson told Cowley that Burke was "very sympathetic" to the venture, in particular to its "massacring aspects." In early March he sent Cowley a circular announcement of the new magazine, which after a visit to the "Sezession" Art Gallery in Vienna he had named Secession. Secession--"I don't like the name," Cowley told Burke--was to be "the first gun for this youngest generation," the writers who were "moving away from the main body of intelligent writing in the United States since 1910" and who were "defending a new position from which to assault the last decade and launch the next." The circular quoted Cowley's formulation of the aesthetic catchwords of his generation, thereby confirming his essay as an official program for the magazine, and announced Secession's polemical intentions. Besides poems, stories and criticism it would publish "insults and vituperations" and "expose the private correspondence, hidden sins and secret history" of more solemn and eclectic rivals like The Dial, Poetry, Broom, and The Little Review: "It already notes in current literature very much that demands hilarious comment." Munson wanted his review to be "intransigent, aggressive, unmuzzled" and to make "a little history."⁸² He would not be disappointed.

After such a martial sounding of trumpets the first issue of

Secession, appearing in April 1922, was mild, if lively enough. Largely it seemed an act of obeisance to the French Dadaists, showing Josephson's early editorial dominance. There were translations by "Will Bray"--a nom de guerre adopted by Josephson--from a forthcoming novel by Louis Aragon and from Tzara's nonsensical verse and prose, as well as experimental poems under Josephson's own name. A critical essay by "Will Bray" reinforced the impression that the magazine was an unalloyed sponsor of Dadaism and explored its provocative implications for American writing. Written in Josephson's soaring rhetorical style, the essay presented a radically advanced position on modern art with such infectious exhilaration that it soon drew many of his literary friends into its orbit. Myopically minimizing the nihilistic despair of the young French writers Josephson protested that the postwar generation in France was far from "exhausted and disenchanted." Instead, he found them "talented, extravagant, intolerant, fun-loving" and saw in them an inspiring counterpart to his own generation of secessionists. In Josephson's admiring eyes the French avant-garde writers were marked by "a desperate willingness to go to any lengths of violence in opposing the old regime. . . . They are bent frankly on unbounded adventures and experiments with modern phenomena." American writers, too, should follow in the footsteps of Apollinaire and "be at least as daring as the mechanical wizards who exploited the airplane, wireless, telegraphy, chemistry, the submarine, the cinema, the phonograph, what-not." Only by exploiting the unlimited possibilities of technology, Josephson argued, could the "myths and fables for the future" be created. He offered sensitive appreciations of the work of Aragon, Breton, Eluard, Soupault and Tzara--Tzara's poems were "as naturally expressive of the beauty of this age as Herrick's are of the 17th Century"--and praised them for employing the aesthetic uses of "all the instruments of the time, the streetcar, the billposter, the automobile, the incandescent light." Josephson concluded by expressing an Emersonian confidence in the possibility of a vital and independent contemporary American culture:

Americans need play no subservient part in this movement. It is no occasion for aping European or Parisian tendencies. Quite the reverse, Europe is being Americanized. . . . The complexion of the life of the United States has been transformed so rapidly and so daringly that its writers and artists are rendered a strategic advantage. They need only

react faithfully and imaginatively to the brilliant minutiae of her daily existence in the big cities, in the great industrial regions, athwart her marvelous and young mechanical forces.⁸³

Munson's contributions were rather more solemn. The promised unmasking of rival magazines was limited to a scathing attack on The Dial (ominously entitled "Exposé No.1"), which centered on its aimless and diffuse eclecticism, its hospitality to Paul Rosenfeld's "acres of vague impressionistic excrement," and its persistent championing of "an established writer" like Sherwood Anderson. "The existence of this Yale-Review-in-a-Harvard-blazer is one of the bitter necessities calling for Secession," Munson perorated.⁸⁴

In a rather heavy-handed editorial Munson advanced a primarily aesthetic position on modern literature, but his response to such "pure" and "abstract" writing as that of Tristan Tzara was divided. While he praised Tzara for developing "a sign esthetic" and took his poetry as "a challenge to further research in the esthetic nature of words," he also advanced a skeptical belief that there were "very restricted walls for an art based on signs." A certain degree of "documentary solidity" was necessary still, he felt, to raise an "abstract" over a "representative" literature. Secession, Munson concluded, existed for writers "preoccupied with researches for new forms" and aimed at an American audience which had outgrown the social and psychological realism of Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson as well as the old guard impressionism and genteel taste of Paul Rosenfeld and Louis Untermeyer. To cinch his editorial policy he referred readers to Cowley's essay in the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post for "an important origin and a general program for Secession." As if to corroborate Cowley's authoritative position in the new venture, Munson opened the issue with "Day Coach," a poem he rated retrospectively as "the best thing in the issue, and one of Cowley's finest efforts."⁸⁵

Cowley was less than happy with such an honor. "Day Coach" was admittedly one of his more radical modernist experiments; the poem was conceived along the lines of Burke's structural experiments with geometrical form and Cowley had struggled hard to make its form "more satisfying logically, more integralistic."⁸⁶ But for all its formal experimentalism the poem as a whole remained lucid and intelligible and dealt with a recognizably human experience. It presented the rapid

succession of impressions of a man traveling by train from New York to Cambria County, Pennsylvania, and developed one of Cowley's persistent themes: the impossibility of a return to the lost haunts of childhood. As such the poem was rather out of key with the predominantly Dadaist contents of the issue.

Naturally, Cowley was "disappointed" in the first issue. By April 1922 he had moved towards an aesthetic position diametrically opposed to Dada and related manifestations of contemporary "romanticism." Munson, indeed, had invested Cowley with responsibility for the editorial policy of a magazine exemplifying much of what he strongly reacted against. Josephson, in particular, seemed to be moving in opposite directions from Cowley, Burke and even Munson. In a letter to Burke Cowley denounced Will Bray as a "galloping young genius," reaffirmed the "reactionary" and "anti-romantic" bent of his own aesthetics, and observed that Josephson was obviously parting with "our company." Secession one, he felt, displayed a disturbing "logical breakdown" in what literary consensus existed among his companions. Munson's use of Cowley's name and article, he wrote to Wheelwright, were but "a doubtful compliment." Still, Cowley was willing to give Secession the benefit of his considerable doubts. After all, the incredibly low printing costs of only \$25 per issue made it into "a grand opportunity" for the younger writers and, besides, the projected second issue sounded "much better."⁸⁷

Cowley's position now brought him in direct conflict with Matthew Josephson. Unaware of Will Bray's true identity, Cowley virulently denounced Bray's apology for the Dadaists in a letter to Josephson, pointing out its linear opposition to his and Burke's approach; a magazine which published both without batting an eye, Cowley fulminated, laid itself open to the very charges of directionless eclecticism Munson had made against The Dial. Cowley's plea for a cerebral classicism, for a literature of "ideas" rather than "sensations," and for the attainment of clear, logical form elicited a violent and choleric response from Josephson. In a series of effervescent and outspoken letters he rejected Cowley's distinction between romanticism and classicism as an essentially meaningless form of academic "hockey-playing"--one could speak with equal right of "the romanticism of Molière and Congreve, and the classicism of Dada," Josephson maintained. An artist's attitude might embrace a multiplicity of motives, classicist as well as romanticist, he felt.

Julien Benda was "absolutely sterile;" the writings of Rosenfeld, Seldes, Frank and Marianne Moore proved that contemporary aesthetics was but "a futile business" and Josephson advised Cowley to "cut clear of it all." He advocated "the destruction of informative-aesthetic criticism" and proposed instead to "convince people by hypnosis, by a quivering finger, by advertising methods!!" Josephson's vociferous and exuberant posturing, so different from Cowley's balanced efforts to attain an intelligent and concrete criticism, reached its truly Dadaist climax with a letter typed on Italian toilet paper.

In Josephson's verdict Cowley's poetry was decidedly anti-modern. He denounced "Mountain Farm," a poem printed in the May 1922 Broom and lamenting the decay of the irrecapturable rural past of Cowley's childhood, as an old-fashioned piece of Frostian pastoralism and wondered: "have you no shame, in the face of the things to come?" Poems like "Day Coach" or "Two Swans," which Munson had accepted for Secession two, demonstrated that Cowley, like Proust, was still "slave to a procession of experiences" and lacked a "central directing brain." By contrast, Josephson praised the work of Aragon as "the expression of a brain detached from experience and using the external world for its own purposes." In a time when artists were forsaking verisimilitude and representationalism for a "purely formal" art, Josephson argued, Cowley's mode of poetry remained conservatively "descriptive," "impressionistic," "sentimental," and "representative."⁸⁸

On June 18 Josephson put an end to the epistolary feud by opening the pages of Secession three, which he was charged with editing, to Cowley for a frank exposition of his "attitude to modern poetry as critic and creative artist." Cowley preferred to retaliate with a blatantly non-sensical poem (entitled "Poem") burlesquing Josephson's aggressively sponsored anti-art. Failing to see the joke, Josephson straightfacedly accepted it for publication. As for his critique of Cowley's verse, the bulk of Josephson's statements struck Cowley as imitative and empty phrases eminently usable for his projected Ridicule of Contemporary Aesthetics.⁸⁹

One manifestation of the modern spirit which persistently aroused the satirical wrath of Cowley and his friends was the overwhelming popularity of Freudian theories of sex and psychoanalysis and their repercussions for literature and morality.⁹⁰ Cowley had earlier expressed distrust of a

literature excessively concerned with an exploration of man's subjective nature and his subconscious drives. At times he seemed equally uncomfortable with the new sexual mores of the times. All recent wives, Cowley observed mockingly to Wheelwright, seemed determined "to be the perfect friend, the companion, the playfellow, and to share equally the erudition and the vices of the husband."⁹¹ In the Bohemian quarters of New York and Paris Cowley had personally witnessed the human havoc which could be worked by a surrender to free sexual experiment and had conservatively responded to the new spirit of hedonism. As often, his reaction took the form of literary satire.

From the fall of 1921 through the spring and summer of 1922 Cowley collaborated with Burke on a poetic drama ridiculing the literary and moral excesses of "Ultra-Modern Love." Their principal target consisted in the writings of such Freudian popularizers as Havelock Ellis, James Oppenheim and in particular Floyd Dell, one-time editor of The Masses and author-to-be of Love in Greenwich Village (1924). Having shifted from Marx to Freud, Dell had explored the new sexual mores in several novels, among them Moon-Calf (1920), and had become a self-constituted prophet of Free Love and a crusader against sexual repression. For his efforts he was jocularly dubbed "Freud" Dell by Cowley and Burke. Their joint play was intended to "thoroughly puncture Dell's innards," as Burke put it.⁹² Provisionally entitled "Hamlet: For an Operetta," the play was a satirical composite of various elements. Besides Dell's preachings on free love, it ridiculed falsely romantic notions of poetic inspiration (there were diatribes against as well as mocking odes in tribute to the moon, which doubled as a symbol of female mystery). Hamlet, the play's protagonist, was conceived of as a prototype of the sensitive young poet, the eternal Laforguean adolescent, who finds himself trapped between Ophelia (seen as the exemplary of traditional virginity, desirous of, yet shrinking from "Life, Experience, Reality," and Hamlet's eminently ravishable idol) and Berenice (the "villain" of a play written by men, Lesbian, mannish, fearless and aggressive, with short-cut hair, gloves and cigarettes, a prototype of the New Woman modelled after Berenice Abbott, Norma Millay and Ida Rauh, whose anti-male preachings and female seductiveness towards Ophelia inspire Hamlet to acts of murder).⁹³

The play remained unfinished, despite the time and energy spent on it. Though with Cowley in France and Burke in America the practical

obstacles to successful collaboration may simply have been insurmountable, the play also suffered from a lack of clarity in conception. It was conceived "with all the artificiality of an opera," including duets, recitatives, solos and arias, but was also intended as a spoof of the traditions of Elizabethan drama--it was to end, Cowley wrote, in "a grand orgy of murder and bombasticism." Because the play was only worked at fragmentarily and at periods of time too widely separated, its satirical targets kept shifting with the current concerns of its creators. In May 1922, after spending a full week on the play in an attempt to finish it, Cowley complained that it had become surrounded with "a fatras of discordant ideas" and was badly in need of clarification. By this time Cowley had come to think of the play in more serious terms as "an excellent step toward the foundation of a classical theater: it was free from geography, not especially dependent on time; simple in emotion and somewhat complex in thought, and depended entirely on certain self-established conventions." He surrendered the manuscript to Burke for revision and completion, urging him to attempt publication in Broom or The Little Review, or else to appropriate an entire issue of Secession for the play, so as to make "a jolly stink."⁹⁴ Though Cowley intermittently suggested taking up the play once more, to all intents and purposes there the matter rested.

But Cowley's satirical indignation continued unabatedly. In his notebook he lambasted the anti-rationalistic worship of "Surrender" among contemporary writers and denounced the members of "the psycho-analytic school" (in particular Waldo Frank and Sherwood Anderson) as producers of "yoni-literature." Their books, he wrote, were reminiscent of "the sensations of a woman who lies on her back and surrenders her body to the unnamed Lover, so that she may attain to the Clean, the Naked, the Real. She expresses herself in the terms of a mysticism in words of one syllable. She digs in the mine of her subconscious and finds that grey impalpable mineral from which dreams are made. She calls them Art." Over against a mystical outpouring of intuitional impulses or subconscious drives Cowley posited a definition of art that, however facetious and even Dadaistic in its language, was serious in its demand of a literature feeding less on the subjective self than on social and human reality, "the vastly more interesting structure of the actual world." It recognized that art was not merely the expression of a personal

sensibility, but the creation of an autonomous work of art. Cowley's formulation became a favorite axiom:

Art is a beast which pastures not on dreams or the Libido but on the violently-coloured prairies of a world which exists, surprisingly enough, in time and space. Art is the fabulous ostrich which eats sand and shits bricks: hence, the Pyramids.⁹⁵

The first public offshoot of Cowley's projected Ridicule of Contemporary Aesthetics was a satirical portrait of an imaginary young artist bedazzled by aesthetic questions. Harold Loeb, after suggesting revisions to point up the caricature, accepted it for Broom, where it appeared in October 1922. "Young Man with Spectacles" was a humorous composite sketch containing recognizable touches of Cowley, Burke and Josephson. Cowley's bespectacled young man was buffeted by contradictory modernist creeds and theories until he was left speechless with befuddlement. The ideas he advanced and abandoned with startling rapidity were a clever and colorful collage of passages from Cowley's personal notebooks and extracts from his recent correspondence with Burke and Josephson. The article, indeed, largely ridiculed Cowley's own confused efforts of recent months to draw up a personal aesthetics. As such, it was a little jewel of self-irony. But its ridicule was also aimed over Cowley's own head at those who were similarly struggling to find a foothold in the quicksands of modernity. For the time being Cowley had found such a footing in the values and ideals of classicism; it was, significantly, the one feature that was exempted from his satire.⁹⁶

By May 1922 Cowley's opinion of Broom had risen considerably. After Alfred Kreymborg's resignation Loeb had tentatively begun to shift the magazine's direction from a catholic eclecticism to a more outspoken commitment to the younger American writers. Though Loeb's literary orientation remained uncertain, his perceptions about Broom's literary allegiances were clarifying rapidly. Among a slightly older American generation he valued the cerebral poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore, while he denounced the writings of Frank and Rosenfeld for containing "passages of purple prose and self-indulgent sentiment until the reader felt that he was sinking in a sea of hot tar." But he was particularly eager to secure contributions from the members of a younger age-group--Cowley, Josephson, Burke, Cummings, Crane and Brown. "My

impression was," Loeb recalled, "that this nucleus of youngsters possessed a positive attitude which contrasted strongly with the negation and despair that had obsessed so many of the American literati in recent decades." In European literature, too, Loeb decided to print "no more tired old masters," and to opt for the work of the younger French, Italian, German, Russian and Central European writers.⁹⁷ With such an editorial policy Loeb could be assured of Cowley's approbation.

Loeb tentatively formulated his new editorial line in an article which he printed in Broom's May 1922 issue, the second one to appear after Kreymborg's departure. In "Foreign Exchange" he explained the motivations behind the current exodus of artists from America in rather conventional terms as a flight from a business-dominated capitalist society to a milieu of freedom and possibility. The bulk of his essay discussed the effect the proximity of a foreign culture was having on American writers in France. Though by his own confession Loeb had not read "This Youngest Generation," his essay dovetailed with Cowley's on several points, a testimony that Cowley's ideas were gaining wider currency among his contemporaries. Loeb singled out two principal influences. First, following Flaubert and De Gourmont, the expatriates displayed "a meticulous attention to form." Secondly, and to Loeb more importantly, the European perspective led to "a revaluation of America," which was only accelerated by French admiration for the more spectacular manifestations of American culture: advertising, motion pictures, skyscrapers. From such artists as Jean Cocteau, André Salmon and Blaise Cendrars American writers could learn "how to apply the lesson of the new American civilization to literature." He urged them to remain American, yet to "acquire French clarity, ease, and style;" by creating a vital literature out of the manifestations of contemporary culture, the expatriates could then perform "an invaluable service" to American letters and put an end to the isolation of the American artists from the community.⁹⁸

Loeb's essay was partly a rebuttal to a fierce attack on the French Dadaists and their aesthetic veneration of American technology by Edmund Wilson. In the February 1922 issue of Vanity Fair Wilson lambasted the younger French writers for dismissing the tradition of "perfection and form, of grace and measure and tranquillity." Wilson took a conservative stand, explaining the attraction of the "monstrous" and "vulgar" forms of

American popular culture for the French as an antidote of force and vitality to their war-induced exhaustion, a notion soon challenged by Josephson in Secession. Wilson sounded a warning against the dehumanizing effects of an urban-industrial technology and pointed to the uncongeniality of an American machine-aesthetics to "le clair genie français."

Be careful that the elephants do not crush you! Do not make pets of the machines! . . . The buildings are flattening us out; the machines are tearing us to pieces; our ideals are formed by the movies and our taste by the posters and the jazz. Be careful how you fling away the rope that unites you to the past from which you have fallen. . . . Your attempts at the barbarous and the harsh are the most horrible things imaginable. Leave that sort of thing to us: our genius is adapted to it. We surpass you alike in the triumphs and the atrocities of the barbarous. . . . The electric signs in Time Square make the Dadaists look timid; it is the masterpiece of Dadaism produced naturally by our race and without the premeditation which makes your own horrors self-conscious.

By its very nature, Wilson claimed, the American sensibility was so Dadaistic as to make French Dadaism appear "a violent, rather sophomoric movement."⁹⁹

Wilson's warnings fell on deaf men's ears. In the eyes of Josephson, Cowley and Loeb his deprecation of contemporary American culture aligned him with the older critics of Civilization in the United States. Loeb, too, condemned Wilson's interpretation as proof of a narrow and anachronistic vision. In concluding his essay Loeb brought his position in line with Secession, as he stressed the difference between Cowley's age-group and the generation of Frank, Rosenfeld, Lewis and Anderson. "The transplanted American writers . . . represent a direction diametrically opposed to the main current of American prose. Objectivity, restraint, experimentation with form, is contrasted in their work with the subjectivity, looseness, and waste of the prevailing literature of revolt. The former assail the tradition of writing, while the latter attack the conventions of living. The former concentrate on an ideal of art, the latter on expressing themselves." Loeb ended on a moderately optimistic note of literary nationalism: "perhaps from the fusion and interaction of these contrary ideals will come the artist or school of artists who will combine truth of vision, perfection of form, courage of

conviction with a wide comprehension of a civilization too marvelous to be entirely hateful."¹⁰⁰

Loeb's hopes for a synthesis between a French ideal of formal elegance and a Brooksonian cultural nationalism seemed profoundly congenial to Cowley. In early May he wrote to Loeb to express his critical appreciation of the latest Broom and pointed out the affinity between Loeb's article and the ideas advanced in "This Youngest Generation." Loeb replied that he was unaware of Cowley's essay, but expected "great things" of his age-group, "above all a positive note to contrast with the persistent weeping over the fact that America is not Europe, or rather is not an imagined Europe which surely does not exist now if it ever did." He was particularly pleased by Cowley's praise since it pertained to the very issue which he felt had "approximated the ideal picture" towards which he hoped to steer the magazine. Broom, he observed to Cowley several weeks later, was slowly attaining "an underlying unity or personality."¹⁰¹

Broom's new editorial direction was consolidated in its next number by Matthew Josephson, whose "Made in America" pugnaciously buttressed Loeb's rebuttal of Edmund Wilson:

The machine is not 'flattening us out' nor 'crushing us.' The machine is our magnificent slave, our fraternal genius. We are a new and hardier race, friend to the skyscraper and the subterranean railway as well. We are at home under the sea as well as in the air, and we can sing and laugh as heartily under these transformed conditions.

It was only necessary to respond freely and flexibly to a "bewildering and astounding American panorama," Josephson argued, for the artist to create "a new folk-lore out of the domesticated miracles of our time."¹⁰²

Josephson's exuberantly affirmative viewpoint convinced Loeb that the two might "advantageously cooperate." During the summer the alliance between Josephson and Loeb was clinched: in August 1922 Josephson became associate editor and Broom was transformed into "in essence a tendenz magazine, expounding a militant modernism in literature as well as the plastic arts. We would become a 'fighting organ,' sponsoring the avant-garde of postwar Europe, the German as well as the French experimenters, and the youth of America."¹⁰³ Whatever his sympathies with Loeb, Cowley was as yet far from such an unqualified and loudmouthed endorsement of

the avant-garde. Over the next few months he was drawn deeper into its orbit and would come to share partial responsibility for the direction of both Broom and Secession; his skepticism about modernism, however, never vanished and his commitment to the avant-garde was never as unequivocal and vociferous as Josephson's. It was a measure of his literary pragmatism as well as of his ambivalent allegiance to an avant-garde aesthetics that, while involved with Broom and Secession, he continued to write for The Dial and The Freeman.

For much of May 1922 Cowley waited anxiously for news about the renewal of his fellowship. His financial predicament remained precarious, necessitating a perpetual search for complementary sources of income. Skeptical of attaining early success, Cowley was yet pragmatic and ambitious enough to want to maintain a hundred percent sales record--he prided himself on having marketed all of the articles he had written in March and April. Still he continued to need the munificent support of wealthier friends like John Brooks Wheelwright and Stewart Mitchell, both of whom extended intermittent loans. Mitchell, in addition, commissioned Peggy to paint his portrait in watercolors for as much as sixty dollars. In May he reported having seen the portrait exhibited at the Independents' Gallery in New York. He also solicited some of her watercolors for The Dial.¹⁰⁴

At the end of May Cowley learned that his American Field Service Fellowship had been extended for a year. Though the renewal relieved him of immediate financial worries, he greeted the announcement with mixed feelings. Lately he had been "frightfully homesick" for the rural America of his youth--"a country where No Trespass signs can be disregarded, and where there are troutstreams"--and had realized with renewed poignancy the nature of his cultural allegiance: "My talent is not cosmopolitan, and I have no desire to spend my life in France." Cowley still cherished his dream of a rural literary life and agreed with Burke that "the ideal life for an American writer is somewhere within two hours of New York." Burke, who had recently fathered his second child, had purchased a farm near Andover, New Jersey, which would remain his permanent home; he had proposed that Cowley settle on a neighboring farm. Though Cowley had

earlier protested that Burke's life was becoming "too much of a piece" and had urged him to transport himself to Europe, he was sorely tempted by his friend's rural ideal of literary community.¹⁰⁵

By the end of his sojourn in Montpellier Cowley was growing tired of the sober solemnity of classicism; he had begun to feel that he had exhausted the intellectual and social possibilities of provincial life in southern France and seemed ready for a transfusion of new literary and intellectual energy. Though he complained in early June that he had done "no thinking on aesthetics" of late, still he felt that intellectually Europe was "tremendously stimulating," that under its influence his ideas were "clarifying slowly," and that even life in the French provinces was giving him "an excellent perspective on America."¹⁰⁶ Such intellectual benefits would be considerably enhanced during his second year in France, as Cowley prepared to leave the classicist backwaters of Montpellier to confront the flood tides of the European avant-garde in full force.

Early in June 1922 Malcolm and Peggy Cowley returned to Paris. They stayed for nearly two months, before embarking on a summer of European travel to the centers of the international avant-garde: Brussels, Munich, Vienna, Berlin. After a year in Montpellier Paris was immensely stimulating. "I feel continually as if I were drunk, although I drink nothing at all," Cowley told Wheelwright. Gossiping, drinking or playing bridge with the American colony at Montparnasse, Cowley was once again struck by its eccentric similarity to Greenwich Village, but this time found the Parisian variety more palatable; its "pleasing atmosphere of youth" made dissipation seem less objectionable than in the "middle-aged" Village. On the whole, his attitude remained ambivalent. Like cocaine, he told Burke, the city left one either "tremendously elated or sunk in a brown fit of depression." Under its influence, he wrote to Harold Loeb, serious work was "just as impossible as with any other drug habit." Despite his misgivings Cowley was aware of the special fascination of the city: "Paris has rarely or never produced great literature. There are exceptions: Baudelaire, Verlaine, but the rule is pretty safe. However, Paris has been the condition of great literature." For Cowley, one came to Paris to be stimulated, but one's serious writing had to be done elsewhere. Remaining in Paris, he believed, one seemed fated to stoop to the mediocrity of genre boulevardier or the anti-bourgeois caperings of the Dadaists.¹

In Paris Cowley was given an unexpected opportunity to meet a number of established French writers, who initiated him into the complicated network of French literary life and politics and brought him up to date on recent French literary history. It proved an invaluable education. One afternoon in June, on the sidewalk terrace of the Dôme, Cowley ran into Ivan Opffer, a "feckless" artist from Denmark, whom he had known in the

Village as an acquaintance of Susan and James Light. Opffer had been commissioned by John Farrar of The Bookman to draw—"from Life"--a series of lithograph portraits of Great European Men of Letters and proposed that Cowley do the accompanying interviews in French, a language in which he was not proficient. The articles would have to be written on speculation, but with funds rapidly running low in Paris Cowley decided he had more to gain than to lose. He accompanied Opffer on his next assignment, a portrait of Henri Barbusse, whose anti-war novel Le Feu (1916) had raised a good deal of political dust. Not all of it had settled down in 1922, as Cowley and Opffer found upon approaching Barbusse's country house. Making their way through the surrounding countryside, they were promptly apprehended as a pair of bomb-throwing suspects by two patrolling agents bicyclettes, who insisted upon inspecting every sheet of drawing paper in Opffer's folio case before allowing them to meet the writer. While Cowley asked questions and took copious bilingual notes, Opffer tried to catch Barbusse's facial expression. The interview was dispatched to The Bookman and resulted in a prompt assignment to do six other pen-portraits.²

Under cover of his now formal commission Cowley met, besides Barbusse, André Salmon, Georges Duhamel, Charles Vildrac, Paul Fort, Pierre MacOrlan (pseudonym of Pierre Dumarchey) and, at his own proposal, James Joyce. A projected visit to Anatole France miscarried due to the author's stubborn refusal to receive visitors. Most of the interviews were conducted during June and July, but Cowley took the summer and fall to give his articles a definitive form. The portraits of European Men of Letters appeared in The Bookman at irregular intervals between October 1922 and January 1925. In the articles, Cowley told John Farrar, he aimed "to define each man" by giving "a personal impression" buttressed by exclusive information gained from firsthand sources.³ Cowley's pen-portraits were in themselves but lightweight specimens of literary journalism limited in depth and slight in critical substance. Collectively, however, they reveal a nascent fascination with the nuances of literary personality and suggest that from the first Cowley thought of writing as a preeminently human activity, one in which character and idea, personal integrity and literary vision were inextricably bound up with one another. In a modest fashion the articles gave evidence of Cowley's growing tendency to view a writer's oeuvre and career as one and

to relate the work of art to the larger social and cultural milieu. His meetings with Barbusse, Salmon, Duhamel and Vildrac, in particular, confirmed Cowley's own evolving attitudes.

Barbusse made an "intense impression" on Cowley. Perhaps for the first time he confronted in Barbusse a sensitive social visionary and left-wing political activist, whose work and personality bespoke a profoundly radicalized human engagement. Cowley's essay radiated admiration, as he sketched Barbusse's rise from relative obscurity to overnight celebrity with the politically controversial Under Fire. He observed how, paradoxically, the war had been Barbusse's nemesis as well as his salvation, since it had enabled him to exchange his earlier pessimism for a new vision of peace and human comradeship. He had plunged into political activism--in 1919 he had founded the international Clarté movement and by 1922 was moving towards a militant Communism--but had done so without surrendering literature to propaganda. Cowley applauded Barbusse's determination to write a literature bearing on "contemporary ideas" and with marked approval quoted the author's repudiation of "pure literature:" "The sort of literature that exists in a fourth dimension and has no connection with modern life . . . is dead. But the literature of ideas is always living." He praised Barbusse for combining a politically advanced mode of writing with an open and bold interest in formal experimentation.⁴ Cowley's early appreciation of Barbusse adumbrated the stand on literature and politics he would take in the 1930s. In 1922, however, the radical implications of such a stand remained unexplored.

Barbusse appears to have seen in Cowley a fraternal artistic and political spirit. In a letter he told Cowley that he was eager to establish intellectual relations with the Americans, to whom he looked as "the arbiters of the historical situation of Old Europe," but who, he felt, were "badly informed" about the "profoundly rational and equitable ideas" of the French avant-garde. Cowley, in turn, entertaining hopes of translating Barbusse's forthcoming novel, helped to straighten out communications between the French writer and his American publishers through Max Eastman, then in Paris as a representative of Hearst International.⁵

Of all the writers interviewed for The Bookman André Salmon was perhaps most congenial to Cowley. Salmon was a close associate of a group

of writers and artists--André Derain, Picasso, Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Pierre MacOrlan--who in the years before 1914 had virtually initiated the new modern art movement in France. In 1922 he was relatively unknown in America, though The Dial had recently published a eulogistic consideration of his latest novel, La Nègresse du Sacré-Coeur, by Cuthbert Wright. Cowley was enthusiastic about Salmon's novels--"To me personally they opened new worlds of literature"--and proposed to translate parts of La Nègresse for Broom. Finding that Cowley shared a lively interest in contemporary literary history, Salmon treated him to a generous personal account of the efforts of Apollinaire and Picasso to originate a radical modernism. Salmon, Cowley told Burke, was "just what I was looking for"--he had an almost "superstitious reverence" for Apollinaire and had given Cowley "wonderful dope" on current French letters which he planned to exploit in future articles.⁶

Salmon's informal lectures enhanced Cowley's understanding of the importance of specific age-groups in literary history and deepened his conception of a literary generation. In America, Cowley observed in The Bookman, the term was "apt to be misunderstood. . . . A literary generation is not a coterie or a society for mutual admiration. It is a group of men whose common age has given them a common point of view, and a common aim which is not necessarily the destruction of every other generation." Thus, Cowley observed, in America one could differentiate between "the generation of hopeful intellectuals" of The New Republic, the "discouraged intellectuals" of The Freeman, "the generation of psychoanalysts" of The Seven Arts, and, most recently, "the critical generation" of Secession. Despite the doubtful perspicacity of his analysis, under the influence of his Paris meetings Cowley was already feeling his way towards a history of contemporary letters in terms of its constituent age-groups.

Cowley credited Salmon's generation with having created "a new ideal of the artistic life." He praised the group for repudiating the Symbolists' aristocratic and disdainful aloofness from common life in favor of a new critical formula: "Art must be given back to life." As a result of their scoffing at the "aesthetic parade" of the 1890s, Cowley believed, the "arty life" had been effectively discredited. In André Salmon Cowley met with an ideal of the literary vocation against which he would increasingly come to measure his personal goals and attainments.

Salmon had distinguished himself in poetry, drama, fiction and criticism, Cowley noted, and wrote with the same success and integrity for a mass audience on Parisian murder trials as for a specialized public on modern art. Impressed by the wide range of human experience he took for his subject matter and by the variety of literary genres he commanded, Cowley upheld Salmon as "a type unfortunately rare in modern times: a man of letters who has taken all literature for his province."⁷

Cowley's meetings with Georges Duhamel confirmed his preference for a literature concerned with human and social reality. Duhamel's wartime experiences as an army surgeon, he believed, had deepened his human sympathies and given him a "delicate compassion" for the suffering he had witnessed. Cowley praised the French writer for combining a sensitive humanism with a "scientific probity" and passion for truth. Duhamel wrote "as if with a scalpel," Cowley said, and applied his sharp analytical gifts to individual life as well as to "the diseased organism of society." Under cover of Duhamel's words Cowley presented his personal conviction of the social and moral dimension of literature and advanced his growing belief in the possibility of a vital American culture: "The only thing that matters for a writer is to know society and the individual, and to tell what he has seen. . . . Americans mistake the meaning of civilization. . . . A people defends itself with museums, with libraries, with works of art, and not with banks or armies. The first question is always a moral question. . . . I love America, but not because the dollar is worth ten francs. I love America on account of Whitman and Emerson."⁸

Cowley saw still other of his personal convictions reflected in the poet Charles Vildrac, the subject of his fourth Bookman portrait. He depicted Vildrac as an artist who managed to rise above the bitter quarrels of the rivaling literary factions in Paris and who retained a respect for his audience. Vildrac's restricted productivity and his reluctance to live by his pen bespoke an admirable refusal to compromise his personal and poetic integrity and his high professional standards: "He has too much respect for literature to use it as a livery horse." Vildrac's stubborn individualism in the Parisian "hierarchy of schools and systems" was as congenial to Cowley as his aversion to theory--with Vildrac he believed that "a book should be judged for itself instead of for its bearing on a preconceived system of ideas." He shared Vildrac's

distrust of pedantry and dogmatism and approved of his rejection of a prevalent academicism in French letters. He sympathized with Vildrac's denunciation of the modern "affectation of intellectualism" as a "cult of the pure and heartless intelligence" (a verdict anticipating Cowley's later response to the anti-human cerebralism of Paul Valéry) and supported Vildrac's open and eclectic persuasion that the artist should "assimilate culture of every sort, so as to devote his efforts honestly and tenaciously to the discovery of himself and to the free development of his gifts."

Vildrac also sharpened Cowley's ideal of a new classical literature, by precept and example. In a letter to Amy Lowell Cowley had observed that his efforts on behalf of a "new" classicism were not to be confused with "Neo-Classicism as now rampant in France." In The Bookman Cowley quoted Vildrac's condemnation of French academic neo-classicism as "a purely bookish attitude" producing theories of art but unable to function as the foundation of a vital modern literature, an attitude which adumbrated Cowley's later response to the sterile academicism of the New Humanists. He concluded his Bookman portrait by positing Vildrac as a contemporary poet who was distinctly "classical" as Cowley understood the term:

Writing about the most daily of incidents in the language of the street, he has the ability to raise them to the level of high tragedy. His poems and his plays are simple, graceful, severe, a little in the manner of the Parthenon. . . . Like [the Greeks] he writes what he has to write, without theories or affectations. He is emotional but not emotionalist and simple without being simplist.⁹

Cowley's impressions of James Joyce were less than undividedly positive. In 1922 the cafés of Paris were buzzing with gossip discussions of the recently published Ulysses, and Cowley decided to devote his Bookman portrait not so much to a "conventional" analysis of the new modern masterpiece as to a discussion of the book's critical reception. He informed John Farrar that he intended to "write up Joyce from the standpoint of his audience" and to provide American readers with "a collection of the bromides that one hears in a Parisian conversation on Ulysses." Cowley's approach, facile as it sounded, seemed partly inspired by a recent altercation with S. Foster Damon on the subject of Ulysses. On July 15, 1922, Damon wrote Cowley that even a hasty reading

of the book's last chapter had persuaded him that it was nothing if not "disgusting." "Perhaps it is a fault of this age that no one can be successfully Rabelaisian," he added. Though Cowley had not given Ulysses the careful reading it deserved, he objected "on principle" to Damon's repudiation of the book on the grounds of moral or sexual obscenity: "'Disgusting' is an adjective that reveals less about the book than about the critic. . . . If Ulysses had been written two centuries ago, in French, and forgotten, you would be the first to drag it from its hiding place and reveal it to the astonished graduates of Radcliffe College. You make the mistake of art dealers. You require that rude books should be mellowed by time, should acquire a Van Dyke sheen, before you praise them." He challenged Damon's right to attack "the authors of immoral literature" and urged him not to develop into "a Boston spinster. Take off them skirts." On September 21 Damon granted that Ulysses was "saved by its technique & also by one or two scenes, including the splendid Walpurgis Night," but such concession could not diminish his general hostility: "There seems to be neither humor, nor pathos, nor phantasy. It is Realism at its most painstaking worst. Such 'frankness' violates the fundamental principles of psychology. When one walks down the street one may notice that it is dirty; but Joyce counts every dog-turd. It is not True, it is merely Factual; it is not Art, it is Photography. . . . I repeat it is DISGUSTING." For a truly modern masterpiece Damon referred Cowley to Moby Dick.¹⁰

Cowley's article for The Bookman, based on several meetings with Joyce during the summer, took him "a solid week" in November to write. Joyce was not an author one wrote about "casually," he explained to Farrar, but one who required handling "with care and gloves and an eraser." Though Farrar judged the portrait "excellent," he did not publish it until July 1924. Opening the article with a satirical sketch of the facile, contradictory and inane reactions to Ulysses by expatriate café-sitters, Cowley himself viewed Joyce with considerable, if ill-defined, ambivalence. Surveying the nearly superhuman pains, the financial sacrifices and the various setbacks which had marked Joyce's struggles to get his early books published, he could not help but admire Joyce's uncompromising dedication to his art, his readiness to fly in the face of "all the forces of custom and decorum and propriety," and his unceasing efforts "to make every word perfect." He presented Joyce as a

ceaseless explorer of new paths, who in Ulysses had pushed fiction to "the limit not alone of the epic novel but of naturalism and frankness; even, in the true sense, of romanticism." Joyce's achievement was so ambitious that it demanded to be measured against Homer's, Cowley felt, but such a comparison was not unambiguously to Joyce's advantage: "either his work is the *Odyssey* of modern times or it is presumption."¹¹

All in all, Cowley's early effort to "define" Joyce had resulted in a rather slender and niggardly tribute. The impressionistic portrait was sprinkled with unexplained touches of condescension, which only latently anticipated Cowley's later severer strictures against Joyce. It was not until Cowley rewrote and expanded his portrait to make it an integral part of Exile's Return that he understood more fully and properly what he had found so "intolerable" about Joyce's genius in 1922. Over a decade later he realized that his original objections had been less against the technical attainments of Joyce's work than to the moral and human implications of a Joycean aesthetics, which he then chose to see as a belated manifestation of the Symbolist religion of art.¹²

Cowley's weeks in Paris had served to clarify and corroborate evolving tendencies in his literary thought to date. His meetings with a wide variety of European writers had pointed up his conservative humanist predilections in art as in life and only reinforced his nascent skepticism about the implications of the Symbolist aesthetics at the root of modernity. By exposing him to a broad range of artistic modes and possibilities they had enhanced his sensitivity to the pluriformity of literary life and creation and fanned his propensity for an open-minded approach to the varieties of literary experience. When he met the more radical avant-garde shortly after, he was able to confront it with a sharpened critical perspective. In the summer months of 1922 Cowley seemed further than ever removed from the radically advanced aesthetics embraced by his literary friends.

During July the French capital seemed wholly given over to Americans. "In Paris American was the official language," Cowley told Damon; "nobody spoke French in Montparnasse but the waiters." Cowley appears to have found the American colony in Paris a self-contained community of eccentric individuals, the majority of whom remained rather isolated from the main cultural movements in France. Many of them, indeed, did not have or avail themselves of the chance to establish contacts with French

writers--when William Carlos Williams, arriving in France in 1924, asked Robert McAlmon to introduce him to the avant-garde French poets, he was puzzled to learn that McAlmon presumably did not know any of them well enough to function as an intermediary.¹³ It was an essential feature of Cowley's European years that he purposely shunned entrapment in a ghetto-like community of American expatriates but actively sought to associate with major French writers both inside and outside the avant-garde. Like Josephson and Burke, he was a serious student of French literature, of the past as of the present, and would do much, through criticism and translation, to introduce contemporary French writers to an American audience. In addition, he used the opportunity offered by his European sojourn to study and talk with the major modern artists of the time--among the "saints" of modernism whom Cowley discussed in Exile's Return he personally met Pound, Joyce and Valéry in Paris--and was perpetually concerned with exploring the impact of European modernist aesthetics and ideas on the young American writers of his generation.

By the end of July Cowley had grown tired of Paris and the divertissements to be found in the American colony. His "choppy" life there left him with "no very clear impression of anything except moments." Apart from his Bookman interviews he had done no serious work, his funds had once again hit rock bottom, and the city left him in a state of intellectual exhaustion. Rumors of a low cost of living and the promise of settling down to work made him decide to spend the rest of the summer in the Austrian Tyrol. On July 24 the Cowleys were in Brussels, where they lingered to await remuneration for several reviews and brief mentions Cowley had written for The Dial. By way of Cologne, Munich and Innsbruck they arrived in Imst, Austria, on August 13, where they put up at the Gasthof Post, an eighteenth-century château converted into a hotel. Town and hotel had been recommended by Matthew Josephson for being a picturesque and historic site as well as "an excellent place to get writing done." When the Cowleys arrived at Imst, William Slater Brown had just left the Gasthof Post for Germany and Josephson had moved on to Reutte, to spend his time with a clan of French and German Dadaists--Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst, Paul Eluard and Hans (Jean) Arp. In the summer

of 1922, Cowley remembered, "young American writers were drifting everywhere in West Europe and Middle Europe; they waved to each other from the windows of passing trains."¹⁴

Having come to Austria to work Cowley found a chaotic nation in the grip of a wildly fluctuating inflationary economy and a concomitant political turmoil that carried the seeds of a future world war. The cost of living was legendarily cheap and for once the Cowleys could live in princely leisure, relieved from economic pressure. With the krone selling seventy-four thousand to the dollar and taking staggering daily plunges sumptuous meals were to be had for the price of a sandwich, wardrobes could be filled out for a song, a week in a good hotel enjoyed for less than a dollar a day. The shadow side of such inflationary conditions, however, was considerably less bracing. Not only were economic exploiters and capitalist speculators garnering immense profits, but on his travels Cowley was disturbed to see a new breed of tourists busily doing its part to aggravate the human misery. "Tyrol is overrun with foreigners, all seeking the same economies, and they are taking the food from the mouths of the inhabitants," Cowley wrote to Foster Damon. These profiteers of the exchange--Valutaschweine, he later dubbed them--were wandering parasitically from country to country in search of "the lowest prices and the most picturesque upheavals of society." The spectacle of poverty, hunger and despair to which inflation was reducing the average middle-class family in Austria filled Cowley with pity and stirred his social conscience by its contrast with his personal well-being. Though his modest expenditures hardly ranked him with the ruthless profiteers--as Matthew Josephson suggested, his small spendings in sound currency did probably more to help than to harm a faltering economy--still Cowley felt personally implicated in what he later described, with clear disgust, as "the army of exploitation." To Burke he voiced his humanitarian concern with the sufferings of the Austrian people:

The Austrians (poor people, they are paid in kronen) haven't enough to buy food. Here in Imst even, where conditions are much better than in Vienna or Innsbruck, I see them dining on a slice of rye bread washed down with water. Water is plentiful. They confide to you how dear things are, and you have to agree with them, although personally and familiarly you are spending less than a dollar a day at the best hotel.

Political tension was acute. Riots and revolutions were "in the air,"

Cowley told Damon; tourists were growing unpopular, foreigners threatened with violence. Cowley felt increasingly uncomfortable. In an atmosphere of human misery and social unrest writing became next to impossible. "All I can think about is poverty, political economics, and the exchange," he confessed to Burke a few days after his arrival in Imst. Instead of writing, Cowley told Damon, "one broods over politics and consigns Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and especially Poincaré to hell. A pretty world they've left us." Three days later he admitted to Burke that his impressions of the Austrian situation had enhanced his skepticism about a formalist aestheticism and strengthened his belief in the need for a literature concerned with the social and political realities of the present: "I don't see how such a thing as pure literature can come out of Austria for the next ten years."¹⁵

The Austrian situation, however, can hardly be said to have channeled Cowley's thought towards political radicalism. The sharp edge of his guilt and compassion wore off fast enough. "It took me just ten days (10) to harden my heart," he observed to Burke on August 27. "I suppose we'll stay now till the revolution, governmental decrees, rising exchange, or cold weather force us out." His political impressions were too shallow, the twinges of his social conscience too faint, to have more than a fleeting impact. As during the war, his attitude towards the unsettling human and political atmosphere in postwar Europe remained essentially "spectatorial." Cowley saw "the picturesque rather than the enduring." After ten days he had digested enough of the Austrian situation to resume writing in the face of it.¹⁶

A feeling of personal guilt, together with a wish to satirize the parasitical tourists swarming over Europe, informed Cowley's poem "Valuta," which he mailed to Harold Loeb from Imst in early September:

Following the dollar, ah, following the dollar, I learned
three fashions of eating with the knife, and ordered
beer in four languages from a Hungarian waiter
while following the dollar eastward along the 48th
degree of north latitude--where it buys most,
there is the Fatherland--

following the dollar by gray Channel seas, by blue seas
in Italy, by Alpine lakes as blue as aniline blue, by
lakes as green as a bottle of green ink, with ink-
stained monumental mountains rising on either hand;

I dipped my finger in the lake and wrote, I shall never
return, never, to my strange land,

. . .

ah, farther than Atlantis is
my land,

where I could return tomorrow if I chose,

but I shall return to it never;
shall never wed my pale Alaska virgin,
never lie in thine arms, O Texas Rose.

Often cited and anthologized to illustrate the typical expatriate attitude, "Valuta" has perhaps been misconstrued too easily as a serious reflection of Cowley's personal experiences as an expatriate wanderer. In effect, the poem's intent was at least partly ironic and self-satirical. It aimed to satirize those expatriates for whom America, seen through a screen of admiration and glorification, was rapidly becoming a mythical country of fantastic skyscrapers and ingenious mechanical appliances, of majestic farmlands and astounding riches, of subways, folksongs, and popular movies. If Cowley was occasionally guilty of such nostalgic falsification, not for a moment did he intend his European stay to be permanent, as his poem claimed. In late October he clarified his position in a letter to John Farrar:

I have joined no band of expatriates and show every intention of returning to New York. . . . The chief advantage of two years in France is to give you a taste for America. . . . Not that I have no fondness for French people and French literature, but I happened to be born on the other side of the water and it will be a sad day when I forget it. The only expatriates in Paris are the people who arrived on the last boat and Harold Stearns. As for the rest . . . say, if you want to hear good, nasal, limey-hating Amurricns, if you want to hear Amurricn spoken in all its ungrammatical purity, come to Paris.¹⁷

Cowley was in Austria on an ironic mission for Secession. While the Austrian situation had convinced him of the undesirability of a pure aestheticism, he was carrying manuscript material for the third issue of a magazine aggressively sponsoring a radical avant-garde aesthetics. His disappointment over its first issue notwithstanding, Cowley had retained a lively, if skeptical, interest in its possibilities and eagerly awaited future issues. In April 1922 Gorham Munson had written to Cowley that the encouraging response to the first issue had given him "visible evidence

that Secession was not locating above a vacuum, that the group of writers I have designed it for would really fill it." He had promised an "immensely stronger" second issue and, in a later communication, had informed Cowley he had enlisted Burke's active cooperation on the magazine.¹⁸

Secession two, published in July 1922, opened with four poems by E. E. Cummings that were presumably "too esoteric" for The Dial. It featured Burke's "The Book of Yul," a story which Cowley had privately praised as the one complete vindication of Burke's experimental theories of form. Cowley was represented by the two poems (subsequently retitled "A Solemn Music" and "Two Swans") which Josephson had criticized as old-fashioned pieces of representationalism but which Munson deemed "astonishingly perfected." Both poems displayed a classical lucidity and elegance; in the verdict of John Brooks Wheelwright they were "complete and inevitable."¹⁹ In addition there was a prose translation of Tristan Tzara, a short story by Josephson, and a piece of nonsensical humor by William Slater Brown. An essay by Munson concluded the issue with another blast at rival magazines. He denounced The Little Review for exemplifying the "wandering preferences" and personal idiosyncracies of its editors, lambasted Broom for presenting an "anthological" and eclectic "cacophony" of contributors, and outlined the editorial platform of Secession as a coherent "group organ." His statement revealed once again how immediately his magazine was a response to Cowley's "This Youngest Generation:"

[Secession] will make group-exclusions, found itself on a group-basis, point itself in a group-direction, and derive its stability and correctives from a group. True it has as yet no detailed manifesto and no organized group behind it. Its writers are scattered all over the world and have no common headquarters or generally sanctioned plans. Yet if one examines the writings of Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, E. E. Cummings, Foster Damon, Mark Turbyfill, the first two numbers of Secession, it is clear, I think, that there is a sizable corps of young American writers working substantially in the same direction, battling with similar problems, and achieving results which can be assembled in a fairly homogenous review. Secession exists unreservedly for these and their kin.

In a broadside Munson reaffirmed Secession's militant and polemic avant-gardism: "Secession has swerved aside and shot ahead of its American contemporaries--straight into the dangerous rapids of modern letters. It disdains life-belts."²⁰

Cowley remained uneasy about being publicly identified with the ideas behind Secession. To John Brooks Wheelwright, who had naturally assumed Cowley to bear editorial responsibility, he protested that he had "no formal connection with [Secession], none whatsoever." The admittedly "excellent" second issue, however, mitigated his earlier disappointment and rekindled his faith in its possibilities. He was even beginning to share Munson's and Josephson's martial intentions for the magazine. To Wheelwright he wrote: "[Secession] aroused a great deal of discussion, more than any other magazine of its type. It stands for something definite, is not a collection of the second-rate work of great men. . . . It is an organ for poetry and polemic, an undignified organ, much more mobile than Broom or The Dial. I want to talk it over with you--badly." To Burke, freshly appointed associate editor, he expressed himself in similar terms: "I do not agree with you that Secession should be solid--entirely. I think it should change its character from issue to issue as much as it can while still remaining our own organ. It should always contain serious work, but should do stunts and polemify and all that."²¹

Secession three, however, caused a temporary somersault in Cowley's appreciation. In September he traveled to Vienna, having agreed to proofread the issue and supervise its printing and distribution. Josephson had handed him all of twenty-five dollars to cover expenses for five hundred copies, mailing costs included. It was not until he saw the contents of the issue that the irony and inconsistency of his mission stood revealed. Josephson had used his editorial carte blanche to advance his personal preferences for a pugnacious radical experimentalism and give free scope to his Dada friends. There was a poem by Philippe Soupault and nonsensical, associational prose sketches by Hans Arp and "Will Bray," as well as an experimental story about a Manhattan sexual voyeur, "Mr. Peep-Peep-Parrish," by Josephson himself, which he had printed despite Munson's earlier objections. In a haphazard series of editorial comments Josephson lambasted Vanity Fair for allowing Paul Rosenfeld's "rosy, disheveled, sentimental" and "rapturous" prose to pass for serious criticism, for transforming (in a recent article by Rosenfeld) the revolutionary Apollinaire into a "chic" and "dashing" literary fashion and for badly butchering Tristan Tzara's "Some Memoirs of Dadaism."²² A fragment from Waldo Frank's forthcoming City Block opened the issue; a story full of emotional fuzziness and vague

abstractions, it dramatized a white man's experience of primitive sexual mysticism with a black prostitute. Burke's "First Pastoral" served as the concluding feature to the issue, which also contained a poem by William Carlos Williams and Cowley's nonsense poem in burlesque of Josephson.

The satirical intent of Cowley's poem, however, went virtually unobserved amidst the predominantly Dadaist contents, which made the issue into a polemical tract for a literature based on mysticism, subconscious drives and associational processes of thought. Josephson, indeed, was not the only one to miss the joke in Cowley's poem. From Boston Wheelwright reported that he and Damon had been forced to defend the poem against attacks by Amy Lowell and Robert Hillyer. Munson, who felt the poem should have stayed in Cowley's "laboratory notebook," received letters from Waldo Frank, Louis Untermeyer, Hart Crane, Jean Toomer and Leo Stein lamenting its inferior quality to Cowley's earlier Secession poems. Munson feared the poem had done Cowley's reputation "a small temporary damage." Cowley, however, perversely refused to publicize its burlesque intent out of resentment against his attackers, and preferred to accept "full responsibility for writing damned nonsense if I feel like writing damned nonsense. As a flank attack on the High Seriousness of American Letters, and lectures on Secession in the Rand School," an oblique reference to Waldo Frank.²³ His defense could not undo the backfiring of his satire.

At the end of September Cowley returned from his proofreading mission to Vienna and, in an angry letter to Burke, fulminated against the contents of Secession three. The issue, he said, "stinks of bad writing, Dada, and the ghetto." Josephson's editorial was "the abomination of abominations" and evinced a blatant disrespect for literary criticism; it was written "without elegance, without logic, with the worst vocabulary of the newspaper hack." Only Burke's "First Pastoral" stood out as "a solidly perfect piece of architecture, a romanesque church. . . . It rises out of a huddle of wooden tenements. Possibly they may burn, destroying the church also." As for Frank's "abominable" story, he could only hope its sexual daringness would lead to suppression of the issue. Cowley's disaffiliation from the avant-garde radicalism of Secession, his uneasiness about being publicly identified with the Secession collective, and his ongoing preference for a classical aesthetics were revealed nowhere more strongly than in his comments to Burke:

The whole weakness of Secession is the fact that it is supposed to be a group organ and that the group falls apart in the middle. I often contradict myself, but if there's one thing I believe in, it is good writing. With you I have been trying to work towards solidity and elegance, towards a to-some-extent classical reaction against the muds and fogs of contemporary literature. . . . I repeat that the third number of Secession has got to be suppressed and that Matty alone cannot edit another number. Otherwise to save our self-respect we have got to secede from Secession.

The fervor of his disapproval, however, was but a measure of the seriousness of his commitment to the magazine. Whatever his objections, he still saw Secession as a feasible instrument for the creation of a receptive audience and a congenial literary milieu for the members of his age-group: "The purpose of Secession is not really to be the organ of a group but to form a group which as yet does not exist. The purpose of a group is to be an audience for poetic drama and to make intelligent literature possible."²⁴

Meanwhile, with Cowley's endorsement of Secession temporarily suspended, his relations with Harold Loeb and Broom were rapidly improving. In late August Cowley traveled north to Reutte to visit Josephson. Memories of their caustic epistolary quarrel of several months past made him approach the meeting with apprehension, but what resentments still lingered were quickly obviated by Josephson's personal charm and conviviality. Though he still resented Josephson's pompous air of superiority--Matty had been "oxygen-pumped" into the belief that he was "the man of talent of us three," Cowley observed to Burke--he enjoyed his host's suave sociability and found him only mildly "upstage." Josephson's brash posturing--he made it a sport to complain to the headwaiter about the food, then tip extravagantly--was contagious and did much to reconcile Cowley to the need to "do stunts and polemify" in Secession while continuing to create serious work. As they discussed the future course of Broom and Secession, Josephson was impressed enough by Cowley's editorial competence to ask him to proofread Secession three in Vienna and proposed him to Loeb for a function as contributing editor on Broom. Whatever his misgivings at the time, Cowley later recalled Josephson as "a very good editor. . . . He had a gift for making discoveries, for taking risks and for getting himself into hot water, as if he carried a steaming kettle with him through Europe."²⁵

On a rainy day in early September Cowley traveled east to Innsbruck to meet Harold Loeb, who was transferring Broom from Rome to a cheaper printing establishment in Berlin. Loeb was accompanied by Kathleen Cannell, a habituée of modern art circles in Paris and Loeb's informal assistant and advisor on matters of art. Cowley found Kitty Cannell an attractive woman of sound and independent taste and developed an immediate liking for her. It turned out that they shared a host of New York acquaintances. Cowley's impressions of Loeb were more reserved. To Burke he described him as the scion of a wealthy Jewish family with international contacts in finance, philanthropy and art, a type he had first encountered in his first year's roommate at Harvard, John Rothschild. Cowley adopted a tone of ironic bemusement as he sketched how Loeb had attained to the captainship of the Princeton wrestling team before joining a "pre-Rape-and-Raphael sort of circle" of art lovers near Haverstraw, where Loeb had occasionally seen Cowley stroll past his cabin in search of trout. After running the Sunwise Turn bookshop in New York, Cowley wrote, Loeb had launched Broom with Kreymborg's help, confident that the latter "would edit a vastly superior Others" but soon finding Kreymborg turn "scared and conservative." He sketched some of the conflicts that had led to Kreymborg's resignation and noted that Loeb seemed eager to "add us to his staff." Cowley depicted Loeb as an editor of uncertain taste, a man under the successive artistic and sexual influences of his friends, who was slow to develop an independent judgment. But if his editorial tastes needed guidance, Cowley felt, as an essayist Loeb was "infinitely more logical" than Josephson.²⁶

Loeb's memory of his meeting with Cowley in Innsbruck mixed irony with admiration:

My opinion of Cowley . . . had risen during the years. No one wrote better letters or contributed such consistently good material to Broom. And I was not disappointed when he finally arrived, looking like a cross between Foxy Grandpa and the darker Katzenjammer Kid. Malcolm refused to be hurried. When a question was put to him, the lines between the eyes deepened and the quizzical expression froze. Nothing else happened. Often the silence seemed interminable. But when he finally spoke, his words meant something.

Loeb offered Cowley a modest position on Broom as a wandering scout and contributing editor. With Josephson established in Berlin, Cowley was to

avail himself of his French contacts, round up new material and translate it; in return he would find Broom a hospitable outlet for his own writings. Cowley did not immediately jump to the proposal. To Burke he grumbled about the magazine's low rates of payment and to Loeb protested that his fee for translations was "lower proportionately than your payment for original work." After longer deliberation, however, Cowley accepted. On September 9 he wrote Loeb that he was "very enthusiastic" about his new connection with Broom and regarded it as "the best stroke of luck I've had for some time." He saw Broom as "the perfect medium for what I have to say," one, moreover, which paid "just enough so that I can afford to work for it--I have to earn a living, as you know." Cowley's enthusiasm was understandable enough. Not only did Loeb seem willing to publish whatever Cowley submitted, his new arrangement with Broom was also "a comfortable lever for meeting anyone I want to know in Paris." He could now exult, indeed, in the profusion of "markets" for his writings: he had The Dial for "literary ideas," The Freeman for "political ideas," Broom for "cultural ideas" and Secession for "poetry and polemic." "I feel now as if I had room to turn around in, an opportunity to express myself, which is really, even if the Villagers think so, the only satisfaction in life."²⁷

Cowley's commitment to Broom was buttressed by his growing approval of its artistic course. As Loeb had written to Lola Ridge in early May, Broom no longer was "a forum . . . where anyone can hold forth who commands the English idiom," but had become "an organ with a strongly held point of view." During the summer months Loeb had allowed Josephson to strengthen his editorial hold over Broom's direction. In a series of articles Josephson had continued to propagate the "pure" and non-referential poetry of Paul Eluard, the use of American popular culture by Philippe Soupault, and the experimental roman poétique of Louis Aragon. He had praised Isidore Ducasse, author of the blasphemous Les Chants de Maldoror, then being serialized in Broom, as the precursor of "a literature of great fertility, freedom, invention, aggressiveness" and the explorer of "the cavernous recesses of the mind and the momentous display of the unconscious." Though there was much in Josephson's aesthetics (and Broom's contents) about which Cowley continued to feel ambivalent, his skepticism was diminishing and by late September, only two days after he had reaffirmed his classical ideals to Burke, he

observed that he agreed with Josephson that Louis Aragon was "doing vastly interesting work."²⁸ More importantly, he was increasingly sympathetic to Broom's nascent cultural nationalism and its endorsement of an avant-garde machine-aesthetics, an editorial line which had grown markedly stronger since Loeb's "Foreign Exchange" and Josephson's "Made in America" in the May and June issues.

Broom's September 1922 issue contained a lengthy article by Loeb, in which he expounded his optimism for the emergence of a vital and indigenous American culture. The essay had a profound effect on Cowley. The recent indictment by American intellectuals of America's cultural inferiority to Europe, Loeb argued, did more to inhibit than to foster the rise of an autochthonous culture in the United States. He forswore all imitation of European art and searched for the signs of a native culture unadulterated by European ideals or traditions. Loeb's analysis of the state of European culture dovetailed with Cowley's denunciation of the "modern" in his notebooks and correspondence. Loeb spoke of "the weakness of contemporary art" and pointed up its intellectualism, its lack of social and historical vision, its excessive cultivation of individualism and originality, and its search for new and exotic forms. Genuine artistic expression in America, Loeb held, was unrelated to the "decadent" traditions of Europe, but was rooted in "the mysticism of money," an American religion of business and money-making. The indigenous manifestations of technology and business--whether in architecture, advertising, engineering or the popular arts--had "an aesthetic value of no mean order." Loeb spoke of "aesthetic pleasure in the balanced masses and curved belt lines of machinery" and praised Marinetti, Wyndham Lewis and the French Dadaists for recognizing the aesthetic potential of a machine age. He spoke of jazz as a universal art form and of negro spirituals as America's "real folk music." Among the literary manifestations fostered by the "mysticism of money" he detected a vital new language ("vigorous, crude, expressive, alive with metaphors, Rabelaisian, resembling Elizabethan rather than Victorian English"), a new narrative technique founded on speed and dispensing with "logical continuity" (a mode best exemplified by the Nick Carter stories) and a stock of new types and "conventionalized characters." Such manifestations Loeb saw as hopeful signs that American culture was entering "a classical period," for proof of which he adduced the "greatest living dramatic

artist," Charlie Chaplin. Loeb hoped that the "mysticism of money" would prove "a revitalizing force to most aesthetic expressions."²⁹

Loeb's essay elicited an enthusiastic response from Cowley. In an earlier letter to Burke he had indicated that "as expatriates expatriating on America as a literary subject" Loeb and he were fully in agreement. Writing to Loeb himself he grew positively ecstatic. The "new" Broom had obviated all his former objections against its aimless eclecticism and its new editorial line held his full approval.

Broom is an international magazine of the arts. You have assembled a staff of translators who find you very good international material. . . . But Broom is also, by reasons stronger than any of us, an American magazine of the arts. As such it has to represent a definite attitude and a set of definite ideas. It needs a sort of manifesto, which I always thought was lacking.

But by God it isn't any longer, not since your article on the Mysticism of Money. There was a set of clear ideas, ideas which are fresh to American literature and which ought to revitalize it. . . . Here is Broom's declaration of principles; all that remains is to apply them. . . . The examples of American art were excellently and justly chosen. The article on the whole was bully. I make a more personal comment on it when I say that it affected my own thinking.

Cowley's response pointed up his growing recognition of the viability of an avant-garde aesthetics for a vital American culture. Encouraged by Broom's clarifying focus, he sent Loeb a letter of practical editorial advice, urging him to solicit "sound, informative, technical articles on [American] photography, advertising, typography," as a means of drawing the magazine further together. But he also recognized the healthiness of Broom's double orientation and, far from being a cultural jingoist, exhorted Loeb to "develop the internationalism of Broom still farther." As a further incentive he concluded with a report on Parisian material he had received from Georges Duthuit, Louis Aragon, André Salmon and Pierre MacOrlan.³⁰

As a direct offshoot of Loeb's essay--it took its lead from Loeb's penultimate sentence³¹--Cowley composed a satirical portrait of an imaginary Young American Intellectual, "written specially for Broom." Cowley advertised his sketch as "venom and bile against the generation of Harold Stearns. Twelve hundred words of fine hate." "Young Mr. Elkins" was partly aimed against the rhapsodic impressionism and mystical

nationalism of Paul Rosenfeld. It was headed by an epigraph from Rosenfeld and presented snatches from Rosenfeld's recent Dial essay on Sherwood Anderson as the opinions of Mr. Elkins. More directly, Cowley's portrait aimed to ridicule the anti-American indictments of the thirty intellectuals of Civilization in the United States, the symposium edited by Stearns, who was Cowley's principal target. He depicted Mr. Elkins as a young man mystically spawned and culturally conditioned by American civilization: "It suckled him with Shredded Wheat. It draped Kuppenheimer Klothies about his shoulders. It gave him an Underwood typewriter (Model 5) and convenient magazines. It sent him to Harvard as a classmate of Walter Lippmann. . . ." But Mr. Elkins spurned the culture that produced him; he thundered against "billboards, Billy Sunday and Methodism, proportional representation, Comstock, elevated railroads. One year with special fulgrance he thundered against the commercial ugliness of cities." At thirty-four he was reduced to the spectacle of "a single tired wrestler at grips with American civilization and determined to talk it to death." Cowley ironically presented Mr. Elkins as the advocate of "a simple, almost a childish thesis; a single thesis concerning America and puritanism." Sketching Mr. Elkins's dearest dream, Cowley criticized those who refused to take seriously America's autochthonous cultural expressions, however crude or popular, but strove instead to transform American culture into a replica of Europe:

[Young Mr. Elkins] dreams of an America which has imitated the best of Paris and Berlin and London, an Anglo-Franco-German America ruled by philosophers and economists and rising clean from the sackcloth-and-ashes of puritanism into the leisured humanism of European culture, into a naked dawn. And what he dreams he writes, in his deeper room, sulkily, on a typewriter which is the most finished product of a mechanical civilization.

Cowley's exposure of the paradox inherent in Stearns's gesture of cultural renunciation was underlined by the irony of his concluding image: annoyed by the cacophonous and chaotic human reality of an urban-technological American civilization, Mr. Elkins rises "nervously" and closes his window upon the very culture which has shaped him.³²

In early October 1922 Malcolm and Peggy Cowley traveled north to spend three weeks in Berlin, where Josephson was opening up the new offices of Broom. They found a Germany in the grip of inflationary

madness and human degradation. The mark was taking dizzying downward plunges, one day selling eight hundred to the dollar, the next day tumbling to a thousand and more. Cowley remembered how, at a monthly stipend of a hundred dollars, Josephson in Berlin dwelled in "a duplex apartment with two maids, riding lessons for his wife, dinners only in the most expensive restaurants, tips to the orchestra, pictures collected, charities to struggling German writers." The Cowleys were established in rather modest, if not seedy, quarters. Through Josephson, who in turn had received the tip from one of his Dada friends, they had been recommended a cheap hotel near the Berlin Tiergarten, the "Hotel am Zoo." When the Josephsons, much dismayed but appreciative of the Dada joke, discovered that the hotel was patronized by a host of Berlin streetwalkers, they decided not to enlighten the Cowleys and spoil their surprise. Upon arrival, however, the Cowleys outjoked the jokers by setting up permanent quarters in the "mournful bagnio" Josephson had left in disgust. Josephson recalled how the Cowleys' habitat caused merriment and consternation among visiting friends:

Malcolm and Peggy Cowley . . . found this Lokal highly diverting, and managed to put themselves on a friendly footing with its surly proprietor, who even permitted them to keep the big German shepherd dog Peggy had acquired as her pet . . . It was droll to see the faces their respectable friends made when they called for the Cowleys; Harold Loeb evinced shock at first, then mirth; Kathleen Cannell . . . , dressed in the height of Paris fashion, peered at the place in surprise through the lorgnon she always carried; and the poet Mina Loy, all unsuspecting, arrived to take dinner with the Cowleys accompanied by Joella, her lovely goldenhaired daughter of fourteen. Indeed the merriment of Malcolm and Peggy, as they played at being Monte Cristo for a week with their small store of Valuta, made a bright note for us in the rather grim Berlin scene.⁵⁵

Cowley was depressed by the spectacle of moral degradation and human exploitation he witnessed in postwar Berlin. With its economic system in ruins, Weimar Germany seemed to have abandoned all human values and social conventions. This, indeed, was the bleak and "godless" Germany of George Grosz's Ecce Homo, drawings from which were reprinted in a special German issue of Broom (February 1923). Grosz depicted, in Cowley's words, "a society without redeeming features. Glory had been lost in the War, honor in the betrayal of the revolution and sanity in the crazy years

when ten million marks would not buy a package of cigarettes. There was no standard left except pure effrontery." Fourteen years later Cowley recalled Berlin in the autumn of 1922 as a city "peopled with cripples and fairies, with bacon-fatty Polish profiteers, with hungry street girls (half of them Lesbians), with demobilized and demoralized German officers who looked as if they belonged in a hospital rather than a night club. The general atmosphere was that of a frenzied carnival in an asylum for incurables."³⁴

It was in Berlin that Cowley first met Louis Aragon, who had come north from Austria to seek out Matthew Josephson. Cowley had already begun to admire Aragon's writings, but he was bowled over by the Frenchman's ingratiating charm and vitality, his "astonishing combination of fancy, of quick, cruel wit and literary erudition." Even upon a first acquaintance, he recalled, "I was ready to admit that he was more brilliant than anyone else I had known." Striding into a restaurant on the Kurfürstendamm, in the midst of a corrupt and dehumanized city, Aragon appeared to Cowley "like a first intruder from the world of living men, like Orpheus in hell." Over the next year his impressions of Aragon would deepen, as he saw him regularly and was drawn into his charismatic orbit. Belonging to a generation of French writers whose war-induced disillusionment had not left them physically or morally broken but had given them a perversely jovial and cynical ability to feel at home in a disorderly postwar Europe, Aragon could relish Berlin in October 1922 as an ultramodern city. A month after his visit he described his impressions in *Littérature*: "Berlin is becoming the most modern city of Europe. . . . Advertising is everything here. The electric signs are luminous over the Potsdamer Platz; the radio blares everywhere in this town. . . . The bars and music halls . . . are decorated with an applied form of Cubist or Expressionist art, while the subway stations must have been designed by Arnold Böcklin." For all his admiration, however, Cowley was not prepared to share Aragon's appreciation of Berlin as a manifestation of "the most admired disorder"--rather, his three weeks persuaded him that "it was an insane life for foreigners in Berlin and nobody could be happy there." At the end of October Malcolm and Peggy hastened back to France on an international express train full of smugglers.³⁵

After a short stopover in Giverny and Paris, where Cowley gathered material for Broom from André Salmon and Pierre Reverdy, he spent two weeks in Montpellier to wind up his scholastic affairs--a nominal task, since he had done no sustained studying nor attended any lectures since March. Marooned in Montpellier, Cowley found the Midi ambience intellectually immobilizing. "I cannot understand how I stayed a year in this town or how I ever had the strength to leave it," he told Loeb. "The air is poison. It is like living in molasses; it is sweet and an enemy of motion. Once an American came here to write a thesis in botany. That was twenty years ago and he is still in the same hotel." After a hectic summer of restless wandering the enforced stability of Montpellier engendered bleak moments of self-assessment. Cowley was depressed by his failure to make a responsible use of his "absolute liberty" and to work out a "scheme of life" by which he could think and write to his contentment. His ambitions, he feared, might well outrun his talents--"this is the period of my life when I realize poignantly that I am not Shakespeare; the beginnings of middle age." Several days of strenuous work, however, did much to lift him out of his "fit of black depression." In early November he sent Loeb his latest poem, "Mortuary," recalling his earlier despondency in Greenwich Village, but also reflecting his present anxiety about finding a viable mode of life which could procure a mainstay against artistic dryness--"death is rigid being the achievement of a pattern; death is a finished pattern of / wrinkles round the eye." He also translated material by Pierre Reverdy for Broom. Despite his ongoing concern about Loeb's wavering aesthetic taste, he found him personally "sweet and generous and very pleasant to work for." He remained strongly committed to Broom and fearfully followed its fortunes in the dizzying tumbles of the German mark.¹

In mid-November 1922 the Cowleys settled down in Giverny, a small Norman village on the river Epte, some fifty miles west of Paris, where they planned to spend the winter and spring. James P. Butler, a painter-friend from the Village and the stepgrandson of Claude Monet, helped them find a studio and two rooms over Père Tellier's blacksmith shop. Giverny was an artists' colony which had known its prime before the war; it still harbored an assortment of artists and craftsmen and occasionally was startled by boisterous invasions of young artists from Paris. Once in a while, eighty-two year old Claude Monet could still be observed working at his easel near the famous water lily pond which inspired his "Nymphéas" paintings. After months of European roving the Impressionist charm and serene tranquility of the Norman landscape worked like a balm: "A long hill running east and west, with little copses and wheatfields. A huddle of stone cottages. A little river bordered with poplars, damp green fields, then finally the Seine. Giverny should be familiar to everybody; it has been painted for the Luxembourg, the Metropolitan, the Autumn Salon, and the Independents; by Cézanne, Monet, T. E. and J. Butler and Robert W. Chambers." After a short struggle for adjustment, complicated by Peggy's falling ill, Cowley was soon perfectly acclimatized to his natural habitat, the countryside. He found his northern environs "much more sympathetic than the Midi." Jim Butler, a natural outdoorsman, whose fondness for the trout in the Epte paralleled his attachment to his hilltop cabin in Candor, New York (site of the Earl Roppel hoax), often joined Cowley on troutfishing expeditions in the Epte or went canoeing with him past the local watermill, Giverny's architectural pride. Cowley obtained a solid blue bicycle and, after writing or studying in the mornings, would pedal into the softly rolling countryside. In his memoirs he recalled being struck by the way in which the landscape reflected the difference in character between the Normans and the French: "On the west bank were straggling towns, the homes of farmer-freebooters who feared nobody, not God or the French; on the east bank the villages were close-huddled each about its church, for spiritual warmth and self-protection." Such a natural correspondence between character and environment only seemed to confirm Cowley's belief in culture as the organic "outgrowth of a situation."²

Spiritually invigorated by a sympathetic landscape, Cowley laid ambitious plans: fortnightly trips to Paris, a thesis on Racine, a book

of poems, a series of portraits for Broom, criticism for The Dial. Typically, Cowley was inclined to put more irons in the fire than he could effectively handle. For much of his long career much of his energy would be spent on a host of minor articles and projects. Only rarely could he afford to plan a book and take time out for a consecutive and uninterrupted effort to complete it. The majority of his books would be remoldings of earlier fragmented writings, though the finished product often would show no trace of patching or pasting. For the moment, Cowley seemed to realize his weakness: "I want to do too much. If I had come here to write a novel or a thesis, I should write it. Under the circumstances, with divided aims, I shall probably accomplish little."³

Cowley's association with Broom and Secession, both of which (in the words of Bernard Smith) made a sport of "Dial-baiting," did not preclude a continued allegiance to The Dial. At the end of May 1922 Gilbert Seldes had pronounced his trust in Cowley's "infallible taste and editorial judgment" and shown his willingness to let Cowley "continue the establishing of [his] critical position" in the pages of The Dial. In early August Cowley informed Scofield Thayer that he had "liked the Dial of late" and singled out Santayana's critique of Stearns's Civilization in the United States for special praise.⁴ Over the summer he wrote two reviews which appeared in The Dial in October and November 1922. Considerations of recent books of poetry by Maxwell Bodenheim, Conrad Aiken and Carl Sandburg, they comprised Cowley's study of what he saw as three major tendencies in American poetry, a personal modification of a tripartite division sanctified by Amy Lowell. In a witty and caricaturistic review of Bodenheim Cowley put him down as the "American prophet of the new preciousity" and, in his notebook, classified him as a representative of "the fantastic school." Aiken and Sandburg he saw as representatives of, respectively, a genteel, polished, Anglo-Saxon tradition and a rough-hewn "ril Amurricn" strain in verse. The latter review (entitled "Two American Poets") encompassed an investigation into the meaning of the term "American" in poetry. "It is a temporal rather than a spatial adjective," Cowley wrote to Thayer; "it belongs definitely to the generation of 1914; an earlier writer like Poe, or a later like Cummings is just a poet; Amy Sandburg Frost is an American poet." In Cowley's eyes "American" did not so much designate an authentic national quality as mark a historical period. It applied to the generation of New

Poets responsible for the prewar "renaissance" in American verse, poets who wore the label "like a rosette in the buttonhole." Since the term could encompass the poetic extremes of Aiken and Sandburg as well as a host of widely divergent writers each of whom defended a different conception of "Americanism," Cowley was forced to conclude that "except as a party label there is no American poetry."

There is no American poetry in the sense that there is French or Chinese poetry. In other words there is no poetry so deeply rooted in our soil and tradition that a foreigner can never fully understand it, and I doubt whether such a poetry is to be desired. In spite of all efforts America remains a thing seen and not a manner of seeing. America is not a point of view, a style, or a mode of thought, but a subject merely; a subject that has been most brilliantly developed in Paris or by Scandinavians. American poets do not exist, but (to witness Sandburg and Aiken) there are capable poets in America.

Cowley's review implied a recognition of the rich diversity of American writing and a plea for cultural pluralism. As Nicholas Joost has observed, by pointing up the relativity of nationality in art, Cowley's review exemplified the ideal of a transnational, cosmopolitan culture advanced by Randolph Bourne and Scofield Thayer; as such its appearance in The Dial was more than appropriate.⁵

By the time of its publication in November 1922, however, Cowley's attitude towards nationality in art was altering drastically. In early January 1923 he observed to Burke that since the writing of "Two American Poets" in August he had "evidently right about faced on the question of the importance of American material." The change, he felt, was mostly "psychological." "America in the distance begins to loom up as a land of promise, something barbaric and decorative and rich. The form-matter pendulum has taken another stroke, and I begin to believe strongly in the importance of using contemporary material." Several weeks later, on January 30, 1923, he returned to the subject in a letter to John Brooks Wheelwright, which showed how, under the influence of his European experience, his interest in the possibility of an authentic national literature was intensifying and how his sense of a specifically American tradition in literature was deepening:

"Two American Poets" was written in August. Since then I have greatly changed my attitude towards American traditions. I should no longer say that there is no American poetry in the

sense that there is French or Chinese poetry. I even disagree with you when you state that America begins with the Civil War, and I think if you reread Huckleberry Finn or the beginning of Moby Dick you would revise your statement. From certain documents it would even seem that American characteristics were already pretty well defined in Revolutionary days. I begin to admire Sinclair Lewis, having recently read *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, and I do not think that critics are at all discerning when they say that he writes from hate only. He has done more than Whitman to create a national consciousness. Nationalism is not a spook. Spooks don't hit you on the head with a brick or prevent you from eating in restaurants. Nationalism does just that to the French in Munich. Nationalism is just as real as bricks or restaurants. A few of its manifestations are desirable.⁶

Cowleys' nationalist orientation was confirmed by his interview with Pierre MacOrlan, author of *A Bord 'L'Etoile Matutine'* (1921), a novel subsequently translated by Cowley and partly serialized in *Broom*. MacOrlan pointed out to Cowley how, in a wavering Europe badly in need of moral and economic regeneration, America was in effect "the bulwark of the present order." America's new importance on the international scene, MacOrlan asserted, had enhanced the status of its literature in Europe. In France, in particular, American poets seemed "more highly rated . . . than at home." A recent anthology of contemporary foreign poetry published by MacOrlan's firm contained an English-speaking section of twelve American poems, four Irish and four English—ample proof, Cowley observed to John Farrar, of "the importance of American poetry in France." Conjointly, the American selection was "both more various and more homogeneous" than Cowley had expected; he found it "not unworthy of a nation." His conviction of the promise and vitality of American literature was further strengthened by a meeting with Ford Madox Ford at the sidewalk terrace of the Dôme. A "pathetic and sympathetic" man, Ford spoke of his adoration for Ezra Pound and expressed his belief that "everything living in English literature comes, like Pound, from America."⁷

Cowley's crescendoing Americanism was equally apparent in his contribution to the January 1923 issue of *Broom*, a special American number. Over the fall of 1922 the contents of *Broom* had emphatically exemplified the aesthetic program for an indigenous American art advanced in Loeb's "The Mysticism of Money."⁸ The magazine's new editorial direction had resulted, in its November issue, in an exuberant attack by

Matthew Josephson on the failure of the Thirty Intellectuals of Stearns's symposium to appreciate "the unaffected beauty and wisdom of the American milieu." Instead of condemning their native ambience, it was high time for American artists, Josephson had pleaded, to recognize the aesthetic potential of "that effervescent revolving cacophonous milieu . . . where the Billposters enunciate their wisdom, the Cinema transports us, the newspapers intone their gaudy jargon; where athletes play upon the frenetic passions of baseball crowds, and skyscrapers rise lyrically to the exotic rhythms of jazzbands which upon waking we find to be nothing but the drilling of pneumatic hammers on steel girders." With ostensible seriousness and lack of irony Josephson had advanced American advertising slogans as "the most daring and ingenuous literature of the age." Broom's December issue had featured Cowley's satirical attack on "the generation of Harold Stearns" as well as an "Instant Note on Waldo Frank" by Josephson ridiculing the inarticulate mysticism of Frank's psycho-analytical experimentalism in Rahab and City Block.⁹

The magazine's national focus reached a pinnacle in its all-American January number, with contributions by Kenneth Burke, Jean Toomer, Robert Sanborn, William Carlos Williams, Kay Boyle, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Gertrude Stein, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, Matthew Josephson and several lesser-known American writers. Cowley was represented by an article in celebration of the American watercolors of Jules Pascin (1885-1930).¹⁰ Cowley's enthusiasm for Pascin had been roused during his summer stay in Paris. At the end of July he had written to Loeb, proposing to do an article on Pascin for Broom:

In Paris my strongest impression was gained from the watercolors of Jules Pascin. No exaggeration. I had seen a couple of reproductions in The Dial--bad reproductions--but I had no idea of the amount or quality of the work he had done on his American trip. It is caricature of the highest sort, savantly distorted; civilization revealed by the line of a uniform and race by the color of the eyeball. Sure choice of the picturesque: Mexicans in Texas, niggers in Florida, Jews in New York, Irish in Boston. Stevedores on the docks shooting craps; a hand reaches out for the money; that hand is the spirit of gambling personified and still remains a lean nigger hand. Travelling salesman enters the washroom of a pullman, his collar draped round a brown derby. . . . After Waldo Frank and Mr. Stearns, here at last is a worthy commentary on American civilization.

Loeb had agreed that, "treated as plastic comment rather than pure art," Pascin might make the subject of a "very acceptable" article.¹¹

"Pascin's America," written in the late summer, was held over for Broom's American number. Amidst the predominantly experimental contents of the issue Cowley's essay--composed before his skepticism about the avant-garde had begun to subside--was conspicuous for its moderately conservative defense of Pascin's social and human realism and for its resistance to a modernist machine-aesthetics. Pascin, Cowley wrote, "did not paint the wheels or skyscrapers one might expect of a modern artist; he painted people. He painted them in groups as a rule, but his interest in a group was the individuals which composed it; in other words he was neither futurist nor unanimist but human." Cowley praised Pascin for recognizing the infeasibility of a pure aestheticism and the insoluble dependency of art upon human experience: "The people he drew, if caricatured, are four-square and three-dimensional. Their implications are social, economic, personal, for into his work Pascin puts all his experience, all his knowledge, and not a circumscribed portion labeled Aesthetics." Cowley's cultural nationalism was apparent as he commended Pascin for rejecting tarnished legends about America and for recreating his own fresh image of "a New World." Rising to a tone of Emersonian affirmation, he ranked Pascin with those mythmaking artists who, each in his personal fashion, had helped to shape America's conception of itself:

Before Walt Whitman America hardly existed; to him we owe the pioneers, the open spaces, in general the poetry of square miles. Bret Harte created California and Twain the Mississippi. Woodrow Wilson, Chaplin, the James brothers; each created a separate America, an America which frightened pleasantly or amused us, a Godrighteous America for which we fortunately did not die. America is a conception which must be renewed each morning with the papers. It is not one conception but a million which change daily, which melt daily into one another. Pascin's America is more interesting, perhaps more durable than the rest, because more colorful, more vulgar, and more plastic.¹²

Cowley was evoking an eclectic openness to the multiformity of American cultural expression that would become a hallmark of his criticism. His treatment of Pascin carried the seeds of his later insistence on the social and humanizing function of art and anticipated his conception of the artist as a creator of myths and values which serve to make man's natural and social environment humanly habitable.¹³

From Giverny Cowley made weekly or fortnightly train trips to Paris, to immerse himself for a day or a long weekend in the hectic and fast-paced cosmopolitanism of the city. "Paris was a great machine for stimulating the nerves and sharpening the senses," he recalled. "Paintings and music, street noises, shops, flower markets, modes, fabrics, poems, ideas, everything seemed to lead toward a half-sensual, half-intellectual swoon." Still Cowley approached Paris with a divided mind, as his rural predilections were brought into conflict with his appreciation of the cultural excitements of the modern city. "Paris is a town I enter with joy and leave without regret," he observed to Burke in early February. "I can't imagine people living in Paris. It is a town where one spends week-ends which occasionally last a lifetime." Finding the city both "fantastic and unlivable," Cowley preferred to approach the urbane cosmopolitanism of Paris from the serene pastoralism of rustic Giverny. The tension between city and country, so central a theme in his verse, was an important leitmotif in his entire career.¹⁴ Its dominant geographical pattern--a pendulum movement between Belsano and Pittsburgh, Giverny and Paris, Sherman and New York--reflected a deep-seated ambiguity about urban living and a nostalgic longing to remain in touch with the rural landscape of his childhood.

On one of his excursions to Paris in mid-December Cowley was introduced by Matthew Josephson to his French Dadaist friends, the group surrounding Littérature--Louis Aragon, André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara. Whatever his reservations about their aesthetic theories and doctrines, Cowley found it hard to resist their infectious vitality, their youthful defiance, and their exhilarating taste for novelty and scandal. Aragon and Tzara, in particular, he found personally likable; both became his good friends and were regular visitors in Giverny. Where six months before he had virulently denounced Dada as a violation of his classical ideal, he now concurred with Josephson that the Dadaists were "the most amusing people in Paris." It was Aragon who initiated Cowley into the Dada art of staging disruptive pranks and manifestations; his pupil found it all "utterly mad" but highly entertaining. He was taken by Aragon to a performance of Locus Solus (1914), a play by Raymond Roussel

which aroused the "unbounded enthusiasm" of the Dada group. Cowley wrote up the performance (and the Dadaist response) for Broom and enthusiastically described the spectacle to Burke. He saw the play as an experimental piece of surrealist and absurdist theater, which violated all the standards of clarity and logic governing traditional French culture. The play roused the fury of the Parisian literary establishment, but was promptly appropriated by André Breton and his consorts as a masterpiece of pointlessness. On several consecutive nights Breton brought along the staff, collaborators, wives and mistresses of Littérature, to conduct an outburst of tumultuous applause whenever the audience showed signs of disapproval or the actors on stage made a trivial remark which could be blown up into comic universality. In the end their riotous behavior led to arrests by the police, who, however, were held at bay by Breton's delivery of a lengthy and "magnificently hostile oration" in defense of the liberty of the spectator. Cowley, who had observed the entire fracas in sympathetic but ironic bemusement, granted there was "something magnificent" in the very pointlessness of the play and confessed he had found the whole manifestation "huge fun."¹⁵

What partly attracted Cowley to Dada was its exuberant, if ironic, affirmation of the ultra-modernity of American civilization and its celebration of American technology and popular culture as the autochthonous expression of a dynamic urban-industrial society. At the end of January 1923, exactly a year after the peak of his classicist infatuation, he revealed how thoroughly he had absorbed the moral fervor and provocative excitement of Dada. His nationalist wrath was roused by an article in Vanity Fair by Kenneth Burke, reiterating the conventional lament that America lacked cultural richness and dignity. America, Burke had written, had become "the wonder of the world simply because America is the purest concentration point for the vices and vulgarities of the world." From among the skyscrapers of Manhattan Burke's perspective on America had remained essentially unchanged. His conviction of America's cultural inferiority to Europe was one which Cowley had shared only eighteen months before; it had been an important incentive to his expatriate venture. From Europe, however, "the dragon of American industry" had come to seem "a picturesque and even noble monster." Filled with indignation Cowley fulminated rather incoherently against what he saw as Burke's defection to the anti-Americanism of Harold Stearns's band

of "Thirty Prominent Americans."

Let me assure you that the chiefest benefit of my two years in Europe was the fact that it freed me from the prejudices of . . . Harold Stearns. America is just as Goddamned good as Europe--worse in some ways, better in others, just as appreciative, fresher material, inclined to stay at peace instead of marching into the Ruhr. . . . Wave old Glory! Peace! Normalcy! . . . America shares an inferiority complex with Germany. Not about machinery or living standards, but about Art. Secession is less important than Littérature because it is published in New York . . . the only excuse for living two years in France is to remove this complex, and to discover, for example, that Tzara, who resembles you like two drops of water, talks a shade less intelligently than you. To discover that the Dada crowd has more fun than the Secession crowd because the former, strangely, has more American pep. . . . THE ONLY SALVATION FOR AMERICAN LITERATURE IS TO BORROW A LITTLE PUNCH AND CONFIDENCE FROM AMERICAN BUSINESS. American literature--I mean Frank, Anderson, Oppenheim, et al.--is morally weak, and before it learns the niceties of form its morale has to be doctored, or all the niceties in the world will do it no good at all. . . . New York is refinement itself beside Berlin. French taste in most details is unbearable. London is a huge Gopher Prairie. You give me a pain in the ass. Mr. Burke, meet Mr. Stearns, You'll be crazy about each other. You have so much in common.¹⁶

If, on occasion, Cowley's attitude rose to jingoist extremes, more commonly his literary nationalism was tempered with criticism. Though, as he told John Wheelwright, he had begun to "potter with Amurrican material," his exploration of native themes was often satirical and rarely devoid of irony. Essentially, his attitude was that of "a critical patriot," whose loyalty to American culture was laced with skepticism. His position was clearly exemplified in an imaginary portrait written for Broom during January 1923. "Portrait by Leyendecker" was Cowley's parodic counterpart to Josephson's "The Great American Billposter." Cowley described his portrait, which was composed along Burkean lines of formal and structural experimentation, as "an attempt to describe the life of the man who is advertised in the Saturday Evening Post;" it was conceived as a fantastic variation upon Babbitt and was, appropriately, dedicated to Sinclair Lewis. Cowley's Leyendecker man--named after the artist Joseph Leyendecker, who was known for his Saturday Evening Post covers and created the prototype of "The Arrow Collar Man"--satirically exemplified the consumerist ideal of life (standardized, uniform, smiling) conjointly propagated by American advertisements. He is the

inventor of Duplicator, Inc., a patented method of duplicating his magic smile upon millions of lips, and the composer of a poem made up entirely of advertising slogans. Cowley had methodically extracted the slogans in the poem from an issue of The Saturday Evening Post and Dadaistically rearranged them to create an ironic impression of "inexplicable sadness." Forty-five years later he included Leyendecker's poem in Blue Juniata: Collected Poems as "Voices from Home: 1923."²⁰

That same January of 1923 he sent Burke a poem for Secession which used American popular culture in a similarly ironic fashion. Adapting the rhythm of a popular jazz lyric to the subject of a burial ceremony, Cowley created "an impressive funeral jig." Its effect was utterly Dadaistic--"WORMS crawl out and the WORMS crawl in / to BUILD them a dwelling beNEATH the skin." But as if to underline that such radical experimentalism did not preclude a classical allegiance to formal elegance and control, he sent in a companion poem on love which was beautifully finished and proportioned:

There is a moment after the embrace
when happily fatigued we do not speak
when still my cheek is resting on your cheek
when hearts throb still and limbs still interlace
. . .

There is a moment logical and white
behind the wall of flesh. It is as if
falling agreeably from some high cliff
I floated in a limitless sea of light

among impersonal forms and came to rest
within the personal limits of a night
where chair and bed loom comfortably trite
where still my heart is beating on your chest.¹⁸

Over the winter Cowley was drawn more deeply into the orbit of the Dadaists. He discovered that, whatever cohesion the Dada movement had possessed in its heyday was rapidly disintegrating; the group was already riddled with the internal dissensions which would soon lead to further factional splintering and cause its ultimate dissolution. But as yet their quarrels were not fatal and in early February Cowley attended a joint Dada manifestation at which Aragon, Breton, Francis Picabia,

Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Jacques Rigaut and Tzara banded together for the first time in eighteen months. At the occasion Cowley was formally taken up into their ranks (though only Aragon and Tzara greeted him with cordiality); he contributed a signature and a poem to their manifestation and Tzara translated "Valuta" for one of the Dada sheets. "I suppose I am now officially a Dada," Cowley announced to Burke on February 8, 1923.

The uncertainty of his proclamation pointed up the ambivalence of his allegiance to Dada. From the first he tried to maintain a critical distance. His commitment was never as vociferous or wholehearted as Josephson's. Rather, he displayed an eclectic openness to the diverse and complex literary life of Paris, regarded Dada as merely one of its multifarious manifestations (if a most intriguing and contagious one), and made a point of meeting many writers of various persuasions. Thus, while he consorted with the Dadaists, he continued to befriend such "hated enemies" of Dada as André Salmon and Pierre MacOrlan, and "in the most fraternal manner" met and conversed with Charles Vildrac and Georges Duhamel, writers less than sympathetic to Salmon and MacOrlan.¹⁹

Yet it was impossible not to find the Dadaists stimulating, refreshing, even liberating. Underneath their nihilistic posturing and theatrical activism Cowley discovered a "surprisingly disinterested" devotion to art and literature. Their loud proclamations of disdain for all morality, Cowley saw, could not conceal that they were "animated by fierce moral convictions." The Dadaists, he observed in his notebook, "seek to regenerate literature by absurdity, for theirs is a moral generation." In particular he admired their high sense of principle, their personal integrity, and their refusal to compromise with a commercial literary culture. Fierce individualists, they yet displayed an attractive sense of literary community: "They are a form of cocaine and personally take no stimulants except their own company." In Cowley's eyes the Dadaists evinced a natural capacity to work (and fight) together which was inherently alien to an American tradition of artistic and spiritual isolation, but deeply appealed to his instinctive feeling for literary and social companionship. Yet he also recognized that for all their brilliance (Aragon, in particular, he judged "immensely talented") they would never accomplish greatness unless they broke away from the group.²⁰

From the first, however, there were limits to Cowley's admiration. He

could not share the Dadaists' predilection for the city and distrusted their free sexual mores and bohemian life-style. He had "no wish to be a citizen of Paris" and, like them, to live in "a perpetual weekend;" rather he preferred to meet them on periodic forays undertaken from his homebase in the country. More importantly, if from the Dadaists he acquired "a pretty rigorous conception of literary ethics," he felt uneasy about its artistic implications. "Dada c'est le jemenfoutisme absolu," he wrote to Burke. "It is the negation of all motives for writing, such as the Desire for Expression, the Will to Create, the Wish to Aid." Through its whimsical individualism Dada seemed doomed to ultimate futility--the pursuit of one's individual caprices, the staging of practical jokes. Even at the time Cowley recognized the internal contradictions of Dada. "A writer who was truly dada would disdain collective action as he would disdain any other attempt to influence the mind of the public." Regarding the world, in Cowley's later words, as "a hostile force to be fought, insulted or mystified," the Dadaists were yet morally bound to the very public they pretended to disclaim.²¹

Though Cowley's early response carried all the germs of his repudiating analysis of Dada in Exile's Return, his understanding in the winter and spring of 1923 remained shallow and impressionistic. At the time he responded intuitively to its mood of carefree excitement and youthful rebellion, but did not explore its intellectual assumptions or historical roots very deeply. He did not actually read most of the Dada manifestoes until, a decade later, he was in the midst of writing Exile's Return.²²

Cowley's struggles to keep a dispassionate distance from an admittedly infectious movement were not always successful. As he granted in retrospect, he "could not help absorbing [Dadaist] notions of literary conduct, as if from the atmosphere." Through Dada, he told Burke in late January, he was "infected with the desire to write excitingly." The Dadaists, he thought, had "affected not [his] thinking but [his] writing profoundly;" he assured Burke that he had "not substantially revised" his ideas on art and criticism. When Burke expressed his "purest disgust" with his friend's apparent infatuation with Dada, Cowley became more emphatic: "I haven't swallowed Dada hook and sinker; my instincts are classical and intellectual. I'll save my soul if it can be saved."²³

In the early months of 1923, then, Cowley was at best a reluctant

espouser of Dadaism. If he admired the moral intensity of Dada's commitment to art, he was never, as Gorham Munson once claimed, "dazzled to the point of gaping a good Western Pennsylvanian gape." Though some of Cowley's Dadaist caperings were to become part of literary lore, to cut a dashing figure as a Dadaist did not come naturally or spontaneously to him. By nature "slow in speech, a little countryfied, apparently phlegmatic" (to borrow Munson's more accurate description), Cowley seemed temperamentally unsuited for the slapstick iconoclasm of Dada.²⁴ Unlike Josephson's, his Dadaist posturings always seemed slightly strained. Ultimately, Dada's impact went less deep than his enthusiasm for a classical humanism. Cowley's deeply ingrained respect for form, intelligence and clarity made him skeptical of Dada's extreme romanticism, its wilful obscurity, its abolition of logic, and its veneration of the subconscious—he never followed Dada into Surrealism. Conversely, Dada's affirmative vitality, its moral fervor, and its effervescent involvement with the present pointed up the tepid anemia and tiresome dignity of Cowley's classical ideals.

For all his momentary attraction to Dada, Cowley's ambivalence about the modern continued unabatedly. On January 6, 1923, he voiced his exasperation to Burke: "What is the 'modern' note that distinguishes authors of the present 'advance guard'? Those terms are so distasteful to me that I can't repeat them without quotes, and yet I possess the current weakness for modernity. And the modern note at present is the substitution of associational for logical thought. Carried to its extremity among the Dadas, the modern note is the substitution of absurdity for logic."²⁵ In several notebook entries Cowley gave vent to his ongoing uneasiness about the confusing and contradictory manifestations of the modern spirit. At moments he seemed ready to renounce all of them in equal measure:

Of all periods Modern is the most irritating. It is full of stage properties, cranes, locomotives, subways, billboards. Evidently to write a poem about the stockyards is to write a modern poem. Or to write a poem whose grammar is arbitrarily bad. Or to make drawings without perspective. To distort is modern. To be obscure is modern. To omit punctuation and connectives is the white shirtfront of modernism. The inevitable reaction follows. It becomes modern to be reactionary, and Mr. Kreyborg is praised for writing sonnets. Somebody discovers that Racine is a great author, from which principle somebody else draws the conclusion that Estlin

Cummings, or even T. S. Eliot, is not a poet. It becomes strictly modern to praise the seventeenth century, and the word Modern is used as a cloak to hide timidity.

At other times he seemed to realize the futility of rowing against the current of his times and appeared willing to resign to the inevitability of being "modern:" "We are modern because we can be nothing else; because we happen to be born in a certain period we belong to that period, and it is suicide to try to escape it. When we write our contemporary civilization is the subject imposed."²⁶

Notwithstanding his misgivings, the Dadaists at least helped Cowley gain a better appreciation of Matthew Josephson. Though he remained irritated and puzzled by Josephson's capricious personality, he found him possessed of an unexpected charm and vitality and was willing to make allowances for his conceit and indiscretion. Josephson's "grand manner," his fighting with waiters, his methods of quarreling, his habit of insulting people--all these, Cowley believed, were but mannerisms directly aped from the French Dadaists. On the positive side he credited Josephson with several "appealing qualities"--a "lively interest in literature," an uncompromising independence and a refreshing capacity for indignation. Josephson, Cowley told Burke, "treads where angels fear to;" he seemed ready to "compromise even the Holy Ghost or Charles Evans Hughes." He also realized, however, that Josephson was unpredictable and continued to require tact.²⁷ Recent developments had put Cowley on his guard.

Over the winter Josephson's sensitive ego and opinionated stubbornness brought him into direct conflict with Gorham Munson. While accepting increasing responsibility for Broom's new editorial line, Josephson remained associated with Secession, hoping against odds to serve both magazines without causing a conflict of interests. In the early months of 1923 the tensions which had long simmered between Munson and Josephson came to a boil. A notorious literary and personal feud ensued, causing a rift between Broom and Secession and disrupting what little cohesion and esprit de corps existed among the contributors. The controversy centered about Munson's and Josephson's diverging attitudes about the merits of Waldo Frank. In the fall of 1922 Josephson, acting informally on behalf of Broom, had supported an earlier rejection by Loeb of a long critical monograph on Frank by Munson. Josephson had next

written a scathing "Note" on two of Frank's books for Broom, an article Cowley deemed "really the best he ever wrote." Munson's bitterness about Broom's "unprofessional" treatment of his work intensified when he was tentatively approached by Josephson to become Broom's American agent, only to learn through the grapevine that Cowley was to be Broom's new editorial assistant. Munson had never ceased to resent Josephson's high-handed appropriation of the contents of Secession three, his inclusion of a story vetoed by Munson and Burke, and his failure to insert a note stating his exclusive editorial responsibility. Moreover, he had begun to grow less than satisfied with Josephson's panegyrics to American machinery and advertising.²⁸

The fracas was brought to a head in late 1922, during an informal editorial gathering at Cowley's home in Giverny, where Josephson was spending the Christmas week. He was carrying new manuscript material for Secession four, sent to the Berlin office by Munson and Burke from New York. By this time Josephson had grown "lukewarm" at best towards Secession and, as Munson suspected, may well have been deliberately procrastinating on the issue. Among the manuscripts accepted by the New York editors he took violent exception to a group of six poems by "Richard Ashton," pseudonym of Donald B. Clarke, a homosexual poet Cowley had known at Harvard, who with Royall Snow had edited Youth: Poetry of Today. Josephson's indignation was roused particularly by one "very long and bad romantic" poem called "The Jilted Moon" and, with Cowley's blessing, he decided to delete everything but its title and the last two of its twenty lines: "To me [you] are no more than Chinese, o moon, / Are no more than Chinese." The mutilation of Clarke's poem was a blatant violation of editorial decorum: Cowley held no editorial power whatsoever and Josephson was formally and morally bound to print material accepted by the New York editors. To Cowley and Josephson the slaughtering of the poem was little more than an amusing practical joke, utterly Dada, and as such permissible. But Munson, more solemn and conscientious, could muster little sympathy for the literary freakishness and sportive polemics they felt should mark Secession. Increasingly out of touch with the very spirit that had given birth to his magazine, a furious Munson removed the truncated poem from all issues of Secession. From then on, Josephson considered his relations with Secession effectually broken, though he did not bother to inform Munson of his formal resignation until after his

return to America in the spring.²⁹

When the fourth issue of Secession finally appeared, Cowley admitted it was "excellent, after all the quarrels." To Burke he expressed his full sympathy with the way Josephson had "played hell" with Ashton's poems and praised the poetry by Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and, especially, Hart Crane featured in the issue. A story by William Slater Brown he thought "immensely amusing;" Burke's "In Quest of Olympus" received lengthy criticism; an altercation between Wheelwright and Munson on the aims of Secession he judged "good repartee."³⁰

Though from the first Cowley was determined to stay on the sidelines of the Munson-Josephson feud, temperamental and literary predilections did not allow him to remain au dessus de la mêlée as much as he may have wanted to. In early January he wrote an exasperated letter to Burke, complaining that the one-sided information he received from Josephson in Berlin made it impossible for him to judge the situation fairly and objectively. Like Josephson, however, Cowley had never had a high opinion of Munson's literary and critical taste and had resented his veneration of Waldo Frank. He confessed to Burke that he was beginning to be "prejudiced" against Munson, whom he feared was "climbing into Olympus over our several backs." Munson's "bandwagon stunts," he granted, had provided them with "a respected organ of our own," but his literary politics had now reached a point where they were beginning to do "more harm than good." In a fight, Cowley thought, he would "instinctively support" Josephson against Munson.³¹

In a scathing memoir published eight years later in The New Republic Cowley evoked Munson as a man "singularly empty of literary talent," who nevertheless desired to be "the apostle of a new American literature" (to be produced by Cowley, Josephson and Burke). He presented Munson as a confused and chameleon-like writer under the successive and contradictory influence of Josephson, Burke and Frank, and recalled that both he and Josephson had felt that for all his intellectual and literary deficiencies Munson possessed a gift for diplomacy and literary politics which might make him a useful chef d'école for their literary group, analogous to the role André Breton fulfilled among the Dadaists. They had hoped that, "guided by people of surer literary judgment," Munson could be manipulated from the wings as "a sort of white shirt-front" of Secession, while his managers pursued their independent ways behind the

scenes.³²

In the winter of 1923 Cowley's exasperation was further roused by Munson's propagandistic sponsoring of Secession in a recent issue of Norman Fitts's little magazine S4N. In "The Mechanics for a Literary 'Secession'" Munson called for "a calm, intelligent, resolute swerving aside, an unemotional sloughing-off of irrelevant drains upon our energies and a prompt deviation into purely aesthetic concerns." There were "bitter necessities" calling for Secession, Munson believed, foremost among them the "aesthetic sterility" of the generation of Dreiser, Anderson and Dell, writers whose work bespoke "social rather than aesthetic values." In addition, Secession was made necessary by the timid anemia and "general flabbiness" of American criticism as well as by a predominantly "negative attitude towards modern life." More emphatically and programmatically than before Munson presented Cowley as the spokesman for a nucleus of writers who were ready to "strike out freely into immediately aesthetic concerns" and used Cowley's description of the aesthetic "catchwords" of his generation as the foundation for his "secessionist" platform.³³

Secession had caused quite a stir in the literary world upon its inception, but Munson's article put the cat among the pigeons. In The New Republic Louis Untermeyer, like Paul Rosenfeld one of Secession's favorite punchbags, looked with "surprise and outrage" at "a younger generation that not only knocks at our doors but threatens to batter down the very structure in which we are just beginning to feel comfortable." He described the adherents of Secession as a band of "New Patricians," whose reaction against the "undisciplined emotionalism" and "inchoate naturalism" of an earlier generation had led them to a new intellectual formalism, a preoccupation with technique and "a rigorous and crystallized aestheticism." Untermeyer astutely pointed out that, whatever their manifesto, there was but "little unity of aim" among the individual members: Burke was "a candid and complete cerebralist," Josephson "straight Dada" and Cowley's "partisanship, apart from his experiments as a poet, . . . more definite and critical." Indeed, Untermeyer observed, the principal output of the Secessionists had so far been critical; the aestheticism of these "newest 'new men,'" he warned, might easily lead to artistic decadence and "imaginative sterility."³⁴

Untermeyer's critique was buttressed by Van Wyck Brooks in The

Freeman, who argued that "formal qualities alone, and especially the 'abstract form' of our contemporary cerebralists, will never constitute a literature; and little is to be expected of a criticism that regards them as the weightier matters of the literary law." Form was dictated by subject matter, Brooks pontificated, agreeing with Untermeyer that "without guiding ideas a literature is doomed to sterility." In order to create significant literature a writer needed, what the Secessionists lacked, "some faith, some cause, some idea outside of himself." Without it, Brooks feared, the Secessionists were "simply leaving one wilderness for another."³⁵

Unexpectedly Secession found a new, if idiosyncratic, apologist in John Brooks Wheelwright. In an open letter to The Freeman Wheelwright took issue with both Untermeyer and Brooks. Untermeyer's supposition of the predominantly critical output of the Secession group, he claimed, was "at variance with the facts;" it was only "the niggardliness of editors" which prompted its members to expend their best energies on criticism and reviewing. Wheelwright pointed out that Brooks's understanding of the aesthetic concerns of his generation was limited at best and challenged his indictment that the young writers were "arid of faith." With impish wit he explained how Damon's work was founded on mysticism, his own on neo-Platonic High Anglicanism, Burke's on "neo-Scholasticism or reworked Spinoza" and Cowley's on a form of Classicism.³⁶

Though the publicity roused by Secession helped to bring Cowley's name before a larger audience, his critical position remained too ambivalent to make him feel entirely comfortable with such a public identification with a radically aesthetic platform. Indeed, Brooks's plea for a literature marked by both intellectual substance and significant form could not but rouse Cowley's sympathy. After all, Cowley had privately criticized Burke's experiments with "abstract form" in terms which closely echoed Brooks's and had warned his friend against "working in too narrow a formula." Mostly, however, Cowley resented Munson's soapbox oratory and his proselytizing advertisement of Secession as "a Cause, a Movement." He privately denounced Munson's propagandizings as "pink tea stuff" and fulminated against his presentation of Secession as a coherent group--its members, he felt, disagreed on every subject except perhaps Paul Rosenfeld. "Secession was never a Movement or a School," Cowley observed to Norman Fitts of S4N. Its contributors were much too

disparate to be treated as a coterie or "composite personality." To be called a Secessionist meant "next to nothing," he insisted; instead, he demanded that each of the contributors be judged "on his own merits."³⁷

By mid-January Cowley was growing increasingly wary of the literary feuding among his friends and detested the way in which their literary relations were being poisoned by trivial conflicts of personalities. He revealed his personal discomfort in a letter to Wheelwright and stressed the need for a clarification of positions and ideas:

I hear rumors that you are spending a wildish winter in New York with the Secession crowd. Don't let 'em play too many literary politics. It's a good thing not to arrive at successes too quickly in New York, for successes fade more rapidly than they are attained. Every friend you make means one sure and ten potential enemies. It is almost safer to begin by antagonizing people, for every enemy you make is apt to mean potential friends.

There is a fundamental weakness in Secession: namely, that it doesn't agree with itself. Munson believes in the sanctity of criticism. Josephson believes in criticism as a burlesque. Brown seems to work on a basis of Joyce, and everyone else to believe that Joyce is an expression of the last generation. Munson, Our Founder, reveres Waldo Frank, a sentiment which I should hardly share. I like Sinclair Lewis, have begun to potter with Amurrican material, think that among the Dadas Louis Aragon has really accomplished something, have been changing my ideas rapidly, don't know just where I stand. However I believe in good writing and believe equally that neither Munson nor Josephson writes good prose. The title of this chapter is A House Divided.³⁸

Cowley's naively idealistic desire to clarify the conflicting ideological assumptions behind Secession drew him deeper into the Munson-Josephson vendetta than he had bargained for. Hoping to clear the air, he sent Munson a frank letter stating his position on Secession. He knew his openness might be offensive but was convinced of its necessity "if we are to get anything done." Cowley's good intentions were thwarted by Burke, who showed Munson Cowley's epistolary confession of bias in favor of Josephson. Munson's reply, however, was less rancorous and more poised than Cowley had reason to expect. It calmly explained the factual inducements to his quarrel with Josephson, but also included a devastating critique of Josephson's ideas on advertising and Waldo Frank, subjects on which Cowley's attitude was roughly consonant with Josephson's. To Munson Josephson was "simply another pest cluttering up

the field," one who made a "fetish of originality," displayed "the fallacious mental mechanisms of Rosenfeld, Upton Sinclair, and F[ranklin] P. A[dams]," and who had a fundamental "disrespect for criticism." Josephson's propagation of machine-age America, Munson felt, went "no deeper than the romantic's thrill upon finding strange materials to exploit." Munson expressed his high opinion of Cowley's poetry, reaffirmed his belief in the validity of polemics in Secession and supported a proposal of Cowley's for a Dadaist "stunt afternoon" at the Greenwich Village Theater. In conclusion he cited Waldo Frank's verdict that Secession was "the most significant group-manifestation since the Seven Arts."³⁹

Munson's letter contained enough truth and good sense to remove the sting from Cowley's prejudice, but also pointed up the gulf between both men's literary loyalties. What little goodwill Munson's letter had created, however, was soon destroyed by news from Harold Loeb, who disclosed that malicious gossip, aggravated by Munson's habit of passing round confidential letters, had implicated Loeb, Cowley and Burke in the feud against their will. Munson, Loeb concluded, was "just a dirty politician," whose conduct possessed "an odor decidedly putrescent." By mid-March the tone of the quarrel had sunk so low that Cowley was ready to wash his hands of both magazines: "Honestly, Kenneth, I'm so discouraged about this feud between Munson and Matty, with wrongs on both sides, . . . that I feel very much like dropping both Secession and Broom . . . and this in spite of the fact that they are the only two American magazines which interest me in the least."⁴⁰

Cowley's discouragement was complete, when he was informed by Loeb that Broom would suspend publication with its March 1923 issue. For several months the fate of Broom had hung in the balance--there had been editorial tensions between Loeb and Lola Ridge (culminating in her threat to resign if a poem by Gertrude Stein were to be included in Broom's American number) as well as financial problems resulting from the fluctuations of the German mark, a rise in printing costs, and frictions with Loeb's sponsoring rich uncles. In January Loeb had personally voyaged to New York in a desperate attempt to straighten matters out, but had met with no success.⁴¹

Broom's premature demise was "a tough blow," Cowley felt, and came at an unfortunate moment, just as he was "planning a bunch of work for it."

In a letter to Loeb he poured out his disappointment: "Write finito on Broom, probably the most interesting magazine which Americans ever published. Its poetry from the first outranked every other American magazine--or English--; its reproductions were vastly superior; it translated what nobody else dared to translate. Its native fiction was weak, but that could hardly be called your fault. See how many complete files of Broom you can collect; they will be valuable." To Burke he expressed hopes that Broom might be resuscitated in the near future. He regretted being deprived of his principal outlet for noncritical prose and, despite his reservations about Broom's eclecticism, reaffirmed his belief in its avant-garde importance: "If Broom had no rudder, or too many of them, its course was always interesting. It was the appearance of Broom which made the Viennese letters of Hugo von Hofmannsthal appear so hopelessly stodgy. It was less dignified than the Dial and wrong more often, but more interesting (I repeat the word)."⁴²

By early 1923 Cowley's efforts to establish himself as a poet and critic were starting to bear fruit. He could boast a reputation as a leading contributor to the avant-garde little magazines and, in the retrospective appreciation of Gorham Munson, was "one of the literary fledglings most likely to mature into a true man of letters."⁴³ To a small circle of literary intelligentsia Munson's appraisal was corroborated by the publication of Eight More Harvard Poets (1923), an anthology of Harvard verse, which marked the first appearance of Cowley's poetry in bookform. The volume was formally edited by Foster Damon and Robert Hillyer, both of whom served as English instructors at Harvard and had appeared in the earlier Eight Harvard Poets (1917). Most of the work behind the scenes, however, was done by John Brooks Wheelwright in collaboration with Damon. Moral and practical support was given by Amy Lowell; financial backing was guaranteed by Wheelwright's aunt Louise Brooks. When arrangements with Harcourt, Brace and Houghton Mifflin fell through, the book was finally published in January 1923 by Brentano's.

Since October 1921 Cowley, one of the first to be invited to contribute, had conducted a busy correspondence about the book with Damon and Wheelwright. He had hailed their proposal with enthusiasm and

throughout its preparations had been a faithful follower and advisor on matters pertaining to the project: the practical and financial organization, the selection of contributors, the solicitation of materials, the arrangement of publication and publicity. Damon and Wheelwright proved generous editors. From the first they were convinced of the superiority of Cowley's verse and allowed his eleven poems to outnumber the other selections. Cowley, in turn, offered only mild objections to their choice of several poems which had little value beyond serving to "express Harvard," and insisted only upon the inclusion of "Day Coach" and "Fifteen Minutes" as a necessary "modernist" counterweight to the "moderately conservative" remainder of the volume. Besides Cowley and Wheelwright, the book featured poems by Norman Cabot, Grant Code, Jack Merten, Joel T. Rogers, R. Cameron Rogers and Royall Snow. Under the pseudonym of "Dorian Abbott" Wheelwright wrote an introduction to the book in which he critically surveyed the history of Harvard anthologies since 1876. He characterized its precursor, Eight Harvard Poets, as a book "in the full flood of modernist and Georgian fashion," which had done much to advance its contributors' present literary standing. The new volume lacked its predecessor's homogeneity, he granted, yet it hoped to capture "an essence of the intellectual temper of undergraduate life."⁴⁴

Critical reaction to the book was bracing and gave proof of Cowley's rising reputation as a poet. James Light, Stewart Mitchell and John Dos Passos wrote in to praise Cowley's and Wheelwright's contributions. From England Conrad Aiken wrote to Wheelwright that the book had "historic interest" but lacked "intrinsic value." He made a notable exception for Cowley, who seemed to him "most like a professional" and "pretty compactly and maturely himself." Several weeks later he repeated his verdict in a personal letter to Cowley: "I liked immensely your things in 8 Mere [sic] Harvard Poets. Far and away the best in it: too good for it." Wheelwright, too, considered Cowley's selection the best in the book and, countering Cowley's private misgivings about the lack of authenticity and underlying unity in his poems, insisted they were "most consistent and coherent" and expressive of "a perfectly distinct personality."⁴⁵

Reviews appeared in all the principal periodicals. Among the few grumbling voices were Milton Raison's and Mark Van Doren's. Raison,

writing for the New York Herald Tribune, was alone in his absolute preference of Wheelwright, the only poet in the volume with "a glint of real genius;" Cowley's verse he deemed "too pretentious" and lacking in intellectual substance. Mark Van Doren, writing in The Nation, felt uncomfortable with Cowley's experimentalism; he found his verse "very free, with a wide range of poetic conceit" and objected that Cowley attacked his "sensational" themes with "all the ruthlessness of a knight who has given an oath to Lady Psychology." Most reviewers, however, concurred with the anonymous critic of the Times Literary Supplement that Cowley stood out "the subtlest and withal the strongest" among the poets, followed at some distance by John Wheelwright. William Rose Benét picked out both Cowley and Wheelwright for doing "their own thinking" and managing to "convey the special color and oddity of their own personalities." He found Cowley a poet "violently interested" in modern life and concluded: "The man I most bank on is Cowley." Kenneth Burke agreed in The Dial and pointed up Cowley's overriding interest in form: "It is Malcolm Cowley who will run ahead of his ticket. His poems are the work of a man keen on the formal elements of writing; with the result that, in addition to their cautious line-for-line texture, they manifest a functional relationship between the parts, a sense of the beauty in balancing movement with counter-movement." In the appreciation of the young Newton Arvin, writing in The Freeman, Cowley achieved "the most mature expression" and was by far superior in "the individuality of his idiom" and "the depth and richness of his human implications." In a review for The New Republic that was surprisingly devoid of rancor Gorham Munson agreed that only Cowley attained to "a well-proportioned height of maturity." Like Burke, he praised Cowley's formal and structural experiments and commended his skillful metrical and stanzaic variation within a single poem. Cowley's verse was "purely literary and without contamination from the arts of music or color," Munson felt; it had "an underlying rigidity like fresh clean marble." Cowley, he concluded, seemed "already a very considerable poet."⁴⁶

Eight More Harvard Poets received its most thoughtful and perceptive criticism from Munson's friend Hart Crane, who over the years had appreciatively followed Cowley's poetry in the pages of Broom, Secession, The Little Review and The Dial. In his review for S4N Crane singled out the "convincing manners" and "fresher reactions" of Cowley and

Wheelwright from the "familiar nostalgias and worn allusions" of the other Harvard poets, whom he dismissed as Georgians. Crane's verdict on Cowley's poetry was witty and astute. Cowley's "genial pedestrianism" opened the way for a modern "'pastoral' form," Crane felt. He praised Cowley's experiments for displaying a gift for "ironic nuance" and "a faculty for fresh record, city and road panorama," but felt Cowley had occasionally carried his classicist predilections too far: "For one who can so well afford to stick closer to home, he deliberately allows French and 18th century influences to intrude too notably in several instances; yet practically all of his poems achieve consistent form. . . . Cowley seems to be civilized in the same sense as the older Chinamen. His alertness is a steady reassurance against crudities or bathos wherever his technical facilities may lead him."⁴⁷

Cowley was pleased enough by Crane's comments to thank him in a letter for "the most intelligent criticism" the book received. Cowley had other reasons for seeking the acquaintanceship of Crane, in whom he had begun to detect the makings of an innovative and important contemporary poet. For several months he had spoken favorably of Crane's poetry to friends and now expressed his admiration to Crane in person: "You write with a bombast which is not Elizabethan but contemporary, and you are one of two or three people who can write a 20th Century blank verse, about other subjects than love, death and nightingales in other patterns than ti tum ti tum ti tum ti tums. Salutations." He praised Crane's "Poster" ("Voyages I") in Secession four as superior to the poems by Williams and Stevens in the issue and singled out "O brilliant kids" as "the most simple, the most brilliant combination of noun and epithet that I have seen these many years." Wary, as always, of the dangers of success, he concluded by warning Crane against prematurely bringing out a book: "If we all wait three or four years, till our public is formed, we can have a great deal more fun by publishing."⁴⁸ Cowley's letter was the beginning of a difficult but deeply cherished friendship.

Cowley was now drawing attention as a poet of considerable skill and promise in wider literary quarters. In February 1923 Poetry magazine published a group of six of his poems--"Poem for Two Voices," "Nocturnal Landscape," "Interment," "Sudden Encounter," "Prophetic," and "Three Hills"--which Amy Lowell had sold to Harriet Monroe the previous summer, much to Cowley's delight. Miss Monroe's preference for Cowley's "country

poems," all of which had been written several years before, corroborated Hart Crane's impression that Cowley's poetic forte lay in the achievement of a modern pastoralism.⁴⁹ Conjointly, the six poems gave evidence that Cowley's deepest and most authentic emotions, as well as his most individual nuances of tone and diction, were rooted in a nostalgic attachment to the land. The leitmotif in the poems is that of separation from the rural landscape of his childhood as the most sustaining source of vitality and identity, conjointly with the wastage of human life and love in an infertile urban ambience. In "Prophetic" the pain of severance from the magic of spring pools, trout streams and chestnut blossoms yields an apocalyptic vision of urban destruction which expresses a perpetual tension at the heart of Cowley's imagination:

With blocks of broken asphalt where the streets ran once,
And granite and brick spilling in heaps across them,
With girders bridging the rain-washed ravines, it would be
More pains than the worth of it to make ten level farms
out of Manhattan Island.

But in the old graveyards,
And under the site of stables and slaughter-houses,
What excellent gardens!⁵⁰

Other editors, too, now showed themselves eager to print Cowley's verse. John Farrar of The Bookman accepted "The Strange Companion" for future publication and John McClure printed "History" in The Double Dealer, the only one of Cowley's poems to appear in its pages. Norman Fitts had earlier expressed a desire to infuse the "left wing" of S4N with "fresh new good blood" by publishing Cowley's work and for its summer 1923 issue accepted "Carnaval in Provence." In April Cowley received an invitation to contribute to Harold Monro's Chapbook and sent in "Processional of the Third Season."⁵¹

Now that Broom had folded and Secession seemed seized with convulsions, Cowley became more ambitious to strengthen his position on the American literary market. His hopes were set in particular on Vanity Fair, which he considered "the only 4-cent a word magazine which is open to the vague possibility of publishing good critical work." In March he talked to John Peale Bishop, a good friend of Edmund Wilson (then managing editor of Vanity Fair), in Paris; Cowley was impressed with Bishop's erudite explanations of the Italian and Provençal in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, but accomplished "nothing definite" concerning Vanity

Fair. At the end of the month, however, he received a letter from Edmund Wilson himself, soliciting such of Cowley's poems as "our readers would be capable of understanding," yet were "unmistakably effective." Wilson's appraisal betrayed a suspicion of Cowley's Dadaist propensities: "You are not sufficiently bizarre to warrant our exhibiting you on that ground alone and I should hesitate to publish in Vanity Fair some of the best of your poems which I have seen because they would be likely to puzzle people without amusing them as freaks."⁵² Wilson soon resigned as an editor and Cowley never made it into the pages of Vanity Fair, except as a translator.

A few days before he received Wilson's invitation Cowley had written a self-promoting letter to Burton Rascoe at the New York Herald Tribune, hoping to find an opening as a reviewer or translator in its book section. He complimented Rascoe on having helped to make its literary supplement into "a magazine for which one can write intelligently" and proposed to do a series of articles, analogous to his Bookman portraits, in which he aimed to convey "the feeling of exhilaration that one gets in the Parisian literary world of today." In May, acting on his own initiative, he sent Rascoe his translation of an article by Louis Aragon, explaining that most of the young French writers shared Aragon's belief that "nothing of importance is coming out of England, that America is infinitely more alive, but that official American literature is if possible more stupid than official French literature." He had translated the article, Cowley told Burke, "to give foreign weight to the good propaganda." From France, however, Cowley was overestimating the interest of American editors in French appreciations of American culture: both Rascoe and Canby turned down his Aragon translation. Knowing he would have to resume a reviewer's existence upon his return, Cowley feared he was losing his "former keen sense of what American magazines are glad to publish."⁵³

Luckily, Cowley's continuing association with The Dial seemed assured enough. In March 1923 he learned from Gilbert Seldes in Paris that Kenneth Burke, who was substituting as managing editor in New York, would be asked to remain on the editorial board after Seldes's return from Europe. Seldes was willing to have Cowley write one long review for The Dial a month. Cowley's opinion of the magazine remained high. "After three years of the new Dial it seems hard to imagine a world in which the

Dial did not exist," he told Scofield Thayer. "It is the rock of American literature, on which schools, movements and other magazines are founded. It has been called conservative, and that is perhaps its greatest triumph. . . . The public who would call the Dial conservative was formed by reading the Dial." Wary as ever of premature success--"Recognition by the general public is our national form of artistic euthanasia"--Cowley felt The Dial had helped to make the prospects for American literature as bright as they were by assisting in the rise of "a number of special publics," each serviced by different avant-garde magazines. Feeling personally uncertain about the merit of his contributions to The Dial--some of his recent reviews had been "pretty experimental," he thought, the result of a determined effort to make the best of his French sojourn "by learning as much as possible and by doing nothing twice"--he asked Thayer for his critical opinion and advice. In reply, Thayer praised Cowley's reviews in The Dial, admitting to a preference for his criticism over his poetry, and invited him to become his private editorial secretary, a position previously held by William Slater Brown, but politely declined by Cowley on the pretext of not knowing shorthand.⁵⁴

With Burke an editor and Cowley a regular contributor of verse and prose, their correspondence pertained more often to Dial-affairs. Cowley explained he preferred to review modern poetry and poetry criticism, gave advice on how to improve The Dial's book-review section, and carried on an epistolary debate with Burke on the nature of criticism and reviewing. From the first Cowley's conception of criticism was less pretentious and less theory-oriented than Burke's: "You believe that a critic should judge a book according to aesthetic laws which he formulates. In effect, you believe in using the book as a text for an essay on Form. . . . More modestly, I believe in defining a book. I believe that there is no distinction, except of degree, between a book-criticism and a book-review, and that your essays in aesthetics parade under a false name. They are good essays but bad reviews." He observed how book reviewing remained "a distinctly minor medium," even if it was attracting "a number of the best intelligences in America. . . . Our critics are almost invariably more intelligent, more creative, than our artists." Despite their disagreements Burke remained eager to have Cowley's longer criticism for The Dial and regularly sent him books for brief review in its backpages (over the years Cowley wrote at least eighty "Brief

Mentions"). In March Burke accepted two of Cowley's poems for the May 1923 issue. Both "The Fishes" and "Starlings" explored a conventional subject of lyric nature poetry, but were freely experimental in form. "Starlings," for example, was Cowley's attempt to apply "dada technique" to a "Georgian subject:"

Starlings wheel and descend at nightfall, choosing maybe
a bamboo copse or a cedar of Lebanon. They cross the
face of the winter sun like a smoke.

A cloud of descending starlings: it takes the successive
postures of a ball, a cane, a mandolin (or rather a
guitar) a string of frankfurters, a candy-poke, finally
a balloon which collapses with a rush of escaping gases.

Out of the centre of a cloud is heard the twittering of birds.⁵⁵

The last three essays Cowley wrote for The Dial during his French sojourn confirmed his ongoing uneasiness with various tendencies of literary modernism--its symbolist aesthetics, its intellectualism, its expressionism. In March 1923 The Dial belatedly published a long essay by Cowley on Marcel Proust, one of two essays by which the magazine commemorated the death of Proust in November 1922.⁵⁶ Cowley's shifting appreciation of Proust illustrates the difficulty a young critical intelligence experienced in coming to grips with a major exemplary of "modern" literature. Cowley had been reading Proust off and on since the spring of 1922. Though he found Proust's "involved," labyrinthine sentences and complex syntactical convolutions hard to digest, late in April 1922 he had commended A la Recherche du Temps Perdu to Foster Damon and observed to Burke that Proust "somewhat reconciles me with the novel as a form."⁵⁷

By late November Cowley's appreciation of Proust had grown more critical and ambivalent. He now believed that Proust's poetic effects derived from an anti-social cultivation of his private sensibility and, granting the magnificence of the separate parts of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, found fault with its lack of temporal sequence and linear structure. To Burke he wrote:

Proust bathes everything in some luminous mental fluid which does not alter the facts but makes them stand out in unfamiliar relief, as if seen by moonlight. . . . The brain of Proust is a tool which he has fashioned to serve his egoism. It is the

sharpest of tools; nevertheless Proust belongs to an inferior category of artists; whatever type he belongs to, he is its foremost specimen.

His one novel is not a work of art but a gallery in which the separate portraits are works of art. You walk around observing them; you do not begin at the beginning and read through.⁵⁸

Cowley's appreciation of Proust was circumscribed by his inability to shed a predilection for narrative sequence and artistic representationalism. In his Dial essay he described Remembrance of Things Past as, in essence, a "historical novel," which, though ostensibly concerned with the history of one man's personal consciousness, yet provided a faithful and minute record of late nineteenth-century French civilization. He acknowledged, however, that the book was so rich and complex as to defy any single fictional category. Though he toned down his earlier verdict--Proust's gallery of portraits was after all in itself "savantly arranged"--he still found the book "episodic, fragmentary," and was uncomfortable with its apparent lack of unity and logical form. Proust's modern associational devices of form and structure were "masterly," he granted, but defeated by the very length of the book, which he judged "its greatest imperfection."

If Cowley was divided in his judgment of Proust's style and technique,⁵⁹ he was adamant in his repudiation of Symbolism as a way of life. Cowley saw Proust as the archetypical Symbolist artist, one who had carried the aesthetic and ethical implications of the Symbolist creed to the limit. The ideals of the artistic life developed by Proust's generation, Cowley observed, had become anachronistic and irrelevant for the present: "if any age can claim him it is certainly not ours." He concluded his Dial essay with a damning picture of the artist completely withdrawn from contemporary social and human reality into the privacy of his hermitage and wholly engrossed in the manic process of translating his "uncontemporary and unique sensibility" into an autonomous monument of art. A decade later he incorporated the passage into Exile's Return to point up the "anti-social" and "anti-human" implications of Symbolism.

Observe the life of Proust, so different from the ideal of contemporary writers. He spent most of it in bed, in an interior room hermetically sealed to prevent drafts. . . . He rarely saw the daylight. His work-room was lined with cork to deaden every noise. . . . his life was the sort which might have been imagined by Huysmans or in the Yellow Book. . . .

His own death was only a process of externalization; he had turned himself inside out like an orange and sucked it dry, or inscribed himself on a monument; his observation, his sensibility, his affectations, everything about him that was weak or strong had passed into the created characters of his novel.⁶⁰

Cowley was now prepared to shed the very Symbolist ideals he had embraced several years before. Revising his earlier veneration of Flaubert's religious dedication to his art, he now subscribed to Burke's conviction that "any man who devotes his whole life to literature or any man who devotes his whole life to a study of letters is a moron." He believed instead that it was desirable for the artist to engage in as wide a range of human and social experience as possible and was disturbed to find how much his own intellectual interests had "drawn into their shell" in recent years: "A sign of maturity and death."⁶¹

At Cowley's special insistence Burke persuaded Seldes to print his article on Proust as a major essay rather than a book review. Cowley, who self-righteously believed that he was "one of the ten Americans, or perhaps five, who [had] read the collected works" of Proust in the original, obviously considered his essay an important statement on modern literature. But when, in March 1923, he saw a copy of The Dial featuring his essay at Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company, he thought the piece "insufferably pompous" and "full of fine writing."⁶²

Cowley was not alone in disliking the pomposity of his "Monument to Proust." Ernest Hemingway used the title of Cowley's essay in a rather obscene poem published in Der Querschnitt, a German magazine edited by Hans von Wedderkop. In the poem Hemingway attacked The Dial for paying pompous homage to Proust and built an alternative excremental "monument" to Ezra Pound: "The Dial does a monument to Proust. / We have done a monument to Ezra." The poem, however, may well have been intended as an oblique attack on Cowley as much as on Proust or The Dial. Though Cowley had heard of him before, he first met Hemingway on one of his visits to Ezra Pound in Paris, where Hemingway had come to seek out Pound's tutelage and friendship. Some time after, Hemingway took Cowley to the office of International News, for which he then worked as a newsreporter. Cowley's moderate success—he was already a poet of some reputation and a regular contributor to The Dial and the avant-garde little magazines—may well have roused the spite of Hemingway, several of whose manuscripts had

been declined by The Dial and whose first book, Three Stories & Ten Poems, was to appear later that year.⁶³ Cowley had published a half-satirical poem on Pound in the New York Evening Post and his admiration of Pound was strongly qualified. Hemingway was quick to jump to conclusions and incorporated a scathing reference to Cowley in a draft of one of his stories. Having seen Cowley on the terrace of the Dôme in the company of Tristan Tzara and having learned that Cowley was a regular consort of the Dadaists, Hemingway too quickly put him down as a despicable expatriate wastrel.⁶⁴ Still later he placed Cowley in an unfavorable light with Marianne Moore, who as editor of The Dial had rejected several of his stories, by repeating confidential editorial information Cowley had received from Kenneth Burke.⁶⁵ Though there were frictions between both writers through the 1930s, Hemingway substantially revised his opinion of Cowley in later years and considered him one of the few literary critics worthy of his respect.

By 1923 Cowley's appreciation of Pound and Eliot, like that of Proust, had grown more critical. He admired Pound's "unselfish devotion" to literature and his principled determination never to repeat himself in any poetic mode; it was impossible, moreover, not to acknowledge his services as a literary "schoolmaster" and impresario of new talent. But with his own enthusiasm for the cultural potential of contemporary America rising, Cowley increasingly rejected Pound's alternative of permanent expatriation and resented his pedantic attitude towards America. Pound's poetry, too, had come to seem less than wholly admirable. Whereas he had once relished Pound as a "polylingual, refractory, irrepressible archenemy of convention," he now felt uncomfortable with his capacity for estranging and outdistancing his audience with every new volume he published. Pound's indomitable urge to move ahead into "unexplored territory" at times was difficult to distinguish from sheer escapism. Despite Pound's "parade of eccentric scholarship," Cowley felt his poems had less intellectual substance than some of Cummings's or Eliot's. In essence, Cowley later judged, Pound belonged to an "older tradition of the tavern minstrel" and in his poetry kept repeating "simply the commonplaces of the art-for-art's sake tradition."⁶⁶

Even more than Proust or Pound, T. S. Eliot was a touchstone of Cowley's shifting appreciation of modernism. Searching in the network of

modernism for a common denominator Cowley readily acknowledged Eliot as its undisputed American leader, his earlier strictures about Eliot's rosicrucianism notwithstanding. A notebook appraisal of Eliot antedating the publication of The Waste Land seemed prescient enough:

Ibsen was never more dead; the definition of modernism is undergoing another change. During the last few years literature has presented a group of phenomena which, if taken together, give indication of a movement perhaps important enough to compare with the classicism of the seventeenth century or the romanticism of the nineteenth. It is no less profound for it involves a readjustment of the commonest logical processes. Its different aspects have been referred to as cubist, neo-classical, abstract, fantastic; but the one term which includes all its tendencies is Intellectualism. There are intellectualist paintings, poems, music and drama; it still lacks a metaphysic, which, like other metaphysics, will be developed after the fact. . . . He never meant to, perhaps, but Eliot has become the leader.

Eliot's influence, Cowley maintained, could be traced in dozens of contemporary poets, most of whom were "too independent to be called his followers." Conspicuously omitting himself, Cowley named Aiken, Bishop, Crane, Cummings and Elinor Wylie. He predicted that future theses would be written on Eliot's influence, but warned that it would be a mistake to "derive most of contemporary letters from Eliot. . . . There are many elements in the equipment of a modern poet. Eliot is [merely] one of the more important." Cowley incorporated his notebook description of the prevailing intellectualism of modern writing in a review of Elinor Wylie's Black Armour which he wrote in the early spring of 1923 for The Dial. In his review he presented Eliot as a mastertype of the modern artist: "intellectual," "perfectly conscious," and "never quite the same."⁶⁷

For the young Cowley Eliot came closer than any other poet to realizing the ideal conception of the modern poet as a ceaseless explorer of ever new poetic theories and forms, "a buffalo hunter pressing westward toward new frontiers," who regarded his poems as "intellectual problems" and who, having explored the possibilities of a new principle, "moved on" to other problems, leaving its application to the host of disciples he gained at every stage. Eliot's formalism was clearly congenial to younger poet-critics of Cowley's persuasion, as was his defense of "the conscious mind" as against "the dark Freudian wish." The

older poet's intellectualism and continuous exploration of new paths seemed not so far removed in spirit from the "theory of convolutions" Cowley and Burke had developed in high school: "The author of 'modern' literature is embarked in [sic] a constant round of convolutions," Cowley observed in his notebook; "He must continually outguess his audience."⁶⁸

What was not apparent in his review of Wylie for The Dial was that the publication of The Waste Land in late 1922 caused an important modification in Cowley's appreciation of Eliot. The change seemed Cowley's as much as Eliot's. Formally and technically The Waste Land might fulfill all the requirements of "a great modern poem;" its intellectual substance, however, elicited "private reservations." In the winter and spring of 1923 The Waste Land in fact ran counter to Cowley's whole emotional and intellectual predisposition. Whereas the Dadaists had infected him with the excitement of living in the present and fanned a moral conviction that "values are created by living men," Eliot, he remembered feeling, "not only abused the present but robbed it of vitality." The present, Eliot's poem seemed to imply, was "prematurely senile," incapable of expressing its "impotence" in language of its own, and thus "forever condemned to borrow and patch together the songs of dead poets." A youthful Cowley was not prepared to follow Eliot on his "desert pilgrimage toward the shrines of tradition and authority." Cowley's inclination to let the exuberant exigencies of the present prevail over the solemn legacies of the past would demand to be rectified in the future. For the moment, however, he was joyously committed to "the adventure of living in the present." Though his literary path was far from clearly marked, he increasingly demanded that writers deal with contemporary reality and "instinctively" rejected Eliot as his guide.⁶⁹

Even during his last months in France Cowley's search for a personal aesthetics remained characterized by intellectual indeterminacy and a lack of theoretical foundation; he could struggle at best, as he told Burke, to formulate his "instinctive reactions." In March 1923 he received a letter from Burke challenging his conception of criticism as a form of "definition" which might involve formal as well as moral, psychological or historical elements. Burke protested that Cowley's critical practice was doomed to remain on a level of newspaper journalism as long as it was marked by his disinclination to judge a book by

previously formulated aesthetic laws, and accused Cowley of violating "the dignity of criticism." As a healthy antidote Burke recommended the Italian Idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce, whose Aesthetic (1902) had appeared in English translation the year before. Croce's doctrine of art as the subjective and nonconceptual expression of intuition--as opposed to logical processes of cognition--had a profound influence on modern aesthetic theory, but predictably conflicted with Cowley's classicist predilections and his defense of "the conscious mind." In conformity with his earlier rejection of Bergsonian intuitionism his response to Croce was one of violent disapproval: "my disagreement with every point of his Breviary of Aesthetics is so profound that I thought of writing an Aesthetic Breviary of my own by the simple process of turning each of Croce's statements backwards."⁷⁰

Burke's preoccupation with the formal properties of writing made him look "with alarm" upon Cowley's Dada-inspired infatuation with American subject matter. When Burke argued that subject matter was bound by "a priori definitions and limitations" which should "originate in formal considerations," Cowley responded with critical hesitation, confessing he was no longer sure of his position on "form and matter." Several weeks later he returned to the subject, arguing that there was "no logical way out" of the problem as long as form and matter were conceived of as an irresolvable antithesis. He admitted that between a conception of art as autonomous creation to be judged by its intrinsic excellence and a conception of art as representation to be judged against its cultural, social and historical background he found it hard to strike a balance:

A work of literature, as distinguished from a treatise on gardening or a realistic novel, should be judged for its excellence, not for its representative value. With so much of Kenneth's doctrine I agree. But I cannot honestly escape the belief that subject matter has merits and defects of its own, which are independent of the way it is treated. . . . A house is not independent of its environment; neither is a book. As soon as one allows a book to be judged against its special background instead of as a phenomenon existing in an imagined vacuum;--at that moment one allows the whole mechanics of representationalism to creep in, which is the logical defect of my position.

Cowley had once again run up against an endemic paradox of art, one which had stalled his efforts at a personal aesthetics a year before and which

would continue to plague his considerations through the decade: the seeming incompatibility between art as expression and art as creation.

Cowley's wavering attitude towards form and matter was paralleled by a growing ambivalence about the role of the subconscious in artistic creation. Classical and intellectualist predilections had earlier engendered wariness about the influence of Freudianism on modern literature and led him to ridicule a veneration of the subconscious as a manifestation of contemporary romanticism. At times, however, his own practice as a poet seemed to belie his Poe-esque critical ideas: "I am going over to the damned unconscious school of writers, having discovered that my best phrases are really inspiration. The plan, the structure, the criticism of faults are perfectly conscious, but the music of the best lines and the unity of the whole impression are not." Quick to rectify his momentary lapse of faith in the all-importance of the human intellect, he was forced to make qualifications: "No, damnation, I am not going over to the unconscious school. I continue to abjure their Franks and Andersons. But I have found that my own unconscious is often a shortcut to better work than I can do consciously, and I am trying to make the best use of this unexpected tool. Consciously."⁷²

An impatience with amorphous and undisciplined emotionalism informed Cowley's consideration of an anthology of contemporary German poetry, translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky, in The Dial. His review, written in early May but not published until August, indirectly attacked The Dial for continuing to promote the work of established poets like Rainer Maria Rilke and Stefan George, poets who, Cowley felt, had lost "most of their stature" in the midst of the present "reaction against all forms of naturalism and symbolism." Principally, Cowley's review entailed a condemnation of German Expressionism. He described it as "no more than a violent restatement of romanticism" and condemned its poets for despising the discipline of form. Most fatally, it conflicted with his demand for an art meaningfully concerned with the contemporary social and human world. Expressionism, he wrote, was "an attempt to express the pure Self, independently of every element imposed on the poet from without; in other words it is a revolt against every form of society." Cowley's analysis of Expressionist verse carried the nonpolitical germs of his later repudiation of the Art or Symbolist Novel at the height of his political radicalism: "The recipe for making

expressionist poetry is not remarkably complicated. Instead of describing the infinite diversity of the exterior world it confines itself to the soul, and souls are uniform and simple. To express the inmost Self is the narrowest of all formulas."⁷³

Meanwhile, there was always la vie littéraire in Paris--exhilarating, hectic and exhausting--and a host of French and American writers to consort with. During his several excursions to Paris in the spring of 1923 Cowley was a regular client at the terraces of Montparnasse. Occasionally he dropped in at Sylvia Beach's bookshop--he had become a member of her library on January 15, 1923--and, once, sat for his photograph at the Paris studio of Man Ray, together with Matthew Josephson. Man Ray remembered both of them as young littérateurs "eager to absorb the Paris atmosphere but prudently keeping a foot on American shores." Among the constituents of the ever-shifting American colony Cowley saw Gilbert Seldes, who was working on The Seven Lively Arts, several times that spring. He talked with John Peale Bishop about Vanity Fair and was informed of Edmund Wilson's recent marriage to Mary Blair, a Pittsburgh acquaintance from Cowley's high-school days. He met John Dos Passos, who "spoke well" of Kenneth Burke, and in May had lunch with E. E. Cummings who, after two years, he found "extremely charming" and in full sympathy with Secession and Broom. While meeting these and other Americans in Paris--Royall Snow, Robert and Elsa Coates, Matthew and Hannah Josephson, Harold Loeb and Kitty Cannell, John and Elinor Nef, Lewis Galantière, John Brooks Wheelwright, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound--Cowley also continued to seek out the Dadaists, especially Tzara and Aragon, as well as French writers and artists outside the Dada group: Jules Pascin, André Salmon and Paul Valéry. Valéry, who was to exert a deeper influence on Cowley than he could have realized upon their first meeting in 1923, already impressed him by writing poetry as if it were "a laboratory experiment in thought."⁷⁴

In mid-April Tristan Tzara arranged for Peggy Cowley to hold an exhibit of her paintings and drawings at Galérie Six, a Paris art gallery run by Madame Soupault. Peggy's newest watercolors were "extremely interesting," Cowley agreed; she had drawn the portraits of nearly all

their artist friends, including Tzara's own. In early June, on the terrace of the Dôme, Tzara introduced Cowley to Theo Van Doesburg, a Dutch artist who later achieved international renown as the founder of the avant-garde movement De Stijl. At the time of his meeting with Cowley he was editing, under the pseudonym of I. K. Bonset, a Dutch Dadaist magazine, Mécane, which was distributed from Leiden and Paris. Van Doesburg impressed Cowley as "a pleasant, enthusiastic, rather simple fellow, less ironic in his temper than the French Dadaists," but even so, when asked to contribute to Van Doesburg's little magazine, Cowley submitted, in true Dada spirit, three rather scabrous "madrigals"--featuring Masochistic Mazie, Sadic Sam from Alabam, and Fetishistic Fanny--written for his own and his friends' entertainment. The poems were printed in a two-page issue of Mécane, where they appeared together with a story by Kurt Schwitters, translated by Van Doesburg. Cowley's reputation as an adept impromptu composer of dirty epigrams and limericks was spreading into unexpected corners of the international avant-garde.⁷⁵

Among the many visitors to Giverny that spring was John Brooks Wheelwright, who arrived in early April as the recently appointed overseas agent of Secession. He brought new editorial suggestions from Munson and Burke in New York and carried manuscript material for numbers five and six, which Wheelwright had offered to have printed at his own expense in Florence, Italy. Having spent a "wildish winter" in New York with the American contingent of Secession (Munson, Burke, Slater Brown, Edward Nagle, Gaston Lachaise), Wheelwright had conquered much of his earlier skepticism and grown more sympathetic to the magazine. After his defense of Secession against Brooks and Untermeyer in The Freeman, Munson had made him European agent and sent him overseas to prevent further tampering with Secession by Josephson, whom Munson suspected of "sabotage" and procrastination on number four. He had virtually given Wheelwright editorial carte blanche, a move he would soon have cause to regret: "Secession is just as much your organ as it is mine. . . . I am chiefly the organizer and 'dirty work' executive. What the magazine is, depends chiefly on what the men it was planned for want to make of it. Everything moves in the direction of editorial control for those within a circle." Some time later, hoping to solidify the editorial equilibrium, Munson suggested that Secession five be put together by a committee of four, consisting of Cowley and Wheelwright on the European end, Burke and

himself in New York.⁷⁶

Falling in with Cowley and Josephson in Giverny Wheelwright was rapidly infected by the pervasive Dadaist atmosphere and surrendered much of his earlier aversion to what he once described as "nonsense translated into action." A brilliant conversationalist, he held long talks with Louis Aragon, each man in his own language, and enjoyed the company of André Breton and his friends, who regularly descended on quiet Giverny from Paris. In early April he went over the material for Secession five and six with Cowley and Josephson. They agreed it was "pretty poor. No life to it." Among the documents Wheelwright had brought over from New York was a public apology to Richard Ashton for the mutilation of his poems, which Munson wanted published in Secession five. At Cowley's insistence the note was not accepted; he maintained that the injury was "intentional" and not, as Munson's statement implied, accidental. Wheelwright was easily persuaded and retrospectively acknowledged that, in playing their Dadaist joke on Ashton's verse, "Cowley and Josephson had devised what was, to them and me, a delightfully pleasing method of expression of their hatred for bad poetry." On his own authority Wheelwright published a long editorial comment in Secession five wickedly maintaining that "the bosses in New York apologise to Ashton but the Satanists can not, their injury was intentional," and embedded the entire text of "The Jilted Moon" in a scathing satirical analysis of Ashton's verse.⁷⁷

Cowley objected to the bulk of the material accepted by Munson and Burke for the fifth issue. "Most of the number is dead," he reported dutifully to New York editor Burke; to remedy matters he considered injecting some Dadaist life into it by writing a series of "brutal and energetic" axioms on art. As it was, however, he declined to bear editorial responsibility for the issue and emphasized as much to Wheelwright: "I shouldn't like my name to appear as sponsoring this number, considering that the larger part of it was chosen definitely in New York, and much of it against my own strong prejudices." Cowley's request was partly inspired by his strong misgivings about Wheelwright's ability to handle the mechanical and editorial ends of magazine publishing, but for reasons of his own he refrained from interfering. "I wondered what the issue would look like after being set in type by Italian printers who couldn't speak English and then proofread by the

worst speller who ever failed to graduate from Harvard," he recalled in Exile's Return. The result, he reflected, "would at least be arbitrary, surprising and utterly dada."⁷⁸

From Italy Wheelwright flouted Cowley's disclaimer of responsibility and inserted a note to the contrary in Secession: most of the material for issues five and six, he pontificated, was "accepted and rejected with the advice of Malcolm Cowley." On his own authority he set out to revise and "edit" a lengthy, technical essay by Munson on E. E. Cummings and had the issue printed in Florence. When he saw Secession five in New York, Munson flew into a rage: his apology to Ashton had been suppressed, his opinions on Cummings had been corrected by Wheelwright, and the entire issue (mistakenly numbered "six") teemed with typographical errors and misspellings.

Cowley, too, had reasons to be unhappy. Not only had Wheelwright discarded his refusal of responsibility, he had accepted only so much of Cowley's advice as accorded with his own ideas, then used it to justify his wrongheaded editorial practice with Munson. Moreover, in the confusion of bringing out two issues simultaneously, Wheelwright had unintentionally maltreated Cowley's own poems. In May Cowley had asked Wheelwright to withdraw two poems—"Old Melodies: Love and Death"—he had earlier submitted for Secession, since one of them was shortly to appear in the relaunched Broom. He had sent "Into That Rarer Ether" as a substitute contribution. But Cowley's request reached Wheelwright too late and all three poems appeared in Secession five and six, thereby feeding Munson's suspicion that by publishing the same poem in both Broom and Secession Cowley was deliberately "playing unfairly" towards his magazine. Wheelwright was sincerely annoyed by the accidental mistreatment of Cowley's contributions, in particular, as he observed to Peggy, "as it was only through his recommendations that I connected myself with Secession." By this time Wheelwright began to suspect that he might not be the ideal man to edit a little "art paper;" he feared he was but "a punk businessman."⁷⁹

Though his voice weighed heavily with Wheelwright Cowley could never be entirely sure in how far his friend would follow his advice in the actual selection of materials. Thus, Secession six contained a long poem by Wheelwright which Cowley had advised against for number five as well as "Fantasia in a Restaurant" by Foster Damon, whose verse, Cowley

thought, had "a bad influence" on Wheelwright. The only item in the issue explicitly endorsed by Cowley was a burlesque detective story by Robert Coates, "The Crimson Emerald." Cowley's own "Into That Rarer Ether" duly appeared, preceded by an apologetic note from Wheelwright.

Wheelwright's incompetence in handling Hart Crane's tripartite "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" has become legendary. Though in retrospect Munson represented Crane as "the chief victim of the Josephson-Cowley-Wheelwright imbroglio," Cowley could justifiably plead innocence in the matter; after all, he had strongly urged Wheelwright to publish Crane's poem. Even if he disagreed with "Pontiff Munson" that the poem compared with Eliot's The Waste Land, he had granted it was "fine enough," adding as his personal judgment: "The best of the three movements is unfortunately the second, which appeared in Broom."⁸⁰ Wheelwright appears to have mistaken Cowley's verdict for a suggestion to exclude the middle section in Secession and print only Parts I and III. When Crane, who prided himself on the symphonic unity of his poem, saw that Broom had misrepresented his intentions by printing only the second part, he demanded Munson withdraw his poem from Secession unless assurance could be given that it would not be subject to gratuitous editing. Wheelwright, however, finding Crane's poem rather incomprehensible and acting partly out of professional jealousy, preferred not to heed Munson's request to return the manuscript and printed a dismembered two-part version of the poem, complete with typographical mistakes, thereby butchering its unity a second time and violently outraging Crane. When the issue reached New York a shamefaced Munson could only excise with a razor blade the entire poem from its pages. He made amends to Crane by publishing an integral version in Secession seven.⁸¹

After his involvement with Secession six Cowley's relations with Munson and his magazine were effectively severed, though resentments would blaze up again in the near future. Burke, weary of the quarreling, also resigned with issue six. So did Wheelwright, feeling personally wronged and sorely grieved, as he told Cowley, at having allowed himself to be associated with a "movement" wrecked by futile bickerings which reminded him of nothing so much as "a church sociable squabble." Munson, now left in sole control of Secession, printed two more issues, in which he made a concerted effort to shift its course "from experimental

aestheticism to a kind of Stieglitz-Frank mysticism," a literary path radically divergent from Cowley's.⁸²

While Cowley was advising Wheelwright on Secession, plans were being laid behind the scenes to revive Broom from New York. Throughout the spring of 1923 Loeb conducted busy epistolary negotiations with Cowley and Josephson to check out the practical feasibility of Broom's continuance. Cowley, who had always set a high value on Broom, was enthusiastic from the first, but cautious. On March 6 he offered his "free services" to a continuation of Broom "in a less tiring and less expensive form:" he had no wish to see the new magazine perpetuate old quarrels and proposed that Broom become a quarterly. Loeb, on his side, was willing to embark on a new venture, provided he could count on Cowley's "wholehearted cooperation," and promised the new Broom would "more or less represent your group." At the end of March he wrote to Cowley: "Much depends on your cooperation. With you helping I shall be happy to delegate the American editorial responsibility to a group and to collaborate thoroughly on policy." In early April Josephson left Europe to take over the American end of Broom and try to find a new angel, printer and distributor. Before sailing Josephson had talked over practical arrangements with Cowley, who now envisioned for himself a position on the magazine that carried stronger editorial responsibility. To Loeb he agreed to act on an American board of associate editors consisting of himself, Josephson and, as a most likely third candidate, Slater Brown.⁸³ In April Loeb visited Cowley in Giverny to go over manuscripts left over from the "old" Broom and was impressed by Cowley's "editorial ability" and feeling for style: "Often he cleaned up a smudgy sentence by the transposition of a word." By the end of May Josephson had found a new financial supporter of Broom in his brother-in-law Maxwell Geffen and preparations were progressing for the first number of the revived magazine. On May 20 Cowley reported to Burke that the refurbished Broom meant "a direct bid for our own crowd with its far dependencies"--Burke, Cowley, Josephson, Coates, Crane, Jean Toomer, Glenway Wescott, Yvor Winters and Wheelwright. He still believed that Broom could fill a separate and necessary function side by side with Secession--"I think the ideal solution is to make it the worthy paper, full of permanent work, while Secession becomes polemic, combative, stunty"--but he also realized that such was hardly feasible unless Munson and Loeb could be reconciled

and convinced that "both magazines are necessary."⁸⁴ He was now fully prepared to stand by Broom and Loeb and pledged his active support upon his return to America.

During Cowley's last months in France the influence of Dada culminated in his friendship with Louis Aragon. In April 1923, having been given a monthly stipend of 800 francs, enough to subsist on in moderate comfort for a number of years, Aragon had resigned from his job with Paris-Journal and come to spend two months in Giverny to work on a new book. In May and June Cowley saw Aragon almost daily. Together they went tramping up and down the country roads, while Aragon, a dynamic and indefatigable talker, recited poem upon poem, recommended books, and proclaimed his literary theories and ideas. Cowley was no better able to resist the influence of Aragon than Josephson had been, on whom, Cowley believed, Aragon had "imposed all his ideas." Cowley's relationship with Aragon approximated that of disciple and master. In early June he wrote a long letter on the subject to Burke, admitting he had fallen under the Dadaist spell of Aragon, but maintaining that his influence was "less literary than moral." In a tone of near-adulation he praised Aragon's precocious literary genius, his "splendid disdain" for the social and moral conventions of his background, his irresistible charm, his capacity for zestful indiscretion, his contempt for literary commerce. Most of all, Aragon impressed Cowley with the moral intensity of his disinterested commitment to art: "He lives literature. If I told him that a certain poem of Baudelaire's was badly written, he would be capable of slapping my face. He judges a writer largely by his moral qualities, such as courage, vigor, the refusal to compromise. He proclaims himself a romantic." Of all the interesting writers he had met in Europe, Cowley observed, Aragon was "the only one to impose himself by force of character."⁸⁵

Character and ideas, however, were difficult to separate and, though Cowley struggled hard to keep echoes of Aragon out of his verse, he did not understand the full force of Aragon's influence on his literary attitudes until much later. Aragon's standards, he recognized in 1931, derived in part from Rimbaud, who at the age of nineteen had renounced

literature for a life of action. Uncomfortable with Rimbaud's defection, but enthusiastic about his gospel of activism, Aragon hoped to make literature into "an active and adventuresome career, by exploring the possibilities of words and images as Rimbaud had explored the coasts of the Red Sea." Aragon's influence brought out the contradictory elements in Cowley's attitudes. Against his classicist predilections he was now drawn into the orbit of the very romanticism he had sharply discredited a year before. Under Aragon's tutelage, he read and admired English and French writers of the Romantic period like Monk Lewis, Lord Byron, Gérard de Nerval and Petrus Borel, seeking for ways to apply their literary methods to contemporary subject matter from "the age of technology and high-pressure selling." Inspired by the example of Aragon, Cowley demanded of writers that they display, in their attitude to art, "high courage, absolute integrity and a sort of intelligence which was in itself a moral quality."⁸⁶ In his notebook he entered an observation which indicated that he recognized, tentatively but presciently, that such a moral stance would ultimately have its social and political repercussions for the writer:

The moral judgment has been reinstated. Thus, for Aragon, Joyce is objectionable because he is mean, Eliot because he lacks the vigor to accept a new civilization, Giraudoux or Morand because they pander to the crowd. Let us add to this list: Frank, Anderson, because they take things lying down.

Once you have admitted that literature has a moral value, you must admit the right of the state, or of society, to have some control over literature. But one differs with society. One desires a new society.

The next step is to take an interest in social laws, to become anarchist, royalist, communist. It will not be long before this step is taken.⁸⁷

Shortly after, he showed himself ready to accept the personal consequences of his "highly moral" attitude:

To deny that literature has any moral value is of no danger to morality, but it is a fashion of denigrating literature. Art for art's sake . . . a cowardly attitude in which one takes refuge, as if to say, "My opinions really don't matter to you, they are only artistic questions." My opinions matter, and I claim the right to be jailed for them if necessary. Art has a moral function. To say: he lived, he died, he loved has no meaning except the meaning that artists give it. They make life interesting, give it dignity and history. Their conception is not always the same as that of the society to which they

belong, and in these cases society has a right to impose its own point of view. Artists are dangerous. I hope to be dangerous; otherwise why bother to be an artist?⁸⁸

Rather than diminishing the humanism at the heart of Cowley's aesthetics, his newly adopted moral stance fortified his belief that art had the power to affect society and bestowed meaning and dignity upon human life. Extending artistic judgments to life itself, Cowley now seemed prepared to transpose his moral idealism from the literary into the social and political world. Filled with a desire for courageous and defiant public action, he drew up a political proposal for the newly relaunched Broom: "Really, people should not be allowed to dismiss us as purely literary creatures. We must proclaim our political opinions, beg for a censorship, write an Open Letter to President Harding, attack the liberal magazines, beg people to abstain from voting, or otherwise we must resign ourselves to conducting petty literary quarrels with Ezra Pound and Robert McAlmon and Floyd Dell." At the end of June, he sent a flamboyant letter to Burke, announcing his belief that "the time has come for us to write some political manifestoes" and proclaiming his wariness of being ticketed in a narrowly literary fashion: "We are not critics or short-story writers; we are poets; in other words we are interested in every form of human activity." Glowing with revolutionary fervor, Cowley confessed he was "eaten with the desire to do something significant and indiscreet. . . . In a country as hypocritical as the United States, merely to enumerate the number of laws one has broken would be a significant gesture."⁸⁹

Cowley was now prepared to translate his desire for indiscreet and significant gestures into action, as if eager to prove that even an American writer could out-Dada the Dadaists, if he chose to do so. Two of his "gestures" have become part of anecdotal literary lore and have done much to fix a public and historical image of Cowley as an American Dadaist extraordinaire. The first took place in Giverny, in the select literary company of Louis Aragon, Harold Loeb (who had come to discuss Broom affairs), John Dos Passos and E. E. Cummings, visitors from Paris for the weekend. After a gay and bibulous dinner, the company resorted to Cowley's studio above the local blacksmith shop to resume drink and argument. The afterdinner lull in conversation was suddenly broken as Cowley, commonly slow-spoken and chary of words but now inflamed with

Dadaist ardor, began to deliver an exuberant oration on book fetishism and the illogical accumulation of bad review books on his shelves. In New York, he declaimed, bad books were something to be given to one's aunts by marriage or sold to Fourth Avenue book dealers, but here in Giverny they "hung about your neck like so many dead albatrosses, pardon me, turkey buzzards," cluttering up the room and unfit even to be used as toilet paper. As he whipped himself up to a climax of mock-indignation, he pulled an assortment of books from his shelves--volumes of "irritating modern poetry and prose" by Elinor Wylie and Jean Cocteau and dispensable French university texts--and, to shouts of encouragement by Aragon, Cummings and Dos Passos, tore them apart and heaped them in a pile on the asbestos apron before the stove. Denouncing the books as so much merde good only for a bonfire, Cowley set fire to the pile. After several endeavors it smoldered reluctantly, filling the room with smoke, until E. E. Cummings, undaunted by his recent arrest in Paris as a redoubtable "pisseur Americain," walked over to the fire and expectorated on the flames. The evening, tumultuous enough at its inception, ended in anticlimax. Loeb, who had been at best a reluctant spectator at the book-burning fracas, tried to relieve his boredom by challenging Cowley to a wrestling match but, his Princetonian championship notwithstanding, found his opponent "unmovable." Later that night Cowley and Aragon marched Cummings and Dos Passos to the railway station at Vernon to see them off to Paris. They missed the last train and were forced to put up at a local hotel. Cowley walked back to Giverny in the early dawn, accompanied by an enthusiastic Aragon vociferously reciting poetry.⁹⁰

But Cowley's Dadaist ardor peaked in the public glare of Bastille Day, July 14, 1923. Driven to a pitch of high excitement by the prospect of his imminent departure from France and the general madness of a Paris swirling in the ecstasy of "a vast plebeian carnival"--rows of Chinese lanterns hanging in the trees, people dancing in the streets to bands playing on street corners--Cowley joined a motley company of revelers at the Dôme. Laurence Vail, recently married to Loeb's cousin Peggy Guggenheim, his sister Clotilde, Loeb himself, Kitty Cannell, Jim Butler, Louis Aragon, with Cowley formed the nucleus of a jolly party which was joined intermittently by Robert Coates and Elsa Petersen, Ivan Opffer, Harold Stearns, Robert McAlmon, and Tristan Tzara. As Loeb, once again a rather humorless and reluctant participant in the merrymaking, recalled,

"groups were fluid, people coming and going, mingling, separating, fighting, dropping out and reappearing." Before long the conversation turned to the Rotonde, a café long patronized by anarchists and revolutionists, including, at one time, Lenin and Trotsky; its proprietor, a disagreeable character, named M. Michel, was rumored to be a police informer and had further made himself unpopular by behaving insultingly towards American women. When Laurence Vail, who bore a personal grudge against the man, proposed that the entire company move over to the Rotonde and "assault" its patron, Cowley's capacity for indignation flared up into a passionate desire for significant action. After the provocateurs had regrouped at the Rotonde across the street from the Dôme, Aragon began a speech denouncing stool pigeons in general and the proprietor in particular. As the waiters, anticipating trouble, gathered about their boss, Laurence Vail spit forth a stream of angry insults and Harold Loeb, pipe in mouth, looked on in embarrassment. All of a sudden Cowley, finding the scene too tepid and revolted by the proprietor's "look of a dog caught stealing chickens and trying to sneak off," shot forward and landed "a glancing blow" on the proprietor's jaw. In the ensuing chaos he was hustled out of the café. For the moment nothing happened. Cowley seemed ready to forget the entire affair and persuaded several of his companions-in-revelry to shift their activities to other quarters. Long past midnight, Cowley returned to the scene of the crime, shouted a new volley of insults at the proprietor of the Rotonde and was promptly arrested by two policemen, who escorted him to the gendarmerie, insulting and manhandling him on the way.

Once at the station Cowley faced a double charge: not only had he unprovokedly assaulted a patron, but--a more serious, if incorrect, charge--he had also forcibly resisted a police officer. Soon friends (Laurence Vail, Louis Aragon, Jacques Rigaut) came to the rescue, bringing Cowley's identification papers and, twice over, bribing the police officer to drop the second of the charges. Cowley spent an anxious night in jail, awaiting a preliminary hearing on the next day. Upon that occasion a group of his friends, sobered up and including nine elegantly dressed and highly respectable-looking women (among them Clotilde Vail, Kitty Cannell and Peggy Guggenheim), testified that Cowley had acted under provocation by the patron and solemnly swore he was a gentleman writer of irreproachable and earnest character. The presiding police

magistrate was duly impressed. The patron had only his own personnel to back him up, whereas Cowley had at least ten disinterested and respectable witnesses. Moreover, as Cowley's hand had been injured in a recent accident with his bicycle, the magistrate acknowledged he could hardly have seriously hurt anyone, a verdict confirmed by the inviolate physique of M. Michel, which showed not the faintest trace of a blow. In the end, however, it was Cowley's friend André Salmon, who as reporter of Parisian murder trials for Le Matin was on good terms with the police, whose personal influence and legal counsel did most to procrastinate the trial and get Cowley off the hook in time for his departure to America. Robert McAlmon, who had testified at the police station that the patron of the Rotonde was "a sour-faced scurvy swine" and an ill-mannered exploiter of Americans, in retrospect believed that Cowley had been saved a six months' term in jail.⁹¹

Overnight Cowley was a Dadaist celebrity--though one somewhat baffled by the sudden admiration bestowed upon him by his French acquaintances. Upon reflection he could only conclude that, unknowingly, his act had sublimely exemplified all the Dada precepts: "First of all, I had acted for reasons of public morality; bearing no private grudge against my victim, I had been disinterested. I had committed an indiscretion, acted with violence and disdain for the law, performed an arbitrary and significant gesture, uttered a manifesto; in their opinion I had shown courage. . . ." Suddenly placed in the limelight, Cowley for the first time in his life became "a public character." Between dinners, cocktail parties, interviews for the newspapers and invitations to contribute to Dadaist magazines in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Russia, Cowley's last weeks in France were busier and more exciting days than he had ever known.⁹²

Beyond the circle of his European admirers, however, Cowley's act was less cordially received and seen as a display of irresponsible tomfoolery. The New York Tribune featured an editorial with a headline--"Prize American Literary 'Eggs' Boil Over in Paris Latin Quarter"--that captured the spirit of gusto and exuberance behind Cowley's gesture, but pointed up its facetious futility. Gorham Munson, who had reasons for malice, remembered that in New York Burke was made visibly uncomfortable by Cowley's pugnacious antics and felt "as if he were watching a literary suicide." Munson himself believed that Cowley was temperamentally

unsuited "to act dada" and found his capering came close to being "painfully stupid" and "pediculous." Cowley, Munson wrote in retrospect, was certainly "the oddest of odd fish in the literary bowl of that year;" for Munson Cowley's act exhibited an "elaborate straining for spontaneous foolery."⁹³

Harold Stearns, the frequent butt of satire and critique by Cowley and Josephson, retrospectively belittled the Dadaist shenanigans of his younger compatriots in Paris as merely "untempered emotionalism overcoming weak judgement." He felt they were confusing a new revolutionary literary movement with what was merely a form of belligerent American arrogance and, in a vengeful and wrongheaded reminiscence, decried Cowley's and Josephson's Dada-inspired Americanism as "a strange form of New Nationalism," one quickly surrendered upon their return: "afterwards, when they got home, they couldn't get on the American bandwagon fast enough. Impolite and aggressive Americans abroad, they became European and Russian yearners when they got back home."⁹⁴

Robert McAlmon gave a similarly spiteful account of l'affaire Cowley in his 1934 memoir, Being Geniuses Together. There had never been any love lost between McAlmon and the members of Cowley's group. Ever since his Village days McAlmon had regarded Burke, Cowley and Josephson as affected Ivy League poseurs in possession of a forbidding erudition and had preferred the poetic company of William Carlos Williams. He adopted a deliberately "anti-intellectual pose" towards them and viewed both Burke and Josephson as a "reprehensible species of egg head," who lacked an appreciation of actual experience but preferred to venerate "the skeleton of intellect and human 'understanding.'" Burke, Cowley and Josephson, on their side, continued to feel cool and hostile towards McAlmon throughout the decade. A few weeks before his "significant gesture" at the Rotonde Cowley had pleaded with Burke the need to write political manifestoes and had named McAlmon together with Pound and Dell as people engaged in "petty literary wars." Cowley later portrayed McAlmon as a man whose capacity for generosity to young and needy writers tended to be overshadowed by his lack of humility and his inability to "bear his sorrows like a Christian." With William Slater Brown--who in 1928 summed up his opinion of McAlmon's writing ability in a famous couplet: "I would rather live in Oregon and pack salmon / Than live in Nice and write like Robert McAlmon"--Cowley was persuaded of McAlmon's literary insensitivity

and later wrote that "he never in his life wrote as much as a memorable sentence." When Being Geniuses Together was to be reissued in a new and revised version over thirty years later Cowley commented that McAlmon, for all his ability to make shrewd and scathing judgments, was essentially "lacking in imagination and blind to anything beyond the end of his own nose." The book belatedly struck Cowley as "McAlmon's revenge on almost all the writers he had known."⁹⁵

As a result of the well-publicized fisticuffs, Cowley was either acclaimed or reviled as an American Dadaist, his personal objection to the aesthetic assumptions of Dada notwithstanding. Because the incident belatedly gained anecdotal notoriety--not in the last place because Cowley himself blew up its symbolic value in Exile's Return while underplaying his continued allegiance to a classicist aesthetics--the glaring incongruity between his privately held classical opinions and his public attitudinizing as a Dada activist has not been properly recognized.

Nothing so pointed up that incongruity as the fact that during his last busy six weeks in France, while he was preparing to cut a dashing figure as the perpetrator of significant public action, Cowley was privately composing a "fabulous" essay on the classical theater of Jean Racine that stood as the culminating point of his search for a personal aesthetics. It formed an act of intellectual justification, to himself and to the American Field Service, for having spent two years abroad, and it was to hold, he observed half-ironically to Burke, "the rubies of my wisdom." A separate notebook devoted largely to his studies in French Classicism gives evidence of its continuous attraction to Cowley and testifies to the elaborate anterior research on the subject he carried out at Montpellier and, more irregularly, at Giverny. Besides notes for a projected comparative thesis on the seventeenth-century French and English theater (Wycherley, Congreve, Molière and Racine), it contains extensive bibliographical annotations, a chronology of the career of Racine, an analysis of the conventions of Racinian theater, a listing of Boileau's Laws of Tragedy, and elaborate quotations from Racine's critical prefaces to Andromaque (1667), Bajazet (1672) and Phèdre (1677).

Two longer notations—"About a Performance of Racine" and "The Morality of Racinian Tragedy"--were later expanded, polished and subtilized to become part of the "monumental" essay on Racine. Returning to Racine in the midst of his flirtations with Dada, Cowley's former enthusiasm rose to new heights. "Racine can be tremendous," he wrote ecstatically to Burke. Far from lifeless or anemic, Racine's poetry was "something to tear the guts out of you."⁹⁶ With mounting admiration he worked on the essay from late May until the first week in July, pouring into it many of the insights into art and aesthetics he had accumulated over the past two years. Thus, the essay stood as a summing up of the literary values and beliefs he had developed in the course of his French sojourn.

Cowley opened his essay with a classical epigraph from André Gide: "L'art est toujours le résultat d'une contrainte." In order that his art might flourish, Cowley maintained, Racine "demanded a discipline." But the discipline of Racine's art was inseparable from the social and cultural conditions which produced it. Indeed, more than any of his previous writings, Cowley's essay emphasized the interdependence of art, artist, audience and milieu. Racine came closest to approximating an ideal—the writer fully integrated into and sustained by his social and literary milieu—which Cowley would subsequently strive to realize in an American ambience. In his organicist view Racine was "a sort of natural fruit" of his age; it was the age which "conspired to make him great"--by creating a literary ideal, forming an "intelligent public," producing "a milieu in which he could exist as a dramatist," and evolving "a set of conventions" governing his tragedies.⁹⁷

Though many of the conventions of the classical theater might appear "the most rigorous and the most completely dead," ultimately, Cowley felt, the precise nature of such conventions was less significant than their existence: "only an existing tradition and an audience educated in this tradition can make the classical theatre possible." Racine, in this respect, was fortunate: unlike contemporary artists, who had to invent their own conventions, he was born into existing ones and found cut out for him a well-trained audience which, as "a collaborator and critic that determined the sole conditions under which the playwright was allowed to work," paradoxically set him free to "devote his attention to expressing emotions and unfamiliar characters in the most polished verse of which he was capable."⁹⁸

Discussing the formal properties of Racinian drama, Cowley posited the classical ideal as one of "absolute perfection." Produced by a definite age and milieu, a tragedy by Racine yet constituted an autonomous organism transcending its historical moment: "The tragedy itself is perfect, not in the sense of something excavated from a former civilization and pronounced more elegant than the Venus de Milo, but perfect as a living organism to which nothing can be added and which any amputation leaves grotesque." A Racinian tragedy, he observed elsewhere, was "stylized" to the point of becoming an "abstract painting of an emotion." It was so highly formalized that it might be geometrically diagrammed, yet it remained a unified and living organism, "a situation which opens like a flower." Racine's abstractness, moreover, was of a different kind from the nonrepresentational obscurantism Cowley resented in much of modernism:

To be abstract a literature need not be unintelligible; on the contrary. An abstract literature is one in which ideas or emotions, expressed with the greatest possible exactness, are combined into a unity which possesses a formal value and which is something more than a copy of experience. Evidently Racine comes nearer this ideal than Gertrude Stein and immensely nearer than those writers of correct verses who invoke his name today [footnote: "Exception made for Paul Valéry"]. The Racinian spirit exists with more purity in the minds of certain painters: men like Braque and Picasso, who by following conventions as faithfully arrive at a fantastically similar result.⁹⁹

A crucial passage shows that Cowley, running counter to the pure aestheticism in vogue among his contemporaries, admired Racine in part for recognizing the inextricability of aesthetics and morality and was attracted to his fundamental and affirmative humanism. For Racine, as for Cowley, art created value and bestowed meaning and dignity upon human life:

. . . I have never been able to decide whether a given emotion was moral or aesthetic. I admire the facility with which the disciples of Croce settle such questions, but in the case of Racine aesthetics and morality are mingled to such a degree that it requires nothing less than a Crocean act of faith to disentangle them. Racine himself made no such attempt . . . even Croce might be surprised to find that it is the tragedies written with a definite moral purpose which are most satisfying from the standpoint of pure aesthetics. Can a pure aesthetic exist? To deny that literature has a moral significance leaves

the conception of morality intact, but it subtracts an important element from literature.

And as a matter of fact the Racinian tragedy, for all its plastic value, is moral to a supreme degree. It is moral for reasons which neither Croce nor Racine himself have mentioned: because it reasserts, in the face of doubts which assail us continually, the importance of man's destiny, the reality of his passions, the dignity of the human animal. We are apt to lose interest in these qualities. Our actions have no more meaning than is conferred on them by art or religion. To write about fashions, travels, books is a trade which any intelligence can perform. Judge an author rather by his manner of describing death and maternity and love, or by his courage to assail these commonplace subjects. After Racine the mass of contemporary literature seems tangential and petty; he takes our attention violently, and it is precisely the violence of his tragedies that makes them a moral spectacle.¹⁰⁰

Cowley concluded his essay with a plea for a more precise definition of classicism, even if he recognized that it was not "a historical phenomenon which [could] be limited in time" but belonged to any period. He posited Racine as preeminently "the classical type" and ventured a personal definition:

[Classicism] is an approach, through the discipline of arbitrary conventions, to a form which is perfect and abstract. At the same time classicism remains intelligibly human. It is concerned with people instead of nature or the supernatural; it considers the moral rather than the picturesque value of their actions; it does not avoid their most rigorous ideas or their most violent emotions. It is an ideal that is tenable in any age, today more than ever, for by following its principles one can create a literature which is fresh and unimitative, which is contemporary and which avoids the excesses of contemporary sentiment.¹⁰¹

While affirming the feasibility of a vital contemporary literature based on classical principles, Cowley also acknowledged, as he wrote Burke, that "the whole classical movement is only a part of literature and not the ideal for everybody." Under the impact of his Dadaist enthusiasm, Cowley's allegiance to classicism, if still undented, had become qualified; he ended his essay on a tangent, making a bow to contemporary romanticism:

Dignity grows tiresome. In spite of its claim of being total, the classical ideal is no more complete than the romantic; the very nature of it is to exclude and eliminate. A world grows up outside its barriers. Its conventions become laws; a generation is born which wears them as chains; either they strangle the

theatre or else are broken away. As long as a nation retains its vitality classical and romantic periods succeed each other. The desire for change is the most durable convention. Unquestionably the last age was romantic.¹⁰²

If Cowley remained "a classicist au fond," favoring elegance and restraint, a part of him also remained disposed to romantic excitement and defiance. He always retained an eclectic openness to modern experimentation. In the end, he was less opposed to the avant-garde than skeptical of certain of its manifestations--he still hoped to be part of modern literature but wanted to shift its course into more desirable directions. Thus as an antidote to the tiresome dignity of classicism he might amuse himself by composing obscene songs and limericks or give free reign to his Dada-inspired capacity for moral outrage by composing an "Open Letter to Gertrude Stein," in which he virulently denounced her "doctrinary modernism," fulminated against her obscurantist "snobisme," voiced his disgust at the numerous "hidden allusions" to lesbianism in her writings, and dubbed her "the bulkiest bore of our century."¹⁰³

Cowley thought highly enough of his essay on Racine to have it privately printed as a pamphlet in Paris. Shortly before embarking for the States, he carried the essay to a printer's offices at the Boulevard St. Jacques and entered into a contract for 200 blue-covered copies at an estimated cost of thirty-five dollars. After Cowley's departure from France, the printing and proofreading of the pamphlet were supervised by Harold Loeb. The French printer, however, failed to make good speed, despite Loeb's repeated urgings, and the business dragged on through the summer and fall. The delay was partly caused by Cowley's temporary inability to pay the printing bill. In mid-September he submitted a slightly amended version of the essay to Van Wyck Brooks, who he expected would be sympathetic to its approach, commenting that "by the definition which I made myself, I cannot be a classicist, but I admire Racine immensely." The essay, too long to be printed integrally, appeared in two consecutive issues of The Freeman in October. Its remuneration helped to meet printing expenses in Paris and by late November copies of the pamphlet had been sent off to Cowley in New York.¹⁰⁴

Round the turn of the year he began distributing the pamphlet to as many of his literary friends and acquaintances as he felt might share an interest in Racine, but, having dispatched some forty or fifty copies, made the "humiliating discovery" that he could not stretch the list of

names any further. He was left with a hundred-odd copies of the pamphlet, which for years he saved in the closets of his various habitations, until he tired of lugging them about and discarded most of them. The dozen or so surviving copies subsequently became collectors' items. In 1960, Cowley remembered, a "slightly foxed" copy brought thirty-five dollars, about the price he had paid for the entire batch in 1923; in 1970 it was offered at the rare-book market for seventy-five dollars.¹⁰⁵

At the time those fortunate enough to receive the pamphlet were almost unanimously enthusiastic. Charles Townsend Copeland gratefully accepted Cowley's humble dedication--"To Copey in default of a better gift." Glenway Wescott (who was eager to make Cowley's acquaintance, having missed him several times in Paris) wrote to say that "your Racine study seems to me very important and finely done." Scofield Thayer enjoyed the essay and said as much in a letter. Foster Damon thought the piece "very stimulating" and found it strengthened his conviction that "Stravinsky and his circle were classicists." He proposed Cowley "set up as a founder of the New Criticism," provided such would not interfere with his poetry. William Slater Brown shared Damon's enthusiasm, judging the essay "a very fine piece of work" and believing Cowley showed the makings of an excellent critic precisely because he was a creative artist first. The response of Gorham Munson, who not long before had eulogized Cowley's poetry in The New Republic, was more severely critical. Though the enmity between both men had come to a head in the fall, Munson's critique was ostensibly devoid of rancor and seemed largely inspired by his exploration of a literary path opposite from Cowley's, one which would soon lead him to the mysticism of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. But the memory of Munson's sharp response would rankle. Though he found Cowley's essay "well worth reading," Munson remained unconvinced that Cowley had "seen through to the end the passional and moral significance of Racine" and felt his approach to classicism was "too structural or formal." In places Cowley tended to "waver and glide too rapidly" and drew conclusions ("The desire for change is the most durable convention") that were "too facile." Cowley, Munson pointedly charged, had failed to consider the inroads made by science into the realm of poetry, morality and religion: "The issue between classicist and romantic is out of the hands of the artist. . . . The battle is being fought out in the at present immensely more intelligent world of scientists. They are giving

us a new universe: the stabilities which propped up classicism are gone."¹⁰⁶

Whatever the limitations of his essay, Racinian tragedy continued to function as an important critical and literary touchstone in Cowley's writings. Even at the height of his "red romance" he periodically reverted to Racine as the prototype of elegance and good writing. And in the late 1950s, in a long essay on the "Five Acts of The Scarlet Letter," he argued that Hawthorne's novel gained "a new dimension" from being read as "a Racinian drama of dark necessity."¹⁰⁷ Throughout Cowley's long career, indeed, his explorations of French classical drama in the early 1920s remained a crucial part of his intellectual baggage, the exemplary proof of an impressive literary erudition perpetually radiating from his work in a quiet and unobtrusive fashion.

Throughout his last six months in France the prospect of returning to America filled Cowley with alternate relief and apprehension, as he saw himself forced to think pragmatically about the future and lay concrete plans. Prior to his prospective sailing in late June, he intended to collect translation rights, make himself the "agent for half a dozen French authors," and carry home "a batch of suggestions" to American publishers. Upon his return he planned to spend "a hectic fortnight in New York" to dispose of translations and get commissions for articles, then to retire to his parental farm in Belsano for the remainder of the summer, to write and to fish. Afterwards--reviving a persisting dream--he hoped to purchase a cheap farmhouse near New York and "dig in for the winter." "The program solaces me with leaving Europe," he told Loeb in early February.¹⁰⁸

As often, hopes exceeded possibilities. Translation rights were easy enough to come by: in late February Pierre MacOrlan granted him, on generous terms, the rights for the English translation of his works. Cowley had already translated four episodes from On Board the 'Morning Star' for Harold Loeb, at a "starvation price" of 156 francs; they were published in the August 1923 Broom. For later issues he translated work by Louis Aragon, Roger Vitrac and Philippe Soupault. From France he asked Burke to look into the New York market for translations and, in early

March, earnestly requested terms and particulars about a farming property Burke had recently located near Andover, New Jersey, in hopes of founding "a Platonic republic" there--"Is there an orchard? Timber? How many acres? Are there trout in the trout stream you mention? Does the garden look promising? What is the fare to New York, and how many hours?" Believing that, with difficulty, he "could manage perhaps \$250 down," Cowley urged Burke to "try to get an option," provided the terms proved satisfactory. After years of wandering from one habitation to the next, he was "really very serious" about purchasing a farm and hoped he and Peggy could "return to something settled" in the country.¹⁰⁹

More immediately, his problem was how to finance his voyage home. In an effort to find money for steamer tickets, he wrote, at two dollars a piece, a series of briefers for The Dial, in addition to a number of longer reviews. "A fit of work is on me and the typewriter sings gaily for several hours a day." Two months later he complained of having relapsed into a "state of Slavic volitionalism" and seemed no nearer a solution of his financial problem: "Hell's bells." He tried, without success, to peddle a translation of Aragon to American magazines and was upset by his failure to gauge its sales potential on his native market. At the end of May, seeing no immediate prospect of future betterment, he appealed to James Sibley Watson of The Dial for a \$200 advance. He was depressed at his inability to make more money by writing than he had, despite his determination to "plunge into work and write and write for money," and could only conclude: "As a money-maker I'm a mediocre poet, and as a poet I'm a mediocre money-maker." Though, by his own calculation, he had earned as much as \$654 during the past year, he anticipated with anxiety the day of return to a hackwriting existence in Manhattan.¹¹⁰

During much of July Cowley was kept busy struggling to round off his French adventure and to make the rudimentary arrangements for a new life in America. He faced his immediate future with trepidation. "I get stagefright every time I think of New York," he confessed to Burke. "How in hell's name are we going to live?" He did not have a place to spend the prospected fortnight; he did not even know where to send his trunks once he docked in New York harbor. "We are going to arrive in New York without a cent, and once we arrive God knows what we shall do," he wrote in despair to John Brooks Wheelwright. "I don't want to go back to

starving in one room." The situation was not quite as desperate as he imagined. Though he did not particularly relish the idea of resuming office work, there was the assuaging prospect of a part-time job on Broom, a promise held out by Matthew Josephson. The practical incommunities of the moment, however, were depressing enough. To pay off his small remaining debts in France he was forced once more to appeal for a loan to Wheelwright. In early July he received the \$200 he had requested from "Doc" Watson. Shortly after he arranged for passage on July 28.¹¹¹

The discouraging efforts to scrape together sufficient funds for his return voyage brought home to him how bracing, comfortable and, above all, unencumbered had been his life in France. "Liberty--nearly at an end," he noted in a letter in early June, lamenting the fact that he was "drawing near the end of our European adventure." He received high-spirited letters from Burke and Josephson describing the bibulous delights to be enjoyed in Prohibition America, but even the promise of "a good bat" upon his return ("I suppose I'll need it. I haven't been drunk since October 1922") could not make New York seem anything but "a distant and difficult mirage." Cowley's misgivings were of a complex kind. His two-year exposure to a wide array of varying and often conflicting aesthetic theories, doctrines and manifestoes had brought a clarification of ideas without giving him the fully defined philosophy of life and art he had sought. The acceleration of his intellectual and literary development had exposed his dangerous inclination--proof of underlying insecurity and confusion--to adopt the protective coloring of his intellectual and literary surroundings. "We are both showing ourselves the rebellious slaves of environment, even our rebellion being determined by our slavery," he had observed to Burke in late January, adding a few days later: "It frightens me to see how dependent on environment I am, and I'll be glad at least to be in the same country with you. Six months more."¹¹²

Inclined to absorb and reflect rather than dominate and direct his literary ambience, Cowley would struggle to control the pressures of environment and to preserve a core of personal integrity throughout the decade, as lengthy entries in his notebooks of these years testify.¹¹³ If, in moments of despondency, he felt much like a literary chameleon, his attitudes and ideas actually showed greater consistency than he

thought. Though his self-doubt might occasionally get the better of him and undermine his self-confidence, he never lost his belief in the primacy of human intelligence and its ability to control human experience. "Man progresses by rationalizing his world," he wrote in his notebook around 1924. "Wild forces are directed to man's uses, brought under the light of logic . . . good actions are deliberate actions, while bad actions are those forced on us by circumstances. The good man is he who controls the greatest number of factors in his own life." Such a principle of individual morality, coupled with his belief in the controlling power of the human mind ("I am sentimentally drawn to every philosopher who endeavors to give a proof of free will, as churchmen were drawn to every philosopher who offered a metaphysical basis for the authority of the church"), likewise infused Cowley's literary preferences. It helps to explain his acute dislike of "authors like Sherwood Anderson and D. H. Lawrence whose doctrine is one of surrender to our instincts. Surrender, drift, passivity, a feeling which is generally compensated by mysticism."¹¹⁴

On the threshold of his return to America Cowley feared that a resumption of his former life as a "humble citizen of Grub Street" might undo the moral and literary gleanings of his last two years. "I am certain that New York and the attempt to make money will change me again completely." But if the feverish intellectual excitement of his European years made him long for "some stable environment in which one's ideas could develop in more orderly progression," he also remained wary of a mode of life which might lead to a narrowing of intellectual interests and a contraction of the circle of experience—"it has been a mistake of yours and mine to avoid experience," he wrote Burke in early June. "We have lost by it." He pursued the subject in the privacy of his notebook, sharply denouncing what he termed "the fallacy of contraction:"

Writers often speak of 'saving their energies' as if each man were given a nickle's worth of energy which he was at liberty to spend--one cent on livelihood, one cent on love, two cents either on literature or other wasteful activities, and the remainder on a big red apple--On the contrary, the mind of a poet is more like Fortunatus' purse--the more spent, the more it supplies.

It is this false theory of energy which leads to the fallacy of contraction. To contract one's circle of experience. To take no interest in politics or economics, but to speak solely of literary things. But the literary things, losing their roots in

general life, wither. They turn to literary gossip . . .

Where writers chose to follow the fallacy of contraction, Cowley believed, they violated what he defined as "the aim of literature:" "the work of expanding the human mind to its extremest limits of thought and feeling."¹¹⁵

In conformity with such a broad conception Cowley, on the eve of his departure, entered in his notebook a definition of "The Man of Letters" which, though partly derived from his studies and his meetings with a wide variety of French writers, had grown into a personal ideal. The man of letters, he observed, was not exclusively or primarily a novelist, essayist or dramatist. Rather, he was "a man whose province is all of literature, a man who devotes himself to letters as one might devote a life to God or the Poor; a man for whom literature is an end in itself. Examine the career of such a man--Dryden, Boileau, Poe, Baudelaire, Duhamel and you will find that he is primarily a poet." Cowley's thought remained marked by contradictions which he would long struggle to resolve. If, in accordance with his earlier Symbolist ideals, he demanded of the writer an almost religious devotion to literature as "an end in itself," he also believed, as he had observed to Burke and later wrote in Exile's Return, that the man of letters "should concern himself with every department of human activity, including science, sociology and revolution." By 1923 Cowley had become convinced that literature desiccated when it lost its "roots in general life."¹¹⁶ The political pertinence of such a belief did not become clear until after the Crash of 1929; divested of political coloration, however, it remained an axiom of his literary creed.

Whatever Cowley's apprehensions, he had benefited enormously from his French venture. He had considerably broadened the scope of his experience, had gained in knowledge about life and art, and had grown in critical and literary self-assurance. His personal acquaintanceship with a broad range of artistic modes and possibilities had corroborated his propensity for an eclectic and pluralist approach in criticism; literature, he already saw, was "a house with many windows." His experiences with Broom and Secession, however peripheral his editorial involvement so far, had publicly placed him in the vanguard of modernity and experiment, exposed to him the pitfalls of literary politics, and pointed up the difficulty of preserving a sense of literary solidarity

even among the members of his own age-group. Having come in search of a viable mode of the artistic life, Cowley saw his ancient dream of a professional writing life in rural retreat yet urban proximity only reinforced by his European sojourn. From his early acquaintance with the French he retained in subsequent years an increasing feeling for the unity of culture and the interrelatedness of all aspects of the literary trade. Such a feeling derived in part from his studies in French classicism, which fostered his understanding of culture as the organic outgrowth of a social, historical and personal situation and, in the figure of Jean Racine, gave him a literary ideal--a writer fully integrated into and sustained by his social milieu--that he hoped to realize in his native ambience. For the time being, his understanding of the relationship between art and society remained superficial and incomplete; its social and political repercussions were hazily intuited at best. But the groundwork had been laid for the "little bundle of beliefs" that he carried with him through life--a fundamental humanism, a belief in the social and communicative function of art and in the "reciprocal connection" between artist and audience, a conviction of the need for a meaningful correlation between literature and contemporary life.¹¹⁷

Cowley returned home hoping to recreate in New York the "atmosphere of intellectual excitement and moral indignation" he had responded to with such fervor in the Paris of the Dadaists. His hopes for such a cultural transference were fanned by invigorating reports on his native country from Matthew Josephson who, since his return in the spring, had been making concerted efforts to launch the spirit of Dada in the United States, hoping to serve as its "high priest," and to act out his celebration of a machine-age aesthetics in the very country in which it had its origins. "America is getting nuttier and nuttier," he wrote Cowley in July. "The country is falling our way . . . the most colorful and preposterous life in the world is being lived in America." Infected by Josephson's ardor and sympathetic to his literary plans, Cowley proved a more than willing ally. What he did not realize at the time of his departure was that his hopes were built in part on a transparent delusion--that a vital culture could be transplanted from one country to another as if it were a marketable commodity--which was a blatant, if momentarily unperceived, violation of his classical belief in the organic

nature of culture. Predictably, the delusion would be punctured in future years. As he later saw, Cowley carried home with him a collection of values and beliefs derived from a foreign cultural ambience but of dubious applicability in his native country: "I was returning to New York with a set of values that bore no relation to American life, with convictions that could not fail to be misunderstood in a country where Dada was hardly a name, and moral judgments on literary matters were thought to be in questionable taste."¹¹⁸

From a distance of three thousand miles he had rediscovered the aesthetic potential of America and attained a new conception of his own role and position as an American writer. But in the process he had come to see America through a screen of nostalgia and idealism, in "a vision half-remembered, half-falsified and romanced." He had embarked on a search for a new literature celebrating the picturesque qualities of contemporary American life in an age of business, industry and technology--the towering skyscrapers, the roaring machines, the glamorous movies, the nervous rhythms of jazz, the banal advertising slogans--but his understanding of the human and social realities behind the glittering façade was superficial and deficient. As Cowley would find soon enough, it was one thing to lyrically invest the products of a commercial and technological society with artistic vitality and potential; it was another matter altogether to have to eke out a daily living as a writer in the massive anonymity of Manhattan. Predictably, also, Cowley's rural tastes were bound to clash with his extravagant if ironic "bravos for the spectacle of American business." In "The Peppermint Gardens," a poem capturing Cowley's mood on the brink of his return, he voiced his tiredness of the classical, "ordered beauty" of a tradition-bound, cultivated European landscape--a landscape cultural as much as rural--and expressed a nostalgic preference for the wild disorder and the humble natural beauties that made up "the magic of my country." Saturated with a "country sliced into even squares / of peppermint candy by garden walls," where even plum trees grew in "geometrical rows," Cowley longed to return to "a country where briars sprout / under the crazily twisted gum trees, / an imprecise, untutored country / where all the gardens are inside out."¹¹⁹

Cowley had sought "salvation" in cultural exile, only to discover the inutility of expatriation. As he would find soon enough, the cultural

dilemmas he had dramatized by his departure from America survived his coming home. He had yet to discover that expatriation was less geographical or external than psychological or internal--the artist's experience, in R. P. Blackmur's words, of "the fundamental failure of coherence between the cultural, political and economic energies of contemporary society"--and that it was painfully possible to be a spiritual exile at home.¹²⁰

Cowley left Paris on August 2, 1923, the day President Warren G. Harding died in California, to confront an American literary and cultural climate hardly less dispiriting than the one he had left two years before. When, some ten days after leaving Paris, he landed at the French Line Pier of New York harbor, he hardly realized how incompatible was the idealized mental picture of America he carried home from France with the forbidding reality of living and writing in the shadows of Manhattan's downtown skyscrapers. Eight years later, in the early stages of writing Exile's Return, he felt that "everything I learned in France, the whole course of my thinking, had prepared me for an uncomfortable season of readjustment." In effect, Cowley's next two years would be a time of uneasy accommodation to a once familiar environment. The ethical and aesthetic beliefs with which he returned would prove but a "dubious" foundation for such high-minded purposes as he envisioned for himself: the transplantation to New York of the intellectual milieu of exuberant defiance and moral excitement he had relished among the Dadaists in Paris. In retrospect Cowley was forced to acknowledge that the attempt had been fated to miscarry: "Looking back at the early autumn of my return, I cannot help feeling that most of my decisions, though made for the highest moral reasons, were ill-suited to the circumstances and costly in their results."¹

In August 1923 Cowley arrived in New York in the highest of spirits, if with pockets virtually empty. For the moment, as he faced the problem of where to send his luggage and how to obtain lodgings for Peggy and himself, practical necessities claimed priority and telephone and taxicab usurped his last five dollars. Soon enough, the Cowleys were established on the top floor of an old house owned by Frances Gifford, a friend of Peggy, far downtown on 16 Dominick Street, almost in the shadow of the

Woolworth Building; it must have been, Cowley felt in retrospect, "the most battered and primitive lodging in New York." Almost immediately he sought out Matthew Josephson at 45 King Street, on the southern border of the Village, where he had been struggling to keep Broom afloat since his return from Berlin in the spring. Together they laid plans for an exciting future. Josephson recalled how Cowley, in the first flush of exhilaration upon his return, went about improvising ditties to be sung to ragtime tunes, one of them in honor of Broom: "We got a movement, a little movement, / And our movement she's all right!"²

The innocence of Cowley's ideas would become apparent soon enough, but for the moment he was more than willing to sample the exciting cultural offerings of the city and to let himself be enchanted by the magical spectacle of New York in the age of business and the machine:

Allagazam, allagazam, the great show is about to begin. The fire-trucks dizzily skidding, the journey through mammoth caves, the song of riveting hammers, the death-defying leaps from beam to beam on the fortieth storey. Allagazam, step up. See the genuine gangsters, the old pretzel women, the ghetto, the African village, the business men dictating to three stenographers and a dictaphone. Come out with the crowd, tonight, aw, be a sport. Buy the elixir of happiness, only fifty cents at my bar. Step up, allagazam. . . .³

Laced with irony, Cowley's celebration of the city shows that his enthrallment was mostly with the colorful, picturesque surface of modern city life. As in the war, he was still inclined to adopt an essentially spectatorial attitude towards contemporary reality; he viewed the city as a "great show," especially enacted for his benefit, without more than a superficial understanding of the complex human reality behind the glittering, kaleidoscopic urban panorama. If, in accordance with the aesthetic beliefs he had evolved in France, Cowley was to succeed in artistically negotiating the thrilling urban scene spread out before him, he would have to find a way of meaningfully integrating his rhapsodic savorings of the aesthetic splendor and potential of the city with a more profound appreciation of the deleterious social effects and human expenditure of urban-technological reality. For a writer who insisted on the inseparability of literature from contemporary life, it would be necessary to find a way of overcoming the degree of alienation implicit in his spectatorial stance, in order to attain his Racinian ideal of an organic integration of artist and milieu.

Back in New York Cowley's first and foremost need was to find a source of income. Not only did the debts he had made in France "weigh heavily" on his conscience--in order to finance his return voyage and to have his Racine pamphlet printed he had had to borrow money from Wheelwright, Loeb and Kitty Cannell, whom he hoped to reimburse in part from the sale of his "Racine" articles to The Freeman--above all, he needed to find the kind of job that would provide him with enough money to satisfy his and Peggy's elementary needs, without depriving him of the time or energy to write. Faced with the choice between free-lance authorship and a regular office job, Cowley's fear of surrendering to commercial compromise proved stronger than the deterrence of a daily nine-to-five routine. Because he feared that, as a free lance, his writing would inevitably be affected by the need to sell it on the literary market, he chose to make his money in the daytime in a different sphere, the world of advertising copywriters, thus saving his remaining hours for what he hoped could be "the disinterested practice of the art of letters."⁴

Cowley's justification for adopting a split mode of existence--by day a copywriter in the service of a business civilization, by night a free and independent writer with an aversion to corrupting his talents--seemed a direct violation of his aesthetic creed. Not until some two years later did he realize that he had opted for a self-defeating life-style; only then did he understand that "when one's writing ceases to have a functional relationship to one's life, when it becomes a way of spending otherwise idle evenings, it loses part of its substance."⁵ By then, Cowley would be ready to risk the occupational and commercial hazards of a free-lance existence, though this time the venture would be undertaken from a new seat of operation, in the country.

At the end of August, after a hurried vacation out of town, Cowley resumed work with Sweet's Catalogue Service Inc., serving as proofreader, copywriter and "general utility man" at a modest salary, but one which at least kept him from hackwriting. On the whole, the office was friendly and the job "a pleasant sort of refuge," involving not much arduous work, except during the two months before the annual edition of the catalogue had to go to press. Much to his misfortune, Cowley was reemployed in the midst of the annual prepublication rush; for the first six weeks at Sweet's he was kept working under pressure from nine to ten hours a day,

sometimes longer, and deprived of any opportunity or desire for a "disinterested" pursuit of literature. "The prospect is disheartening," he complained to Wheelwright; "I cannot write." To Loeb he wrote: "From August 29 till October 5, I was working so hard that my sole recreation was to play a rubber of bridge and drop off to sleep."⁶

If Cowley's reminiscences do not contain much evidence that he experienced any sense of incongruity in being employed at Sweet's--"Copywriting for Sweet's Catalogue was merely stating the facts about honest products"--an entry in his notebook of the time expressed more ambivalent feelings. Exploring the artistic possibilities of American advertising--an interest first developed under the influence of the Dadaists' vociferous enthusiasm for the autochthonous expressions of machine-age America--Cowley sounded much like a man trying to convince himself of a truth he only half believes in:

Advertising. Advertising is one of the arts, certainly, but an applied art, like ceramics, mortuary sculpture, writing for the magazines. It is more important than any of these, because in advertising there is still a certain virtue in being original. There is a great deal of liberty in advertising, within its definite restrictions. Also, one is working with new materials; one is combining drawing with literature in a fashion which Picasso and Picabia arrived at, independently.

By the definite nature of its aims, advertising is held to a certain economy of means, which is the only rule of good taste. It is never as bad as the work of people who set out deliberately for Beauty and Eternity.

Advertising is a group art, an anonymous art, and it is the cathedral of 1923, erected to the deity whom all of us worship: bow down, brethren, before the possession of a butler, a chauffeur, four motorcars, Success!

Hart Crane said that advertising could only appeal to the acquisitive instincts. It is the wrong way to state a truth. Advertising is the literature of a religion with a creed: buy more. Increase your wants: that way lies happiness. It is exactly as true as the opposite doctrine of Epicurus.

A decade later, writing Exile's Return, Cowley acknowledged that, in his efforts to adjust to the literary situation of America in the booming Coolidge years, he made the mistake of assuming "too many obligations." In addition to the pressing work at Sweet's, he was now associate editor of the "new" American Broom ("a position without pay or honor"), and was expected to assist Josephson in his lone but frantic endeavors to keep the magazine from expiring.⁸ Until October 5, however, when Sweet's

Architectural Catalogue was published, Cowley's share of the editorial work was minimal and Josephson, in effect, exerted sole control over the management of Broom.

Still, the ulterior purpose of his efforts remained inviolate: to recreate in New York City a congenial cultural milieu infused with a spirit of defiant activism and youthful exuberance, prerequisite to a proper appreciation of the artistic value of the dazzling contemporary American scene. On the surface, literary conditions seemed encouraging enough. On the wave of a booming national economy American literature, too, seemed to be "entering a period of excitement and inflation." There was a profusion of writing jobs, publishers and literary markets. From literary journalists like Burton Rascoe one gained the impression that there was "an appalling overproduction of genius" and that American writing was on the threshold of a new golden age. But even so, Cowley remained dissatisfied with what he felt was a lack of moral fervor and true courage in the literary climate. He was disturbed by the failure of American artists to seriously negotiate the challengingly new urban-technological scene before them and transmute it into art. Instead of being true to their vocation as poets, too many chose to withdraw into a riskless mode of life, to escape into expatriation or the past. In his notebook Cowley whipped himself up to a state of moral indignation as he demanded an infusion of new literary oxygen:

Poets should be suppressed. . . .

Poets, if one defines the term in accordance with its application, are people with a certain weak attitude toward the world they live in. They cannot digest it. They cannot make it poetry. Poetry is an acid which eats away values and deposits new values, like salts, on the open plumbing of new civilizations. A civilization without poetry is unbearable. Poets find that American civilization is unbearable because they lack the force to transmute it into poetry.

They cling to a certain ideal. A life without subways and typewriters, with trees, leisure, dogs, love burning "with a hard gemlike flame." Perhaps in Europe they could find it? They emigrate. They are disappointed. They take refuge in a past: Greek, medieval, piratical, Western-pioneer, with costumes which lend a facile atmosphere. Poets discovered the West somewhat later than did the movie directors, and poets have never discovered the movies. Poetry is a combination of elements which have never met before. Is there any poetry in the volumes of Edna Millay?

The game is so easy, so tame; there are no risks; we have allowed them to take a title which belonged to more

adventuresome spirits; now let us make the title worthless. To cast ridicule on poets by every means at our command, to attack them, physically if necessary, to clear the air so that breathing is possible!⁹

"People need to be shocked, have pins stuck in their buttocks, made to think," Cowley had fulminated to Witter Bynner on the eve of his departure from Giverny. His Dadaist desire to provoke and activate was only fanned when, back in America, he felt himself surrounded by a literary atmosphere of aimless, sluggish apathy. In his notebook he returned to what he now had come to think of as "an inevitable project"--"the analysis of this literary age"--and diagnosed a present "crisis in literature." He was persuaded that "all the machinery for a literary renaissance" was at hand (there was a reading public "interested in literature, eager for novelty," and there were publishers "prosperous" and "willing to experiment"), yet he looked about in vain for the writers of the new risorgimento. Fashionable authors like Anderson and Dreiser he decried as "muggy and ill-defined Rousseauists," who lacked discipline and uncritically worshiped freedom and the libido: "I find them fundamentally antipathetic, fundamentally vulgar." But even the writers with whose aims he felt in sympathy—he singled out Edmund Wilson as "an excellent example . . . more excellent because I do not know him intimately"--disappointed him: "They are 'bored' by this, 'not interested' in that, overcome by inertia, without direction. Their actions are apt to be dictated by irritated nerves. They tend to be reactionary in the sense of being antagonistic to their age." As an antidote to such negativism, Cowley envisioned the forthcoming "genius" of the times as one fully alive to the multifarious possibilities of the contemporary scene, at home in many different fields of human endeavor but enslaved by none, and marked by a sparkling enthusiasm for life:

Now the genius of this age, if he appears, will work with the instruments provided by this age: he will know science, and business, and applied psychology; he will even make use of publicity, as a tool. His mind will be keen, but he will forge ahead by virtue of a certain zest in living, which we seem to have lost. I ought to make the portrait of this shining, mechanical, electric creature.¹⁰

Cowley's Emersonian hopes for reanimating a sluggish cultural milieu centered on Broom. On October 5 the nineteenth edition of Sweet's

Architectural Catalogue came out and Cowley could begin to assume a more active role in the magazine's precarious adventures, both as editor and writer. Since Josephson's return to America in the spring he had single-handedly reestablished Broom in New York and managed to find a new angel, his brother-in-law Maxwell Geffen, who was willing to extend a line of printing credit despite the fact that in America publication costs were twice as high as in Europe; even after a reduction of Broom's size and format to save expenses, he was ready to accept a loss on each successive issue. For several months Josephson had been combining the functions of editor-in-chief, business manager, advertising director, proofreader, fundraiser, subscription manager, manuscript reader and general errand boy. He had strongly steered Broom towards a celebration of the contemporary scene and made it into an effective instrument of what Burke ironically called "our Great Young New American Movement." In addition to Burke and William Slater Brown, formally Broom's third associate editor but too busy writing in the country to offer much practical assistance, Josephson had managed to persuade a considerable number of other writers and artists to stand by Broom and offer material for the first few American numbers. Among them were the painter Edward Nagle, stepson of the sculptor Gaston Lachaise and a college friend of Cummings and Dos Passos, who served as advisor and contributor on art; Glenway Wescott, the young novelist from Wisconsin, recently returned from France; Jean Toomer, the young black novelist and poet, parts of whose Cane appeared in Broom; the poet Isidor Schneider, then an employee at Boni & Liveright's; and Charles Sheeler, one of America's leading avant-garde painters. William Carlos Williams pledged his continuing allegiance and contributed several poems as well as sections from his In the American Grain. Hart Crane continued to move in the circle of writers associated with Broom, but his relations with Josephson were strained and he did not contribute to any of the magazine's American issues. Cowley, too, had been busy mustering support for Broom. During his voyage home he had met Ramon Guthrie, a poet, one-time ambulance driver and aviator, who was returning to America with a French wife and a doctorate from the University of Toulouse. Later Guthrie became a well-known teacher and Proust scholar at Dartmouth and, towards the end of his life, composed a booklength poem, Maximum Security Ward, much admired by Cowley. In the fall of 1923 Guthrie was quickly enlisted in the ranks of Broom.¹¹

By early October Cowley's more active help was sorely needed. A month earlier Josephson had written to Loeb: "Cowley is in the mess of returning to America and reestablishing, otherwise he would be a bulwark. . . . I must say that he has been very helpful and concerned; that France in the last while changed him much for the better." With Cowley's assistance Josephson had drawn up an editorial program for Broom which involved the presentation of more American writers and artists and fewer translations from Europe. In the first American Broom, printed in July 1923, Harold Loeb surveyed the "internal evolution" of the magazine's editorial policy over the past two years and described the "nucleus of American writers of the youngest generation" to which the new Broom was now openly, if not exclusively, committed. Loeb emphasized their "wholehearted disapproval" of the preceding generation of Anderson, Dreiser, and Lewis, and pointed up their affirmative Americanism:

The men of this group are not shocked by the disclosure that stockyards are congenial hangouts for neither man nor beast. They cannot confess even to surprise when told that newspapers occasionally misrepresent the facts. Although interested in the social customs of Main Street, they are dubious whether a reformed Main Street, with a little theatre, Community Pageants, Modern Book Shop and Birth Control Club would be more attractive and happier. . . . They may like billposters no more than does Van Wyck Brooks, but they do not contend that such things are done better in Europe. Rather they hold that there is a great deal to be said for the American system of going the limit if you are going to go it at all. They keep an open mind toward the phenomenon of contemporary industrialism, and devote themselves to the more immediate task of men of letters: writing well.

The writers associated with Broom, Loeb continued, were distrustful of "current panaceas" for social and political ills and abjured "the doctrines of poets on economics and of novelists on psychoanalysis." What marked them was an "unusual concentration on problems of form and style." Singling out Burke, Josephson and Cowley as the nucleus of Broom, Loeb analyzed the distinctive features of each member of the triumvirate:

Kenneth Burke, perhaps stimulated by research in plastic mediums for what Clive Bell calls "significant form," has been studying its elusive equivalent in writing. His stories, which discard the old binding of plot or narrative, obtain unity by what he calls a super-plot: "the structural framework which appeals to us over and above the message of the line," or

paragraph.

The experiments of Malcolm Cowley are even more diversified. He believes that every literary conception has an ideal form. In the search for it he has evolved nearly as many forms as he has written poems. He is not afraid to write about contemporary phenomena, and does not share the fashionable gesture of horror toward them. Matthew Josephson is another who is able to discover food for poetry in the "crackle of typewriters, comptographs, dictaphones and phonographs" or "dropping dishes in the effervescent crater" of that part of the restaurant one does not think about. His talent is not quite so intellectualized as Burke's or Cowley's, not so dependent on theories based on reason, but more instinctive, drawing directly on the subconscious. Thus, his critical writing does not illuminate by studied analysis and synthesis so much as by the unexpected phrase or word that opens vistas of indefinite extension. . . .

All of these have a love of rhetoric, of mouth-filling explosive phrases, unlike the emotional breast-juggling of recent years and more akin to the eloquence of the Elizabethans.

At last, Loeb concluded, Broom was giving up its "vagabond career" and settling down "in the country to which it belongs."¹²

Ironically, if unintentionally, Loeb's survey of the first two years of Broom marked his final contribution to the magazine. Though nominally he remained chief editor, his position in Europe made it practically impossible for him to play an active part in the process of editorial decision making in New York. Loeb's actual editorial involvement with Broom fell off sharply during the fall, as he was more and more absorbed in writing his novel Doodab. Though he remained strongly committed to the magazine, a series of misunderstandings about the serialization of parts of Doodab in Broom created tensions between the three editors and hurt Loeb's feelings to the point where he threatened to resign. In effect, as Loeb rightly if painfully suspected, his editorial title was rapidly becoming "merely honorary."¹³

Cowley was represented in the first American issue of Broom by his translations of four episodes from Pierre MacOrlan's On Board the 'Morning Star', as well as by the last in his series of imaginary portraits, "Snapshot of a Young Lady," which he had worked on between March and June in Giverny. Louis Aragon liked it well enough to undertake a French translation. The story was a fantasy burlesque of a detective story; it surrendered realistic conventions of verisimilitude as well as traditional devices of plot, chronology and linear narrative structure,

and parodied the improbable mixture of astounding riches, horrendous crime, brutal murder and sentimental, wanton love, which marked the plots of countless popular tales and movies.¹⁴

Broom's September issue even more strongly reflected the editors' flamboyant appreciation of the multifarious expressions of contemporary American culture. It featured essays on the American motion picture by Philippe Soupault, Robert Alden Sanborn and William Slater Brown (who preferred to speak of "sculptural kinetics whose esthetic value could be as significant as a work by Beethoven or Michel Angelo"). There were sections from Jean Toomer's Cane and from Williams's In the American Grain, as well as poems by Glenway Wescott and Isidor Schneider. Cowley appeared with his Dadaist improvisation of a funeral jig set to the rhythm of a popular ragtime tune, "Memphis Johnny," and Josephson with "Brain at the Wheel," an ironic poetic tribute to the mechanical genius of automobile tycoon Henry Ford. Cowley was enthusiastic about the September Broom and said as much to Loeb in his first communication from New York: "The second American issue of Broom impresses me very favorably. It has a great deal of unity, and ought to make a very definite, if hostile, impression."¹⁵

The emphasis on autochthonous forms of American cultural expression continued in Broom's third American issue. It featured American art by Edward Nagle and Joseph Stella, as well as a series of photographs and paintings by Charles Sheeler, ranging from his "Still Life" of a black telephone to his pictures of Bucks County barns. There was a group of sonnets on American prostitutes by E. E. Cummings, "Five Americans," a second section from Williams's In the American Grain and a portrait by Brown and Nagle of the idiosyncratic Joe Gould, followed by what purported to be "Chapter CCCLXVIII of Joseph Gould's History of the Contemporary World, to be published posthumously." The October issue had originally been planned as "a collection of political manifestoes," meant to shock a stuffy and dignified literary scene into an awareness of the aesthetic possibilities of present-day American realities, but it turned out, so Cowley judged from a perspective in the early 1930s, to be "a sad affair which proved, if nothing else, that we and the writers we published were innocent of political ideas." Nothing so pointed up that innocence as another, exuberantly satirical tribute by Matthew Josephson to Henry Ford, wizard of efficiency and mass production, beneficent

symbol of machine-age America, which culminated in Josephson's proposal of Ford as "the people's candidate" for the Presidency of the United States.¹⁶

With Josephson aggressively at the helm, Broom managed to attract a good deal of (not always favorable) attention. The magazine was written up in the New York Tribune and Evening Post, the Chicago Daily News, The Dial, The Nation and The New Republic. Burton Rascoe conducted a lengthy interview with the controversial leader of the "youthful iconoclasts" of Broom in his "Bookman's Day Book." From London a member of the older generation, John Gould Fletcher, wrote to pay his respects to "the new and successfully rejuvenated Broom;" he felt it was "showing signs of becoming the most interesting periodical in the U. S." Not all, however, were voices of critical acclaim. Edmund Wilson had earlier evinced skepticism about Cowley's and Josephson's Dadaist proclivities; recent issues of Broom had only strengthened his disapproval: "I can't hand the Broom crowd very much," he observed to John Peale Bishop; "Cowley, I think, has some ability but is sort of an ass, and Josephson is an ass with practically no observable ability." Several months later, assuming an attitude of above-the-battle impartiality in The New Republic, Wilson incorporated his views on the merit as well as the naivety of Josephson's ideas in "An Imaginary Conversation" between the editor of Broom and one of his favorite punchbags, Paul Rosenfeld.¹⁷

The Dial took a more subtle, if more ambivalent attitude towards the writers whom, following Gorham Munson, it dubbed "skyscraper primitives." In contrast with the members of the Seven Arts group, whose humanism had bred a mostly negative criticism of American culture, the writers of the Broom group appeared to the editors of The Dial to have come up with a program of "dogged optimism" which incorporated "the entire futurist credo"--"They can find, in advertising, movies, political buncombe, jazz, corrupt business tactics, bootleg, Billy Sunday, and so on, an endless 'wealth' of striking and picturesque material." But such an aesthetic veneration of machine-age America, the editors saw, conveniently sidestepped "the humanistic consideration." Between the negativism of the "humanistic approach" and the "dogged optimism" of a celebratory aestheticism, however, the editors of The Dial had trouble forging a reconciliation--"One can enjoy the whirr of a smoothly running motor, or one can see only the wreckage in human life which lies behind that

motor—and one is respectively skyscraper primitive or Seven Arts." The Broom group had chosen to pursue "the harder task," they granted; even their "omission of humanism" was not entirely indefensible: after all, it was "not the province of the artist to decide whether a given sensation is an asset or a detriment to the community." The skyscraper primitives, the editors reasoned, "accept the sensation simply as a fact, and exploit it." They could do so "with impunity" as long as they were "content to leave art on the plane of chessplaying or baseball, simply one more outlet for human energy," as long as they could be content with a relatively pure display of "skill without content." Mostly, however, they deserved praise for recognizing that "the machine is the dominant factor in contemporary life, and that America is the most highly mechanized country in the world, so that for better or worse the course of society for the next era is most likely to be settled in American terms."¹⁸

The Dial's criticism of the skyscraper primitives was pertinent and presciently relevant to the subsequent development of Cowley's position. Over the next few years he would become increasingly aware of the "missing" dimension of humanism--so central a tenet of the classicist aesthetics he had evolved in France—in his and Josephson's celebration of machine-age America. Concomitantly, he would grow increasingly disturbed by the modernist tendency toward a "pure" or "absolute poetry" and by the futility of a literature which more and more became a self-contained mode of lexical game-playing.¹⁹ A growing concern with the artist's social and human responsibility would pave the way for his radical commitments of the 1930s.

Despite Cowley's hopes that even adversary publicity might work in Broom's favor ("it is busy making enemies, and if it lasts long enough its enemies will put it over," he told Loeb), financially the magazine continued in a sorry state. Rising printing debts, dwindling resources and a shortage of new subscriptions were perpetual worries. A vigorous circulation campaign might momentarily revive the editors' hopes--"Broom seems [to be] doing better than we had expected, and two advertisements at \$50 each from Boni & Liveright and Harcourt, Brace will cut the deficit on the next issue to a couple of hundred dollars, which Geffen seems willing to cover"--but by the fall even the indefatigable Josephson was losing heart and began to view the prospects of Broom with growing pessimism. In Europe Loeb, too, seemed ready to throw up his

hands: "I have no more opinions about Broom's chances but let my spirits rise and fall in accordance with [the] last letter from New York." In October Cowley met with Josephson to decide upon the future course of the magazine. In order to limit expenses to \$500 or less per issue, they decided to once again reduce Broom's size (to forty-eight pages), abandon half-tones, and stop paying contributors, thus allowing Josephson to assume a business job on Wall Street and edit the magazine in his spare hours. Cowley was far from happy with the solution and confessed to Loeb that he felt "sceptical about the success of the undertaking, for a magazine needs one man's time. It might be better to go down in the glory of a last number."²⁰

Even more disillusioning than Broom's practical difficulties was the waning enthusiasm of the magazine's circle of friends and contributors. In early September Josephson complained to Loeb that "the 'group' which is roughly associated with Broom is in a remarkably sterile mood. The absence of any real cooperation . . . on the part of the younger generation is highly discouraging." Some time later Cowley wrote to Loeb in much the same spirit: "The crowd seems willing to help, but most people are in a condition where they can't write much. To get good material seems to be the hardest problem." A month later he voiced his growing exasperation with the apparent apathy of his literary friends: "the people I meet in New York seem to have lost all capacity for indignation and are content to accept the unimportance of their lot or to solace themselves with piddling drunks."²¹

Coming to Broom with a fresh commitment to spend as much of his time, energy and personal savings as he could afford on the struggle for its continuation, Cowley was not prepared to stand by passively and watch the magazine founder on the rock of its precarious finances or the indifference of its friends. Even if it was inevitable that Broom should die, at least its ending "must not be ignoble," he told Burke. "To die gently on an ebb tide is not my idea of death." Mindful of his Paris days, Cowley still hoped to buck the rising tide of apathy and to infuse the literary atmosphere with a new sense of excitement and defiance. "Cowley believes Broom should have a spectacular end," Josephson reported to Loeb. Indeed, Cowley had plans galore. Handbills were to be passed out and soapbox orations to be held in Union Square; a Dadaist manifestation was to be staged at a New York theater, complete with "violent and

profane attacks" on famous writers, mock-trials of prominent critics, and burlesques of cherished enemies like Anderson, Dell, Mencken and Rosenfeld—"anything," he later wrote, "that would add to the excitement of living or writing" and that would display a Dadaist disdain for "sanctity of American letters." In addition, some of such stunts might gain publicity for Broom and indirectly help to keep the magazine afloat.²² Most of Cowley's plans, however, were fated to remain in blueprint.

As a first step Cowley decided to call a meeting of all the writers and artists, friend and foe alike, who had contributed to Broom and Secession. In part, he wanted to gauge and, if possible, reactivate the commitment of Broom's supporters, so as to be able to determine the future of the magazine. More broadly, his aim was to discuss common problems and try to find a communal platform on which to proceed. Without defining his objectives with much intellectual precision, Cowley was persuaded that some form of "joint action" was necessary, if tepid and anemic conditions of the literary life were to be remedied and new standards and ideals given a lease on life. Therefore, he wanted the meeting to be a "catholic," nonpartisan one, which would "clear the air," compose factional quarrels, and, if possible, bring all together in a unified larger group. Sending out an urgent invitation to Burke, Cowley explained: "If we can get together in one room, we can at least define our positions, if we can make no plans to go ahead. Piddling Jesus. The people who can be content with art-for-art's-sake, three issues of a magazine composed of essays by G[orham] B. M[unson] and stories by W[aldo] F[rank] and an occasional glass of synthetic gin, will continue to be content. For God's sake, let's brew some stronger liquor. For God's sake, let's find out where people stand."²³

Cowley's hopes for unified cooperation in an atmosphere shot through with rankling personal conflicts and sharply diverging artistic positions were naively high. Josephson, not on the friendliest of terms with either Munson or Crane, was understandably skeptical of Cowley's plans. Though he admitted they were "logical and clearsighted," he had little confidence in the outcome of the "grand powwow" to be staged and went along only with some reluctance.²⁴

The ensuing meeting took place on October 19 in a small Italian restaurant and speakeasy on Prince Street, in "Little Italy." Most of the

writers Cowley had invited attended, among them Burke, Crane, Josephson, Light, Sanborn, Schneider and Wescott, as well as several spouses and nonwriting friends; altogether some thirty people were present. Williams, Stevens, Toomer, Brown and Nagle were out of town; the latter two sent professions of loyalty to be read at the meeting. Waldo Frank declined to attend, as did Gorham Munson, who was recuperating from an illness in Woodstock, in upstate New York. With Frank and Toomer absent, Hart Crane was left as Munson's sole supporter, a position he viewed with some misgivings. As he told Munson, he seemed fated to be "the only delegate from the higher spaces at the Broom conclave. . . . Very likely I'll play the most contrary rôle—make a scene or something before we get through." Shortly before, Crane, still full of rancor over Wheelwright's butchering of his "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" in the recently arrived September issue of Secession, had told Cowley that he had only "a very slight interest in the meeting" and was "unconcerned with its issues."²⁵

At Cowley's request Munson sent in a statement to be read out at the meeting; it presented, he told Cowley, what he considered "the primary issue." By his own account Munson was disturbed that Cowley's invitation failed to advance "good reasons for common action" and in his note sought to redress what he felt was the absence of a framework of philosophical ideas. In his statement he pleaded the necessity of "some conscious life-attitude" and borrowed a phrase from John Middleton Murry ("the passionate apprehension of life") to point up the missing dimension in Broom's approach: "life can once more become highly significant, and contemporary literature has a rôle to fulfil in bringing back significance to life." In the process of advancing his ulterior aim, however, Munson let himself be tempted into launching a violent and personal diatribe against Josephson, which made up the bulk of the letter. He denounced his former ally as a "literary opportunist" and "an intellectual faker," one who was dishonest, cunning, treacherous and notoriety-seeking, and proclaimed that any self-respecting modern movement must part from such as Josephson.²⁶

Munson's statement reflected his and Crane's growing interest in the mystical and visionary idealism of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. The latter's Tertium Organum, in particular, constituted a sort of "common bible" for a small circle of friends which, besides Crane and Munson, included Frank and Toomer.²⁷ Such an artistic and philosophical direction was strongly

at odds with Cowley's and Burke's hard-edged intellectualism and the formalist exploration of the aesthetic potential of machine-age America advocated in the pages of Broom. It was this basic divergence in artistic orientation that formed the deeper cause for the ensuing quarrels and raised them above the level of a mere conflict of personalities.

Cowley's reading of the letter was the dubious highlight of the meeting. In the middle of his reading, struck by Munson's pompous rhetoric, Cowley could not refrain from letting his personal prejudices get the better of him and gave free reign to his instinct for parodic comedy: "I began to read it seriously to my audience, but halfway through I was overcome by a sense of absurdity and began to declaim it like a blue-jawed actor reciting Hamlet's soliloquy." As a result, the meeting dissolved into a deafening cacophony of insults, squabbles and angry protestations. Crane, as promised, played a leading part in the pandemonium and rushed to Munson's defense. Wine was poured profusely; people shouted back and forth, or else sought to beat a dignified retreat in silence. Several days later Josephson reported on the gathering to Loeb:

It turned into a riotous party after a while. Attempts by Cowley and me to control it were pathetic. Attempts by the members to discuss their common problems concertedly failed through the inertia of intoxication. Yet many things were clarified. Principally that if anything is to be done here (Cowley admits), three or four of us must go ahead and then tell the others about it. Artists, like other humans, are sheep, only controversial and ill-controlled sheep.

The evening, Josephson felt, had been much like "a Tzara-Breton (Dadaist) affair;" only, he added, "Americans in a literary fight have more sense of humor (too much always) and drink harder than Frenchmen--very emotional and less logical than Dadas."²⁸

What seriousness of purpose the meeting might have had was lost in partly self-instigated Dadaist futility. Cowley's projected general discussion never got off the ground. Shortly before midnight, after some dispirited debate about the contents of the next issue of Broom, the meeting dispersed. Cowley was deeply disappointed. "The question of personal quarrels seemed to overshadow everything else," he reported to Wheelwright, still in Europe to survey the printing of Secession. The whole experience made him realize, he noted in Exile's Return, "the

pathos and absurdity of the fierce individualism preserved by American writers in the midst of the most unified civilization now existing. . . . In the struggle we had lately undertaken we were beaten almost before we began. We should have realized that there was no chance of imposing our ideas on others when we couldn't agree among ourselves, or even preserve the decorum customary in an Italian speakeasy."²⁹

Cowley's efforts at unified cooperation had miscarried, but at least issues and positions had been clarified. For now battle lines were drawn and writers openly took sides with either Broom or Secession. At the end of October Cowley reported on the new alignments to Loeb:

Hart Crane elected to stand by Munson, which disappointed me, for although Munson would be no asset to Broom if he did cooperate, Crane can write. As a result of the meeting, Burke resigned from the board of Secession, saying that he would not join the staff of Broom, but would contribute impartially to both magazines. Brown and I decided to contribute nothing more to Secession. I wrote Munson and told him that so many real differences of opinion had developed, beyond the personal animosities, that he was justified in continuing Secession; that it was no longer in competition with Broom. I hoped there would be no enmity between the two papers. Munson answered, why no enmity? I answered nothing. We seem to be enemies now, formally.³⁰

Several weeks later the Prince Street meeting had a violent aftermath. The incident belatedly gained anecdotal notoriety, not in the last place as a result of the inflated and contradictory accounts of witnesses and participants; the literary grapevine did the rest. In early November Josephson, infuriated by Munson's personal attacks, decided that the only honorable way of settling the dispute was to travel to Woodstock, where Munson was staying with the art historian William Murrell Fisher, and challenge him to a bout of fisticuffs. The ensuing battle, refereed by Fisher, took place in an autumn drizzle on a stretch of muddy, marshy pasture and apparently, so Cowley reported at second hand in Exile's Return, was but "a dull spectacle, a war fought horizontally more than vertically, a series of slips and wallows that ended when both heroes were too stiff with mud and bruises to battle on." Both Josephson and Munson subsequently boasted pugilistic superiority and claimed a qualified triumph. In New York, Josephson remembered, the "Duel in the Mud" created quite a stir and was set down by literary columnists

as possibly "the first time in the history of America that two men of letters came to blows over their opposing critical or aesthetic doctrines."³¹

Eight months after the incident, on Independence Day, 1924, Cowley visited the scene of the battle, together with Wheelwright and Brown, and, indulging in a mood of Dadaist clownery, dedicated a "battlefield monument." In mocking celebration of the memorable fight he composed a humorous ode to immortalize the two combatants, which read in part:

Know, Muse, that heroes yet exist
Whose anger brooks no intercession,
And tooth meets tooth and fist meets fist
And "Up," cries Munson, "with Secession!
Down Broom," he snarls, and warriors pant
Each to defend his literary slant.

All afternoon the battle wavers;
Now fortune smiles on Josephson,
Now frowns, and now stout Munson quavers,
"Broom is unswept. I've almost won."
The other sneers, "Almost how splendid!"
As deep in mud both heroes lie up-ended,

Yet battling on, till strength and light
Together failed. Then Fisher rose,
Grimly dividing weary wight
From bleary knight and fist from nose:
So, on another fateful day,
Half-dead Achilles by half-living Hector lay.³²

Cowley's immediate response to news of the fight, however, was less lighthearted. The version sent into the world by Munson, in particular, rekindled all of his personal resentment. On November 14, 1923, he gave vent to his exasperation in a letter to William Slater Brown:

People disgust me who try to carry physical matters into the domain of the intellect. Munson keeps repeating . . . that he won a "moral victory." If I remember my war, moral victories are the sort which precede strategic retreats. . . . I never saw a man of so little talent who possessed such a capacity for irritation. He never lies. He told Kenneth about hitting Matty, about rolling over on top of him, and ended by saying, "Fisher discretely calls the fight a draw." All of these statements agree with Matty's; they must be gospel. But. The impression he gives is this: I defeated Matty clearly but Fisher, out of politeness, called the affair a draw. By a combination of truths he produces falsehood. Immediately on reading this, the fight changed its values for me. It had seemed a sorry

spectacle, completely ridiculous; now suddenly I wanted to punch his pasty face myself.

"Munson has the power to make me change my dearest beliefs, simply by expressing them," he added. Following his admittedly "hostile instinct," Cowley sent Munson an acerbic and "unambiguous" note, declining to answer his epistolary statement because it consisted of "unsupported assertions based on your personal prejudices," accusing Munson of making "garbled quotations" from other people's letters, including Cowley's, and expressing a clear preference for Josephson "because he has infinitely more talent as a writer." Reversing the charges, Munson promptly returned Cowley's "testy and confused document," accused its author of conducting "a persistent whispering propaganda" against him, and requested not to be approached "on a plane of bickering." Though Cowley continued to feel hurt by the "sad business" of personal quarrels, from this point onwards his connections with Munson were effectively severed. As he told John Wheelwright, who from Florence was fighting a private epistolary battle with Munson over Secession: "Console yourself, Dearie. Munson has also broken off Relations with me. The protection of the Methodist Church (or is it Baptist?) is henceforth denied us. Why don't you write your companion in the outer darkness?"³³

Despite his aesthetic and philosophical affinity with Munson and Frank, Hart Crane continued to seek out the less solemn companionship of Cowley and his friends. He relished the spirit of lively camaraderie and Dadaist buffoonery which prevailed among the Broom-group, finding that their company offered him welcome compensations for the frustrations of a business job and that their easy-going tolerance allowed him to give vent to his "Rabelaisian humors and drunken rages." Though temperamental and artistic differences gave cause enough for friction, Cowley's friendship with Crane, based as it was on mutual respect and admiration for each other's poetry, remained intact.³⁴

At the beginning of November, as Munson and Josephson were preparing to engage in muddy battle, Cowley and Crane traveled to Woodstock, where Crane, having recently resigned from a suffocating job at J. Walter Thompson's copywriting agency, was to spend an idyllic part of the winter at the farmhouse rented by Brown and Nagle. En route, they stopped off at the country house of Eugene O'Neill in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Shortly before, Crane had met O'Neill in New York and been invited for the

weekend. Peggy Cowley, an old Village friend of O'Neill's, earlier that week had traveled ahead to the Ridgefield country home with Agnes Boulton, the playwright's second wife. Though Cowley knew O'Neill—he had seen him several times in Village speakeasies and had consorted in the circle of O'Neill's friends at the Provincetown Playhouse—he never was a close or personal acquaintance of the playwright; rather, he remained "a friend of his friends." During the weekend O'Neill, breaking his habitual taciturnity, talked freely to Cowley about the literary concerns close to his heart, in particular the work of German expressionist playwrights, showed him his workroom, a barren and meagerly furnished bedroom reminding Cowley of nothing so much as "an abbot's cell," and discussed his new play in progress, Desire Under the Elms. Though O'Neill, as Cowley recalled in a late memoir, was being "extraordinarily kind to a shabby young man without a reputation," communication between both men was strained and they found it difficult to establish a sense of rapport. "Eugene O'Neill, Mr. O'Neill the playwright, Gene, . . . speaks a language so different from ours that I seemed to converse with him from different worlds," Cowley remarked to Burke several days after the visit. If he had sensed in the older writer "a need to explain himself to a new generation of writers, to a representative of the future by which he will be judged," Cowley had made little or no effort to help bridge what he later felt was a gulf not merely between literary generations but between "fame and obscurity." Instead, he had rather stubbornly persisted in "defensive pride and foolish reticence." The weekend took a bizarre turn when Cowley, priding himself on his country knowledge, explained to O'Neill how to tap one of the three fifty-gallon barrels of hard cider stored in the cellar, thereby starting O'Neill on a dramatic course of alcoholic misadventures, which ended a week later when Agnes Boulton found the playwright in a comatose state in one of the upstairs rooms of the Hell Hole in the Village.³⁵

The failure of Cowley's efforts to gather all behind a common literary program could not diminish his commitment to Broom. He had a strong hand in the makeup of its November 1923 issue which, retrospectively, he rated as the best of the five American numbers, "the nearest to our elastic ideal of what a magazine should be." There were poems by Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams, as well as a poem by Cowley satirizing Munson's rhetorical and philosophical

pomposity, "Towards a More Passionate Apprehension of Life." In addition, the issue featured two of Cowley's translations from the French of Aragon and Vitrac, book reviews by Wescott, Josephson, Sanborn and B. H. Haggin, the music critic, as well as two pieces of experimental fiction, one a satirical fantasy about a Wall Street speculator by William Slater Brown, the other a story about a street corner pickup by Charles L. Durboraw, which modulated from sharp vernacular realism into an apocalyptic sexual fantasy: "An Awful Storming Fire or, Her and I on a Journey to the Secret of the Sun, by the Author Who Solved the Mysterious Riddle." The latter story was sexually titillating enough to draw the attention of the Postmaster General: on December 8, 1923, the editors of Broom received a letter of admonition, informing them of censorship regulations and notifying them that "if there is doubt as to the mailability of any matter that appears in your publication, the copies mailed will be withheld from despatch." The editors suffered a momentary pang of disquietude, but they took the warning in a spirit of levity and William Slater Brown composed a lengthy mock-editorial satirizing "SEC 480" of the Postal Laws as "one of the most perfect specimens of indigenous American Folk Lore."³⁶

Through November and December Cowley and Josephson fought, against odds, to keep the magazine afloat. Cowley pumped all his spare time and most of his personal savings into the venture. "I personally should be very sorry to see Broom go under, for I think all of us need an organ in which to print," he told Loeb. As a result of the recent quarrels, he believed, the writers still loyal to the magazine ("sensationalists, apers of French dadaists, skyscraper primitives--we have been called a fine bunch of names") were in a predicament: even "if we didn't want to continue Broom--and we do--we should be forced to by circumstances."³⁷

Brown, too, had recently renewed his pledge of allegiance in a personal letter to Cowley ("I shall certainly stick to Broom, Matty and you, Sink or Swim, until we all go under") and from Woodstock offered what help he could. Josephson by this time had become convinced that "a career in business with independent and detached position in literature" was his best bet and had taken a job on Wall Street, "pimping" (in Cowley's words) for a brokerage firm, which left him less time for Broom than before. To make matters worse, Maxwell Geffen, the magazine's printer and largest financial backer, withdrew his subvention after the

November issue, thereby taking most of the wind out of Broom's already tattered sails. The editors dolefully struggled on. Brown negotiated terms with a new out-of-town printer in Kingston, New York: manufacturing costs per issue were to be limited to \$250, Broom's format was to be further reduced (to thirty-two pages), the subscription rate lowered from \$5 to \$3 a year. While Brown took over the mechanical end, Cowley and Josephson searched for new benefactors, issued appeals to readers, started subscription campaigns. Cowley, always good for a practical plan, devised a scheme to back up the magazine by a system of patronages and suggested a one-evening literary performance to raise additional money. A tireless canvasser and fundraiser, he remembered the month of December as "a series of luncheons with this man or that, a continued exposition of our plans, a long plea that resulted sometimes in a check for five or ten dollars, sometimes in an embarrassed refusal." Broom's December issue, originally planned as "a bang-up issue . . . with everybody in the crowd contributing," was silently omitted. In late November Cowley voiced his mounting disillusionment as well as his bitter determination to Loeb: "the general situation is so discouraging at the present time--Dial gone over to the fairies, Secession to Munson and Frank, no other magazine on the horizon--that we are forced to continue to save our collective face and the respectability of American letters." Meanwhile, nearing the point of exhaustion, the editors were busily, if unwittingly, preparing Broom's last issue.³⁸

The contents of the January 1924 number of Broom had already been made up and the issue sent to press by the time the editors received the Postmaster General's reminder of censorship regulations. Broom's twenty-first issue, its slenderest, featured contributions by E. E. Cummings, fast on his way to becoming the magazine's favorite son, Ramon Guthrie, William Carlos Williams and (in Cowley's translation) Philippe Soupault. Slater Brown wrote a sensitive review of Cummings's Tulips and Chimneys and, together with Cowley, composed an open letter to the editors of The Dial, challenging its decision to present its 1923 Award to Van Wyck Brooks, an established critic with a wide audience, rather than an important new talent like Cummings. Cowley and Brown attacked The Dial for its cowardly eclecticism and its lack of a "positive standard" in choosing its awardees. As a result, they proclaimed, the Dial Award had become "meaningless" and the magazine was rapidly becoming a mere

"international dictionary of names"--"impersonal, inorganic, like a museum of universal archeology." They concluded:

We believe that Cummings' talent is startling and new. We believe that a new literature is developing for which there is no place in the Dial. However, we have no quarrel with you for being conservative or radical; realist, naturalist, impressionist or fin-de-siècle. We protest only because you do not know your mind.

In retaliation, the editors announced the annual presentation of a Broom Award to "a young American writer who, in our opinion, has done a significant service for American letters." The award was intended "to aid the creative writer in his struggle against modern conditions" and to "give him leisure for work." The editors presented their award for 1923 (consisting of \$2.00) to Sinclair Lewis and motivated their choice as follows:

In choosing Mr. Lewis we were guided by the facts that his reputation is established, that his books are regularly published, and that he could derive much less benefit from this award than could some younger writer.

Our choice will undoubtedly call forth comparison with the first award of the Dial. We face this without hesitation, for not only does Mr. Lewis need the money less than Sherwood Anderson, but he writes better prose.⁴⁰

On the basis of these contents Broom stood in no danger of postal censorship. But in preparing the January issue Cowley and Josephson had also accepted, if with "a passing moment of anxiety," a philosophical tale by Kenneth Burke, "Prince Llan," containing, in condensed fictional form, many of the author's theories about art and life. The editors suspected that Burke's "ethical masque" might in places be "too outspoken to meet the requirements of the postal authorities," but they naively trusted that it was also too intellectual and abstruse to catch the vigilant eye of the Postmaster General. In effect, they made it a matter of principle to print the story: if Broom could no longer publish the kind of daring, innovative material for which it had been called into existence, it seemed to lose its raison d'être.

On January 14, 1924, the editors received word that the last issue of Broom had been judged "unmailable" by the Solicitor for the Post Office Department at Washington and that the magazine had been suppressed under

Section 480 of the Postal Laws, prohibiting the mailing of obscene material like pornography and contraceptives. No official motives for the suppression were given, but the editors could only assume that the wrath of the postal authorities had been roused by the third paragraph of Burke's tale, which referred undisguisedly to women possessing "breasts" that stood out "firm like pegs," as well as "sitters" which "undulated" as they walked. Postal employees dumped six heavy bundles containing 1500 copies of Broom's January issue in the cellar of Cowley's house on Dominick Street. A few hundred of them could be delivered by taxi to New York bookshops; the remainder was disposed of as waste paper.⁴¹

The suppression of Broom caused much excitement, indignation, even newspaper publicity. The editors received expressions of commiseration and support from many of Broom's friends, among them Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams and Norman Fitts, the editor of S4N, who was convinced that, after a silent period of recuperation, Broom would "again stick up its horrid head." Eugene O'Neill wrote an indignant letter of protest to the Postmaster General in Washington, denouncing the censorship decision as one "unjust at any time;" it was an action which made him "apprehensive for the fate of the work of every serious writer." Burton Rascoe, mindful of the "fine and courageous" work published in Broom, criticized the suppression in the New York Herald Tribune and praised the editors' "refreshingly unorthodox" policy. The American Civil Liberties Union offered free legal aid in case the editors wanted to appeal the decision.⁴²

But Cowley and Josephson, feeling "utterly tired and discouraged," lacked the resiliency to put up an effective fight. Had it been merely a matter of losing a single issue, Cowley recalled, they might have made the effort. But with the withdrawal of Geffen's support after the November issue Broom's debts had grown practically insurmountable. Josephson had hoped to clear most of the debts from the proceeds of his translation of Apollinaire's The Poet Assassinated, but the proceeds were minimal to nonexistent, and his job on the Wall Street Exchange left him with little or no time for Broom. With the help of contributions from Williams and Wallace Stevens, money had miraculously been found to print the \$200 January issue, but in barely three weeks' time Cowley's personal bank account had dropped from \$120 to \$30. Faced with bankruptcy and plagued by battle-fatigue, Cowley and Josephson had to admit defeat. In

mid-March 1924 Cowley reported to Loeb in Europe: "It took us some weeks to realize that everything was ended, but when the letters piled up without our being able to answer them; when we were suppressed with a chance for big publicity, and could not take advantage of the chance, we began to see how hopeless was the affair. It is still a nightmare to me, for it was the first time I found myself absolutely impotent, absolutely unmeasured to the work in front of me."⁴³

Cowley's sense of defeat upon the demise of Broom was aggravated by a simultaneous series of incidents, which pointed up with painful clarity the failure of his efforts to enact the iconoclastic ethics of Dada in New York. The weeks of tireless canvassing for Broom had left him mentally and physically fatigued. Restless and irritable, overly susceptible to hints and innuendoes, he came to suspect "a general conspiracy of slander" against contemporary art and saw insidious attacks against the young avant-garde writers where none were intended. It was, accordingly, a hypersensitive and distrustful Cowley who, in late December 1923, read the much-publicized first issue of The American Mercury, edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, and who overreacted to its principal feature, a scathingly satirical attack on the modern aesthetes by Ernest Boyd.⁴⁴

Boyd's article, entitled "Aesthete: Model 1924," presented a "composite" caricatural portrait of a young aesthete which, though ostensibly imaginary, contained so many recognizable touches of so many of the writers associated with Broom or Secession, that each could justifiably feel personally attacked. Cowley thought he recognized, besides himself, Gilbert Seldes, Edmund Wilson, Burke, Josephson, Dos Passos, Cummings, Munson and John Farrar. Josephson, in addition, spotted features of Loeb, Waldo Frank and Hart Crane. Munson, rather perversely, remembered that Boyd's portrait was "entirely imaginary and related to no writer and no review that I could identify." At the time, however, he denounced Boyd's article in Secession as "a piece of mud-slinging bristling with gratuitous inferences of log-rolling, ignorance, perversity, etc" and expressed the hope that the "few writers" whom it annoyed would prove "intelligent enough to disregard derisive gestures of

this calibre."⁴⁵

Boyd pictured his aesthete as a decadent, foppish, slightly effeminate creature, whose self-enamored dreams of literary grandeur outran his actual achievements and whose writings were flawed by fake erudition and facile scholarship. At Harvard Boyd's aesthete exhibited a stock of aristocratic, racial prejudices, wrote sonnets to Boston débutantes, and indulged in the "fleshy sins" of that "decayed city." When he went off to war, he did so only to exchange his "collegiate patriotism" for the easier stance of the slacker. After the war he resorted to Paris, met Ezra Pound and the French Dadaists, and wrote a tribute to Marcel Proust, before returning to Greenwich Village to become the editor of "one of the little reviews making no compromise with the public (or any other) taste." In its pages he printed prose and verse "remarkable chiefly for typographical and syntactical eccentricities, and a high pressure of unidiomatic, uninspired French to the square inch." In fiction Boyd's aesthete seemed obsessed by "a breathless phallic symbolism," while in criticism he evolved "an ingenious style, florid, pedantic, technical," but utterly meaningless and incomprehensible. His articles, Boyd wrote, consisted mostly of "esoteric witticisms and allusive gossip about fourth-rate people."

Boyd's article also contained more serious charges, some of which struck at the fundamentals of Cowley's and Josephson's radical literary program for *Broom*. Thus, Boyd accused his aesthete of trying to "monopolize the field of contemporary foreign art." He pictured him as "the literary counterpart of the traditional American tourist in Paris," one "glamored by the gaudy spectacle of that most provincial of all great cities" and feeding on an exclusively French literary diet. With particular venom Boyd mocked the avant-garde interest in the popular arts and its veneration of the aesthetic possibilities of machine-age America, "this new-found delight in publicity experts, election slogans, billboards and machinery," the "cult of the movies." With unmistakable pertinence he exposed the divided loyalties of the aesthete, which forced him (as it had recently forced both Cowley and Josephson) to adopt a split mode of existence: "his allegiance is torn between the sales manager's desk, where, it appears, the Renaissance artist of to-day is to be found, and the esoteric editorial chair where experiments are made with stories which 'discard the old binding of plot and narrative.'" In

malicious conclusion, Boyd pictured his aesthete as about to abandon his avant-garde idealism for the commercial standards of a consumer culture. The aesthete, he wrote, was already filled with "a violent and unnatural nausea, a revulsion against the wild delights of his former debauches," and planned "a return to the cozy hearth of the American family. . . . There is pep in the swing of his fist upon the typewriter as he sits down to a regular and well-paid job, convincing others, as his employer has convinced him, that he really knows what the public wants."⁴⁶

Whatever the ironic exaggeration of Boyd's charges, there was enough venomous bite in them to kindle the wrath of an oversensitive Cowley, who promptly seized upon the incident as an opportunity for provocative Dadaist posturing in America, a "significant gesture" in line with his performance and arrest on Bastille Day in Paris the previous summer. "It seemed to me," he recalled in Exile's Return, "that a critic of some distinction was taking sides with the philistines against his natural allies, was appealing to dangerous forms of prejudice, was making implications about the personal lives of people, many of whom were my friends. 'He ought to be punched in the jaw,' I said." Half-derisively Cowley conceived of himself as "a sort of West Texas sheriff sworn to uphold a code of literary conduct."

Rumors of Cowley's threat of physical violence had already reached Ernest Boyd, reputedly a man of bookish and timid character, even before he received a phonecall from his presumptive aggressor, who requested an opportunity to explain his objection to Boyd's article and demanded an apology for offensive passages. When Boyd claimed not to know who Cowley was and professed to see no reason for an interview, Cowley (at least in Boyd's subsequent version of events) "expressed his opinion of me in language so filthy that, when his oaths and obscenities were exhausted, I asked him if he had not written a poem for one of the esoteric magazines with the modern aesthetes' weakness for what is dirty. Upon which Mr. Cowley offered to come around and 'beat me up.'" Shortly after, Cowley, who in turn claimed never to have made any threat of fisticuffs at all but merely to have delivered "three round oaths before hanging up," sent Boyd the following note:

Please excuse me for having used such extravagant language to describe you. I only meant to say that you were a sneak, a coward and a liar.

In this description of your character, fortunately, the two

of us seem to agree.

Sincerely yours,
Malcolm Cowley

There, however, matters did not stop, for now Cowley's friends took up his Dadaist gesture. They sent Boyd "anonymous telegrams, facetious and abusive," and beleaguered him with phonecalls during a gathering at Josephson's apartment, where Burke, Cowley, Crane and Josephson took turns informing Boyd of their opinion of his article and his character. Accounts vary as to the messages conveyed. Where Boyd claims to have heard "threats and abuse" conveyed in a "vigorous, hooligan style," Cowley remembered the séance as "a pompous, leg-pulling conversation," in which Boyd showed himself a "master at repartee."⁴⁷

Even here the Battle of the Aesthetes, as it was subsequently dubbed, was not allowed to rest, for now the literary grapevine eagerly took up the incident. Gossip pictured Boyd as endangered by "hard-boiled, furious blackjack-toting aesthetes" against whom he desperately sought police-protection. Rumor had it he hardly dared leave his apartment. Burton Rascoe added his bit by presenting the readers of the New York Herald Tribune with an inflated embroidery of the affair, in which he hyperbolically attacked both sides:

Two hours after the edition of [The American Mercury] appeared on the stands Greenwich Village was in an uproar. The whole literary left wing, which had hitherto been disorganized by internecine strife, solidified against the perpetrator of the article. . . .

East Nineteenth Street swarmed with the younger poets, and when the venerable Boyd set out on his morning constitutional he was greeted with a fusillade of ripe tomatoes, riper eggs, sticks, stones and copies of 'S4N,' and barely escaped back into his home with his life. There he was kept a prisoner by expediency for three days while Dadaists pushed his door bell, kept his telephone abuzz, scaled the walls to his apartment and cast old cabbages and odor bombs through the windows, sent him denunciatory telegrams, and rigged up a radio receiving outfit with an amplifier through which they broadcast the information that he was a liar, sneak, thief, coward and no gentleman. . . . Barricaded behind his books, subsisting on depleted rations and grown wan and weary under the assaults and harassments, Boyd called Heaven to witness that he had never heard of or read anything by any one of some dozens of his most revengeful assailants and that they had read into his article hints about their private life which he had no intention of putting there nor on re-reading could discover.⁴⁸

In the end, Cowley's "significant gesture" painfully backfired: the sale of the first issue of The American Mercury surpassed the editors' wildest expectations, and Ernest Boyd, as a result of his well-publicized martyrdom, became "a literary hero and a commercial success." Boyd, indeed, had stolen the thunder of the American Dadaists. Instead of arousing a lethargic literary milieu from its apathetic slumbers, Cowley had carried his Dadaist propensity into the realm of the ridiculous: he had rather well succeeded in making a fool of himself. A decade later, in Exile's Return, he acknowledged the failure of his Dadaist attempt to apply "the standards of ethics" to a situation calling for "standards of salesmanship." What in Paris had seemed a "noble disinterestedness," in New York became "a meddlesome effort to push myself forward, to break the front page." In America Cowley's "significant gesture" became "a silly touchiness, an offense taken where none was intended." His "manifestation was a flop."⁴⁹ When, in the wake of such grotesque failure, Broom breathed its last, Cowley's sense of defeat was complete.

Cowley's account of the Battle of the Aesthetes in Exile's Return is informed with a curiously trivializing and laconic tone, which occasionally rings false. From his radical perspective in the early 1930s he was inclined to apologetically tone down the angry exuberance of his Dadaist posturing in the winter of 1924. While he rightfully exposed some of Boyd's "purely tactical misstatements," he tended to overplay the implications of homosexuality in Boyd's caricature and conveniently sidestepped Boyd's more pertinent charges concerning the aesthete's split position as both an avant-garde artist and the servant of a business culture. Ten years after the incident Cowley may well have read Boyd's article "with some curiosity and an occasional yawn," but some of Boyd's satirical volleys had carried more serious implications than he seemed willing to admit. Moreover, his contention that Boyd's attack must be explained on the economic grounds of literary competition--an insight too obviously born of his radicalized consciousness--rests on at best a half-truth: if Boyd had reason to fear competition in the field of contemporary foreign art, Cowley, too, had his reasons for professional jealousy. As he later confessed to Burton Rascoe: "In 1921, when I began writing for Broom, I discovered what was to me a new literary genre, the composite portrait." He had written several of such imaginary portraits for Broom--"Young Mr. Elkins," "Young Man with Spectacles," "Portrait by

Leyendecker," "Snapshot of a Young Lady"--and entertained hopes of publishing them, together with his portrait-interviews of French men of letters for The Bookman, as a book of "Portraits: Real and Imaginary." When, in late 1923, he saw the first issue of The American Mercury, containing the "composite portrait" by Ernest Boyd ("a fairly assiduous reader of Broom"), Cowley was "moderately incensed" to find that Boyd had "borrowed" his literary device and used it against him and his friends.⁵⁰ Indeed, as the ensuing Battle of the Aesthetes showed, Boyd was doing to Cowley and his friends much more effectively what Cowley had hoped to do to Harold Stearns and Paul Rosenfeld in "Young Mr. Elkins." In late 1924 Boyd published Portraits: Real and Imaginary, thereby preempting the field.

Sadly enough, the entire fracas surrounding "Aesthete: Model 1924" drained the best of Cowley's energies. When, immediately afterwards, a more serious opportunity presented itself to engage in a "significant gesture"--a protest against the censorship regulations under which Broom was suppressed--Cowley and Josephson had no spirit or energy left to make an effective stand.

Five months after his return to America Cowley had to acknowledge the failure of his efforts to recreate on Manhattan "the atmosphere of intellectual excitement and moral indignation" that he had relished among the Dadaists in France. "We had tried," he noted in Exile's Return, "to write and publish a new sort of literature celebrating the picturesque qualities of American machinery and our business civilization, and we found that American businessmen in the age of machines were not interested in reading poems about them." Josephson, too, retrospectively granted the futility of their endeavors: "We had bravely announced our 'acceptance' of the Machine Age, without much analysis or thinking through the matter. . . . We had the effect of a few people firing off peashooters at the unbreakable plate glass-and-steel façade of our civilization." Ultimately, Cowley's and Josephson's understanding of contemporary urban-technological America remained rather superficial and, in essence, "spectatorial;" as the editors of The Dial had been quick to grasp, their aesthetic celebration of machine-age America remained devoid

of much internal substance as long as it sidestepped the "humanistic consideration." With the demise of Broom, Cowley and Josephson confronted with renewed poignancy the failure of American culture to provide "social arrangements by which the artist himself might escape the peril of being caught and mangled by the assembly lines." They now found that, as Josephson put it, "we ourselves, in effect, were being flung to the machines." At bottom, as much as by the problems of personal conflicts, slanderous attacks, financial bankruptcy and postal censorship regulations, the editors felt defeated by the general cultural climate which made such censorship decisions possible: the moral and political conservatism of the Coolidge years, a cultural atmosphere which fostered, in the words of one historian, "a literature of complacency, . . . an economics of success and a metaphysics of optimism." Cowley could only painfully conclude that "the American Mercury, with its easy incredulity, its middle-agedness, its belligerent philistinism, was the expression of a prevailing mood."⁵¹

Though Broom died in a whimper of editorial frustration and discouragement, it had lived long enough to make its mark. If, in its earlier phase under Kreymborg and Loeb, it had perhaps been less pioneering than other little magazines, eventually it helped introduce to America some of the foremost members of the international avant-garde in writing, painting and the plastic arts. If it always remained sensitive to the internationalism of modernity, the magazine (particularly in its New York period) provided a radical forum for many of the experimentalist writers in America, both those of Cowley's generation and those of slightly older age like Williams, Stevens and Moore. Under the editorship of Cowley and Josephson it persistently sought ways of meaningfully relating literature to contemporary life and provided an important stimulus to a serious artistic negotiation of modern American society governed by business and technology. If it failed to answer all the questions raised by its unorthodox and combative platform, it played a flamboyant and vital part in urging the need for and revaluating the possibility of an authentic national American culture, one fully responsive to the pressures of contemporary life and not inherently inferior to that of Europe. As such, Broom, and Cowley with it, had consistently been in the vanguard of the modern movement of the 1920s.⁵²

The demise of Broom, so painfully symbolic of the failure of Cowley's efforts to "remake" the American cultural milieu by substituting "moral for mechanical values," impressed upon him with renewed poignancy the need to organize his life along different lines. In early 1924, in a moment of personal stocktaking, he entered in his notebook a confessional "Epistle to Malcolm Cowley by Malcolm Cowley:"

My dear Malcolm, it would be wise to admit that you were mistaken, and that while working for the catalogues of the late Mr. Sweet, you cannot be editor, free lance, drunkard, literary polemist. Instead you must confine yourself to essentials: thinking, reading, conversation, writing, friends, livelihood, in about the order named. In this moment you must strip yourself of everything which is not essential to these aims; and especially of the functions of editor, free lance, drunkard and literary polemist. You must arrange your life against interruptions; you must sleep, bathe, exercise and pass the other moments beneath a lamp or talking. Too many excitements: at this moment you are tired and discouraged. . . . You have left the stage and you did not even bow.¹

Persuaded of the need for efficiency, unity and coherence in his life, Cowley now sharply saw how different was the reality of New York from the picturesque image of a dynamic urban-technological spectacle he had naively clung to since his return from Europe. Increasingly he became aware of the missing dimension of humanism in his and his friends' aesthetic celebration of the contemporary American scene. New York, he now felt, was "the least human of all the babylons," its values anti-human, its standards commercial and anti-artistic: "Its life is expressed in terms of geometry and mechanics: the height and cubical content of its buildings . . . the lines of force radiating from subway stations, the density of traffic. Its people have a purely numerical function. . . . Their emotions are coefficients used in calculating the probability of

trade. . . . Just what is the coefficient of art?"²

Even in the late fall of 1923, while it seemed still possible to keep Broom afloat, he had experienced moments of anxious ambiguity about living a writer's life in babylonian New York. "Of course the advantage of living in New York is the fact that one is so chronically busy that one does not think, or if one thinks, does not feel," he wrote to Hart Crane in late November 1923. "Sometimes in a sudden rush of emotion you discover yourself to be bored, sad, violently goodhumored." New York, he complained to Loeb, left one "no time for the simplest actions, the most simple emotions." Instead, the city had the capacity to rouse extremes of nervous feeling: inexplicably, one's mood would shift from intense boredom to a "frantic good humor" or "unutterable sadness." In Exile's Return Cowley evoked the paradoxical nature of New York: "It is the city without landmarks, the home of lasting impermanence, of dynamic immobility."³

Cowley's letters and notebooks give evidence of the unsettling and contradictory impact of his urban experience in the winter of 1924. At times the city fanned his Dadaist propensity for iconoclastic activism: "Violent physical exertion when drunk is the solution of every moral problem," he wrote to Burke. At other moments he sought consolation in a mood of "stoical indifference" derived from his reading of Paul Elmer More's Hellenistic Philosophies: "The aim of the complete man is not writing but ataraxy." In his notebook he defined the dominant mood of New York as one of "mysticism:" "one reacts against the crowds, the drinking, the atmosphere of business, and with nerves whittled to a fine point, retires into the secret places of his mind, creates a quiet that is more hysterical than the crowds, the atmosphere of business, the hysterical drinking." Embroidering upon the sentiment in a letter to Burke, he observed that the atmosphere of New York seemed "a (hysterical) classicism, to be distinguished from the classicism of the Mediterranean, which results from sympathy with one's environment instead of rebellion against it." At times the frantic pace of New York drove Cowley to seek refuge in the deceptive quietude of a museum, to contemplate the "cruel and gothic mythology" of Mexican culture and find it "better suited to our uses than Jupiter and Venus;" at other times a longing "to be classical" inspired him with a sudden "hysterical desire" to rush to the library and read Plato. At still other times he seemed to hear in the

rumble of trucks the sound of "doom approaching" or jotted down in his notebook the vengeful, apocalyptic visions of the destruction of New York that had plagued him in his sleep: "the buildings tumble, the seas rush in, and the waters lap against the subway walls. . . ." Always, however, there was the pastoral dream of "a quieter land," the longing to settle down on a farm in the not too distant future.⁴

For the time being, however, Cowley remained deeply disturbed by the lack of continuity and coherence in his life. "It is astonishing to learn how my opinions change from month to month," he observed in his notebook. "Is there any character constant beneath them?" Seeking to articulate a principle of "individual morality," he arrived at the belief that "good actions are deliberate actions, while bad actions are those forced on us by circumstances. The good man is he who controls the greatest number of factors in his own life." More often, such moments of self-confidence gave way to discontent with the fragmentary nature of his life and the fearful disunity of his days: "I live by clocks which deceive me," he wrote to Burke on February 1, 1924. "I rise at 8.45 and reach the office at 8.45. I rise at 9.05 and reach the office at 9.20. I rise at 8.00 and reach the office at 9.30. I never keep engagements, but on no principle. I have time for nothing." In his notebook he gave vent to his intellectual waverings and his confusion about the contours of his personality:

It frightens me how [my days] are episodic. Yesterday I was going to write a novel. Day before yesterday I was studying to write an essay on aesthetics. To discover what I was last month, I have to re-read my own letters, exclaiming, Are these mine, did I say this? Who was I this morning? My character is the color of my surroundings. Am I Epicurean, Stoic, Platonist, Classic, Modernist, Rebel, Academic? I could tell you if I kept a diary, or if, by laying my hands on the elements of the past, I could lay one on the other and call them Malcolm Cowley.

Marked by conflicting aims and discontinuous activities, his life seemed reduced to "a succession of episodes that only a succession of days can bind together, a calendared life, a chain of Saturdays. . . . I have been to Europe, I have lived in the country, I hate New York, my days succeed each other without color, and . . . there is nothing to do, and no Messiah who will lead us forth in crying, 'When will the end be?'" Only Hart Crane, who had recently lost his job with an advertising agency, who

was "disgusted" with New York, and who contemplated returning to Cleveland, Ohio, seemed to be worse off: "It is disquieting to find a man more episodic than myself," Cowley observed to Burke. Knowledge of Crane's greater misery, however, hardly served to assuage his frustrations. Ironically speaking of himself in the third person, he reported to Burke: "Cowley--Is busy denying everything he did before Xmas, with the belief that everything he did was right. Simply, the standard was higher than he could maintain alone, when most of his time was taken by an office. He writes amiable reviews, and for the first time has the sensation of walking backwards." He ended his litany of lamentation with a half-ironic cry for salvation: "Messiah--Wanted Badly."⁵

Cowley's sense of failure and dislocation would intermittently surface through the decade; in effect, it would not be healed until he found himself drawn into the orbit of the radical movement in the early 1930s. Then his commitment to a radical political vision would partly be based on such hopes for messianic salvation as he expressed in the early months of 1924. As he explained much later, in being attracted to a political radicalism in the 1930s, many writers (including himself) were "also unconsciously seeking a religious solution, a faith that would supply certain elements heretofore lacking in their private and professional lives as middle-class Americans." Marx, he wrote elsewhere, was revered by writers less as an economist, philosopher or scientist of revolution than as "a prophet calling for a day of judgment and a new heaven on earth."⁶

In 1924, however, he was content to pour out his anger in his notebook, where he gave free reign to his disgust with the commercial and utilitarian standards of writing prevailing in America under Coolidge: "I utterly hate and despise the trade and tradesmen of letters. Your typical writer--I beg pardon, your Creator, for writers have assumed the attributes of God--is a child spoiled by his audience, a vanity parading before comic mirrors, a prima donna arguing for another curtain call. . . . If I associate with him it is only for professional reasons, as thieves for their own protection are forced to band together."⁷

For all his indignation and his hatred, however, Cowley was slowly accommodating to Manhattan. If the city often seemed unbearable, he now discovered that it also harbored a "strong and vulgar poetry" peculiar to

itself, an urban "folklore" of sex, jazz and dazzling skylines, of Halloween office parties, Harlem dancing parties and Village speakeasy drinking parties. "New York has enveloped itself for me in a haze of ragtime tunes, a sort of poetry which leads me to a melancholic happiness," Cowley told Burke. Believing that "the function of poetry is to make the world inhabitable," he could now feel that even the presence of prostitutes made the city appear more human and "more livable." To Loeb he observed how the irregular redbrick Manhattan landscape, perceived through "a haze of ragtime tunes," appeared magically transformed: "The brick house, the empty lot, the skyscraper, juxtaposed, become an organic whole."⁸

Gradually, Cowley became reconciled to living a writer's life among the skyscrapers of Manhattan; slowly he rediscovered "that the city was less inhuman than it seemed . . . that New York had another life, too--subterranean, like almost everything that was human in the city." Meeting with writers in restaurants and coffeehouses, or congregating with returning expatriates in speakeasies, Cowley might indulge in reminiscences of Europe or bring the latest news from abroad--Tristan Tzara and Jim Butler kept him au courant on goings-on in Montparnasse and Giverny, and Robert Coates, to whom he had turned over his studio above the blacksmith shop of Père Tellier, had recently returned to New York--but Europe was rapidly becoming a fading memory, as Cowley joined the anonymous hordes of writers peopling Manhattan and entered upon the "common life" of city inhabitants, settling down to "the simple business of earning a livelihood," laying rather more modest and less rebellious literary plans for the future, hoping to find adequate compensations for the frustrations of urban living, yet always dreaming of a farm of his own.⁹

In late February 1924, on Washington's Birthday, Cowley made a trip to Woodstock, in the Catskill mountains, to spend a long weekend with William Slater Brown. Brown had momentarily escaped from New York into the country and was living a primitive, hermit-like existence in a drafty shack hastily converted into a studio. For three days Cowley shared Brown's invigorating country routine: in the mornings they chopped wood,

In the afternoons they took long walks, tramping the snow and talking aesthetics, in the evenings they drank hard cider. Once they tried out the Dadaist experiment of "automatic writing" but were disappointed by its results. Brown made only a symbolic effort to heat his shack, but the indoor cold seemed to incite him to energetic productivity. Writing or studying from ten to twelve hours each day, Brown managed to strike a spark of confidence in his visitor and, momentarily, made him forget his discouragement: "[Brown] is writing with immense vigor," Cowley told Loeb, "and for the moment seems the one man in whom there is any hope." His three days at Woodstock, he felt, were "the highlight of a rather somber three months."¹⁰

Against odds, Cowley and Brown spent part of their time endeavoring, as Brown had put it in a letter, "to stew up together some fitting Marche Funèbre, Will, or Lament for Broom." They considered the leftover manuscript material of the magazine but agreed that most of it was "undistinguished." Partly to meet outstanding subscription obligations, they planned to raise \$70 for a small, cheap issue to be printed by Brown in Kingston. This special "suppression issue" was to consist of the personal manifestoes of the Broom contingent, friend and foe alike. Invitations were sent out to Burke, Loeb and others, but ironically, only Gorham Munson sent in a manifesto-like statement, attacking Ernest Boyd and the "Irish Immigration" into literary criticism and advancing, in germinal form, the tripartite division of the contemporary literary milieu into an Elder, Middle and Youngest Generation which would form the cornerstone to his Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900 (1928). Though Cowley remained eager to put the failures of the recent past behind him and "talk about the major problems as if Broom would always be or had never existed," for the moment he lacked the energy to concretize his halfhearted idealism: the plans for a suppression issue of Broom were silently shelved, to be resuscitated later in a different form.¹¹

Returning to his upstairs room at 16 Dominick Street, Cowley felt much like reentering "a sealed tomb." Reluctantly he resumed his fragmented life of routine-like busyness. In mid-March he wrote to Loeb in a familiar vein of complaint: "The key to 3/4 of my actions at present is the fact that I have time for nothing; no time for a decent shave, for a haircut, to think, talk, write letters, or for more than a duty-bath at

hebdomedary intervals." At Sweet's the prepublication rush for the Engineering Catalogue kept Cowley working nights: "The days pass and I do not know how." Socially, he regularly saw Robert Coates, Hart Crane, Burke and Josephson; less frequently he consorted with Robert Sanborn, Peggy Loeb and Susan Light. To Loeb he described the depressing tone of his social life in Manhattan: "The chief topic of conversation is wanting to be somewhere else, though I suspect that New York would be pleasant enough if I had ten thousand a year and no job. Coates, who is free-lancing, seems to be contented and says, 'I am very happy in New York. I never look in people's faces.'"12

Cowley's search for a personal aesthetics which could provide him with an anchorage in the spinning currents of modernism had not ceased with his departure from France and the composition of his essay on Racine. Through the fall and winter following his return he continued to feel his way towards a personal collection of aesthetic "maxims" and to elaborate upon the bundle of beliefs he had arrived at in Europe. His thinking remained marked by a propensity for broad, axiomatic definition, which at times served to conceal the logical weaknesses in his argumentation. In his letters and notebook he now formulated an aesthetic maxim which, though ostensibly geared towards machine-age America, in effect amounted to a reaffirmation of his Racinian ideal of classical elegance: "Beauty is a by-product. . . . The man who writes for eternity writes dullness. The man who attempts deliberately to create beauty is an artsy-craftsman." Aesthetic value, Cowley believed, resided in "efficiency" and "utility;" art resembled a perfect machine ("one to which any added part is useless and from which no part can be subtracted without impairing its efficiency") rather than a living tree (which might possess "any number of excess branches"). Beauty, he noted geometrically, was "the shortest distance between two points: the satisfaction of hitting the ball with the bat."¹³

In France Cowley's aesthetic thought had centered on the seemingly irresolvable dualism of form and matter. He now explored a variation on this principal dichotomy which he believed brought him closer to the resolution of an endemic paradox of art than he had come before: art, he advanced, was both "disinterested creation" and "the expression of a sensibility." In several notebook entries Cowley examined the contradictory implications of such a definition: "Literature is divided

between creation and expression. The class of writers I prefer are those who build an emotion instead of expressing it. The test of a book is whether it has any life independent of the man who wrote it. And yet a worthless man can write only a worthless book."¹⁴ In a lengthy entry he deepened his definition and reached for a synthesis:

. . . Artists are of two types: Expressionist or Creationist, depending on which side of the coin they wish to turn upwards . . . one can draw a portrait of the Creationist, but with difficulty, for he lives in his work, and each of his books can be considered apart from the man. His passion is to make things; his joy, as Socrates remarked, is on a nobler plane, but similar to that of the father. He passes into his work, which lives after him. Death becomes an incident, for into each word he wrote, each line he drew, there had passed something of himself, he there had died a little.

In the case of the Expressionist, his real creation is a personality, and his books are incidents in the making of it. Every one of his words is as important as himself, for every word is a part of him. Apart from his personality his books may be as valueless as much of Goethe--whom I mention as the greatest Expressionist, just as Racine is a pure example of Creationism. And like all great men, Goethe transcended his category. Hugo is a less noble example, but of all Expressionists Rimbaud has the greatest influence on the present generation.

At the end of the paragraph on the Creationist there was an apparent confusion (into each word he wrote, each line he drew, there had passed something of himself). Evidently this is expression, just as Goethe's Expressionism passed into classicism or Creationism, and this is the key to the solution of the antinomy. The desire to make; in other words to give life to something organic, which, deriving from one's self can still exist outside one's self, is the basis, perhaps, of all art, for the Expressionist desires to create a personality which shall become a legend and thus live on.

Cowley was persuaded that his reformulation of the antinomy of form and matter in terms of the contrast between creation and expression had helped to solve a crucial difficulty; as he wrote to Burke, "if only a Neo-Platonist could imagine the wedding of Form and Matter, a more direct mind can see that, on a higher plane, creation is expression and expression creation." Loyal to his belief in the communicative function of art, he added a third term: "Expression is communication. Robinson Crusoe singing on a desert island is not, in our sense, expressing himself, nor is the unintelligible writer a poet."¹⁵

Cowley continued to explore the interconnections between the various

sets of antinomies throughout the decade. In a later entry he replaced the term "creationist" by "constructionist," following Paul Valéry's use of the term "construction." In an interesting "addenda" he admitted that his critical practice was not always consistent with his theoretical observations:

Addenda. The classical American example of the constructionist is Poe, and Whitman of the expressionist. Examples of expressionism are plentiful today; the constructionists, except Eliot, are second-rate: Cather, Hergesheimer, Cabell. France offers some excellent examples of the opposition, as notice Valéry against the Surrealists.

You will sometime observe, O putative reader, that my abstract views are more definitely settled than my reactions to particular work. Thus, by temperament, I incline to constructionism, but sometimes write expressionistically and do not always prefer Valéry to Joseph Delteil. And rarely Cather to Anderson. Perhaps I only detest expressionism when it is followed blindly, and not when it is embraced as the result of reflection and a choice.¹⁶

In a series of consecutive notebook entries, partly written in the form of an imaginary dialogue between Burke and himself, Cowley acknowledged that his aesthetic antinomies were not restricted to the realm of art but were interrelated with similar dichotomies in other branches of human knowledge: "An interest in aesthetics is like a crevice through which one slips to the domain of philosophy as a whole." Problems in aesthetics had correlating problems, he observed, in the different fields of metaphysics, ethics, politics, sociology or logic. On a higher plane an aesthetic differentiation between Expression and Creation was but a manifestation of "the opposition of two attitudes fundamental in man--the fatalistic and the volitional," determinism and free will. Thus, he reasoned, "creation requires a conscious act, a choice, an exercise of the will. Whereas expression is generally only a record of experienced (i. e. passive) states." Persuaded that determinism often implied a critical and philosophical monism ("monists are usually determinists"), Cowley advanced his personal credo: "any monistic conception of the universe is infinitely less rich, less complex than the real world. By conviction, point of view, Weltanschauung, I am pluralistic and believe in free will."¹⁷

The dualism at the heart of Cowley's aesthetic thought extended to his definition of poetry. With Socrates--he had recently been reading

Plato's "Symposium" and "Banquet"--he tended to equate "Art" with "Poetry" ("the masters of arts are all poets") and conceived of the poet as preeminently a "maker." In his notebook he added two axioms as important qualifications: "Only something made for the first time can be said to possess poetry. . . . Poetry is something made without ulterior purpose and for its own sake." Simultaneously, he warned against imposing a priori limitations on "the nature of the thing created;" a painting, vase or sonata, an automobile, advertisement or moving picture, a house, mud dam or garden, he argued, might possess poetry in the same way as a novel, a book of verse, a theory, emotion or idea:

The philosopher is a poet. The mathematician is a poet. The inventor may be a poet. And to separate, arbitrarily, "poetry" or "art" from the rest of life, and to erect aesthetics into a metaphysic or pseudo-science without relation to other philosophies and sciences, leads to the most sterile and ridiculous of commonplaces.¹⁸

Over the next few years such aesthetic notions as Cowley was developing in his notebooks would form the critical foundation to his practice as a literary journalist.

For a young ambitious poet-critic the literary situation in the spring of 1924 seemed hardly encouraging. As Matthew Josephson believed, in the early 1920s "the chances of winning one's bread as a free-lance writer who took his art seriously were almost zero." Recent changes in the New York literary scene had not brightened Cowley's prospects. Henry Seidel Canby had announced his resignation from the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post. Burton Rascoe, who had shown himself sympathetic to the cause of contemporary literature in general and the younger generation in particular, had been fired from the New York Herald Tribune, to be replaced by Stuart P. Sherman, an older critic whose more conservative leanings aligned him with the New Humanist followers of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. Van Wyck Brooks's Freeman had been forced to suspend publication. And whatever hopes Cowley had invested in Norman Fitts's S4N--during the previous fall Fitts had printed three letters by Cowley praising the magazine--were badly dented when Gorham

Munson boldly appropriated the double issue of September 1923-January 1924 and devoted it entirely to essays on the subject of his recent book, Waldo Frank: A Study (1923); the issue, Cowley told Loeb, was "the most outrageously silly piece of backscratching I have seen in long years." With Broom gone, too, and only The Dial open for briefers and an occasional poem or review, Cowley felt momentarily deprived of literary outlets: "There is no where to write," he complained on May 9. For the moment, the only things which held out hope were Canby's plans for a new independent literary weekly (in the summer he would launch The Saturday Review of Literature), and Edwin Seaver's announcement that he was starting a new magazine from Woodstock, to be called, simply, 1924.¹⁹

In such a situation Cowley was determined to remain on good terms with the editors of The Dial. In January he informed Alyse Gregory, with "a twinge of inflammatory conscience," that he was eager to work off arrears in writing briefers, but for the moment was reluctant to take on any new books: "It is depressing to feel that I have accepted responsibilities which I cannot fulfill." By early April he had cleared up some eight books for brief review and was ready for new assignments. Eventually, The Dial printed seventeen of Cowley's briefers during 1924; the previous year, from France, he had contributed twenty-two of them, a personal record. Typically, the briefers covered a wide range of literary modes and genres: from books on bootlegging and boxing to volumes of English and American poetry, translations of Greek and Chinese verse, and French and Russian novels.²⁰

Despite his frequent complaints--"In New York City I can't understand how anyone finds time to write," he had told Alyse Gregory--Cowley was busy enough plying the literary trade. During the spring he actively corresponded with John Brooks Wheelwright about the publication of a joint book of poems, to perpetuate the relative success of their appearance in Eight More Harvard Poets a year before. His initial enthusiasm for "a joint venture," however, was checked when he reflected that such a project might preclude the publication of a volume of his own. Instead, he proposed an exciting alternative: an anthology of "the younger poets" (he named, beside himself, Crane, Cummings, James Daly, Damon, Guthrie, Josephson, Schneider, Tate, Wescott, Wheelwright and Yvor Winters as the poets of promise), to be introduced by an older poet (Aiken, Eliot, Pound, Moore, Stevens, or, preferably, Williams), and to

be published by either Albert and Charles Boni (who were bringing out Burke's The White Oxen and Cowley's translation of a novel by Pierre MacOrlan) or Norman Fitts (who had just published Ramon Guthrie's Trobar Clus and who was receptive to the idea). Cowley anticipated that the proposed selection of poets would "outrage critics" and "start a great many controversies;" he still searched for "a combative title" and could barely contain his ardor: "I haven't come into a more practical idea these long months," he wrote to Wheelwright; "I hope you agree with me, for here[,] I think, is a venture which will help all of us and be fun for all of us." Though, from a practical perspective, Cowley's plan seemed nothing if not viable, and though Crane and Tate responded enthusiastically to his invitation, the anthology remained in blueprint.²¹

Cowley's efforts on behalf of Harold Loeb were more successful. Through the spring, summer and fall of 1924 he acted as a mediator between Loeb and his New York publishers, negotiating terms for the American publication of Loeb's novel Doodab and offering extensive criticism and suggestions for improvement. In early May he promised Loeb that he would "do any dab" to get the novel published, though he was doubtful as to the extent of his influence with New York publishers. By late June he reported on the progress of his negotiations with Boni & Liveright, with whom he had established contact through Isidor Schneider, then an employee at the newly amalgamated publishing house. In September he personally talked with Horace Liveright about Loeb's novel and discussed changes required by the publisher. "I should suggest compromising with Horace as much as possible," Cowley advised Loeb, "for there is no doubt that he is the most likely publisher for a first novel, in spite of his dishonesties and stupidities." By late November 1924 Cowley could send Loeb his "congratulations on the signing of the contract" and compliment the newly launched novelist in glowing terms.

I find your style marvelously improved: it is quite as good as that of some people who pass as stylists, and by the completion of your second book, you should be a stylist yourself. You could never have a really bad style because you think clearly, and sloppy thinking is at the base of sloppy writing. . . .

A good book, Harold. It surprised even me, and I was expecting it. Your enemies like Kreymborg will be grievously surprised.

When, a year later, Cowley reviewed Doodab for the New York Herald Tribune, he adopted a more critical tone, but still spoke of a promising first novel and praised Loeb's "exact fancy" and his ability to create "living characters." In acknowledgment of services rendered Loeb dedicated his second novel, The Professors Like Vodka (1927) to Malcolm Cowley, who again had critically reviewed the manuscript.²²

Cowley's efforts on behalf of Loeb were exemplary of many such literary services to follow: over the years he would often be instrumental in getting young or established writers published, recognized or awarded. It would not be the least, if perhaps the lesser-known, of Cowley's merits to function as a "middleman" of letters and be the personal critic, confidant, advisor and exhorter of countless writers, both unrecognized and established, both inside and outside the professional publishing circuit.

In the spring of 1924 Cowley undertook the first in a series of translations from the French which, in the course of the decade, would bring him an established reputation in the field. In the recent past he had intermittently translated work by French writers for Broom and, once, had translated Paul Morand's "Paris Letter" for The Dial, but now for the first time he tackled a complete novel by the French author Pierre MacOrlan. Cowley had interviewed MacOrlan in Paris for The Bookman, obtained six months' rights for his English translations and already done four episodes of A Bord 'L'Etoile Matutine' for Broom. More than a year before he had discussed the possibility of rendering the entire novel into English with Loeb, but it was not until April 1924 that he contacted MacOrlan again to renew translation rights for England and America, and, for \$100, contracted to translate On Board the 'Morning Star' for Albert and Charles Boni. The book appeared in the late fall of 1924, copiously illustrated with woodcuts by Daragnès, so as to make it, in the verdict of an enthusiastic Foster Damon, "an exceedingly handsome book." Cowley's lucid and elegant translation of MacOrlan's eery fantasy tale received favorable notice in The Dial; the magazine denounced MacOrlan's tendency to place "charm before reality" and criticized his glib striving for literary effect, but praised Cowley's "suave" translation of a book full of "grotesque, cruel and supernatural adventures." The appearance of Cowley's rendering of On Board the

'Morning Star' in late 1924 was given added publicity by the neatly timed publication by John Farrar of Cowley's Bookman portrait of MacOrlan in January 1925.²³

By the summer of 1924 Cowley was becoming, in the verdict of Robert N. Linscott, "perfectly well-known as a competent reviewer." His critical articles and reviews were now appearing regularly in the book sections of the New York Evening Post and New York Herald Tribune, in Canby's newly started Saturday Review of Literature, and, as always, in The Dial. The reviews he wrote between the fall of 1923 and the winter of 1925 exemplified Cowley's ongoing concern with contemporary letters, principally but not exclusively American, and underlined the contradictory premises of his literary taste. In September 1923 The Dial printed his niggardly appraisal of a volume of poetry by Sacheverell Sitwell, The Hundred and One Harlequins, in effect a belated footnote to his earlier attacks on the Georgian poets. That same month the New York Evening Post featured the first of several considerations of, mostly American, contemporary novels which illuminated Cowley's unfolding taste in fiction. The Nuptial Flight, a novel by Edgar Lee Masters, a one-time poetic model, was rather summarily dismissed as "a problem novel of which the subject is the sex instinct and which has chosen a particular family only for its bearing on this problem, as one would choose laboratory specimens." Typically, the review betrayed a greater fascination with the dynamics of Masters's career as a writer than with the specific novel, but it was conspicuous for Cowley's denunciation of platitudinous, "journalistic" prose and for his demand that fictional characters be above all human and alive, and not, as in The Nuptial Flight, "parts of a mechanism or examples to prove an argument."²⁴

A similar emphasis on the creation of "living" characters pervaded Cowley's surprisingly eulogistic considerations of two novels by Harry Leon Wilson (1867-1939), former editor of Puck and, in Cowley's verdict, "the most considerable of our humorists." Wilson's humor--"dry, mellow, and purely American"--was partly dependent on "a civilization and a situation," but above all on the creation of "living people;" by comparison even Twain's humor relied "more on action than [on] drawing characters." Though he acknowledged that Wilson often failed to provide his characters with greater depth than was required for publication in The Saturday Evening Post, Cowley did not hesitate to place Wilson in the

"great tradition" of Sterne, Fielding, Dickens and Twain. With unwarranted confidence he prophesied that at his best Wilson had created characters that would continue to "live after his books have been forgotten."²⁵

By contrast, Cowley gave short shift to Theodore Dreiser. His influence as a novelist, Cowley judged, fell little short of being disastrous. Dreiser had become "not so much the leader as the model of a whole generation of realists who strive to be as ugly and apathetic as the worst of [their master]." By making "ugliness" his subject and by writing about "the sort of weak transgression that does not deserve the name of sin," Dreiser had become responsible for "the literature of mediocre defeat" and the mood of "inane despair" marking much of the fiction of his imitators. Cowley concluded his review with an appraisal of Dreiser as a stylist which, half a century later, had become widely accepted. The man's style, he observed, was marked by all "the faults of an earlier journalism"—"No sophomore could write more awkwardly than Dreiser at his worst." Yet his stylistic infelicities were compensated for by a "power of tragic pity" which gave Dreiser's language "the rhythm of life" and lent his characters an unexpected "dignity."²⁶

Cowley could muster greater sympathy for The Eleventh Virgin, a semi-autobiographical novel by Dorothy Day, a close friend of Peggy's and a frequent visitor of the Cowleys. He praised the novel as an accurate and authentic rendering of the mood of artistic life in Greenwich Village on the eve of America's entrance into the First World War and added some personal impressions already tinged with nostalgia: "The Village of those days had a charm which it lost with the introduction of tea rooms, jazz pagodas and exorbitant rents." In a manner anticipating his analysis of "The Greenwich Village Idea" in Exile's Return, he concluded his review by pointing up the declined importance of the "former people" of 1917: by 1924, he observed ironically, the principal topic of Village conversation was no longer radical politics but sex and psychoanalysis.²⁷

In two more substantial articles Cowley examined two unambiguously modernist writers: Guillaume Apollinaire and Kenneth Burke. The first review, a consideration of Apollinaire's Le Poète Assassiné, translated by Matthew Josephson, incorporated some of the "dope" on Apollinaire he had received from André Salmon two years before in Paris. He took Apollinaire as an example of the "expressionist" artist, one whose

personality tended to overshadow his work and whose controversial influence persisted beyond his life: "Five years after his death he is still too contemporary for his work to be estimated justly." A painter, essayist, dramatist and novelist, Apollinaire remained to Cowley foremost a poet: "a man whose vision is new, simple and disturbing." Cowley used the example of Apollinaire to publicly denounce the Symbolist ideal of literature as "an almost monastic profession," one demanding abnegation and renunciation of the world, and betrayed his sympathy for Apollinaire's heady involvement with contemporary life and his capacity for change and perpetual self-renewal:

Poverty, chastity and obedience: Apollinaire made no such vows. It pleased him better to be violent and worldly; to be feared by his enemies like a melanite bomb. He multiplied himself, created artistic movements and personalities, exploded with new ideas, and wherever he passed by commotion threatened, followed, grew. Suddenly he would end the disturbance by expressing it in some astonishingly simple poem. And so his career proceeded, from field to field of artistic endeavor, leaving behind him enemies and disciples in every field.

Impressed by Apollinaire's astoundingly varied achievements, Cowley noted his influence on painting (cubism), music (Les Six), and literature (Dada and "super-realism") and admiringly concluded: "He extends across the whole symphony of modern art like a full stop."

Cowley's appraisal of The Poet Assassinated was curiously at odds with the conservative emphasis his other reviews had laid on traditional elements of realistic fiction. Apollinaire made no attempt to present himself as "a real person," Cowley observed, but seemed to have written his novel as "a defiance to all the conventions of realism"—"He detested the sort of book which recounts the adventures of mean people in a mean way and of which the ultimate praise is to call it just as tiresome as the life it represents." Here was a writer who thwarted the conventions of artistic representationalism, who set aside consistency of plot, coherence of characterization, narrative logic and chronology, a writer whom one read "to be amused and surprised." Cowley concluded his review with an insight which owed much to the failure of his recent endeavors to transplant Dada to New York:

In one sense the novel is impossible to translate. It depends on its literary background, and, despite all contrary efforts, Paris is Paris and New York remains New York. There is

a type of critic who, discovering that expressionism is a mode in German[y] or super-realism in France, announces that we should all be expressionists and super-realists. He forgets that literature is still a national affair and that carrying over experiment from one literature to another leads to a senseless confusion.²⁸

In December 1924 The Dial published Cowley's review of The White Oxen, a collection of the experimental short fiction Kenneth Burke had been writing since 1920. Over the years Cowley had closely followed his friend's progress as a fiction writer and, in his critical response, had oscillated between skepticism and enthusiasm. In preparing to review the book for The Dial--he had personally asked Alyse Gregory to assign the book to him--Cowley reread Burke's stories with great care, some of them "for the x-teenth time," and found his admiration, in particular for "My Dear Mrs. Wurtelbach" and "The Book of Yul," persisting: the two stories, he wrote to Burke, satisfied "both formal and associational logic" and were "the two most successful stories, the completest justification of a method to which you no longer adhere."²⁹

Cowley's consideration of The White Oxen was a crucial early review. Not only was it well enough written to catch the appreciative eye of Allen Tate, who recommended it to Donald Davidson as an example of "fine, simple, lucid prose;" but, more pointedly, the review comprised Cowley's examination of what he saw as one of the essential features of the modernist creed. In line with his earlier appraisal of T. S. Eliot, Cowley presented Burke as a ceaseless explorer of new paths, who never repeated himself, but always moved on in search of "new discoveries." "[G]ood writing today is regarded more and more as an adventure," Cowley wrote. "We seek those territories of the imagination which lie across the border of the last formula." It was Burke who, in The White Oxen, exemplified preeminently this modernist tendency towards "a perpetual grailism," the perennial search for "the next phase."

Cowley analyzed the progression of method within Burke's volume as an evolution from realism to "accuratism." The latter, he emphasized, was not to be confused with mere precision of naturalistic imitation: "Though events are reported with a detail which becomes increasingly exact, the aim is no longer to make an image of life; but rather, through the combination of observed facts, to create another reality corresponding to nothing outside the author's mind." Abandoning his predilection for

artistic representationalism, Cowley dismissed "Flaubertian realism" as merely a literary commodity: "any trained writer can manufacture it, and any editor, if he desires, buy it across the counter." Instead, he noted how Burke pushed fiction "beyond the limits of pure realism" into a self-conscious, foregrounded formalism (what Burke called an "increase of stress upon the more rhetorical properties of letters"). In The White Oxen, Cowley concluded, Burke had realized, with complete success, the aims he had set for himself; the book, he felt, marked the close to a "cycle" in Burke's development and raised the question of where the author's next phase would lead him: "Burke can write adventure stories or psychological novels; abandon fiction for poetry or metaphysics; go Dada or Gaga, but his grailism makes him incapable of going back."³⁰

Cowley's sympathetic treatment of Apollinaire and Burke gave evidence of the continuing ambivalence of his response to literary modernism. Whereas, in theory, he might endorse an experimentalist divagation into nonrealistic, nonrepresentational art, in the practice of his criticism he continued to judge novels by the standards of conventional realism. At times the contradictory assumptions behind his approach to literature made Cowley feel uncomfortable. Thus, while publicly he announced the exhaustion of "Flaubertian realism" as a literary mode and acknowledged that, instead, "the tradition of St. Apollinaire" seemed "on the point of being accepted," in the privacy of his correspondence with Burke he confessed to the fundamental conservatism of his taste; in the process he revealed that his insight into the workings of the subconscious was not particularly perspicacious:

. . . one profound reason for my unhappiness is the fact that subconsciously the thing I chiefly admire in literature is the creation of characters. Thus, I have an immense subconscious respect for writers like Duhamel, Proust, Galsworthy: a respect which becomes outspoken in the case of men one can safely admire, like Dickens, Mark Twain, Harry Leon Wilson.

Now if I carried the criticism or poetry I have written in the past to its extreme perfection, I should still be completely dissatisfied in my subconscious judgments, because I had created no characters.

Though he feared that he possessed "no special talent for creating characters," he toyed with the idea of writing a novel and, in his criticism, decided to "try more for character studies and interviews than

plain reviews."³¹

The ambition to write a novel persisted through the decade; it surfaced intermittently in the 1930s and 1940s, before he came to accept the proper bent and limitations of his talents. As early as 1917 he had spoken to Burke of his "unquenchable" desire to write a novel of "the Galsworthy, George, Maugham type." Four years later he had finished a complete outline for a novel set in Greenwich Village in the Prohibition atmosphere of dissipation and sexual profligacy which he had known before he left for France. The projected novel centered on the turbulent fluctuations in the relationship between an ambitious but naive young writer--"He was a gentle young man, transversed by storms of moral indignation. He had written poems, but his character was a form of protective coloring. . . . His most American characteristic [was] that of blundering ahead without stopping to analyse his motives"--and an experienced, hard-drinking and not too faithful divorcee, who "had a knack for picking out men for their outstanding qualities, . . . had learned a little about writing, a little about drawing, a little about decoration," and who introduced the young apprentice writer to New York editors. The novel, a thinly disguised fictionalization of Cowley's early life with Peggy in the "Crooked Streets" of the Village, remained in blueprint; as an accompanying note to the outline explains: it was "too autobiographical to be written."³²

Numerous aborted fictional sketches among his papers and lengthy drafts in his notebooks testify to the persistency of Cowley's hopes for a novel which would deal with the lives of young ambitious men and women in the carefree and hedonistic atmosphere of 1920s New York. What fragments he wrote suggest that Cowley conceived of the book as a collective novel about the drifting, empty lives of the "lost people," as he later came to call them, a book thematically concerned with the wastage of artistic genius, the corruption of talent and moral character, the dynamics of literary failure and success. By the summer of 1925 he had made a definite start on a novel, found a publisher, settled on a title, finished two chapters and part of a preface; several newspapers had announced the forthcoming book, but the novel remained unfinished. Five years later, his desire for a novel still unquenched, he drew up a new prospectus: "The novel I want to write should belong to the Fielding-Dickens-Dostoevski type--a large canvas, many people moving in different

directions, the whole bound together by some big and moderately simple theme." The "fairly simple ideas" about which the novel was to revolve had obvious pertinence to Cowley's personal life in the 1920s:

(1) Character, more than ability, is the key to success in the arts. Every year there are graduated from our universities, art schools, conservatories, Greenwich Villages and Montparnasses, hundreds of young men and women with the ability to be great. They fail because life is too hard for them, or because they are too weak for life.

(2) We pay for our vices. However, I have my own definition of vice. I think there are two great crimes for an ambitious young man: one is selfishness, or rather self-centredness, and the other is surrender, taking the easier of two possible courses instead of the more difficult.

I have thought of starting out with four or five young men and two or three young women, all of them people of great natural talents. One succeeds; one makes a meretricious success; one finds a sort of happiness; the rest are failures on account of weaknesses that become more apparent as the novel proceeds. . . . Most of the characters will be people of principle; they will discuss the moral rights and wrongs of sodomy, abortion, promiscuity, theft, slander, falsehood--for, according to the two principles I laid down above, no act is right or wrong in itself; it is right if it leads to a more universal life, if it is difficult, and if it is in accordance with the code of morals one has drawn up for oneself.

I had better begin by drawing up a list of case histories, so that I can be certain of the characters available.³³

In May 1934, in the immediate wake of finishing Exile's Return, Cowley returned to the idea of writing a novel about "the break-up of a group [of young writers in New York], as some of its members are snatched into fame and others decline into alcoholism, so that their relative positions are completely changed at the end of the story." Three years later he again projected a novel about the "roots" of literary failure and success and recurrently considered the tragic life story of Hart Crane as a potential subject. He continued to waver, however, between "a simple love story" and a "group novel." It was not until 1952 that he admitted to himself, in the private confessional of his notebook, that he had "more or less decided not to be a novelist," but that perhaps his memoirs and poems might have "the same value" as the by now chimerical novel. In the end, what novelistic and poetic talents Cowley possessed--a capacity for evoking mood and emotion, a gift for building narrative and bringing to life the complex nuances of a writer's literary personality--were

channeled into the writing of literary criticism, where it could be made to serve his sensitivity to the interweavings of character, art and milieu and help to make him an outstanding memoirist and biographical critic. Likewise, the principal thematic concerns of his projected novel—a collective portrait of the younger literary generation of the 1920s, a study of the "ordeal" by success and failure--were transmitted to his critical and historical writings and remained central to his interests. The question of "the mechanics of literary reputations" was an important leitmotif of the "chapters" of literary history published in And I Worked at the Writer's Trade (1978). The closest he eventually came to writing his collective novel about literary life in the 1920s was in Exile's Return, a sui generis book which not only possessed the stylistic virtues of a well-made novel, but which, while concerned with real events and characters, was built on "a good novelistic structure," as Cowley explained to Burke in 1931. Not without justification, indeed, he could in 1967 point to Exile's Return as "a non-fictional novel . . . done rather deliberately in that form."³⁴

The summer of 1924 saw the beginning of two cherished literary friendships which helped to make life in New York bearable, even enjoyable, for Cowley: Hart Crane became a regular companion, and in June Allen Tate made his first visit to New York from Nashville, Tennessee. Cowley and Crane had corresponded about poetry before they had first met in August 1923, shortly upon Cowley's return from Europe. In March Crane had arrived in New York from Cleveland, Ohio, taken a job as copywriter with the J. Walter Thompson agency, and fallen in with the group around Broom, consorting with whom he had found "a perfect circus." Cowley had seen Crane several times during the turbulent fall of 1923; he had been volubly present at the disastrous Broom-Secession meeting in October and both men had spent a bibulous weekend at Eugene O'Neill's country place in Ridgefield in November. At first, with Crane electing to stand by Munson and Frank, their relations had remained rather strained. "I like Crane," Cowley had told Burke at the time, "but every time I see him we fight on another subject." Crane had expressed similarly ambivalent feelings about Cowley to Munson: "I wouldn't make any compromises with

C[owley]. I like many things about him, but he is still in his adolescence when it comes to certain reactions." In early January, learning of the failure of Cowley's "significant gesture" against Ernest Boyd, he had observed to Munson: "Cowley's gaucheries in admitting his mistakes and tactics are really funny."³⁵

Crane, however, was not prepared to take as severe a stand against Cowley's set and the "trivial disturbance" created by the first issue of "The American Murkury" as did Gorham Munson, privately in his letters, publicly in Secession. Indeed, by 1924, with Munson becoming more deeply involved with the Gurdjieff movement than Crane cared to follow and Crane spending more of his time with the writers of Cowley's less solemn circle, Crane's friendship with Munson had markedly cooled, while he grew proportionally closer to Cowley. In April 1924 Cowley helped Crane get a position as a copywriter at Sweet's; for almost a year they worked together, behind adjoining desks, helping to bring out the firm's gigantic architectural and engineering catalogues, lunching together two or three times a week. Cowley, who prided himself on possessing the "quick competence" of the one-time scholarship student, did not rate Crane's talents for copywriting too highly ("He wasn't really a good copywriter, but his work was adequate and that was all that was demanded of him") and was surprised to find unexpected lacunae in the reading of a poet whose single-minded and perfectionist devotion to his art he admired immensely. Crane, in turn, was happy enough about the job at Sweet's, without regarding it as more than a practical necessity. His heart was in his poetry—he was already contemplating a poem to be called The Bridge--and he responded enthusiastically when, in May 1924, Cowley invited him to contribute to his projected anthology of the younger poets.³⁶

It was through Crane that Cowley first met Allen Tate. The occasion was a party at 30 Jones Street, the Greenwich Village apartment of James Light and Susan Jenkins and the temporary sanctuary of Crane. Tate, on his first visit to New York from the provincial, genteel South, recalled being slightly daunted by Cowley's snobbish parade of cosmopolitan sophistication: "I appeared neatly dressed in a dark suit, carrying a preposterous walking-stick and wearing a Phi Beta Kappa key. I was completely unsophisticated. You were already a man of the world--had been to France and known the Dadaists, etc. You remarked, 'We no longer wear our Phi Beta Kappa keys.' And you picked up somewhere an old stick--not a

cane--and carried it the entire evening!" Cowley, who felt hardly as sophisticated as Tate made him out to be, in turn recalled that Tate had "the best manners of any young man I had known, in America or France. . . . [H]e used politeness not only as a defense but sometimes as an aggressive weapon against strangers."³⁷

From the South Tate and his fellow Fugitives had closely followed the vicissitudes of Broom and Secession. In the summer of 1922, acting upon a suggestion of Hart Crane, Munson had invited Tate to contribute to Secession. Tate had sent in "Elegy for Eugenesis." When Munson rejected his poem, Tate had observed to Donald Davidson: "I fear that I can't compete with those Secession birds for all my ultra-modernism." Tate could not concur in Davidson's dismissive judgment of the meaningless absurdities to be found in Secession--"very smart, very sophisticated but nevertheless hokum"--but his sympathy for the cerebral aesthetics exemplified by Secession had been strongly qualified. In July 1922, while Cowley was touring Europe, he had explained the grounds of his ambivalence to Davidson: "The chief point of my disagreement with [the critic-poets of Secession] is their effort to get away from the connotative and ideational (idea-emotions) in poetry . . . it seems to me that our given medium of language, by its very nature, cuts us off from a complete intellectualism. These fellows are simply trying to do in poetry what has been done in the last twenty years in painting and music . . . abstraction." At roughly the same time Cowley had expressed similar reservations about a pure or abstract art to Burke. For all his skepticism, however, Tate had had high hopes of Crane, whom he deemed "the best of the lot," and in March 1924 had considered asking Crane to contribute to The Fugitive. Earlier that same year, unaware of the magazine's recent suppression, Tate had submitted a poem to Broom, but had been informed by Cowley: "There's no use accepting your manuscript, as God knows when we'd be able to print it. We're closing up shop, and will have to perpetuate Broom in other forms. Come to New York when you can, and, also, try writing some prose, having mastered the easier art of verse." Even in his discouragement Cowley could not resist being flippant.³⁸

When, in June 1924, Tate met the writers of the Broom-Secession group in person, he was surprised to find them "much less theory-ridden" than the Southern Fugitives. Shortly after, he reported his first impressions

of Cowley and his literary circle to Davidson:

Today offered me my first rest, and I took it with Malcolm Cowley who escorted me through the Bronx Zoo. We discussed the coming Anthology, in which my inclusion is now a certainty: discussed it quite casually, for Cowley refuses to talk literature, looks like a truck-driver, and was educated at Harvard . . . the type of snob that becomes a snob himself by giving one to understand that he deprecates all other snobs: but a very keen and refreshingly unpretentious person withal. But Crane, despite my fears, is the most considerable personality I've met among the younger men. . . . Don't think these people are an organized group of aesthetes. They're the simplest and least given to "organization" of all people I've seen and far less conscious of being "poets" than we are as a group. It may interest you to know that the "outer circle" of The Dial (Cowley, etc) have so strongly urged me to offer my Baudelaire translation to that journal that I am mailing it in today. . . . It seems, by the way, that Crane, Burke, and Slater Brown are the large boys here. Cowley said this, naturally leaving himself out; Cowley is now having a feud with Munson. Cowley ridicules Waldo Frank, Munson worships him.³⁹

It was Cowley's second meeting with Tate which, in retrospect, stood out as the more memorable occasion. It began in the late afternoon of June 24, 1924, with a gathering at 110 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn, where Hart Crane not long before had rented a back room with a resplendent view of Brooklyn Bridge, certainly, so Crane believed, "the most superb piece of construction in the modern world." Cowley and Tate were duly impressed by the splendor of the view, which gave focus and direction to the literary talk that followed. At one point, in response to derogatory remarks by Crane about the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, Cowley read out loud "The City in the Sea." The contemporary relevance of Poe's nightmarish evocation of the doomed city of death, with its "time-eaten towers" and "Babylon-like walls," could not have been lost on a poet who, not long before, had written down his own apocalyptic visions of urban inundation in his notebook and who had once evoked New York as a city of the "living dead." Crane was thrilled by the experience of hearing a poem read aloud to so much effect. Later, Cowley, Crane and Tate wandered down to the waterfront and climbed to the end of a scow at the end of a pier on the Brooklyn side of the bridge. There they continued talking, sat listening to the black water lapping the pier, watched the myriad early lights flash on in the "proud towers" of Manhattan, and looked across the river to where an enormous electric sign

proclaimed the virtues of "Waterman's Fountain Pens." The moment made an indelible impression. It left Cowley with an exhilarating sense of united literary effort, as if with Crane, Tate and others he were bound by an unspoken "oath of comradeship"—"Suddenly we felt," he remembered, "that we were secretly comrades in the same endeavor: to present this new scene in poems that would reveal not only its astonishing face but the lasting realities behind it."⁴⁰

For the moment, Cowley's grasp of the realities behind the thrilling urban spectacle remained rather tenuous, but such experiences as he shared with Crane and Tate were crucial. As Crane well knew, aesthetically contemplating Manhattan from a vantage point like Brooklyn Heights helped one "to feel the greatest city in the world from enough distance . . . to see its larger proportions." Immersed in the city's oppressive reality, one was "often too distracted to realize its better and more imposing aspects." Cowley, too, would increasingly feel the need for distance from New York. Meanwhile, such moments as he experienced that afternoon with Crane and Tate might inspire a perfectly finished and classically elegant sonnet like "Those of Lucifer," a poem in ambivalent celebration of Manhattan's powerful but possibly diabolical skyscrapers. Originally entitled "Skyscrapers" and included as "Towers of Song" in Blue Juniata (1929), the poem was subsequently dedicated to Allen Tate. Its visionary lyricism perhaps inspired by Poe's "The City in the Sea," it stands as one of Cowley's finest achievements. An early version, submitted to Alyse Gregory in February 1925, was published in The Dial for July 1925:

Those of Lucifer

Out of an empty sky the dust of hours
a word was spoken and a folk obeyed
an island uttered incandescent towers
like frozen simultaneous hymns to trade

Here, in their lonely multitude of powers
thrones, virtues, archangelic cavalcade
they rise
 proclaiming Sea and sky are ours
and yours O man the shadow of our shade

Or did a poet crazed with dignity
rear them upon an island to prolong
his furious contempt for sky and sea

To what emaciated hands belong
these index fingers of infinity

O towers of intolerable song⁴³

Working at Sweet's for nine hours a day kept Cowley from writing as much as he wanted to write. Apart from a handful of book reviews he was less than usually productive in 1924. That year, for the first time since 1916, none of his poems reached print; 1923, by contrast, had seen the appearance of twenty poems in as many as ten different magazines, in addition to the publication of Eight More Harvard Poets. Once again sharply brought up against a faulty "mechanics" of living, Cowley saw his summer lassitude aggravated by a rising sense of frustration. In August his letters to Burke reached new depths of ironic lamentation. "During the last month I've been as near absolute 0 as one gets without a more serious consideration of the relative merits of pistols, gas, poison and heavier-than-air flight without wings," he wrote hyperbolically on August 12. A week later he complained that unfinished work, domestic chores and hot weather had brought him to the point where he would "go walking on the roof and be afraid to approach the parapet for psychological reasons." With mounting seriousness he contemplated quitting his job at Sweet's the following spring and venturing upon an independent freelancing life away from New York. Meanwhile, he looked about for means of scraping together the money for such a move.⁴²

As if to check out his possibilities on the commercial literary market Cowley now undertook, if not without some serious misgivings, the sort of hackwriting work which under different conditions he would have denounced as an unacceptable form of compromise. At \$50 a month he agreed to write on a regular basis for Charm, a rather copious magazine issued by L. Bamberger's department store in Newark, New Jersey, for distribution to its mostly female charge-account customers. Subtitled "The Magazine of New Jersey Home Interests," Charm seemed modeled after Vanity Fair, while catering to the needs and interests of New Jersey housewives. For its first few years the magazine was edited by Bessie Breuer, an old Village friend of Peggy's, who later ventured into novel

writing without attaining much recognition; she was succeeded by Lucie Taussig, an editor who gave Cowley more freedom to write on subjects of his own choosing.⁴³ Between 1924 and 1928 Cowley wrote over thirty-five articles for Charm; in August 1925 he became book editor and was commissioned to write a monthly book page.

Charm's editor Bessie Breuer managed to dream up some rather "outlandish" topics for articles. Over the years Cowley wrote on an astounding variety of subjects, ranging from aspects of the literary life in Greenwich Village and Montparnasse to reading habits, personal libraries, detective stories, American humor, American history, travel books and biographies. At his own suggestion he wrote a series of articles dealing with New Jersey history and geography, with local places of interest, with industries or crafts peculiar to the region. Thus, he wrote on William Franklin, the last Loyalist governor of New Jersey and the son of Benjamin Franklin; composed a historical guide to the Quaker settlements in western New Jersey; presented surveys of churches remaining from colonial times and ancient trees which had witnessed the American Revolution; wrote a history of the Morris Canal, one of the region's oldest waterways, drained in 1924; surveyed the cluster of beautiful lakes in northern New Jersey, and reported on the plentiful fishing trade in Barnegat Bay, off Long Beach Island. In addition, he wrote regular omnibus reviews of "books of the season," discussed various aspects of the literary trade, and recommended books for summer reading or giving at Christmas.⁴⁴ The articles, lavishly illustrated by photographs, drawings and cartoons, appeared duly flanked by advertisements for real estate developments, newfangled household appliances, frigidaires, radios, egg noodles, cutlery, shoes, rugs, trunks, hair tonics, body lotions, dental creams and mosquito nets for baby carriages.

Cowley's first few articles for Charm, written and published in 1924, set the tone and pattern for the many that followed. "Parnassus-on-the-Seine," an article on American expatriate life in Montparnasse, was popular and lightly satirical in tone. It resurrected the figure of Young Mr. Elkins, the subject of Cowley's satirical portrait of Harold Stearns in Broom, whom it again presented as the archetypical expatriate. The article hardly rose above the kind which helped to fix the stereotypical image of the expatriate as a nonwriting, café-sitting wastrel and which

appeared in magazines like Literary Digest or The Saturday Evening Post throughout the 1920s. Only its tone of mild irony betrayed its author's criticism. But if the article did not probe deeply into the phenomenon of cultural exile and seemed intended first of all to exploit the entertainment value of its subject, nevertheless it tried to suggest a little of the serious impact of Montparnasse on the artist, beyond the cheap and snobbish exhilarations to be found in cafés, cabarets and sidewalk terraces; the "real charm" of Montparnasse, Cowley told the housewives of New Jersey, lay in the international exchange of culture and in "the battle of ideas" waged there, a battle of Modernists against Conservatives, of Romanticism against Classicism and Realism.⁴⁵

A second article broached a subject guaranteed to capture the interest of Charm's readers: "Do Artists Make Good Husbands?" Clever, witty and amusing, it challenged the conventional view that marriage interfered with an artist's liberty and pushed him towards conformity and caution. Instead, a flippant narrator distinguished between artists proper and people possessed of merely "the artistic temperament," and argued that "an artist's marriage is usually happy." The article surrendered any opportunity for a serious treatment of its subject, but the interference of the exigencies of an artist's personal life with the pursuit of his professional ideals was an aspect of the literary life that continued to fascinate Cowley. In popular form, indeed, "Do Artists Make Good Husbands?" exemplified an interest which would persist. In more serious form it surfaced again in "A Natural History of the American Writer" in The Literary Situation (1954), a near booklength study of the living and working conditions in the writing profession in America; there, in a manner anticipated by his Charm article, Cowley presented himself as a literary anthropologist reporting on the personal and professional customs and folkways of American writers as a special tribe.⁴⁶

Other of Cowley's articles for Charm, too, however limited their intrinsic value, allowed him to pursue in popular, lightweight fashion broader interests which surfaced in more serious and complex forms in his maturer years. Thus, several articles evinced a bibliophilic delight in books as made objects and displayed an interest in all aspects of the literary trade, from seasonal fluctuations in the publishing world to prices, editions, lettertypes and the quality of printing paper. Others,

in particular the articles on New Jersey, exemplified an early interest in arboriculture, the preservation of the American landscape, the public management and conservation of natural resources. In later life, Cowley would plant his own little forest of pine trees on his acreage in Sherman, Connecticut, and, for twenty years, would serve the local community as chairman of the zoning board, helping to preserve the regional landscape against commercial encroachments; he also reviewed the state of farming in New England for regional magazines like Country Journal.⁴⁷

Cowley's articles for Charm were written for money; they stand in much the same relation to his more serious work as Fitzgerald's potboiling stories for The Saturday Evening Post stand to The Great Gatsby, or as Allen Tate's work as assistant editor of the pulp-paper magazine Telling Tales stands to his "Ode to the Confederate Dead." The Charm articles lack the crucial quality of Cowley's more serious essays and reviews: the distinction of rising above incidental opinions and proceeding from an "intellectual center."⁴⁸ Yet they possess certain redeeming features not untypical of the best of Cowley's writings. A natural gift for storytelling stood him in good stead in entertaining his New Jersey readers; many of his articles were cast in the form of miniature stories and created imaginary or real characters. His easy narrative style--smooth, lucid, elegant--proved a tool adaptable to virtually any subject. Writing in simple language, with a deliberate avoidance of specialized vocabulary, Cowley aimed to introduce new literary ideas to his unsophisticated readers. Hoping to instruct and entertain, he retained an almost eighteenth-century respect for his "common reader"--"O Gentle Reader" was his occasional form of address--and rarely or never talked down to his audience. Instead, he regarded writing for Charm as something of a "challenge" ("much as if I had been an engineer asked to design an outlandish bridge"), an exercise in capturing a segment of the American reading public entirely different from the sophisticated readers of The Dial and The New Republic. It was a challenge which seemed to fit in with the admiration he had earlier professed for a writer like André Salmon, who wrote with equal success for a mass audience on Parisian murder trials as for a specialized public on serious literary matters. Fifty years later he confessed to having shared "that 18th-century ambition to write for the intelligent but

unspecialized reader, the audience that Diderot had in mind for the Encyclopédie.⁴⁹ Throughout his literary career Cowley would occasionally alternate his serious writings for highbrow periodicals and specialized academic quarterlies with articles for mass-circulation magazines. It was in part because the best of Cowley's work would be accessible to a large audience without compromising standards of excellence, complexity and depth, that he could become an influential and widely read literary critic and historian.

In 1924, however, Cowley embarked upon his Charm adventure almost against his better judgment. He knew, as he confessed to Jane Heap of The Little Review, that measured by the highly moral literary standards he had evolved in France such work reeked unforgivably of compromise; Louis Aragon, he acknowledged, would consider it "very unethical." When Kenneth Burke, speaking with the voice of literary conscience, objected that, what with working for Sweet's and hacking for Charm, Cowley seemed to have abandoned a disinterested pursuit of literature and capitulated to pragmatic and commercial motives, his friend had trouble defending himself. He admitted that the articles in Charm were "wrong," "bad policy" and "hardly excused by the prompt checks which answer them," but indignantly denied any concern for his "commercial name." His trouble, he explained, lay in the combination of a "constitutional need to write" with a wasteful and "faulty methodology;" the principal excuse for Charm was that it promised to help him leave New York to become a free-lance writer:

When I came home [from France], I determined to hack no more. I found that I wrote no more. In the little intervals between supper and sleep, it is possible only with the greatest difficulty to write well, for writing well requires consecutive thought. So I returned to hacking, on the principal [sic] that bad writing left me happier than none. In the scale of hacking, an article for Charm is somewhat higher than a bad book review, because it exercises an idle part of my brain.

Some things are as simple as ABC, and one of them is that unless I quit my job, I will never be worth more than a hundred dollars weekly in a city of millionaires; also that the longer I remain, the more narrow my views become. It is for this ABC reason that I am going to the country, somewhere, and live on God knows what.⁵⁰

Against Burke's objections he advanced that his reading, at least, was as earnest and disinterested as ever and, in evidence, listed the books he

had recently read "for other than business reasons"—among them Plato's "Phaedras" and "The Banquet," Paul Elmer More's Hellenistic Philosophies, Sir Thomas Mallory's Morte d'Arthur, Byron's Beppo, Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Matthew Lewis's The Monk, Twain's Life on the Mississippi, Frazer's The Golden Bough, Joseph Delteil's Choléra and two novels by Maurice Barrès, Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort and Un Jardin sur l'Oronte--ample proof, he claimed, of the seriousness and variety of his interests.

In the face of Burke's attacks Cowley now reaffirmed his belief in the natural beauty of plain, simple things--"Kitchen chairs are more beautiful than overstuffed library rockers. A Pennsylvania farmhouse is more beautiful than the Wurlitzer Building;" for similar reasons Harry Leon Wilson was preferable to Joseph Hergesheimer, he added. If such preferences were the signs of an "inverted snobbery," as Burke charged, then Burke's concern with "pure" literature, Cowley countered, was a serious "defection from the classical standard, in which literature is a part of life like the other parts." Whereas two months before he had rather cryptically denounced Burke's "tendency to kiss the ass of culture," he now restated his position in less equivocal terms:

You have a tendency . . . to divide things printed from things merely existing, and to worship the printed word. Personally I endeavor to place books in the midst of life, and to lay the same weight on reading a face, a store window, a museum or a pine stump in a clearing as in reading any book which is not a finished work of art. . . .

At times when I am riding the top of the world I can hardly understand you. It is only after being beaten down by New York that I begin to share your hunger for mere culture, and to rush frantically to the library for a hypodermic full of Plato, taken like any other hypodermic.⁵¹

At the end of August Cowley made a trip to Belsano, to spend a long weekend with his parents. He fished the Cambria County trout streams, played Chopin waltzes on the family grand piano, its deep tones reverberating like "echoes out of a past," and climbed to the attic of the farm, where he rediscovered all the letters Burke had written him since 1915: rereading them was like reliving his own adolescence. Writing

to Burke from Belsano he returned to the philosophical debates about God, Immortality and Love of an earlier time--"such topics are sweet to meditate, in the country, in the dusk, when one is seventeen"--and wondered once more whether, measured by the high ambitions of their adolescence, he and Burke had possibly failed in literature and life. "What we should have done," he speculated, "was to keep the quality of our interest [in metaphysical, religious and sexual questions] the same, but to transfer its subject" to matters literary and artistic.⁵²

In mid-September, back in New York, the relief Cowley had found in his invigorating and nostalgic visit to his childhood country vanished entirely, as he found himself caught up once more in the annual prepublication rush for Sweet's big architectural catalogue, due on the first of October. Working overtime till nine or ten at night precluded any social, literary or intellectual activity, and Cowley's spirits sank accordingly: "Writing nothing, seeing minus nobody and thinking very little," he complained to Wheelwright. To Harold Loeb, still in Europe, he voiced his frustration and disgust in a long litany of lamentation:

The disgusting feature of New York is its professional writers, who are venial to the last degree. Out of business, into literature, there is nobody to respect. One doesn't demand Apollinaire or the Dadas in every city, but there should be at least, in the older generation, a Paul Valéry. The Brouns, Boyds and Canbys are international.

Harold, there would be all sorts of fun to be had with these straw figures of greatness if the business of living left one with any time. The atmosphere of this city is exhausting. I feel the need of nine hours of sleep, evenings at home, a mind walled up like the entrance to a deserted subway. I have done, during the year, nothing, and will do, during the year, nothing. To quit the job is my only hope, and that hope, considering the amount of hack work it involves, is not bright. Nowhere else in the world have I been brought so blankly against the mechanics of living. And for this reason, I do not advise you to come home. What I want to do is to join you in France. How?⁵³

A month later Cowley's spirits had risen considerably. After Sweet's catalogue had gone to press in early October, he had gone north to spend a month's vacation in Woodstock, in the foothills of the Catskills, some ten miles northwest of Kingston, New York. Woodstock, of old an artists' colony, by 1924 had become a favorite place of refuge from the city for the young writers of Cowley's circle. William Slater Brown had been

living there for some time, first renting a house with Edward Nagle, later cohabiting with Susan Jenkins, whom he would marry after her divorce from James Light. Munson had sought out Woodstock for convalescence, fought his muddy battle with Josephson there, and in the summer of 1924 had again resorted to Woodstock as the place where "the electrifying impulses" of the 1920s could most advantageously be felt. The poet Edwin Seaver was launching his new magazine 1924 from Woodstock, Hart Crane had spent six weeks there during the previous fall, and the Cowleys, too, had paid several weekend visits to the hilly countryside around the village for invigoration and refreshment.⁵⁴

In October 1924 Cowley enjoyed Woodstock to his heart's content. He relished the biting air and the splendid colors of autumn in the Hudson Valley, gathered walnuts, butternuts and hickory nuts, sampled the cider made by the local farmers, and derived the more enjoyment of the open wood fire in his fireplace for having sawed the logs himself. As always, the country revived Cowley's rural tastes and instincts, renewed his awareness of the divided loyalties in himself, and fortified his determination to opt for the rural life. "Part of me is still a farmer, and the part is complete. Part of me is a New Yorker," he wrote to Burke from Woodstock; "The parts have little connection. The rural part is a woodsman, proprietor and miser. The New Yorker is an unhappy spender, tainted with an alcoholism which disappears in the country. . . . This country [around Woodstock] is very satisfying. Nice brooks, mountains rising to 3200 feet from valleys of about 600; pine growing plentifully and spruce on the higher ridges; a great cider country; no swamps."⁵⁵

With the revival of his energies, Cowley's habit of lapsing into complaint gave way to a renewed desire for action. A recent meeting of his circle of friends at McSorley's saloon in the Village had been but a "sad" and tepid affair, and Cowley now seemed determined to rekindle the combative, iconoclastic spirit which had marked such gatherings in earlier days. "We are like tinder, we need a spark, but the tinder is wet," he exhorted Burke from Woodstock. What was missing, he said, was "a new romanticism. A certain brave defiance. . . ." Acting on the upsurge of his moral fervor, he wrote an open letter to the editors of New York Herald Tribune Books, taking issue with critics of the old guard like Stuart P. Sherman, H. L. Mencken and, more mildly, Henry Seidel Canby, while speaking up for the literary "moderns," whom he described as people

"without compromise; perpetual extremists who are fundamental in a fashion which is not that of academy or church."⁵⁶

A more serious conflict arose over the issue of Dada in America and was fought out with Waldo Frank, first in the pages of 1924, then in private correspondence. In effect, Cowley's debate with Frank reenacted in real life the imaginary conversation between Josephson and Rosenfeld staged by Edmund Wilson in the pages of The New Republic in April of that year; much like Wilson's dialogue, the Cowley-Frank altercation dramatized two contradictory positions without coming any closer to a resolution of the issues.⁵⁷ In the September issue of 1924 Frank finally retaliated against the many attacks leveled against him in the pages of Broom by Cowley and Josephson. His position on American Dada was in line with Wilson's earlier attack on Dada in Vanity Fair. Dada, Frank argued, may have worked well as a "salutary burst of laughter" in a moribund Europe, but it had no relevance for an American civilization that was, in essence, young, anarchic and nonsensical:

Good jokers, the Dadaists were: wistful creators, against sour sense, of sweet absurdity. But they did nothing more ridiculous than the installation of the Dada mood in American letters. Europe called for Dada by antithesis: America for analogous reasons calls for the antithesis of Dada. For America is Dada. . . . Dada spans Brooklyn Bridge; it spins round Columbus Circle; it struts with the Ku-Klux Klan; it mixes with all brands of bootleg whisky; it prances in our shows; it preaches in our churches; it tremulos at our political conventions. . . . It is in the commercial comedy of our advertisements. . . . It is in the medley of strutting chimneys and bowed heads, of strutting precepts and low deeds that make America. We are a hodgepodge, a boil. We are a maze of infernos and nirvanas. Our brew of Nigger-strut, of wailing Jew, of cantankerous Celt, of nostalgic Anglo-Saxon, is a brew of Dada. No wonder they imported our essential chaos to lighten the regularities of France!

American Dada, Frank thought, lacked the "intellectual stuff and stamina" of its French counterpart: it consisted of little more than "weakling strains of the European pose muddled with American incompetence and lost against the background of American bewilderment." What America needed was the opposite of Dada: seriousness, order and tradition. The American Dadaists, Frank believed, were simply too caught up in the anarchy of American life to exert control or direction over its course; they were its slaves, not its leaders. Dada in a Dada world stood "in danger of

becoming narcissistic: of growing infatuated with its own twitching image."⁵⁸

In late October Cowley wrote to Frank from Woodstock; his letter, together with Frank's reply, was published in the November issue of 1924 as a "Communication on Seriousness and Dada." Cowley granted that Frank's attack on "a hypothetical group of American Dadas" was justified insofar as it concerned the impossibility of transplanting features of one national culture to another: "For American writers to revolt from the tradition of Rémy de Gourmont or Mallarmé is empty imitation, a gesture with no more significance than could be given to a French protest against anticigarette laws in the State of Kansas." But Frank had been blinded by bias, Cowley charged, when he failed to consider that "the progress of literature is also a discovery of new principles, involving a rejection or reaffirmation of the old: and that such principles are international." It was here, in its liberating and innovative impact, that Cowley located the positive contribution made by Dada:

. . . Dada was also a discovery: that nonsense may be the strongest form of ridicule: that writing is often best when it is approached in a spirit of play; that associational processes of thought often have more force than the logical; that defiance carried to the extremes of bravado is more to be admired than a passive mysticism. Dada was the sense of exhilaration which was born when our old shackles were tested and found to be rusted away.

In this sense, Cowley had added in an early draft, Dada was "living still." It gave evidence that the romantic movement was "not dead," and reaffirmed that "what a man writes is a fundamental part of his life." He voiced his admiration for those American writers who, in France, "met many writers of many schools, took the best of each and retained enough personal force to write about their own surroundings in their own manner," but, concluding in a spirit of perverse mockery, proclaimed himself the "butt" of Frank's attack: "the clever but not coruscant, smart or swift young man who clutters our more serious magazines, the American Dada."⁵⁹

Cowley's polemic conclusion was more convincing as a specimen of Dadaist posturing than as a logical refutation of Frank's position. The weakness of his response lay in its failure to address the serious issue concerning the deficiency of American culture which lay at the heart of

Frank's critique; instead, in a manner more emotive than precise, Cowley quarreled with certain isolated points and used them as stepping stones to a defiant proclamation. Moving on a different temperamental and literary wavelength, Cowley was unable to rise far enough above personal bias to read Frank right.

In reply Frank pointed out the inadequacy of Cowley's response and, rather painfully, suggested that Cowley's propensity for broad definition had led him into facile (Frank spoke of "juvenile") thought. Unable on his side to keep the exchange on rational grounds, Frank took personal offense at Cowley's use of the term "passive mysticism" and convicted his opponent of "impertinence" and "an ignorance so essential as to disqualify you in your present temper from true intelligent discussion." His article, Frank claimed, had by no means sought "to destroy American Dada, but merely to put it in its little place." Cowley's advertisement of himself as the American Dada, Frank abrasively concluded, was hard to accept; his poetry alone gave evidence that Cowley was "fit for better things," provided he could muster "the moral courage to confront the reality of our world, and the spiritual energy to take issue with it; instead of permitting yourself to be flung off by its centrifugal action, in the fond belief that because you fly off to Nothing in a graceful pirouette and with a foreign oath upon your lips you are being any the less booted and beshat by the very elements of life which you profess to despise."⁶⁰ Frank's angry words contained enough truth to make them painfully pertinent; not only did he reverse Cowley's charge of a lack of moral courage, he also, in effect, reiterated the complaint made earlier by the editors of The Dial, that the "skyscraper primitives" failed to engage the human reality below the picturesque surface of modern life.

William Carlos Williams, who had followed the exchange from Rutherford, New Jersey, acknowledged that Frank showed "more energy in his comeback than I had thought possible," but believed that nothing conclusive had been proved against Cowley: "After scraping away the mud and shit I think the judges will have to give you the decision." Cowley had reason to feel less confident. The altercation with Frank was now carried over into private correspondence, where it dragged on through several rounds of epistolary debate, its focus shifting from Dada to Frank's personal understanding and experience of mysticism. Private continuation of the argument, however, did little to resolve the issues

between both men, though the tone of their communications somewhat improved, and the debate ended in a stalemate. If, as a result of the exchange, Cowley had come to a better appreciation of Frank's intelligence or even to a realization that his present and earlier dismissal of Frank was founded on at best a limited grasp of what his opponent meant by "true mysticism," he gave but little proof of such a change in his letters to Burke. On the contrary, as before, he ridiculed the overblown rhetoric of Frank's prose style, voiced his exasperation at his arrogant assumption of intellectual superiority and, while he granted that Frank was "not stupid," continued to resent the obscurantist privatism of his beliefs: "I have never been told his lodge-rites or those of any other Masons."⁶¹

Indirectly, Cowley's quarrel with Frank also disrupted his relations with Edwin Seaver's 1924 and dashed his high hopes for the magazine. From the first Cowley's enthusiasm for 1924 ("the only magazine of any interest now appearing," he had told Loeb) was mingled with suspicion as to what seemed "the omnipresence of Munson's influence." Seaver, indeed, was clearly sympathetic to the writings of Frank and Munson; he had been impressed by Frank's "For a Declaration of War" in Secession seven and had granted Munson ample space to expound his views in the first two issues of 1924. When Seaver invited Cowley to contribute--"it seems to me that you are one of the few writing in this country today who have something to say and know how to say it"--Cowley found it hard not to "smell politics" but was willing to give Seaver the benefit of his doubts. During the summer Cowley had assured Seaver that 1924 would have "everybody's support as long as it didn't take sides in our factional quarrels" and had asked him to invite Josephson to write for 1924, as proof of editorial impartiality.⁶²

Seaver, however, was unable, or unwilling, to steer his magazine clear of factionalism. When, in the midst of his debate with Frank, Cowley asked Seaver to make a minor textual change in his open letter and add a footnote clarifying his use of the offensive term "passive mysticism," Seaver's response was a tart refusal, on the grounds that to comply with Cowley's request would "place Frank in an embarrassing position" and would be "taking advantage of your adversary."⁶³ In a diplomatic letter Cowley reminded Seaver of the dangers of factionalism--"If 1924 became a factional magazine it would be interesting only to its

own faction"--and said he hoped Seaver would prove equally "just" to Frank and Munson and to their opponents. To Burke he uttered his disappointment that 1924 ("an excellent magazine, the most interesting we have at present") seemed destined to perpetuate old quarrels instead of terminating them. On the basis of his recent experiences he could only conclude that Seaver's editorial "standard of selection" was "something else than literary," and that in "this little teapot-tempest with Frank" Seaver was taking Frank's side, both personally and editorially.⁶⁴

Disheartened as he was by the unwanted revival of the factional bickerings of a year before ("Everywhere I turn, another fight"), Cowley yet granted that his "little rumpus" with Frank had been "a great education." From talks with Allen Tate he had gathered that "Frank, Munson and Crane have gone much deeper into Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, etc. than we ever suspected, and that any reference to mysticism outrages not an idea but a cult," he told Burke. "Yeats swallowed any number of theosophies and continued to write well. I like Yeats but God knows I can't swallow theosophy. The only solution is to write." Cowley was eager enough to dissociate himself from "the whole dirty series of arguments," but he found it as hard as before to remain au dessus de la mêlée. Much to his exasperation the whole literary atmosphere seemed once again shot through with a polarizing factionalism: while Frank, Munson, Crane and Seaver were "living in the perfume of mutual praise," Ernest Boyd appeared "anxious to have it believed, and it is believed, that we [Burke-Cowley-Josephson] are another backscratching coterie." When Burke appeared unwilling to favor one group over another, preferring rather, in Cowley's words, to be "not so much a neutral as a partisan of both sides," all Cowley's old resentments against Munson flared up. "It would amuse you to hear that Munson is a gurgeyite, galooshiously gurgling Gurdjieff growling Gurdjieff gargling Gurdjieff," he wrote to Harold Loeb and Kitty Cannell in Europe. Munson's type of mind, he confessed to Burke, was to him "profoundly antipathetic." Cowley's animosity towards Munson went beyond a conflict of literary ideologies or aesthetic assumptions; it was, at least in part, personally motivated and admixed with a strongly moral component. "I think Munson pious, mean-spirited and sly; a man whose every act is in strict accordance with a moral code which is determined by his every action," he observed to Burke. He still strongly resented Munson's lack of generosity and cooperation at the time

of the notorious Broom-Secession meeting, as well as his "nagging criticism" of his pamphlet on Racine; in general, he felt, Munson's behavior was marked by backstairs dealings and malicious tale-bearing, the result of wounded vanity. More than anybody else, it was Munson whom Cowley held accountable for sowing mutual distrust among his literary friends and undermining even his own self-esteem: "Dirty little quarrels: I never knew anything like them before I heard of Munson; they've hurt all of us tremendously, most of us only in the public estimation, which is small matter, but me in my estimation with myself and in my opinions of my friends, causing a mistrust which is more serious."⁶⁵

It was not long, however, before Cowley's discouragement once more gave way to a desire for action and cooperation: he had "lost faith but not hope," he told Burke from Woodstock, and, though he despaired of patching up a truce between Munson and Josephson and would not have any further literary dealings with the former, he reaffirmed his readiness to project another conference of literary friends, draw up "some sort of program . . . fight about it, split up definitely if necessary, but get something started." His recent experiences with Frank and Seaver had strengthened his belief that "people only fight on moral grounds" and he had found that he thrived on moral indignation. As he fulminated to Burke, he would rather fight and fail, than resign himself to living in an atmosphere poisoned by "small tattlings, small mistrusts:"

. . . we have stood silent too long under insults; it is not good for a man; it spoils his temper, makes him mean-spirited, checks the flow of his words. To be beaten and turn the other buttock was never our nature, nor was it our nature to be beaten, run away, and shoot jelly-beans from ambush. The latter course might possibly be the most effective with the public; it is certainly the one most in keeping with the literary customs of our city. . . .

. . . there is in me the necessity to fight: I kept quiet for a year, and it nearly made a wreck of me. I'd rather fight alongside of others, but if the difficulties, backings-down, defections of friends . . . become too entangling, then there's nothing left for us but each to throw his little stink bomb in the midst of our machine-gunned enemies, and to go home to supper.⁶⁶

When Matthew Josephson, too, proved to be appalled by the apathy of his "spiritless friends" and expressed a fervent desire to commit himself to some form of irreverent group action, Cowley met with Josephson and

Crane to lay plans for a combative group manifesto. The recent publication of Ernest Boyd's Portraits: Real and Imaginary, containing, besides the infamous "Aesthete: Model 1924," Boyd's personal version of his ensuing battle with the aesthetes and a reprint of Rascoe's double-edged satirical account from the Herald Tribune, had revived public interest in the Dadaist fracas and rekindled Cowley's anger. When the editors of the New York Evening Post first gave Boyd's book to Josephson for review, then hastily withdrew the commission for fear of causing scandal, Cowley and Josephson felt they had perfect proof of the anemic cowardice of literary New York. On November 22, 1924, Cowley wrote an exhilarated letter to Wheelwright in Boston: "There are wars and rumours of them; Boyd thwacks at us girlfully; Munson runs off to discharge his poisoned jellybeans from ambush; I fall into polemic with Waldo Frank and Mr. Godsno Hue; editors refuse to give us Boyd's book to criticize. Everything points to our getting out some sort of single-issue magazine venture, a revival of Broom or Secession, anything to startle, amuse and answer back." The issue, Cowley announced to Burke, was to be entitled "Contribution to a Literary History of Our Times" and was to contain letters, reminiscences and polemics, "anything which bore on our thesis that the Great Literary Politicians of New York were a bunch of worms, afraid of shadows because they cast none, anxious to kiss the feet that trampled on them." Cowley's imagination was fired: he realized the issue would "make us more enemies than friends," but was convinced it would be "very good for our spirits." His earlier response to Boyd's composite portrait had had the contrary effect of exalting his literary enemies beyond their importance (certainly "the greatest recorded degree of negative effectiveness," he told Burke); this time, however, Cowley was determined that the effect of their polemics should be "chiefly on ourselves."⁶⁷

Cowley's moral anger was admixed with a longing to resuscitate the exciting European days of Broom. To Loeb he made a sentimental confession: "Harold, you don't know how we regret Broom; if only some copper magnate would die and leave you Fifty Thousand Dollars, wouldn't you like to contribute a tithe of it to renewing the good fight? In the same case, I should like nothing better: to write and edit, moving from capital to capital with the valuta, cursing the Dawes plan and browbeating the miserable printers who think that typographical errors in

foreign English are of no account. The two years of Broom were not two years to the wind; it still makes more stir than the continuing Dial.⁶⁸ Beyond serving to meet outstanding obligations to former subscribers, however, the new publication would only have the most tenuous of connections with Broom.

From the first Kenneth Burke had responded with bemused skepticism to Cowley's trumpet calls for activism and polemics. In February, when the turmoil about Boyd's "Aesthete: Model 1924" had barely subsided, he had advanced his belief that, at any time, Plato was preferable to polemics--his dialogues were "strong enough to take the bitterness of a hundred piddling newspapermen out of our lives"--and had issued an "appeal for the catacombs," urging Cowley to withdraw from his strategies of futile peashooting at negligible journalists into a serious and disinterested pursuit of art and aesthetics: "Let each man . . . see to his private still and his private printing press, that he may live like a gentleman in the midst of prohibition and journalism." To have to deal with the Boyds of their time had seemed to Burke "an unavoidable evil placed upon us by the bent of our talents." In America today, he had concluded, there was "but one magazine where the study of letters [might] occasionally be pursued in public," and that magazine was The Dial. In late November, when Cowley was urging him to leave his aesthetic hermitage and participate in a new attack on Boyd, Burke again responded with cautious reluctance: "one can answer Boyd only by Boyd tactics, and I think it less compromising to let him go unanswered than to answer him in his own damned bickering fashion." Burke, for one, failed to be convinced of the harm done by such as Boyd and believed that "one reputable article, on any reputable subject, appearing in any reputable paper, [could] do more to repair whatever slight damage Boyd may have done than all the broadsides in the world directed against him." He would rather use his \$10 contribution to the new magazine venture to acquire a set of Thomas Aquinas than to "sweep Boyd into hell," he said, adding: "one cannot sling mud, even victoriously, without getting dirty." In the end, however, Burke consented to be publicly aligned with the offended "aesthetes" and promised an article exemplifying more serious concerns.⁶⁹

By early December 1924 preparations for the issue were progressing speedily. A name had been decided on (Aesthete 1925); Cowley and Josephson had enlisted the cooperation and financial support of Brown,

Burke, Crane, Schneider, Tate, Wheelwright and Williams; Charles Sheeler had offered to design a cover; and a fictitious editor and angel had been invented in the figure of Walter S. Hankel, a retired manufacturer from Dayton, Ohio. Preparations proceeded in a spirit of general agreement; the only dissonant note serving as a reminder of recent factional bickerings was the early withdrawal from the roster of Hart Crane, who had made his participation contingent upon an unanimous pledge that none of the contributors would ridicule Munson or Frank--all promised to agree, except, perversely, Wheelwright.⁷⁰

By mid-January 1925 the redoubtable Aesthete 1925 was in the press; in early February copies were distributed to the New York bookstores and city editors were telephoned in an effort to "break into the news columns."⁷¹ Aesthete 1925, indeed, aimed to be shocking and controversial; every article in its thirty-two pages was "guaranteed to be in strictly bad taste." Its chaotic but kaleidoscopically colorful contents--anonymous, pseudonymous or signed--certainly proved that Dada in America was still alive and kicking, if perhaps for the last time. Charles Sheeler's cover design, a pen-and-ink drawing of skyscrapers and city tenements, recalled the Dada-inspired fascination with machine-age urban America propagated in Broom; the back cover featured a satirical letter to the censor by Walter S. Hankel, spoofing Section 480 of the Postal Laws and reminding the ironic reader how drastically Broom's literary program had failed in America.

A pencil drawing by Peggy Baird Cowley featuring a bald and mustached Walter Hankel suggested that the fictitious editor of Aesthete 1925 was partly modeled upon "the corpulent ghost of Munson," but the bulk of the issue's satirical venom was at the expense of Mencken and Boyd. William Carlos Williams, too deeply immersed in the final stages of writing In the American Grain to offer a more substantial contribution, sent in a note denouncing Mencken's influence as nefarious and negligible, and voiced his disrespect for those who took Mencken's intellectual and linguistic pretenses seriously: "The only person I know who reads Mencken (or is it Nathan?) and speaks pleasantly of him, is a slow-paying customer of mine . . . a smart, uptodate, cloacal sort of guy with just instinct enough to fall for a mind that is serving to sluice even the beginning American language into the waste tanks." An even more scathing indictment of Mencken was cast in the form of a full-page "advertisement"

for the "Mencken Promotion Society." Dadaistically mocking the consumerist slogans and typographical conventions of American advertising--"Get Self-Respect Like Taking a Pill / MENCKENIZE!"--it presented Mencken as the panacea for a middle-class sense of cultural and intellectual inferiority and praised him for endowing mediocrity with an aura of respectability. "Can't you understand modern art? / Let Mencken show you the absurdity of the Ku Klux Klan. / Can't you follow modern philosophy? / Let Mencken snigger with you at William Jennings Bryan." The advertisement trenchantly pointed up the conservative allegiance to American values underlying Mencken's radical debunking: "It is said that Mencken is shaping public opinion. This is a DIRTY LIE. Mencken is voicing public opinion. . . . Mencken has been called a radical. This is a DIRTY LIE. Mencken is a conservative. Mencken expresses the conservatism of revolt."⁷²

Ernest Boyd could vie with Mencken for receiving the most incisive ad hominem attacks. In an open letter to Walter Hankel Allen Tate publicly, if self-ironically, aligned himself with the offended "aesthetes" and vituperated against Boyd ("one of the best-equipped American journalists") for catering to the moral and intellectual prejudices of "the great hordes that swarm the plains from Wisconsin to the Gulf of Mexico." By insidiously shifting his attack on the Aesthetes to the realm of morality, Tate charged, Boyd had seen to it that it was now "deliciously and abhorrently understood by the ministers in Guthrie, Kentucky, that all young American writers are given to the varieties of enjoyment derivable from the ritual of lily-carrying and of an effete satanism." In part, Tate's satire cut both ways: he spoke of Boyd's victims as "a group of young men who wouldn't exactly meet Defoe's requirement of being understood of the people" and, in conclusion, granted that, if Boyd's popular appeal rested on illegitimate grounds, the reputation of his enemies was yet to be made: who, after all, Tate wondered, were Malcolm Cowley and Matthew Josephson?⁷³

Cowley, too, attacked the excessive publicity accorded Boyd as a result of the misguided response to "Aesthete: Model 1924" and, in a mock-advertisement, ironically reversed the situation:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

In spite of rumors to the contrary, Mr. Ernest Boyd is not

employed by me as personal press agent, his activities in this capacity being undertaken solely on his own initiative.

I will therefore not be held responsible for any statement, dogma, threat, or announcement of affiliation which he offers, makes, or publishes; nor will I discharge or fulfill any debts, promises, or obligations which he has contracted or may hereafter contract. (Advt.)

MALCOLM COWLEY

It was Matthew Josephson, however, who launched the most venomous attack on Boyd. In "Dr. Boyd Looks at Literature," the review of Portraits: Real and Imaginary first commissioned, then retracted by the "affable worms" directing "one of our outstanding literary supplements," Josephson marshaled all his powers of hyperbolic rhetoric for the purpose of annihilating Boyd's book through excessive praise. His pen dripping with irony, Josephson loudly proclaimed the deserved success of Boyd's "daring exposé of our young aesthetes:"

. . . Mr. Boyd, beyond question, must be complimented for importing into American letters the spirit of controversy. His blows fell upon the heads of the generation of Younger Writers at a moment when they had become far too snug, far too happy in their eccentricities, and were basking much too luxuriously in the warm sunshine of the public's approval. Here in America, we were too gentle and soft-spoken among ourselves. How much more bracing is the atmosphere of combat which the irrepressible Mr. Boyd brings!

Boyd proved, Josephson charged, that with "very little concern for ideas or clear thinking" one could still write "an epochal essay like 'Aesthete: Model 1924.'"⁷⁴

Illustrative of the spirit of subversive buffoonery animating Aesthete 1925 was a piece of humoristic nonsense fiction by William Slater Brown, postmodernist avant le mot, who, in a manner anticipating the more extravagant experiments of Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth, explored the possibilities of parodistic lexical game-playing and fictional self-referentiality in "An Interplanetary Episode." John Brooks Wheelwright staged "Little Moments with Great Critics," which, in a manner adumbrated in France by Littérature and in America by Vanity Fair, presented the average ratings by the Aesthetes of virtually all the established critics and literary journalists of the older generation. Though the average percentages suggested a consensus of opinion belied

by the differences in individual ratings, it came as no surprise to find Boyd, Nathan, and Mencken at the lowest point of the scale with, respectively, -5.61, -20.7, and -28.8 %. More interestingly, crowning the ranks were George Santayana, T. S. Eliot and Paul Elmer More, with 70, 70.4, and 71.3 % respectively. The virtue of such ballots, Cowley explained to a skeptical Burke, who denounced the idea as a "school-girlish" trick, was that they made one "stop to examine his position. . . . The absolute bluntness of an averaged figure may sometimes have more force than a long review. More thought may lie behind it." The idea was not new, he granted, but remained important if one believed that "every generation, every group, every individual has in turn to create or specify new values." Indeed, the Dadaist zaniness of "Little Moments with Great Critics" could not obscure an underlying seriousness of concern with the nature of literary criticism. Not only did Cowley and Burke conduct an earnest behind-the-scenes correspondence about the value of such ratings, at Burke's suggestion a pseudonymous footnote analyzed the hierarchy of critical types implicit in the ratings. Highest scored "academic critics, devoted to standards of morality and scholarship, whose fault is a superstitious reverence for these standards;" they were followed by the psychological and sociological critics (led by Van Wyck Brooks with 49 %--"For the finding of sociological evidence, 98 %. For the use of it as literary criticism, 0"); next came the editors and publicists, "inclined to the conservatism of compromise" ("Yes and No Says Canby. Editor Outlines Middle Course Between Heaven and Hell. Solution Deemed Acceptable to Both Modernists and Fundamentalists"); and, at the bottom, the impressionists and columnists ("that most rudimentary impressionist variety")--Heywood Broun, John Farrar, Burton Rascoe. Burke's hierarchy of critical types, with its conspicuous omission of a formalist or aesthetic mode of criticism (implying that only the younger generation as represented in Aesthete 1925 were writing criticism proper), revealed that serious criteria lay behind the Aesthetes' inanely humorous attacks on the literary establishment.⁷⁵

Kenneth Burke's principal contribution to Aesthete 1925 was a direct offshoot of Cowley's recent altercation with Waldo Frank in 1924. His "Dada, Dead or Alive" proved, again, that underneath the issue's overall zaniness lay a serious, if largely unarticulated, concern with art and criticism. Wittily taking issue with Frank, Burke proclaimed that "Dada

could arise in Europe and America simultaneously because in both regions regimentation and chaos thrive side by side, each engendering a keener sense for the other." Defining Dada as "perception without obsession" ("Dada is the child who, seeing a lame man hobble down the street, attempts through neither sympathy nor mockery, but sheer curiosity, to hobble"), Burke rejected Frank's ideal of wholeness and integration as a "deliberate ruling out of certain predominant factors in life." What was needed was not, as Frank proposed, the contrary of Dada, but precisely "Dada aggrandized:" an ideal of integration which encompassed all factors of contemporary life--"supernal beauty AND the brass band"--and which was, in effect, "Dada plus."⁷⁶

Burke's article underlined how much of the satire in Aesthete 1925 had a double edge, striking both at the group's literary opponents and at themselves. Burke's plea for "Dada aggrandized" was accompanied by his declaration that "Dada, like God, is dead." Another, pseudonymous, contribution by Burke mocked the expatriate experience of France from which so many of the collaborators had recently returned. The advertisement promoting Mencken was in itself a parody of Dada stunting. Wheelwright's critical stagemat of quasi-scientific percentages self-mockingly played into the hands of those (Brooks, Lowell, Untermeyer) who had criticized the younger generation for practising criticism as if it were a branch of mathematics. Even the pamphlet's title was self-ironic: not only did it update Boyd's "model 1924" to suggest that the prototypical Aesthete set his sails to the current literary winds, it also self-mockingly advertised as "aesthetes" a disparate group of writers whose divergent literary values and beliefs belied any such common denominator. In this respect, the response of Allen Tate to Aesthete 1925 was revealing. Participating in the general buffoonery, Tate had ironically proclaimed in Aesthete 1925 that "obviously we are all aesthetes together;" to Cowley, however, he expressed private reservations about the "Meditations" on art and criticism contributed by Walter S. Hankel (and written by Cowley). Hankel's observations--including diatribes against "popular critics" and a plea for the amateurish and immature in criticism as more healthy and alive than a deadly "professional spirit"--failed to do justice to its author, Tate objected; it presented "a limited view of our sane and honest friend." He hoped it was not too late "to remove the stigma of mere aestheticism from

Mr. Hankel's reputation" and to have him parade before the public in his true nature as "one of those rare spirits whose harmony of parts is most aptly described by the term Humanist."⁷⁷

Aesthete 1925, for all its larkiness, did not nearly cause as much of a stir as the first issue of The American Mercury, with its ensuing "battle" between Boyd and his enemies. Its 600 copies created a brief flurry of publicity and excitement and warmed the heart of William Carlos Williams, who confessed himself "surprised and delighted at the sight and perusal of Aesthete 1925," and sent his congratulations: "The invigorating thing is that you have succeeded in making SOMETHING live in the poison gas atmosphere of New York. It is astonishing." If Williams was right, then Cowley had indeed attained his aim of rousing a lethargic literary milieu from its torpor; Williams, for one, had no trouble recognizing Cowley's animating spirit behind the venture and, in his hopes for another renaissance of American art, sensed the dawn of a new era: "I get a good flavor of COWley from this AESTHETE. It's wonderful! It seems to me that there's something here that I have been watching for for a long time. I think that damned slow thunder-on-the-horizon COWstench is beginning to seep-sound through the skyscraper. It looks to me as if this is a beginning."⁷⁸

John Brooks Wheelwright, who had the biggest financial stake in the magazine (he had contributed \$25 towards meeting a total expense of \$75; others had donated \$10 each), wrote to say that he found Aesthete 1925 "most satisfactory and effective," though he regretted that his projected ridicule of Waldo Frank had been shelved in favor of Burke's more serious article. Cowley had his own interpretation of the effectiveness of Aesthete 1925. It had to do, he explained to Burke, with the "superiority" of the attackers over their victims, a superiority based on the literary ethics of the Aesthetes, who were "more interested in literature than in success." Once successful, he feared, they might be "more obnoxious than the Boyds, Menckens and Shermans." Hence, the "virtue" of Aesthete 1925 was that it was bound to be received unfavorably ("A mere childishness. Why don't you quit kidding and go to work and write something that will stand on its own feet?") and thus would serve to "retard" the success of its creators.⁷⁹

The ultimate significance of Aesthete 1925 was limited; what serious literary concerns it exemplified remained submerged in a pervasive tone

of prankish inanity. Though it helped to strike some badly needed sparks in the "wet tinder" of literary New York, its explosive light flared too ephemerally to constitute a beacon for the future. The group it brought together was too loose and disparate in its literary assumptions to provide a focus for future action; shared hostility towards Menckanism and a desire to thumb its collective nose at its literary elders could hardly form the intellectual foundation of a movement. The contributors to Aesthete 1925 were united by the exuberant feeling of belonging to a defiant league of youth, by a common plight of poverty and an intense literary ambition; for the rest, beyond a general concern with the nature and value of literary form--a concern diametrically opposed to the formlessness of Dada--there was more to distinguish than to unite the individual participants. Only a momentary willingness to band together in a spirit of good fun--and fun the launching of Aesthete 1925 certainly was--could have bundled the divergent talents of men like Tate and Williams, Wheelwright and Burke. The spontaneous energies released by Aesthete 1925 were largely expended in a mood of manic playfulness and innocent glee, a mood still possible in the winter of 1924-1925 but soon to give way to the more neurotic atmosphere of hysteria, bewilderment and self-destruction which marked the later years of the decade. Conceived before the laughter became "keyed too high," Aesthete 1925 could still take innocent pride in its carefree immaturity and Dadaist iconoclasm. Even here, however, as Dickran Tashjian has suggested, the magazine was "not so much a culmination of American interest in Dada as it was symptomatic of the failure to engage an American Dada." In this respect Burke's proclamation of the death of Dada, coming three years after the movement had been pronounced dead in France, was timely and appropriate. For, precisely because Aesthete 1925 offered "no climactic argument, only explosion and dispersion," it could take its place in literary history as "the last Dada fling in America."⁸⁰

Organizing and publishing Aesthete 1925 was a bracing experience for Cowley. For once it had proved possible to assemble a motley group of young writers behind a common literary program and to show that a spirit of united endeavor could, if only temporarily, put an end to factional

quarreling and clear the air for serious literary discourse. In early December Cowley reported to Burke that "the atmosphere of petty quarrels" had momentarily disappeared and that "gossip" had given way to "much sober discussion" of literature. Later that month, invigorated by the prevailing mood of literary community and good-fellowship among his friends, he urged Burke to leave his farmhouse in Andover, New Jersey, and spend more time in New York: "this winter there is more social life, including more intelligent conversation, than I have encountered since leaving Peabody Highschool. Nobody has been very brilliant, coruscating, coruscant, smart or even clever, but one encounters a vehemence of belief in literary questions that gives one a sense of--shall I say--well-being." All in all, Cowley told Wheelwright in February, the winter had been "pleasurable and busy."⁸¹

In nostalgic retrospection Cowley recurrently spoke of this period as "the good winter" of 1924-1925. After work, he would regularly meet with friends for Prohibition drinks at the Poncino Palace, a Village speakeasy at the rear of a delicatessen; its specialty, a hot rum toddy, earned it the nickname of "Punchino" Palace. Once or twice a week he would join ten or twelve of his literary companions for wine and dinner at the Italian restaurant of John Squarcialupi, first located in a large basement on Waverly Place, later on Perry Street. Among the regular attendants, with or without their respective wives, were Brown, Burke, Cowley, Crane, Josephson and Tate, who by this time had moved to New York with Caroline Gordon; their numbers would occasionally be swelled by irregulars like Cummings, Coates, Schneider or Loeb, back on a six weeks' visit from Europe to see his novel Doodab through the press, and then the occasion might be turned into a "gay, impromptu, Dutch-treat dinner party." Susan Jenkins has recalled how, at the end of such an evening, "the onerous task of figuring out who owed what always fell to patient Malcolm Cowley." After a bibulous dinner, the company would gather about the long narrow table in the back room, to talk literature and, "without self-consciousness," read aloud their latest poems. Harold Loeb remembered attending one such evening at which Hart Crane declaimed a new section of The Bridge, then announced he was "through with poetry for life," and Allen Tate recited a satirical piece of verse entitled "The Earnest Liberal's Lament." These, indeed, were festive, rowdy occasions, at which heated literary debate under the influence of copious Italian wine easily

gave way to horseplay and good-natured jesting. Climactic was the New Year's Eve party that winter, when Cowley's circle was assigned a special room to celebrate at Squarcialupi's and Crane, in an ecstasy of delight, was brought to the point of singing Gregorian chants. There was, Cowley sensed in retrospect, a touch of innocence about these informal literary gatherings: "We were all about twenty-six, a good age, and looked no older; we were interested only in writing and in keeping alive while we wrote, and we had the feeling of being invulnerable--we didn't see how anything in the world could ever touch us, certainly not the crazy desire to earn and spend more money and be pointed out as prominent people." Burke, always argumentative, would sidle into his role of "noisy analyst of human follies" and, pursuing "logic pure and medieval," strive to "outquibble and outcavil" his companions; Tate, "studiously polite" yet aiming to preserve an "inner hush" behind the shield of his good manners, would display an unexpected talent for "comic inventions and pure impishness;" Crane "invariably" banged away at an old upright piano, shaking his bristly head in time to his favorite popular songs, or playing Très Moutarde, a tune with a special nostalgic appeal for Burke, Cowley and Susan Jenkins, since to its melody had been set the words of a Peabody football song. Later in the evening Crane might sink into moroseness or obsessively stalk among the tables, growling snatches of poetry, before storming out to roam the Brooklyn docks--storm warnings of his suicide seven years later. In a moving poem published more than forty years later Cowley, with a mature understanding of the "tangled reasons" for the ordeal by failure and success of his one-time literary companions, cast a nostalgic and sacramental aura about the gay gatherings of this "omnicolored crew" at Squarcialupi's during that "good winter:"

All of an age, all heretics,
all rich in promise, but poor in rupees,
I knew them all at twenty-six,
when to a sound of scraping shovels,
emerging from whatever dream,
by night they left their separate hovels
as if with an exultant scream,
stamped off the snow and gathered round
a table at John Squarcialupi's
happy as jaybirds, loud as puppies.⁸²

Once or twice Cowley's group of literary "aesthetes" crossed lines with a circle of young revolutionary writers--John Dos Passos, Michael Gold, Joseph Freeman--who resorted to Squarcialupi's to lay plans for the launching of The New Masses. Upon one occasion, Cowley recalled, Dos Passos scribbled a half-derisive message to the aesthetes' table: "Intellectual workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your brains." More commonly, the radical writers met at a different place, on East Tenth Street. For most of the decade, indeed, aesthetes and revolutionaries moved in separate spheres and circles; less than ten years later they would march together in political demonstrations and sign joint statements supporting the Communist Party Presidential candidates.⁸³

Much of the groundwork for Aesthete 1925 was laid during the dinner-meetings at Squarcialupi's, the drinking sessions at Poncino's, or occasional gatherings at the office of Telling Tales, on East Eleventh Street, where Tate had succeeded Hannah Josephson as editorial assistant to Susan Jenkins. At Squarcialupi's one chair at the long table was ceremoniously kept vacant in honor of the magazine's mysterious Maecenas, Mr. Hankel. Aesthete 1925 gave some focus to the loose gatherings, but the issue was finally rounded off in one marathon session, held on Sunday, November 30, 1924, at the Broadway Central Hotel, the group working together "in excellent ensemble" for a day and a night.⁸⁴

The preparatory meetings for Aesthete 1925 released so much good verse and prose that immediate plans were laid for a creative, nonpolemic, second issue. At Cowley's insistence an announcement to such intent was printed in the opening number; the follow-up issue, it stated, was to contain verse and prose by the original contributors, augmented by Robert Coates, Hart Crane, Charles L. Durboraw and Isidor Schneider. Harold Loeb, before sailing back to Europe, promised to supervise the printing of the issue. There, however, matters rested. A meeting held at Allen Tate's in early March, at which Brown, Cowley, Crane and Josephson were present, revealed considerable "bashfulness" on the part of Brown, Crane and Tate, all of whom dreaded the work involved. Cowley and Josephson were discouraged by the lack of response, and, even though they knew Burke, Schneider and Wheelwright to be in favor of the venture, were reluctant to carry through their plans on the basis of a majority decision: "the amount of work connected with the publication of a

magazine demands that everybody be agreed," Cowley explained to Burke. Rather, they decided to assemble material for a second issue, to be printed as a group-manifesto under the aegis of another magazine--Jane Heap had expressed interest in such a possibility for The Little Review.⁸⁵ Aesthete 1925 remained a one-issue occasion. The product of a brief but invigorating resuscitation of esprit de corps among Cowley's literary friends, it foundered on the recrudescence of a lack of agreement and sustained commitment among its participants: in its wake the "Aesthetes" once again dispersed and went their separate ways.

The disbanding of the "Aesthetes" coincided with a resurgence of frictions between Cowley and Burke, who from the first had been less wholeheartedly committed to Aesthete 1925 than Cowley had hoped. More seriously, he now seemed to question the purity of Cowley's literary motives. An honest altercation ensued--"our correspondence could be culled to prove that we were the most faithful of enemies"--during which Cowley reaffirmed the necessity of abstaining from tact in their friendship ("the only friendship to me is to tell me, when you think I'm running off at a tangent, that you think I'm running off at a tangent") and rejected Burke's aim to "live by philosophy or aesthetics" as an attempt to do the impossible: to make "the world safe for aesthetics," he was convinced, it was necessary to make some degree of "compromise" with it.⁸⁶

Cowley's falling-out with Burke, concomitant with his friends' failure to perpetuate Aesthete 1925 in more serious form, revived his former skepticism about the utility of literary groups and provided the occasion for one of his periodic stock-taking letters to Burke, in which he reviewed the progress of his career since his arrival in New York twenty months before. Then, he observed, he had wanted "to help to start a--something--in New York that would incorporate the better features of Dada," to wit "its ethics, assertions and adventures." These, he now realized, had been far from definite plans ("I should be rather ashamed of them as such"), but had rather served to give "a sort of emotional direction" to his endeavors. Looking back on the quarreling and backbiting which had ensued, but also on the invigorating atmosphere of cooperation in which Aesthete 1925 had been born, Cowley realized with renewed poignancy the introverted, narcissistic character of any literary coterie or school: "Here at last is a Group," he observed to Burke, "but

we never really wanted a group, except for social purposes. What we wanted was a direction. A group stares at its navel and lives in an atmosphere of self-congratulation. Its direction is centripetal." On the basis of his recent experiences Cowley, for all his instinctive feeling for literary community, found it difficult to decide "whether the friendship with other writers of my own age was good or bad." Such doubts did not extend to his relations with Burke or Josephson ("friendships too old and tangled to be evaluated"), but pertained more specifically to the "earnest ensemble" which had composed Secession, 1924 and Aesthete 1925; such group magazines, he felt with some equivocation, had perhaps harmed the reputation of individual contributors, but had also boosted their morale. For the moment, he thought, "we had better make every effort to continue some sort of magazine of our own," while trying to restrict the function of "groups" to the social rather than the literary sphere.⁸⁷

Typically, Cowley tended to blame his ambivalence on the impact of the city. The nervous intensity of city life, he felt, diminished one's "interior resources," fostered an "inability to stay alone" and drove writers to huddle together in a manner that clashed with their strongly individualistic bent. Living in the country, he was convinced, the question of "groups" would no longer disturb him and his precious individuality no longer be sapped. Later, writing Exile's Return, Cowley realized that his aversion to the city was a symptomatic part of a much broader disgust with a whole culture governed by a creed of industrial and commercial consumerism. After the failure to establish Dada in New York he had become, in effect, "simply another advertising copywriter who hated his job." His literary life had lost the sharp individuality of its outline, while his adventures had come to lack their former element of "freedom" and "novelty." Significantly, it was at this point in his life that, so he judged in retrospect, his experiences as a writer stopped being representative of his literary generation and became "merely typical;" it was here, also, that he left the stage as a leading actor in his generational drama, Exile's Return, to take up a position in the wings. Looking back to the years after 1924, Cowley saw himself as an anonymous face in a crowd, his individual life merging with that of a whole social class: the countless young people on the fringes of the arts, who had come flocking to Manhattan from the Midwest, to live and write in the margin of a booming business culture badly in need of

"propagandists" to advance its consumerist creed. For a time, indeed, Cowley's life was hard to distinguish from that of the numberless advertising artists, copywriters, romancers, designers, stylists and editors who discontentedly served the cause of business and technology. All of them, Cowley observed in Exile's Return, were "individualists by theory, yet they lived the life of their social order as strictly as Prussian officers, and had to cultivate meaningless affectations and real vices in order to possess even the appearance of individuality." Cowley's description was infused with an undertone of guilt and distaste which had obvious relevance to his personal situation in the mid-1920s:

. . . all these people were living a series of contradictions. They prided themselves chiefly on their professional competence, their skill with words or lines or colors, their ability to gauge the public taste, and yet their skill was devoted to aims in which none of them believed. Their function as a class was to be the guardians of intellectual things, and yet they were acting as propagandists for a way of life in which their intellect played a minor part. They were selling their talents.⁸⁸

The mood of innocent jollity and carefree irresponsibility marking the "good winter" of 1924-1925 could not obviate an underlying feeling of subtle alienation from prevailing cultural values in America which would grow only stronger in the second half of the decade and form the seedbed of Cowley's subsequent political radicalism. With many of his literary friends Cowley increasingly felt a stranger in his native land--"The financiers, the salesmen, the prophets of success were our enemies."⁸⁹ In the spring of 1925, however, Cowley's sense of cultural estrangement--an "alienation on native grounds," in Alfred Kazin's words--was less a fully articulated intellectual attitude than an "obscure" feeling of dislocation and rejection, complicated by a deep attachment to the American land and, ultimately, American society. Beset, as always, with an "instinctive fear of being successful" ("It didn't seem to me possible to be successful in America and at the same time be a good writer"), Cowley now sought a way out of the dilemma that had been plaguing him since his return to America in 1923. Inexorably tied to New York for his income from writing, yet dreaming of an independent and untainted literary life in the country, he decided on a compromise which would combine the "advantages of two worlds."⁹⁰

In April 1925 the Cowleys moved to Staten Island, where they rented a delapidated five-room house, with heat, electricity, and bath, for thirty dollars a month. Cheap carfare and easy commuting to New York were compensations for the "high" rent. In late March Cowley described the place to Burke and indulged in the anticipatory pleasures of semi-rural living:

Yes, we took a house. It is one mile from the Annadale Station in the south-central portion of the island. From the window of what will be my study there is a middling view of the sea. The lot is about 30 x 200; it has some young bearing plum and cherry trees, a grape arbor, and plenty of garden space. . . . From the exterior, it looks pretty shabby and run down, but it will not be uncomfortable. . . . The country is not altogether raw; there are plenty of broad fields and oak woods, and it is only two miles to the sea.

The move to Staten Island was a double experiment: it was an intermediary step towards a definitive removal to the country projected for the following spring; and it enabled Cowley to check out the feasibility of making his living entirely by writing. "For people of unheroic temperament, it seems best to move to the country in two steps, using this suburban house as a nucleus for collecting the tools and furniture we shall certainly need before we go farther," he motivated his decision to Burke. Besides the purchase of a secondhand Ford, a primary necessity of country living, Cowley planned to commute to New York for several months longer, retaining his job at Sweet's until he could be sufficiently assured of literary markets for his writings to "safely embark on [his] new free-lancing career."⁹¹

Given his rural background and his persistent ambivalence about urban life, Cowley's semi-departure from New York seemed a predestined and inevitable move. In the mid-1920s he hoped it would help to assuage his sense of alienation from a business culture whose dominant values clashed with what was, after all, his only real interest--the pursuit of literature. Rerooting himself in the country, while retaining his economic ties to the city from a distance, catered to Cowley's "obscure need to be an outsider" in American society in Coolidge's New Era; it would allow him, so he hoped, to retain a degree of independence and integrity impossible in New York.

At the end of June 1925 Cowley resigned as a copywriter for Sweet's Catalogue Service to become a full-time free-lance writer. From the summer of 1925 onwards his output as a critic, reviewer and translator steadily increased: over the next four years he wrote more than 125 essays and reviews, translated seven books from the French, and published some twenty-five poems; in addition, his first book of poetry, Blue Juniata, appeared in 1929. For much of the second half of the 1920s Cowley's literary career was dominated by a precarious struggle to remain financially afloat. As a free lance with a rising reputation he could count on having access to a great many avenues of publication. Between 1925 and 1929 his poems appeared in a variety of literary magazines and periodicals, including Poetry, The Little Review, transition, The Dial, The Nation and The Hound & Horn. For Charm he continued to write on an assortment of topics and books, of popular and more specialized interest. For Brentano's Book Chat he did a series of profiles of contemporary American writers. For the New York Herald Tribune he regularly reviewed French literature, while he continued to write, if less frequently, for the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post and Canby's Saturday Review of Literature. The Dial, now under the editorship of Marianne Moore, remained open for briefers and longer review-essays on modern European and American literature. In early 1928 he began writing regularly for The New Republic under Edmund Wilson. His translations, meanwhile, appeared in various magazines, among them The Dial, the New York Herald Tribune, and Vanity Fair.

Wide as it was, the range of Cowley's literary activities was circumscribed by the need to carry his writings to market. A separate notebook devoted to a meticulous account of his literary earnings testifies to his persistent worries over money. What with fees for

articles and translations, publishers' advances for books to be written, edited or translated, and reader's reports for firms like Macaulay and Harcourt, Brace, Cowley's monthly income for these years ranged anywhere between a one-time high of \$583.00 in May 1926 and a depressing low of \$120.00 in May 1929, averaging between \$250 and \$275 a month.

Astoundingly productive as he was, the lists of projected books and articles he incorporated into his notebooks suggest that his achievements fell far short of his ambitions. Though he was writing enough to be assured of a modest income, he remained discouraged about his inability to do the kind of writing by which he set great store. Intermittently he lapsed into moods of lamentation and bleak self-assessment, as he found himself still incapable of resolving the ambiguities which had been the principal "motifs" of his career so far. Throughout the decade he struggled to maintain the relative purity of a rural literary life against the compromises of an urban culture of consumerism, fighting to uphold a principled integrity against the practical necessity of hackwriting.

In the latter half of the 1920s Cowley's career continued to revolve about the pivotal concerns of the early years of the decade: a search for a personal aesthetics, an attempt to define and approximate the ideal of the man of letters, a process of uneasy accommodation to a radical literary modernism, a persistent concern with the mechanics of literary failure and success, the establishment of a congenial literary climate and a sustaining sense of literary community. But his pursuit of these concerns was now marked by a diminished sense of excitement and discovery. The watershed years in France and their turbulent aftermath in New York were followed by a calmer period of consolidation and gestation, as Cowley mostly lived a quiet rural life, spending only his winters in New York. Though he was busy and resilient enough, the four years between 1925 and 1929 constituted a less dramatic (if still crucially formative) intermezzo in his critical and intellectual development. Though he took his stand in most of the literary and intellectual controversies of the time, it was not until the end of the decade and particularly once the Depression began to have its impact on Cowley's literary and political thought, engendering a critical reassessment of his and his generation's odyssey through the postwar period, that his intellectual development again accelerated and a new phase of fermentation and progression began.

During the summer months of 1925 the frolicsome mood of carefree invulnerability which had marked the preceding "good winter" in New York was perpetuated some seventy miles upstate near Patterson, in Pawling County, New York, where the "omnicolored crew" which used to gather at Squarcialupi's habitually reconvened from the city for weekend parties on Tory Hill, just across the state line from Sherman, Connecticut. There William Slater Brown and Susan Jenkins, after divorce and remarriage, had bought an isolated, unremodeled pre-Revolutionary farmhouse surrounded by an old apple orchard and some eighty acres of overgrown land. After resigning from Sweet's, Hart Crane had joined the Browns to help with repairs and paint the weathered clapboards. It was here, at Robber Rocks--as the place was named after a nearby cave which during Revolutionary days had served as a refuge for a band of local Tories--that the Cowleys regularly got together on Sunday-afternoons with a group of literary friends comprising (besides Crane and the Browns) the Tates, the Josephsons, and, later in the decade, Robert Coates, the painter Peter Blume and the novelist Nathan Asch, all of whom lived in the neighborhood at one time or another during the 1920s. Cowley fondly recalled "the general atmosphere of youth and poverty and good humor," as the crew played a rowdy game of croquet, a pitcher of hard cider hidden in the grass, or, driven inside by a drizzling rain, sat swapping stories or reciting poetry beside the fireplace in the big, low-ceilinged kitchen.

Particularly memorable was that year's Fourth of July celebration, in effect a three-day saturnalia, involving, so Hart Crane told his mother, "an omnibus-full of people from New York," a case of gin, and jugs of locally brewed hard cider. Cowley vividly remembered Crane's "pagan ecstasy," as he capered on a stone fence, a nail keg perched on his head, a pair of "cerise drawers" on his legs, his face luridly painted, to dance like an African cannibal. "We went swimming at midnight," Crane reported, "climbed trees, played blindman's buff, rode in wheelbarrows, and gratified every caprice for three days." Later that weekend, Cowley recalled, Crane lapsed into one of his meditative silences, antecedent to reaching the state of frenzied exultation in which he usually composed

his poems; rushing inside, he would pound out his magical, opaque phrases on the typewriter, a phonograph blasting at full volume in his ears, and finally come stamping out of his room to submit to his well-meaning but only half-comprehending friends an early draft of an obscure visionary poem, "Passage." In retrospect, Cowley understood that Crane's idiosyncratic behavior--which so heavily taxed his friends' capacity for tolerance, with its inexplicable shifts of mood from ecstatic exhilaration to sullen moroseness or glittering violence--was in effect a necessary part of his method of writing poetry, a Rimbaud-like "derangement" of the senses followed by a calculated and painstaking exercise of the critical faculty. Witnessing Crane's quirky and tempestuous conduct on such occasions helped Cowley understand the connections between Crane's complex sensibility, the process by which he wrote his poetry, and his ultimate suicide. Crane's "method of self-induced frenzy," he later saw, could be truly successful only for short spurts of time and carried within it the seed of self-destruction.¹

August 1925 was a month of miscellaneous activities. With Peggy Cowley made a trip to the parental farm in Belsano, but the journey was hardly a success. Seventy miles from Staten Island the self-starter of the Cowleys' rickety Model-T Ford refused to work and Cowley broke his arm trying to crank "Little Eva," as the car was nicknamed, back to life; in the end he had to hire a driver to complete the trip and drove back after two weeks with a bandaged arm. Cowley's visit to his childhood country was less invigorating than usual. Peggy did not get along easily with Cowley's mother and Cowley himself felt ambivalent about the inbred conservatism of the Pennsylvanians: "The people are stingy, inquisitive and very kind-hearted. They all belong to the Ku Klux," he told Josephson.²

That summer the Cowleys also spent several days touring the fabulous lake district of northwestern New Jersey, to gather material for an article which Cowley had been commissioned to write for Charm. The piece, lavishly illustrated with photographs, appeared in August 1925. Cowley's connection with Charm--in August he was made "book-editor"--yielded an assured income of \$50 a month. Over the next three years, writing a regular book page, he could bring to the attention of his readers a wide variety of books which otherwise might have remained outside their unsophisticated ken. At various times these included biographies of

American historical figures like Washington, Franklin, Paine, Jefferson, and Brigham Young (Carl Sandburg's Abraham Lincoln receiving special praise); books catering to the public's thirst for "general knowledge," like Mark Sullivan's Our Times, Will Durant's The Story of Philosophy, or Charles and Mary Beard's The Rise of American Civilization; and, most interestingly, a galaxy of contemporary American novels, including Sherwood Anderson's Dark Laughter, Conrad Aiken's Blue Voyage, Willa Cather's The Professor's House, Carl van Vechten's Nigger Heaven, F. Scott Fitzgerald's All the Sad Young Men, Thornton Wilder's The Cabala and Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. The latter review was Cowley's first consideration of Hemingway in print and contained his earliest analysis of Hemingway's style--a style which seemed "ridiculously simple," yet managed to convey "a complicated feeling of pity, sadness and passion." Cowley's discussion typically relied on empathy and personal experience to explain Hemingway's "hardboiled sentimentality." His Charm book page bore witness to his conviction that, in recent years, the novel form had grown "incredibly rich and diversified;" it had become "capable of expressing almost the whole of modern life."³

Over the summer he wrote several chapters of his projected novel, but there the book ground to a halt. Instead he considered collecting his poems into a book of his own--by this time some seventy-five of his poems had appeared in magazines--and hesitantly cast about for a publisher. Friends responded to the idea with more enthusiasm than the author himself. "I saw Conrad Aiken the other night," Foster Damon wrote from Brown University, where he had lately been appointed a professor of English; "he said a volume of Cowley poems was in prospect. Great stuff!" Damon suggested several publishers, but there the project stalled (though Cowley asked Damon to put in a good word for him with Houghton Mifflin), partly because Cowley's rigorous self-criticism limited the selection of eligible poems to a bare thirty-five, partly because of his perverse preference to remain "unknown" and retain his freedom "to move in any direction." With a stubborn wariness of early success, Cowley realized instinctively that an "ordeal by success" might be as fatal as an "ordeal by failure."⁴

Cowley's career and reputation as a free-lance reviewer received an important new stimulus when, during the summer, he wrote his first review for Irita Van Doren, who had succeeded Stuart P. Sherman as literary

editor of the New York Herald Tribune's weekly supplement, Books. In a consideration of George Moore's Anthology of Pure Poetry Cowley challenged the editor's principle of selection--ideas or emotions, Moore believed, being timebound, precluded permanence in poetry--and pointed out that Moore had wholly missed the all-importance of "form" in the matter. In refutation of Moore's "dangerous" and "dogmatic" theory he analyzed a cherished passage from Baudelaire's "Femmes Damnées" to prove that the emotion of aesthetic delight engendered by the poem was "our tribute not so much to the violence of the poet's feeling as to the perfection which his form achieves." Cowley's analysis, interestingly enough, seemed predicated on Kenneth Burke's definition of "form" in terms of "the psychology of the audience," which appeared almost simultaneously in The Dial for July 1925.⁵

Irita Van Doren, with her husband Carl and his younger brother Mark part of the "Van Doren dynasty" on The Nation (she had served as its literary editor from 1922 to 1924), took kindly to young ambitious book reviewers; every Wednesday afternoon she held open house at her offices and young reviewers gathered in her waiting room hoping to be assigned a book. Cowley remembered her as "an Alabama woman with a soft voice and an enchanting smile," who could be ruthless and firm when necessary but who was, in essence, the "kindest" of "kindhearted editors." Possessed of a great capacity for loyalty to her reviewers, she was quick to recognize the competence and critical promise of Cowley at the age of twenty-seven. Over the next six years Cowley wrote some fifty articles and reviews for Irita Van Doren, including a series of leading essays in 1929, the New York Herald Tribune in effect forming part of the financial backbone to a precarious free-lancing life. It was partly owing to her encouragement, friendship and editorial hospitality that Cowley was eventually able to realize his plan of "living deep in the country with nothing to sell but words."⁶

Irita Van Doren valued especially Cowley's expertise in French literature and for years on end assigned the majority of books in the field to her specialist reviewer. Fascinated by French literature ever since, in his late teens, he had been introduced to French avant-garde poetry by Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound and the prestige of T. S. Eliot's early verse among young Harvard poets, Cowley now gained, through his translations and critical reviews, a solid reputation as an "authority"

in the field; it would persist through the decades, as he continued to follow with a loving, critical eye the fate of French writing, through the Depression, the war years and beyond, and to produce authoritative translations of Gide, Aragon and Valéry.⁷

"American publishers, and the American public to a lesser degree," Cowley observed with approval in the spring of 1926, "are beginning to devote more attention to contemporary French novels." There remained "a pronounced divergence between the literary arts of the two nations," he noted, but "the success of a book in Paris now generally involved its publication in New York." Eighteen months later he expressed the need for a criticism which could "interpret the aims of modern French writers in terms which an American layman [could] understand." It was a need admirably filled by Cowley's own translations and reviews. In addition, he was now regularly consulted by American publishers--Harcourt, Brace, Macaulay, and, as early as 1929, Viking Press--on the advisability of translating French books into English. He could thus hope to function as a cultural mediator, helping to familiarize an American audience with a wide range of French poets and novelists, ancient and modern, famous and unknown. Simultaneously he might help to remedy a backward cultural situation in which modern French poetry remained "a vague sort of Thibet, an unvisited province of the mind," as he judged was still the case in 1927.⁸

Between 1925 and 1930 Cowley's reviews, marked by an unobtrusive erudition and a solid grasp, both scholarly and imaginative, of the history and spirit of French letters, in effect spanned the whole range of French writing, from the Middle Ages to the complex and confusing present. He reviewed the life and works of François Villon, the fifteenth-century poet-scoundrel whose early death at thirty had been evoked in Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley;" he considered four novelists of the ancient régime (Crébillon, Laclos, Diderot and Restif de la Bretonne); and he discussed The Charterhouse of Parma, the first volume in a new edition of the complete works of Stendhal, confessing to a preference for The Red and The Black. Several reviews exemplifying a growing interest in romanticism dealt with Gautier, Baudelaire, de Gourmont and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam. Baudelaire received an ample share of Cowley's critical attention: he reviewed translations of his poetry and prose, as well as of his letters, and critically weighed two recent

biographies of the French poet. The majority of reviews, however, introduced his American readers to a wide array of contemporary French writers: Jean Cocteau, Henri Barbusse, Roger Martin du Gard, Blaise Cendrars, Julien Green, Paul Morand, Alain-Fournier, Joseph Kessel, François Mauriac, André Chamson, and, receiving special attention, André Gide. Though the limited scope of a review often precluded in-depth examination of his subject, the bulk of Cowley's considerations of French writing evinced exactly the talent for "disinterested appreciation" which he felt was an underestimated quality of the critics of his generation. In several reviews, also, we see Cowley assuming his familiar role as the literary historian of his generation, as when he discussed, with a half-ironic, self-mythologizing touch, the impact of modern French poetry on the members of his age-group ("the children of the new century"): "New horizons were opening before our astonished, blue, empty, nordic eyes. We were so many Keatses confronted with half a dozen Homers."⁹

Cowley's concern with French literature and the impact of European modernism on the American writers of his generation made some of his less internationally oriented contemporaries berate him for not giving the literature of his own country equally serious attention. Carl Sandburg was one who missed entirely Cowley's concern with the creation of a vital American literature and told him in a letter that he regarded him as one of "the few American writers meant by the left oblique in Emerson's remark, 'There are persons born and reared in this country who culturally have not yet come over from Europe!'" Sandburg should have known better, for when The Prairie Years was published, Cowley had written him the following note in praise: "By God you pulled it off. Your Lincoln is good; it belongs with Moby Dick and Leaves of Grass and Huckleberry Finn; it is the best piece of American prose which has been written in the last ___ years. Fill in the blank yourself, but use at least two figures." Though Cowley might occasionally speak, not without irony, of France as "the country where good Americans go when they die and where literary Americans go when they wish to become conscious of their own land," his commitment to raising America's estimate of its own literature was indisputable and in no way at odds with his interest in a French culture which existed for him primarily as "a challenge to our own civilization of flivvers, skyscrapers and business organization." Indeed, as the 1920s proceeded, he grew ever more skeptical of the cultural

benefits of expatriation and proved as much of a literary nativist as Sandburg or Williams. Thus, in late 1926, he observed that since the war American travelers to Europe had been shedding their ancient sense of cultural inferiority, tending instead "to seek American equivalents for the picturesque qualities we found in France or Italy or along the Rhine." American writers, likewise, increasingly aimed at creating "a rich panorama of everything colorful in American life." Two months later he returned to the subject, reading the current "craze" for biographies of prominent figures from American history as a mode of cultural stocktaking symptomatic of "America's coming of age." "American civilization today," he wrote in Charm in January 1927, "is in the position of a man who looks at his past or of a merchant who lists his wares. We have acquired a new set of values since the war, and have learned to apply them to our present life. We are now eager to test the past by the same standards, and in this spirit we consider the lives of our national heroes. Like merchants we allow for depreciation, figure the replacement cost, and reach a new valuation--a basis on which to plan the future."¹⁰

Cowley's firsthand familiarity with French literature, together with his passion for formal and stylistic perfection, made him an excellent critic and practitioner of the translator's art. From the first his reviews were conspicuous for his serious concern with the standards of translation. Cowley was in the position to offer authoritative criticism, ranging from a translator's idiomatic errors and stylistic infelicities to a more serious failure of sensitivity to the nuances of cultural difference. The ideal translator, he felt, was himself "an artist who had chosen the task of recreating [a foreign work of art] in English." He generally spoke well of notable translators like Lewis Galantière and C. K. Scott Moncrieff who showed "the rare ability to make a liaison between two cultures," but also praised the young Marshall Best for removing "all foreign touches from the style" in his rendering of Julien Green's Avarice House. He was not afraid to criticize, either. Matthew Josephson's translation of Apollinaire's The Poet Assassinated, he wrote, was marred by the former's "scanty" knowledge of classical French literature, while Van Wyck Brooks's authoritative rendering of André Chamson's The Road was shot through with "minor errors . . . on almost every page." Cowley came down with particular harshness on Arthur

Symons's translation of the prose and poetry of Baudelaire, which he dismissed as "inexact, awkward where it should be graceful, and partial where it claims to be complete." Symons's most serious offense, Cowley felt, lay in his tendency "to make Baudelaire's verse more heavily sinister than it [was] in reality;" as a result, Baudelaire's "atmosphere of evil and pity" was transformed into "a sort of gross academic debauch." Symons's faulty rendering of Baudelaire supported Cowley's conviction that translation always implied interpretation and that in essence poetry was untranslatable: "At best we can render only such qualities of the original as we possess already; and it generally results that the translator's work is a mirror to his own mind, rather than to the author's." Cowley found ample proof for such a thesis among the many translators of François Villon who had subjected the rascal-poet to a "process of sentimentalization" in their Victorian hopes of rendering him into "a fitting poet for the parlor, the matinee and even the dame-school." In the process, Cowley charged, they had managed to cover over the "terrible frankness" and "violent colors" of Villon's original poetry.¹¹

Cowley's reviews of French literature evinced a chief, if not exclusive, concern with the "formal" side of writing, with "structure, balance, invention, clarity." If, upon occasion, he deemed it important to note that French literature was "no longer purely concerned with questions of form and technique," on the whole his earlier indifference to social and political concerns remained intact. Thus, he noted Henri Barbusse's strong political commitment in Chains, a novel about social and human oppression through the ages, quoted the "stirring appeal" to revolt on which the novel ended, but, somewhat inconsistently, entitled his review "The Road of Excess." A similar political neutrality pervaded his review of Jean Cocteau's apologia for his religious conversion, A Call to Order. Cowley saw Cocteau's move from "the extreme Left" to "the extreme Right" as emblematic of "an increasingly powerful tendency toward classicism, order, logic, nationalism, tradition," but ignored the political implications of Cocteau's transformation; instead he focused on the formal and structural "anarchy" of A Call to Order and dismissed its author, on purely literary grounds, as an "expressionist" type of artist who violated Cowley's classical predilection for lucidity and elegance.¹² As the 1920s rolled on, however, Cowley's reviews exemplified, side by

side with an ineradicable respect for form, a growing awareness of the social and moral aspects of writing, as was shown by his response to the works of André Gide.

Of all the French writers reviewed for the Herald Tribune it was André Gide who came closest to attaining a literary ideal and resolving the incongruities in Cowley's own attitude to modernism. Gide loomed for him as indubitably "the greatest man of letters in France, perhaps in all Europe." Such an honorific was predicated on "ambition of a very high order" and involved "a sound basis of talent, a love for literature in all its forms, a lifetime of varied accomplishments, a promise fulfilled." With Burke and Eliot Gide shared a "perpetual grailism," that perennial desire to "launch out on unknown seas" which Cowley had repeatedly posited as an essential feature of the "modern" sensibility. Insisting on his "liberty to experiment in different fields," Gide showed an admirable aversion to "specialization," adopting rather "the whole of literature for his province." Cowley's distrust of specialization, a leitmotif of many early reviews, was closely linked to his persistent wariness of early success: "An author who wishes to profit rapidly by success," he wrote in 1929, "is forced to specialize. Having once created a public for himself, he is henceforth ruled by its tastes, which he has helped to form; in other words, he is limited by his past achievements to one mood, one medium, and usually to one group of subjects." By contrast, Gide had admirably placed "the uncertain joys of discovery" above "the rewards of exploitation."

Between 1926 and 1929 Cowley reviewed three of Gide's novels, as they appeared in English translations: Les Caves du Vatican (1914; The Vatican Swindle, 1926), Les faux monnayeurs (1925; The Counterfeiters, 1927) and L'Ecole des femmes (The School for Wives, 1929). He delighted in Gide's attitude of "freedom" towards the conventions of the novel, relished the liberties taken with characters and plot, verisimilitude and chronology, and felt his fiction radiated a refreshing "sense of liberation from troublesome and unnecessary bonds of fact." The Vatican Swindle, he rhapsodized, revealed "new qualities of style, imagination, character [and] action," and gave one the feeling of standing "at the threshold of a new romantic era." Clearly, Cowley's recent readings in the literature of romanticism had engendered a more open-minded attitude to experimentalist fiction, without making him shed a deeply ingrained

predilection for the novel's traditional virtues. It was Gide who proved that the two were not mutually exclusive. The Counterfeiters, in particular, convinced Cowley that the deluge of radically experimental novels since 1900 did not inevitably signify the death of the genre, as he claimed to have feared in 1927:

During our own century the history of the novel has been distinguished by experiments of every conceivable sort. We have been given Freudian novels, Expressionist or Dada novels, stream-of-consciousness novels, lyric novels, super and infra-realistic novels. We have grown familiar with very strange techniques, some . . . borrowed from the cinema, others from machinery, and still others from the world of dreams. It seems that every writer has a new remedy, a patented pulmotor of his own, with which he guarantees to resuscitate the art of fiction. And the novelists themselves are at fault if we come to suspect, sometimes, that an art which requires so many doctors must be nearly on its deathbed.

For readers who enjoyed "novels as such, and not as an imitation of something else," Cowley continued, The Counterfeiters was "a vastly reassuring book," since it proved that the novel could be "born anew without being false to its own nature." Gide's search for a new "pure" novel had led him back to "the old traditions of European fiction," to Fielding, Dickens and Dostoevsky. Cowley conservatively relished The Counterfeiters as foremost "a novel of character" remarkable for its "unusually rich texture" and its "extraordinary number of 'dynamic' characters." The Counterfeiters was "genuinely great," he claimed, by virtue of a paradox: it was an indubitably modern experimental novel which, "by deliberately avoiding realism," yet managed to create "the effect of life." In The Counterfeiters, he wrote two years later, Gide had "reached heights of tragic feeling which had not been equalled since Dostoevsky."¹³

Gide's appeal to Cowley went beyond formalist aspects and had direct bearing on his own difficulties with the apparent irreconcilability of aesthetics and morality. Gide, indeed, provided the same "undying answer to those who believe that no sort of moral judgment has a place in art" which Cowley relished in Baudelaire. The Vatican Swindle, he felt, contained the clearest expression of a "new system of morality," one which placed Gide at the opposite end of the spectrum from writers like Sherwood Anderson or D. H. Lawrence. Gide saw man as foremost "a creature

of free will," Cowley insisted, one whose highest good was "to exercise this will, to control his destiny, to make decisions. Any action which is dictated merely by necessity is contemptible. Any action performed without motive should be commended, because it is a defiance of cause, heredity, environment—all the factors which limit the free exercise of the will." Cowley praised Gide's "habit of passing moral judgments on his characters" and was delighted to have found a writer who disdained what he called "the 'unmoral' novel . . . the novel of indifference." Gide thus confirmed Cowley's intuitive but strongly held belief, now publicly proclaimed, that "any question which really excites us becomes a question of morality." Eventually Cowley would follow this "greatest of contemporary French writers" on the path towards Communism. Just as, in the late 1920s, he admired Gide for his ability to harmonize the conflicting forces of tradition and experiment, morality and art, so in 1934, at the height of his political radicalism, he could praise Gide for his ability to "take an interest in collective matters, to work for judicial reforms, for better treatment of African natives, then finally to proclaim his sympathy with Communism--and to do all this without damage to his literary work" and without surrendering his "fierce individualism."¹⁴

Gide's force of moral conviction was a quality sorely absent in contemporary American writing. In two reviews, one for The Saturday Review of Literature, the other for The Dial, Cowley took Conrad Aiken's Bring! Bring! And Other Stories as a case in point. Unlike Gide's, Aiken's characters were "static almost without exception," he criticized; they surrendered "active" thought to a passive emotional life governed by "a desperate futility, a search for pleasant physical sensations, and the fear of death." Cowley related this moral attitude of Aiken's characters to the form of the short story, which he defined in terms to which he would remain surprisingly faithful. "Ideally considered," he wrote in The Dial for December 1925, "the short story is a plot which contains four elements. There is a situation (or event); an emotion which the event calls forth; an idea crystallized from the emotion; finally an action."¹⁵ Aiken's stories violated such a conception, since they eliminated "idea" as well as "action;" they offered "no climax, no real conclusion," only "a chain of obscure causes" leading to "an emotion . . . almost disembodied." Form in Aiken's fiction thus reflected his characters'

morality of futility, defeat and passive acceptance. Cowley's concern, however, extended beyond the idiosyncracies of Aiken's art to the entire realm of contemporary letters:

This dangerous passivity, the neglect of logical thought, the distaste for action (growing into a contempt for action): all these are the symptoms of the malady which afflicts the more intelligent writers of our time. Their books are concerned with people who drift, accept, surrender to their passions. A strain of inherited agnosticism, applied first to God, then to society, has finally centered in the self. They are palsied with doubt; afflicted, characters and authors, with an atrophy of the will.

Boldly applying aesthetic criteria to life itself, Cowley displayed a typical impatience with the subjectivism and moral paralysis of much modern writing; before long it would propel him towards a recognition of art's social function and relevance. As early as the fall of 1925 he opposed "a personal mysticism which often seems anti-social" to "the impulse to reform society."¹⁶

One of the few contemporary American novels to meet with Cowley's unambiguous appreciation was Doctor Transit, a first novel by Isidor Schneider, which had also roused the enthusiasm of Hart Crane. Cowley praised the book for its "glorification of the will," a quality which was becoming "rare in serious fiction," where one commonly found "characters like those of Anderson or Lawrence [who displayed] a curious lack of volition, a tendency to let themselves drift on the black stream of their instincts and passions." Cowley hoped the characters in Schneider's "epic of the will" would prove symptomatic of a "new attitude," in art and in life. He adduced a passage from Shelley's A Defence of Poetry to point up the quality of "imaginative power" ("the poetical faculty," in Shelley's words) so lamentably absent in modern civilization:

We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.

Shelley, Cowley suggested, would have admired Schneider's novel for its "attempt to digest the calculations of science, to make them human, to use them as the foundation of another mythology." As an attempt to "imagine new characters, new motives and events, a new society" Schneider's novel was a healthy antidote to the underlying mood of much of contemporary writing, which he described elsewhere as "bitter, agnostic or ironic." Shelley's romantic admonitions, Cowley implied, had a great deal of pertinency in an age which was rapidly growing "tired of its own complexity."¹⁷

Cowley now showed a much greater liking than before for "purely imaginative," daringly fantastic writing which wilfully departed from the standards of conventional realism. In a time when the realistic novel had been "formularized," it was refreshing to read a novel like Doctor Transit, a book built on an "absurdly" irrational plot, filled with "miraculous" incidents, "unreal" writing, and "imaginary" rather than "observed" characters, but which still retained the formal and stylistic qualities of "an epic poem." Cowley's growing appreciation of contemporary romanticism was a mark of his eclectic openmindedness to the rich diversity of modern writing and in no sense impaired his persistent neoclassical concern with formal elegance and control. Emblematic of the latter was his review of The Bridge of San Luis Rey by Thornton Wilder, a novel he judged "perfect in itself"--"the texture is completely unified: nothing falls short of its mark; nothing exceeds it; and the book as a whole is like some faultless temple erected to a minor deity."¹⁸

By the summer of 1925 the "general exodus" of writers and artists from New York City was well under way. Many of Cowley's literary friends took part in this move of "escape" from a business-oriented urban culture which they felt was becoming increasingly dominated by a hypocritical morality and a pervasive materialism. As early as 1922 Kenneth Burke, a pioneer in this as in many other fields, had fled from his Greenwich Village basement to a dilapidated farmhouse in Andover, New Jersey, some fifty-five miles from the city, where he lived a Spartan life of rustic honor and frugality, planting his own garden, dispensing with electricity and running water, hoping to remain untainted in the serious pursuit of

art and criticism and, eventually, to entice his friends to join him in his "Platonic republic." In the spring of 1925 Matthew Josephson, turning his back on Wall Street, followed suit and purchased four acres and a country cottage boasting a bathroom and electric light at Katonah, New York, in northern Westchester County, about an hour from New York; his place adjoined the "gentleman farms" of industrial barons and Wall Street financiers, one of which was rented that year by Sinclair Lewis. In August Josephson confessed to Cowley that his removal from the city and the Street had given him a badly needed stimulus: now that he had renewed his commitment to "following an art rather than a business," Josephson felt his new life-style placed it within his power "to do the things I love to do, more than before." Two months later, as if in proof, he solicited Cowley's criticism of parts of a novel he was writing. Josephson's place was about an hour from Tory Hill, where Slater and Susan Brown provided a place of merry rural refuge for their friends and displayed much converts' zeal in tempting them to settle in the area. In the autumn Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, married and expecting their first child, decided to make the "bold move" and rented eight semi-furnished rooms from Mrs. Addie Turner, "a grass widow of sixty with a whining voice and a moderately kind heart," who lived in a converted barn half a mile from the Browns' cottage. There, living on a monthly income of less than forty dollars, mostly from book reviews, they struggled through the winter, Gordon trying to finish a novel, Tate occasionally warming himself, in the spirit of Thoreau, by "sawing and splitting his own wood;" simultaneously they provided generous accommodation to Hart Crane, with whom they managed to live under the same roof in "comparative harmony" for nearly four months of a "hard, back-country winter."¹⁹

A romantic malgré lui, Cowley, too, had long shared his friends' Thoreauvian idealism. Like Burke, he hoped to preserve his personal independence by reducing his needs to "the gross necessities of life," as Thoreau had written, and, by living on "the plainest sort of food, shelter, clothing and transportation," avoid being trapped in the "squirrel cage" of commerce and success. "Although we didn't read Emerson," he recalled in 1959, "we had the Emersonian dream of establishing ourselves in some untouched Concord not too far from the city, but closer to the wilderness, where we could write in the morning, roam the hills in the afternoon, and sometimes gather in the evening

round the fire in a chunk stove." Cowley's naive dream of a life of rustic simplicity and untainted literary pursuit soon proved impossible to maintain without some degree of compromise; his experiences as a free-lance reviewer served to remind him daily of his economic ties to a literary marketplace governed by the same laws and principles as the larger system he despised. As he later granted: "We became part of the system we were trying to evade, and it defeated us from within, not from without; our hearts beat to its tempo." Such realizations, however, could only come by hindsight. In the summer of 1925, with all his friends joining the "exodus" from New York and Cowley remaining mired in his "dinky little white house" on semi-suburban Staten Island, he was busily scraping together funds to realize his plan of moving permanently to the country; he had already settled on the area around Patterson, New York, where the Browns, he granted, had found "the right neighborhood."²⁰

In September Cowley returned for a month to Sweet's to help out in the annual prepublication rush and make an extra buck. In October, swamped with reviewing obligations, he complained to Allen Tate of being once again submerged in a "great lassitude." During the late fall he took time out to make a tour of Monmouth County, New Jersey, visiting the region's ancient churches and talking to the local clergy, for a Charm article on "Churches Which Remember the Revolution." Unable to do the work he truly valued, Cowley relapsed into a mood of self-ironic lamentation. "When I shuffle my head sounds like a great resounding cavern," he told Burke in early November. When John Brooks Wheelwright announced that he was abandoning the "profession" of literature (though not the writing of poetry) in order to study architecture--modern literature, he explained to Cowley, "strikes me as the result of systematic demoralization. It is because letters are not and are now treated as though they were a profession. A man should have some other thing as a major interest, I am certain"--Cowley replied despondently: "We all have to face the problem of making literature a vocation or an avocation. I've tried them both, and have been unhappy both ways. Perhaps living and thinking are the only vocations." What was needed, he said, was "some sort of external discipline, without which we mope." Earlier, in August, he had bemoaned the fact that "a certain type of life, of conversation," which he associated with Wheelwright, seemed to have "temporarily passed out of [his] life." With his friends dispersing into

separate rural enclaves, Cowley missed the sense of literary community which had sustained him through the previous winter and summer.²¹

At the end of November, eager for the stimulus of disinterested literary conversation, he took Josephson on a visit to Wheelwright in Boston. The occasion proved as exhilarating as Cowley had expected. "I feel like a man who has just had a cataract removed from his eyes," he wrote to Wheelwright upon his return. "In a sober life, devoted to Art, Letters and Money, I [had] forgotten the strange countries which lie over the border of work and sleep." Wheelwright's effervescent companionship brought back the spirit of exhilarating Dada pranks played on Secession from the blacksmith shop in Giverny, as well as memories of earlier Harvard days, when he had joined Damon or Wheelwright for literary sessions at the house of Amy Lowell. Cowley and Josephson came away from their visit with a renewed conviction of the "necessity of a salon--some place where people could meet once a week or once every two weeks, with a pretense of breeding and a reality of conversation." Such a salon, Cowley was convinced, would have "the effect of a whetstone: it sharpens people's minds against each other. . . . It is an opportunity for general conversation, which Plato believed to be the highest delight of life." The project, exciting and viable as it seemed, stranded for lack of a suitable "hostess"--there was no Mable Dodge or Gertrude Stein or Amy Lowell to be found who was willing to invite and entertain "the froth of the whipped cream of the Artists and Writers of the nation." But the impulse behind the plan, so symptomatic of Cowley's consistent efforts to maintain an ever more precarious sense of united literary effort among the members of his age-group, remained, to be resuscitated in the future and expanded to encompass what Cowley would come to think of as the "commonwealth of letters." Even in the 1920s he and Tate "speculated about the possibility of putting out a magazine of sorts, to be called 'News of the Republic of Letters.'"²² Cowley's later efforts on behalf of Yaddo, the League of American Writers, and the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters were a natural exfoliation from his early efforts to sustain a sense of common literary purpose among his coevals.

In the closing days of 1925, however, Cowley had to make do with occasional weekend trips to Robber Rocks and weekly or biweekly lunches with his friends in New York City. His trip to Boston, followed by a

visit to S. Foster Damon in Providence, Rhode Island, had been merely an exhilarating intermezzo. Back in New York Cowley had difficulty resuming his "practical affairs," which he confessed to Wheelwright were in a "terrible" state: "I haven't been so poor since I left college, ill, with Peggy ill, and with just money enough for a train and a taxicab to Greenwich Village."²³

When, shortly after, Allen Tate invited him to spend Christmas up at their new domicile on Tory Hill and offered to go hunting with him ("You can't walk a quarter of a mile without raising partridge; rabbits almost trip you up every step"), Cowley jumped at the proposal. Tate also reported that all of a sudden Crane seemed to have become "the darling of capitalists and, so to speak, the delight of kings," having received \$1000 from the financier and art patron Otto Kahn to relieve his poverty and set him free to write the poetic masterpiece that for some time had been simmering in his brain. On December 12 Crane arrived at Addie Turner's in excellent spirits, bringing liquor, exotic groceries, a new pair of snowshoes and ambitious plans for work. With the Cowleys driving up from Staten Island to stay in "Mr. Crane's part" at the Turner house, and the Josephsons being accommodated at nearby Robber Rocks, Tory Hill that year witnessed one of its merriest Christmas reunions. At one of the festive get-togethers, Cowley remembered, Crane read out his "Voyages II." It may well have been Crane's reading of this poem (in which "sleep, death, desire / close round one instant in one floating flower") which moved Cowley to compose "The Flower in the Sea," a poem both about and dedicated to Crane, which beautifully captured the peculiar mixture of the sexual and the religious in Crane's visionary poetry. Cowley mailed the poem to Crane upon his return to New York after Christmas. It imagined Crane speaking:

Jesus I saw, crossing Times Square
with John the Baptist, and they bade me stop;
their hands touched mine:

visions from the belly of a bottle.

The sea, white, white,
the flower in the sea,
the white fire glowing in the flower,
and sea and fire and flower one,
the world is one, falsehood and truth
one, morning and midnight, flesh and vision

one.

I fled along the avenues of night
interminably, and One pursued,

my bruised arms in His arms nursed,
my breast against His wounded breast,
my head limp against His shoulder.

Crane was pleased with the tribute. In a letter written to Cowley from Addie Turner's in early January 1926 he praised it as a poem "flatteringly apocalyptic" with just "the proper nautical slant." "The Flower in the Sea" seemed "to stand on its own feet as a poem," Crane judged; he appreciated "a very great deal the tonality and direction of it in its more intimate aspects."²⁴

Before going off to spend Christmas with the Tates, Cowley had put out feelers for a new free-lancing job. In mid-December 1925 he wrote to Lowell Brentano, an acquaintance from Harvard days and a scion of the family which owned the largest book store in New York; it also ran the publishing firm which had brought out Eight More Harvard Poets. Cowley proposed to write a series of portrait interviews of "distinguished American authors" for Brentano's Book Chat, the firm's house organ. Under the editorship of Bellamy Partridge the little bimonthly magazine, founded in 1922, cherished literary aspirations beyond the mere promotion of new books. In origin, indeed, the Book Chat recalled The Chap-Book (1894-1898), a magazine which also began as a house organ of Stone and Kimball, Chicago book publishers of Harvard extraction, but grew into a self-consciously avant-garde little magazine of the "purple" 1890s.²⁵ Unlike its more illustrious predecessor, however, Brentano's Book Chat never was important or influential enough to earn a place in the literary annals of its time.

Cowley's proposal for a series of pen-portraits was well, even enthusiastically, received. In early February 1926, even before his first article had appeared in its pages, he was asked to become contributing editor, together with Gilbert Seldes, Samuel Ornitz and others. Barely two months later he was offered the job of conducting "The Tower of Babel," a column written under a nom de plume, in which he was expected

to review the current stock of foreign books in French, German, Spanish and Italian. Cowley accepted the assignment--though, as he admitted to Tate, what with his "rusty" German and his "nonexistent" Spanish and Italian, the job was "something of a joke"--and for some two years filled a considerable part of the contents of Brentano's Book Chat with his pseudonymous writings; he even took a course in Italian at Columbia University. For a while his work for Brentano's yielded an assured income of another \$50 a month. By 1927, however, he had grown tired of a hackwriting job which yielded pay but little honor, and turned over "The Tower of Babel" to the destitute Allen Tate. By May 1928 Tate, too, had reached the limits of his tolerance for such work and, in turn, passed on the column to another set of destitute friends, Susan Jenkins and Slater Brown.²⁶

Between 1926 and 1928 Brentano's Book Chat featured ten of Cowley's portrait-interviews of contemporary American writers: Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, William Beebe, Ring Lardner, H. L. Mencken, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Conrad Aiken, Carl Sandburg and Ernest Hemingway. In addition, he wrote on a variety of subjects, from the "fine art" of giving books to the special appeal of the Nick Carter stories (a relic of Broom's earlier interest in forms of American popular culture), and the disappearance of a once popular type of verse, the "harbingers" of spring. Writing for the Book Chat Cowley might try to improve its literary tone--his readers were somewhat more sophisticated than those of Charm--but editorial demands prevented him from rising far above the level of middlebrow comprehension. Bellamy Partridge consistently enjoined him to write in a light, humorous, "chatty" vein and, wherever possible, to "inject a little of the mysterious stuff called popularity."²⁷

Cowley's pen-portraits of American writers were conceived along the lines of his Bookman series on French authors, but were distinctly popular in tone and did not shun the anecdotal; some of them, he shamefacedly acknowledged to Maxwell Perkins at Scribner's, read "very much like a publisher's brochure, except that they're rather less blah." Yet they exemplified, if often embryonically, many of Cowley's ongoing critical concerns and illustrated a typical approach which would persist beyond such admittedly "apprentice stuff." Their most conspicuous characteristic was Cowley's objective "to describe an author's work from

the standpoint of his personality and his personality from the standpoint of his work." As such, the literary portraits gave evidence of Cowley's intention to "try more for character studies" in his writings and adumbrated his maturer explorations of the complex interweavings of personality and literary art.²⁸

Each Book Chat portrait embedded a (sometimes ironic or scathingly critical) study of a literary personality within the larger story of the writer's career. In a manner which anticipated Cowley's later "empathetic" mode of criticism, he would build his literary portrait around personal reminiscences or observations of the author. Thus, he recalled first meeting Sinclair Lewis on the terraces of the Dôme in Paris in 1921, when the author of Babbitt was satirically impersonating his own fictional creation, and set his reminiscences against the impressions of Lewis which he had gleaned on a visit to the novelist's country estate in Katonah, in the summer of 1925, together with Matthew Josephson. Likewise, he evoked a picture of O'Neill as he had first seen him in the back room of the Hell Hole in the Village, after his return from the war in 1917; he recalled "an evening of animated conversation" with Edwin Arlington Robinson in the spring of 1919, when with Foster Damon he had sought out this "most distinguished American poet" in his Brooklyn domicile; and he remembered his first meeting with the young Hemingway in the Paris apartment of Ezra Pound, antecedent to reconstructing what, barely two years later, had already become "the Hemingway legend."

To complement or correct his personal memories, Cowley sought out most of the writers in person. In January 1926 he talked to Willa Cather in her comfortable Greenwich Village apartment and met with Lewis in a New York hotel. In July he gained access, through the sensitive mediation of Maxwell Perkins, to Ring Lardner and interviewed the writer in his home in Great Neck, Long Island ("You can tell him that I promise not to ask too many questions, not to treat him as one of the Seven Lively Arts, not to handle his Puppets with dirty fingers and not to drain the family cellar," Cowley had promised Perkins). In January 1927 he talked to Edwin Arlington Robinson. In the spring of that year he escorted Carl Sandburg during a performance of his "ril Amurricn" poetry and songs before an incongruous audience of rich and elegant Eastern ladies at the New York Junior League, and during the summer spoke with Conrad Aiken while

visiting his friends John and Elinor Nef on Cape Cod.²⁹

Cowley transformed each of his Book Chat portraits into an opportunity for discussing an aspect of literature or the literary life which he saw reflected in the writings and career of his subject. Thus, his portrait of Willa Cather, one of the best in the series, explored the dynamics of her literary career ("There is a moment when the public is finally ready to accept the state of mind, the attitude toward life and writing, in a word the personality of a particular novelist"); it reviewed her development as a professional writer with the hallmark of the "modern" artist ("For her, every new book is a new problem; it requires a new attitude, a new method, a different solution"); it applauded her search for "hard definite outlines, finish without brilliance; in one sense of the word, perfection;" it praised her uncompromising "honesty of vision" and located the secret of her success in her "life of disciplined endeavor." Among contemporary American writers Willa Cather stood for Cowley as "the finest example of the classical ideal," one existing, paradoxically enough, amidst "the broken debris of the romantic tradition."³⁰

In Sinclair Lewis, Cowley suggested, literary style and personality were one: both radiated an "air of round-eyed simplicity," a hatred of pretension and an unmistakable vitality. Ever since the days of Broom Cowley had relished Lewis's satirical commentary on American civilization; he now credited him with having profoundly affected America's understanding of itself, revealing in the process how much his appreciation of Lewis coincided with an aversion to "pure literature:" "It is possible that such a thing as pure literature exists; that, after substracting all the human qualities of a book, there is a faintly metaphysical remainder which can be ticketed and put away in a glass jar; but in any case this remainder is abstract, tedious and dead."³¹

William Beebe, the popular ornithologist and explorer of tropical wild life, held a particular fascination for Cowley. The odd man out in the series, Beebe impressed Cowley as a man of wide culture with a natural gift for style, who could afford to write "almost subconsciously." He examined the "aesthetic" implications of Beebe's adventurous, "strenuous" life-style and found him an exemplary of a "classical" ideal of universality sharply at odds with the contemporary tendency towards specialization. Beebe, so Cowley hoped, might be "the

pioneer of a new and happier age in American letters."³²

Like Edmund Wilson Cowley dealt with Ring Lardner as a serious writer at a time when his critical reputation suffered from his popular success as a sportswriter with a gift for sardonic humor. Lardner's literary secret, Cowley astutely saw, lay in his uncanny sensitivity to the modulations of vernacular speech, a perfect "ear" directed by "a delicate sensibility, a rather profound philosophy and a deadly sense of humor." If, occasionally, Lardner's writings were "as completely cuckoo" as anything by Tristan Tzara, more often Cowley found in his humorous stories "the stuff of tragedy," a moving image of man "in all his childish and pitiful vanity."³³

Predictably, but refreshingly after so much praise, H. L. Mencken received short shrift, much in the mocking spirit of Aesthete 1925. Aiming to provoke his readers, Cowley reviewed his own shifting attitudes to Mencken over the last fifteen years--from his reverential reading of The Smart Set in 1912, through the violence of his hostility in 1919 (when he regarded Mencken as "the greatest existing menace to American letters"), to his contradictory feelings of "anger and amazement" in 1927. Mencken, Cowley acknowledged, was the Voltaire of his time, the "voice" and "prophet" of an "age of gin, Freud, knickerbockers, sex, the Charleston, boyish bobs and revolt against all forms of puritanism." But if he was admittedly "the most influential writer in the country today," as a literary critic Mencken was "tremendously overrated:" it was "charitable to overlook" his "expeditions into pure aesthetics." Cowley's biggest grievance against Mencken, however, was the latter's tendency to make American literature seem more deficient than it was: "our writers," he objected, "are strong enough to stand on their own feet, to be praised only for their virtues and damned for their faults."³⁴

Edwin Arlington Robinson impressed Cowley as a poet single-mindedly devoted to his art in a culture in which poetry was "not counted among the useful arts," one who displayed a veritably "heroic" determination not to yield to commercial compromise. Recalling Theodore Roosevelt's decision to make the federal government "for once" into "a patron of the fine arts" (Roosevelt had given Robinson a position as a Custom House official), Cowley criticized the Coolidge administration for its blatant indifference to the fate of American letters.³⁵ In an age of "intensive specialization," when literature, like any business, stood in danger of

becoming a "great Fordized industry," Conrad Aiken remained a healthy antidote and a signal of hope. Cowley praised Aiken as one of the few American writers who did not "confuse art with business" but who remained "strictly a man of letters," a literary species "almost unknown" in America.³⁶ Together, Cowley's portraits of Robinson and Aiken were symptomatic of his growing impatience with an American culture which failed to recognize the function and validity of art and could not provide its artists with adequate spiritual sustenance.

Cowley's last Book Chat portrait was advertised as "the first real pen-picture of Ernest Hemingway that has ever appeared in print." By the time of its appearance, in the fall of 1928, Hemingway had already gathered about himself the aura of "a legendary figure." Cowley did his best to boost the legend, painting a colorful and anecdotal picture of Hemingway's charismatic personality and successful career. From the latter he playfully distilled a "formula for literary success" (prime requisite was a distance of "at least three thousand miles from the quarrels, the cliques and the easily satisfied curiosity of literary New York") and acknowledged that Hemingway "expressed his generation better than any other writer." From the first Cowley intuited that the "secret" of Hemingway's literary power was to be sought "less in the qualities of his style than in the qualities of his mind." Uncertain as to Hemingway's ability to "think well," Cowley had no hesitation about praising the astounding "keenness" of his "sensory perceptions." The qualities which distinguished Hemingway's writing--"its appeal to the senses, its emotional intensity, its lack of general ideas, its absolute freshness"--convinced Cowley that he was less a novelist than "a lyric poet by instinct—a poet who has stumbled into the less thorny paths of prose."

Cowley's portrait of Hemingway is important as one of his earliest attempts to define the leading characteristics of his generation; it was a "practical" generation, he wrote, one "energetic in the attainment of its limited ends," "candid in the pursuit of pleasure," and, in its own way, "fundamentally religious."

[It was, Cowley proceeded,] a very simple generation, after all. Its elders by ten years felt that they were living in a complex age and at a time when civilization was beginning to decay. They wrote in a knowing and discouraged fashion about the problems with which they were faced, chief among which was the relationship of man to the machine. For writers like

Hemingway, this relationship is no longer a problem; they have mastered the machine; they sit unheedingly at the wheel of a high-powered automobile or the joy-stick of an airplane; they have become the primitives of a new age. They have learned . . . the sort of deliberate innocence which is the goal of sophistication.

Being simple, they like to write of simple themes. . . . Essentially, these are the themes which might have interested Villon or Catullus, Pushkin or Li T'ai Po. They differ remarkably from the subjects chosen by Hemingway's immediate predecessors, who were so obsessed with the complexity of their age and so bitterly determined to be original that most of their stories were written, as it were, on the very margins of experience. Hemingway is convinced of his originality; he does not need to prove it by being finical or obscure. Having found a new manner of writing, he dares to attack the ancient themes of love and death.³⁷

Here, in all its crude and elementary simplicity, were the nebulous contours of the picture of the lost generation Cowley would present with more persuasiveness, depth and complexity in Exile's Return. His early analysis displayed a typical inclination to define his generation in contrast to its immediate elders (those belonging to what Munson called the "middle" generation) and exemplified a naively self-confident indifference, so typical of a generation buoyantly committed to the present, to a native American tradition in writing which extended backwards from Eliot through James to Hawthorne.

Cowley's pen-portraits were generally well-received. There were letters of appreciation from Cather, Beebe and Robinson, who felt they had been treated with tact and generosity. Aiken, however, objected that Cowley had misjudged his novel Blue Voyage (but gratefully accepted Cowley's proposal to introduce him to editor Partridge as a potential contributor to the Book Chat). Whatever the author's own misgivings about writing for Brentano's Book Chat, by October 1927 he still had enough confidence in his portraits to suggest a continuation of the series to Bellamy Partidge, on the understanding that he would be allowed to write on up-and-coming younger writers and would be permitted to exchange his strategy of "unmixed praise" for one of frank reaction: "The stunt is not to leave people in a mood of dumb acquiescence, as if they were sitting in church, but to get them in a state of mind in which they approve, disapprove, shout and get generally excited." He projected future profiles of Dreiser, Booth Tarkington, Anderson, Maurice Werner and American Biography, Amy Lowell, the Younger Dramatists and the

Expatriates. Conjointly, Cowley was persuaded, the Book Chat portraits would encompass "a pretty complete survey of American literature since the war" and could be published as a book.³⁸ Though, in the end, none of the proposed portraits were written, Cowley was conceiving of himself with growing self-assurance as the chronicler and historian of his literary times.

In February 1926 Cowley took time out from his regular free-lancing work to complete a translation of Joseph Delteil's controversial "novelized biography" of Joan of Arc. The book, he confessed to Marianne Moore at The Dial, was "the most difficult problem in translation that I have ever encountered. Written French and written English are almost identical, except for the vocabulary. The Delteil is composed in the French vernacular; which means in a syntax as far from English as the Semitic or Turanian tongues. It is a fine book in French; I don't know that I have got the same quality in English." Cowley had made the acquaintance of Delteil's work through Louis Aragon who, at one of the Dadaist gatherings in Paris in the spring of 1923, had enthusiastically declaimed a passage from Delteil's first novel, Sur le fleuve Amour, which had impressed Cowley as "all very barbarous, imaginative, and lyrical, and new." For a while Delteil was a hanger-on of the Dadaists and Surrealists and Cowley continued to follow his unfolding career after his departure from France; in 1924 he read Choléra, but found it a less likable if still "extraordinary book."³⁹

Delteil's Joan of Arc was a rhapsodic, unabashedly personal recreation of a cherished historical legend, written from a modernist perspective; it was a book which managed to outrage Surrealists, academicians and patriots alike, but which attained an immense popularity in France. Cowley relished Delteil as the incarnation of "the spirit of the younger Frenchman since the war," an author who showed a refreshing disdain for popular success but spoke his own mind, "with malice and gusto," regardless of established opinion. Most of Delteil's novels, Cowley noted in his "Introduction," exemplified "the revolt of the individual against a standardized society" and as such seemed pertinent to his own day and age. As he proceeded to list the qualities for which

he liked Delteil--"A vast weariness with the ratiocination, the profound aesthetics of the last generation. A departure from realism, idealism, naturalism; all are equally boring. A revolt in favour of lyrical freedom and the imagination. Finally a taste for adventure, action"--it became apparent that Delteil's appeal fitted in with Cowley's growing appreciation for a contemporary romantic literature daringly inventive and unorthodox, but above all unmistakably, even shockingly, "modern."⁴⁰

The book received wide and favorable notice. Most reviewers followed the lead Cowley developed in his introduction, that the book was to be seen less as a biography than as a modern "lyrical novel," one written with "a poet's grasp of sensuous objects, a poet's sympathy, a poet's freshness." Praise for Cowley's translation was unanimous. Matthew Josephson, writing for The Saturday Review of Literature, regarded the book as "a test of the modern style" and commented: "The text with its mixture of the latest colloquialisms and the most obsolete terms, its brood of quarrelsome metaphors which are like angry bedfellows, seemed veritably inaccessible. It needed much nimbleness and virtuosity to attack this French and create the illusion of something written in English." In a lengthy review for Herald Tribune Books Harrison Smith considered Joseph Delteil "fortunate to have found a translator who could mirror his sustained lyric outbursts so that the English version rises to the level of an interpretation and recreation." Together with the translation of MacOrlan's On Board the 'Morning Star', Smith believed, this translation of Delteil "should establish a reputation for [Cowley] that is to be envied."⁴¹

Even before the book appeared, in April 1926, Cowley was approached from unexpected quarters: on March 11, 1926, he was invited by Ernest Boyd to contribute a biography of his own to the "International Men of Letters Series" which Boyd was editorially supervising for Little, Brown and Company. Any misgivings Cowley may have had about writing for a man he still regarded as his literary enemy must have been taken away by Hart Crane, who urged his friend to go ahead with "the Boyd proposal," reasoning that, far from "implying any concessions" on Cowley's part, to do so would be "a fine weapon against further attacks from that gent." Cowley, in effect, jumped to Boyd's proposal and suggested Baudelaire as "the man I am most anxious to write about," followed by Stendhal and Rémy de Gourmont. Baudelaire, Cowley argued, was quite

simply "the great poet of his century, and one of the great precursors" of modernism. The background to his life, moreover, was "rich in tragic, and even more in comic effects" and Cowley was confident of his ability to dig up an amount of hitherto unused material, in particular on the admittedly "ludicrous and terrible" subject of French satanism. Boyd was impressed and accepted Baudelaire as an "excellent" choice for the series.⁴²

Cowley's exhilaration was only reinforced by the sudden prospect of exchanging a life of free-lancing drudgery for the adventure of another trip to Europe. If he wanted to make the book into a "definitive" biography, and he did, then he would have to spend at least several months in France to gather new material. In early April he applied for a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship and asked Marianne Moore to be his reference; he sent her a copy of his Racine as proof of his competence--the essay, Moore agreed, was "surely a very powerful recommendation." In his letter to Moore, Cowley indicated how he hoped to fit in Baudelaire with his present literary preoccupations: "Any study of Baudelaire must touch several questions which are fundamental in literature:--one's judgment of romanticism considered in its most extreme manifestations; one's judgment of the relation between morality and aesthetics; and finally the interplay between the artist and his environment, particularly interesting in the case of Baudelaire."⁴³

Cowley's critical biography of Baudelaire was never written. The Guggenheim fellowships for the year had already been parceled out and, though his enthusiasm for the project lingered on, he finally abandoned the idea, his fascination for the French poet being channeled into reviews of books on Baudelaire by others. The latter, together with his explanation of his prospective treatment of Baudelaire to Marianne Moore, suggest that at least part of Cowley's biographical thesis would have revolved around the "reciprocal" connection between the poet's life and work, an interest consonant with the themes he was developing in other reviews at the time.

It is true that in Baudelaire's case we cannot forget the relation between his poems and his actual experience [Cowley wrote in 1929]; but neither can we forget the double contrast, first that his life was disordered, chaotic, full of trivialities, whereas his poems are purified, disciplined, composed, to the highest degree, and, second, that in life he

suffered from atrophy of the will, whereas his poems represent his tireless efforts towards one goal, his incessant exercise of the faculty of choice, his determination to achieve perfection at any cost--in a word, the will itself, in one of its noblest manifestations. We can subtract his life from his poems and they remain. We cannot . . . subtract his poems from his life, for in a sense they are his life.

The artist as constructionist and expressionist, a defense of the conscious intelligence against a psychoanalytic explanation of literary genius as "a form of abnormality," the contrast between the poet's personal morality and his literary ethics--these, in all probability, would have constituted the leitmotifs of Cowley's treatment of Baudelaire.⁴⁴

His trip to France having fallen through, Cowley relapsed into discouragement. When he complained to Josephson about being perenially hemmed in by the necessity of hackwriting, his friend replied in a spirit of ironic encouragement: "don't get tired; pretty soon we will all write a letter to Thomas Lamont [chairman of J. P. Morgan and Company] about you. . . . The proposition is that Malcolm Prometheus Cowley is to be unharnessed enfin and allowed to graze wherever he pleases, and finally to say something with all the felicity-for-saying which he has been acquiring these many years." In early March, hoping to find a more sympathetic ear, Cowley wrote to Marianne Moore: "I like to carry some of my doubts to you; nobody else seems interested in the questions of literary ethics which are always disturbing me." Later that month, he unburdened himself in a long letter to Allen Tate. Tate, he knew, had long been vexed by much the same problems of poverty, hackwriting and the concomitant lack of opportunity for truly creative work; the year before, with Tate struggling to get by on an income of thirty-odd dollars a month and growing increasingly despondent, Cowley had banded together with several of his friends, including Edmund Wilson, and appealed to the Secretary of the Personal Service Fund in New York for financial aid for "a poet of unusual talent," but one in "exceptionally hard straits." At the end of March 1926 he addressed one of his periodic letters of plaintive, doleful stocktaking to Tate. Measuring his present life against the high ambitions with which he had returned from France, Cowley felt his life had been reduced to "a mass of unimportant details:"

Three years ago, when I came back from France, I had very different plans. I was going to take a job so that all my writing could be disinterested. I also felt (and feel today) that the grave weakness of the literary life in New York was the fact that it was unimportant. For unimportant read "had no moral value." Anything to which we attach importance becomes a moral question. We don't consider it a vice to do sloppy work--at least there is no form of opinion which condemns sloppy work--so evidently we consider the whole question as immaterial.

And we were going to change all that. When the Dial played safe by giving its award to Brooks, we were going to protest. When Boyd made a cowardly attack--cowardly because it didn't represent his own beliefs--we would protest again. We would be passionate, ridiculous and undignified. We were. And we became profoundly discouraged, not so much by general hostility as by our own tepidity and quarrels.

According to my own standards, everything I'm doing now is rotten. The articles for Charm are rotten. The articles for Book Chat are rotten. The translation would have been respectable, but I let the publishers make so many expurgations, and made so many myself without being asked, that I feel as if even that job helped to dirty my hands. I want to write a book on Baudelaire, but oughtn't to be doing it for Ernest Boyd. I see nothing else to do but compromise. Some people are saved by a sort of divine dumbness which makes them incapable--not morally, but intellectually--of successful hackwork. I've always lacked that defense.

Lack of talent isn't one of our chief problems. Almost any of our friends has as much talent as André Gide or Joseph Conrad. The problem is living such a life as to develop our talents. Until forty, at any rate--afterwards things are easier. To reach forty with clean hands. I can't see myself doing it.⁴⁵

As often in his moods of black despondency, Cowley was inclined to exaggerate the misery of his plight and the degree to which he had allowed his integrity to be corrupted. When he went so far as to criticize the withdrawn, bucolic type of life away from New York led by the Browns and Tates--"I admire it from a distance, but think it a mistake to retire, to narrow your circle of experiences. . . . Sometime you'll have to return to New York, and be in a worse fix than I"--Tate sharply took his friend to task for falsely bemoaning a partly self-inflicted fate:

. . . I think there is something wrong with the general argument you make out for the hell and damnation of us all. . . . Economically I would seem to be worse off than you [Tate was making barely \$40 a month, Cowley five times as much], but I am not. You make more money, because you have more jobs; you are

more versatile. Your fallacy lies in the phrase "narrowing the circle of experience." I assert that the circle of my experience has as large a diameter as it had in New York. . . . I can't see the advantage of working like hell at a great variety of hack jobs just in order to stay bewildered and in New York. . . . On a hundred dollars a month six persons could live out here, and have enough left to buy stick-candy. But you make more than that; and you complain that you are broke. You deserve to be. And all for the illusion of wide experience. As long as you're living in a fashion that requires two hundred dollars a month, you will manage to make that much; you will manage it by writing essays "of no value;" and you will reflect on the misery of a mechanical life, which gives you no spare time, and, moreover, corrupts your moral hands with dirty jobs . . . but why abet the criminal? Why make it worse? . . . Facts sir, nothing but facts . . . will puncture an illusion.

Tate's criticism was well-taken, not in the last place because it implied an admonition to stop wallowing in self-complaint and begin to exert that capacity for directing one's own life through conscious choice and an exercise of free will which Cowley had been calling for in his notebooks and reviews. Though Tate agreed that the present literary scene was "intolerable" and devoid of "moral value," he believed that his "temporary choice" of living in the country was preferable to Cowley's ambivalent loyalty to New York.⁴⁶

As Tate well knew, Cowley's reluctance to exchange the possibility of "wide experience" in New York for a rural existence in closer proximity to his friends hardly posited an unsolvable dilemma. As early as November 1925 Cowley had spoken to Burke of his plans to settle in the neighborhood of Robber Rocks; in the spring of 1926 he again told Tate of his intentions to "rent a place in your vicinity," while possibly retaining his "Staten Island dump." In May 1926 Cowley moved to Sherman, Connecticut, where Charlie Jennings, a local farmer, had found a suitable house owned by his old friend Akin Briggs. News of Cowley's arrival in the neighborhood--the house he rented lay at a walking distance of five miles from Addie Turner's--was eagerly greeted by Hart Crane: "The news of your plans for the summer is good to hear! We're all anticipating the first of May--though you will be a little distant." Cowley's move to Sherman was only one further step towards a permanent year-round residence in the country. For the moment Cowley resumed the amphibian life-style of his youth, living like one of the "summer people" in the country from May through October, while spending his winters in an

apartment in downtown Manhattan. In early June he described his new rural environs to Harriet Monroe, who had just accepted a group of Cowley's pastoral poems for publication in Poetry:

This is a magnificent country, full of deer, trout, granite and poison ivy. I hope I'll be able to stay out of the woods long enough to complete some work. "The woods" are not a figure of speech. They are acres of oak, elm, hemlock, black, white and yellow birch surrounding the bed of a stream where trout sleep in pools below the falls. Before writing the last sentence I looked out of the window, sniffed the breeze and decided the fish would be biting. Then conquering temptation, I returned to the machine.⁴⁷

Without a doubt, Cowley had returned to homelike territory.

The spring of 1926 witnessed the birth of another group manifesto by Cowley and his friends, when Jane Heap made good her earlier promise to open up the pages of The Little Review for a creative, nonpolemic reprise of Aesthete 1925. From the first The Little Review had been sympathetic to the spirit of youthful iconoclasm of Cowley's literary circle. Margaret Anderson had published Aragon, Picabia and Soupault as early as 1921, and, as one of the "23 new systems of art" advocated by The Little Review in the quirky course of its existence, Miss Heap had welcomed Dada to America in the spring of 1922: Dada, she had written, deserved credit for introducing "ridicule into a too churchly game" and for flinging "its crazy bridges to a new consciousness." She had also greeted "the new epoch" buoyantly ushered in by Secession. Though she had criticized Aesthete 1925 as an ineffectual polemical magazine conceived under "the auspices of poverty" ("wasn't it rather a poverty of spirit to devote an entire magazine to Mr. Ernest Boyd?"), she had retained enough confidence in the "aesthetes" to solicit the help of Cowley and Josephson for a special issue she was preparing on the French Surrealists. Both men had their misgivings. Cowley had never followed Dada into Surrealism, Josephson's former enthusiasm had by this time turned into "antipathy," and both had a low opinion of Jane Heap's artistic tastes and standards--for Heap art was "merely an occasion for gossip," Josephson observed to Cowley. Over the fall and winter, however, Cowley helped out by

translating verse by Tristan Tzara as well as an "innocuous" article on the paintings of Joan Miró by Michel Leiris.⁴⁸

By April 1926 Jane Heap had modified her plans for an exclusively Surrealist issue and decided, as she told Matthew Josephson, that "it would be fun to publish your group and the French group against each other." She expressed her "high opinion" of Cowley's literary talents and invited him to write one of his notorious "mad outbursts" for the issue. Cowley thought Heap's idea for a joint French-American issue "excellent," and he submitted a group of poems about his literary friends as well as "Race between a Subway Local and a Subway Express," a fictional experiment with motion and structure in the spirit of Marinetti's Futurism. Mindful of the barrel of leftover manuscripts from Broom, he also pleaded the inclusion of "a dandy sketch" by Charles L. Durboraw, the author of the Broom story which had alerted a suspicious Postmaster General. As with Aesthete 1925, the final push to the group manifesto was given during an all-day session of Cowley and company at the old-fashioned Broadway Central hotel in New York, where they convened in "a very big, neat, dusty room that smelled of poverty amid decayed grandeur." There, the one-time Aesthetes worked together in a spirit of good fun and lively camaraderie and completed the issue's American section before, late in the afternoon, they resorted with their wives to jollier quarters, the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem.⁴⁹

The 1926 spring-summer issue of The Little Review featured a motley assembly of European Surrealists and former Dadaists--among them René Crevel, Michel Leiris, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Joseph Delteil, G. Ribemont-Dessaignes and Marcel Arland--as well as reproductions of work by Joan Miró, L. Moholy-Nagy and others. The American section featured most of the contributors to Aesthete 1925 (Williams, Josephson, Cowley, Brown and Wheelwright), as well as work by Hart Crane ("Voyages"), Ernest Hemingway ("Banal Story"), Charles Durboraw ("Colors of Life"), Gorham Munson, Edward Nagle, and John Riordan, a young disciple-friend of Williams, who had been introduced to the "aesthetes" in the winter of 1924-1925. Conspicuously absent were Kenneth Burke and Allen Tate, though the latter had submitted his poem "Idiot" (which Cowley deemed "a tremendous and impressive piece of work," Tate's best poem so far) to Matthew Josephson for inclusion in the group manifestation. An editorial note by Jane Heap set the tone of irreverent iconoclasm in which the

Issue was conceived and voiced a typical lament:

. . . In America there is a prejudice, a disdain even, for groups, cliques, revolutions, movements, in fact for all of the tricks that the young Europeans make use of to ward off blight and boredom. . . .

We are all too serious about art in America. . . . So serious that we treat it as we treat the dead . . . with respect and no attempt at communication. That man who produces works of art is either treated as a god or as a rather ridiculous and useless member of society. As long as this attitude obtains there is little hope for art in America.⁵⁰

Not all American contributors, however, were equally persuaded by Miss Heap's claim of artistic kinship with the European Surrealists. Matthew Josephson, for one, launched a caustic attack on his "anciens amis," which pointed the direction in which Cowley, too, was steadfastly, if more slowly, moving. In "A letter to My Friends" Josephson rhetorically attacked the Surrealists and one-time Dadaists for their irrational and anti-social attitudes to art and life. He mocked their veneration of Freudian psychoanalysis, urged them to stop being pretentious and esoteric "littérateurs" who made a sport of retreating into the private recesses of the self, and admonished them to face the realities of modern life. "Revolution, the race-track, the political arena, the stock market"--these were the proper spheres of reality for writers to move in. In America, Josephson fulminated, writers could not afford to withdraw into the pursuit of "pure literature," but were forced to "live in storm-cellar or country-retreats. It is bitter to survive; it is bitter to find ears." Still, it was "a thrilling struggle" to be a writer in America: "Stealthily, to have done something well in the line of our own traditions remains a secret delight and a social crime. . . . For this reason, one may be happy here, although the consuls in the skyscrapers still turn their thumbs down for us, and our position remains desperate and precarious enough."⁵¹

Josephson's admonitions to his former friends were rather prescient: as he noted in a footnote to his open letter, recent events had endowed his words with "an air of prophecy"--by mid-1926 many of the Surrealists had shifted their objectives from aesthetic subjectivism to political revolution, the majority turning "Bolshevist," a few others Fascist. It seemed only a matter of time before Josephson's impatience with a culture

in which art was "a secret delight" but "a social crime" would similarly break out into political radicalism. In 1926 his transitional stance was roughly consonant with Cowley's own, though the latter's nascent social consciousness remained as yet publicly unarticulated.⁵²

Cowley's contribution was an "Anthology" of portrait-poems about his literary friends, which pointed up the idiosyncracies of each, yet underlined their joint manifestation as a group. While each poem captured the nuances of a distinct style and literary personality, conjointly the poems stood as Cowley's study-in-verse of the different dilemmas and ambiguities plaguing the writers of his age-group in the mid-1920s. Thus, "Kenneth Burke," later renamed "The Narrow House," expressed Cowley's fear that a permanent residence in the country might, as he had told Tate, "narrow" the circle of one's experience; the poem pointed up the discrepancy between Burke's idyllic pastoral existence and his driven pursuit of chimerical hopes and dreams. "Matthew Josephson," later retitled "Buy 300 Steel," captured his friend's inner conflict between the earnest, moneymaking Wall Street speculator and the poet longing for a peaceful rural residence devoted to writing. "Walter S. Hankel" presented a bizarre apocalyptic vision of the destruction of Manhattan (later, retitled "The Death of Crowds," it was dedicated to the painter Peter Blume). The poem on Robert Coates evoked the wistful sadness and near-suicidal melancholy that marked the writer's life in New York; renamed "The Eater of Darkness," after Coates's second novel, it was included in Cowley's Collected Poems (1968). A satirical poem on Gorham Munson, an earlier version of which had appeared in Broom, mocked the rhetorical and dignified pomposity of his criticism. "The Flower in the Sea," the splendid poem on Hart Crane, formed the highlight of the group. "Malcolm Cowley" captured the sense of life as a pointless, hurried pursuit of "nothing" which had intermittently plagued its subject in New York:

Hurry
 at a quarter after seven
 nothing, at a quarter after eight
 nothing, the aim is nothing, the pursuit
 hurried

And so he climbed the hill
 breathless, reached the summit, found it bare
 of memories and galloped down the slope

the Baron asks your company to dinner
hurry

Up other hills to other summits hurried
down other slopes to other valleys hurried
hurry at a quarter after seven
nothing, at a quarter after eight
nothing

Cowley, mercifully, never reprinted the poem.⁵³

Cowley's "Anthology" had a comical aftermath. In March 1926 he had talked to Eugene Jolas in New York and been invited to contribute a selection of his poems to an anthology of modern American poetry which Jolas was compiling and hoped to publish in Paris in a French translation. When, during the summer, Jolas read Cowley's series of poems in The Little Review, he assumed it was an actual anthology and, through his wife Maria Jolas, sent Cowley questionnaires asking for biographical information on each of the seven poets, including Walter S. Hankel. For a moment Cowley contemplated the perpetration of another Dada prank: "I thought seriously of letting Jolas remain in ignorance, and of having us all prepare fictitious biographies to send him," he wrote to Hart Crane. But eventually he decided to enlighten Jolas. In early November Jolas admitted he had made quite a "gaffe," but voiced his admiration for Cowley's astoundingly adept poetic performance: "Since I have gotten acquainted with the work of Coates, Crane and Josephson, I think you did an amazing work in the quality of your empathy." Though Jolas still planned to include four of Cowley's "Anthology" poems in his French collection, he ultimately selected two superior poems. When his Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Américaine finally appeared in Paris in 1928, it contained "The Urn" and "Blue Juniata."⁵⁴

Jolas was sufficiently impressed by Cowley's poetry to want to secure his contributions for the new radically experimental magazine he was starting from France with Elliot Paul. In early January 1927 he and Paul sent separate invitations to Cowley to write for an early issue of transition, as the new magazine was to be named. It intended, Paul explained, to present "the modern writers of America" side by side with translated work by continental European writers, and it had already secured a prestigious list of contributors, including Joyce, Stein, Anderson, Hemingway, Coates, Aragon, Jean-Richard Bloch and Paul Eluard. When, by May 1927, the editors had not heard from Cowley--it is not

unlikely he distrusted their search for a literature which was "a lyrical expression of the subconscious"--Jolas more insistently offered the pages of transition to Cowley "for the expression of whatever genre you choose," and urged him to at least "send us something to help demoralize all the literary sows both here and in America." This time Cowley complied: the January 1928 issue of transition featured "The Hill above the Mine," a poem about the destruction of the Pennsylvania landscape of his childhood, as well as "Race between a Subway Local and a Subway Express," a story which combined a realistic rendering of Cowley's own repetitive experience as a subway traveler with the futuristic demand that literature be concerned with and reflect the accelerating speed of a chaotic modern technological society.⁵⁵

In May 1926 Cowley undertook what would be his most ambitious and important translation, a rendering of a book of essays by Paul Valéry, Variété (1924). Cowley had secured the job with some difficulty. In December 1925 he had recommended the book for translation to Harcourt, Brace and Company, but no action was taken by the publishers. In March he more insistently urged publication and this time with success: at the end of April Harrison Smith, who had been favorably impressed by Cowley's earlier renderings from the French, informed him that Harcourt, Brace were willing to have him translate Variété, at a total fee of \$450, provided the manuscript be ready by July 20, so as to permit early fall publication. "I am delighted that you have undertaken this for us," Smith wrote; "there is no one in this country who I think can handle French as you can." Cowley received an advance of \$100, a sum which, on the eve of his removal to Sherman, came in more than handy, and the translator started preliminary work. Then, out of the blue, the publishers received word that Valéry had personally arranged for Variété to be translated by Lewis Galantière, whose rendering of Jean Cocteau's Le Grand Ecart Cowley had eulogistically reviewed the year before. On May 7, 1926, Cowley learned that Harcourt, Brace had notified Galantière that an American translation had already been contracted for. Without a moment's hesitation Cowley, who had not been consulted in the matter, launched an epistolary campaign to straighten out the situation and wrote at length

to Valéry and Galantière, both in Paris, to explain his predicament. "How would you feel," he asked Galantière in an angrily polite letter, "if you got a publisher to accept a book, studied for your translation, wrote part of your introduction, got an advance and spent it, planned your life on it, and then somebody else stepped in?" In a more studiously diplomatic letter to Valéry Cowley recalled the circumstances of their first meeting in Paris--"I carried a letter of introduction from Georges Duthuit. I came from the University of Montpellier, where I had met your brother and your nephew. You talked to me about your poetry, and spoke of observing all the rules of verse as one would observe the rules of tennis"--and adduced all possible arguments to convince Valéry that his arrangement with Harcourt, Brace was in the best interest of author, publisher and translator. He assured Valéry of his excellent credentials as a translator, pointed up the convenience of his location in New York and guaranteed that Harcourt, Brace, one of the finest and most "honorable" American publishing houses, would "take all possible care" with the publication and distribution of Variété--all this despite the fact, which Cowley was honest enough to admit, that one could not expect "a very wide sale for Variété, partly because the American public has no very deep interest in ideas, and partly because the ideas which do interest them are of a different intellectual order."⁵⁶

Galantière gallantly withdrew as a translator (even though he had already completed nearly half of Variété in a first draft) and promised to assure Valéry of Cowley's equal competence. In a spirit of disinterestedness, which indicated that both translators conceived of themselves less as competitors than collaborators in a larger-than-personal endeavor, he wished Cowley "good luck" with the book, which, he granted, was "a wonderful nut to crack." But Valéry was stubborn. He resented the "cavalier fashion" in which he had been treated by Harcourt, Brace--they had informed him of their decision to go ahead with Cowley as a translator and had seemed reluctant to submit the manuscript of the translation to him for review--and threatened to stick to Galantière, despite the latter having relinquished all claims to the work. It is not unlikely that Valéry's acerbity was partly caused by his reading of the American translation, by J. H. Lewis, of "Note and Digression," part of his "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci," a first instalment of which appeared in the June 1926 Dial with the announcement that "the

present translation is published by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company who will shortly bring out a translation of the volume, Variété, in which this essay is included." Galantière, who had seen the Dial issue in Paris, denounced Lewis's rendering as one teeming with "inaccuracies" and thought it gave "evidence of bad translator-judgment" (at one point, indeed, Cowley discovered that Lewis had spoken of Hercules's "modi operandi" where Valéry referred to his twelve "labors"). If this was the sort of treatment to be expected from an American translator, no wonder, then, that Valéry bristled up. It needed all of Galantière's tactful diplomacy to get Valéry to agree to a workable compromise, by which Cowley would do the authorized translation and Galantière review the manuscript in Valéry's name. "You understand," Galantière wrote to Cowley, "that I propose this only as a pis aller, and without any pretension to revise your work."⁵⁷

Cowley spent most of the summer of 1926 "slaving over Valéry," as he put it to Hart Crane. On September 1 he reported the completion of the manuscript to Burke, the delay having been caused by a month of illness--temporarily diagnosed as a "septic condition"--which, much to Cowley's chagrin, threatened to ruin his "brilliant financial prospects." He partly made up for lost time by reading T. E. Hulme (1883-1917), whose essays on art, literature and philosophy had been collected and edited by Herbert Read in 1924 under the title Speculations. Hulme, who had regularly written for A. R. Orage's New Age and championed Henri Bergson, had exerted a strong influence on modern poetic taste through his anti-romantic advocacy of hard, dry imagery and abstract, geometrical form. He had revived the dualism of classicism and romanticism, conservatively recommending the former as part of a reactionary preference for discipline, royalism and religion. Unlike his friends Josephson and Tate, Cowley could not muster much enthusiasm for Hulme, though he granted that he showed "the possibility of synthetic thought in this chaotic age."⁵⁸

In early September Cowley sent the manuscript of his translation of Variété to Galantière in Paris. "Get down on your knees and lift your voice to Heaven, saying: O Lord, I thank Thee that I didn't go ahead with that translation," he commented. If the Delteil had seemed difficult, Variety was "the toughest piece of work that one could hope to find." Cowley had spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy on the job

and, though he granted that Variety was "a tremendously fine book" ("the more time I spent with it, the more I admired it"), he was "far from satisfied" with his English rendering. Setting aside his pride--"ordinarily I'd be furious to think that some one else was going over one of my translations"--he urged Galantière to critically review his manuscript ("It takes something of a collaboration to render Valéry in English"), sending along a list of "doubtful" passages and explaining why in places he had "departed pretty far from the original." His aim, he said, had always been "to obtain greater clarity." A literal translation would make Valéry more difficult than he already was in the original, he reasoned, since an American reader lacked the "wealth of associations" which made Valéry's "shortcuts and elliptical expressions" understandable to a native audience. He asked Galantière to make but a sparing use of the "unlimited opportunity for change" offered by any translation but emphasized that he was "more anxious that the manuscript should be correct than that it should preserve my own precious individuality of style." He concluded by pointing up the conscientious and disinterested effort made by all involved: "I hope that Valéry has ceased to think that he's being treated cavalierly. We're all trying to do the best possible work with the English version. And nobody's making a profit out of it. The publisher isn't, you're not, and as for me, the time I've spent [on it] is entirely out of proportion with the money I'm receiving. We're all acting out of respect for a magnificent volume of essays." Eventually, indeed, Valéry swallowed his angry pride and informed Cowley through Julien P. Monod, his "minister of the quill," that he felt happy about the arrangements made for the translation of his book.⁵⁹

In mid-October 1926 Cowley completed an introductory essay on Paul Valéry which revealed why, as he had told Marianne Moore, he considered the essays in Variety so "extremely important." Through Allen Tate he submitted his "Introduction" to Mark Van Doren at The Nation. When Van Doren reluctantly rejected the essay (he had already contracted for an article on Valéry by the French critic René Lalou), Cowley sent it on to Edmund Wilson, who promptly accepted it for The New Republic and offered to print some of Valéry's essays, notably "The Intellectual Crisis," in Croly's magazine.⁶⁰

Cowley's "Toward a Universal Man" appeared in The New Republic on December 8, 1926. One of his crucial early essays, it brought into focus

many of his fundamental critical concerns of the time. Like André Gide, Paul Valéry helped to resolve many of his ambiguities about specific tendencies of literary modernism and, by precept and example, presented a solution to a personal problem which had haunted him with stubborn persistence for years: the episodic and fragmentary nature of his literary endeavors, the disturbing lack of focus and direction in his literary life. For all Cowley's current interest in romanticism, Valéry appealed to his deepest classical and intellectual instincts. In addition, he gave intellectual and philosophical sanction to Cowley's own loose bundle of aesthetic beliefs.

In his essay Cowley presented Valéry as the "constructionist" par excellence, a type of artist whose poems "exist[ed] independently" of his person and were "not necessarily an expression of himself;" Valéry wrote poems, as he had told Cowley in 1923, as "a laboratory experiment in thought." With a splendid disdain worthy of Rimbaud or Aragon, he had abandoned a prospectively brilliant career as a young Symbolist poet of the circle of Mallarmé and Gide, and for twenty years had stopped writing for publication to devote himself to a more essential aim: the search for "a fundamental attitude underlying all the operations of the mind." For Valéry, one of the fathers of "pure poetry," literature had ceased to be "an end in itself" and become "simply a form of mental exercise." The essays in Variété, likewise, were intellectual exercises of an "instrumental mind" of exquisite and mathematical precision. What was remarkable, Cowley felt, was that none of the essays dealt with subjects of the author's choosing but that all were dictated by external circumstance; yet Valéry admirably managed to recover "the natural direction of his thought" in each of the assignments, thus preserving its "essential unity." Here, indeed, lay the possibility of an intellectual methodology which promised to put an end to Cowley's feeling that his life and writings lacked coherence and direction:

Valéry is not alone in possessing an "instrumental" mind. In our stage of civilization we find numbers of men who can solve any problem set them, but cannot set themselves problems. They lack direction. Independence they also lack, since their careers are determined by outside influences--the books they are asked to write, the formulae they are asked to discover, the portraits they are asked to paint, the trades to which they are apprenticed. If the objects set them are unworthy, their minds deteriorate, and in a period of idleness, will rust as

quickly as a piece of complicated machinery left standing in the rain. . . . But Valéry alone has discovered a solution: that is, by making the instrumentality of his mind an end in itself, by seeking continually to develop and protect it, he has recovered his independence.⁶¹

In a stock-taking letter to Burke, written when he was translating *Variété*, Cowley revealed how strongly and immediately pertinent to his personal life and career was this notion of "the Instrumental Mind." He himself, he believed, possessed "an instrumental mind . . . of excellent quality." There were moments when his mind seemed capable of independently engendering ideas, but he feared that he often lacked "the gift of spinning these moments into days or months." As he correctly sensed, his mind was not of the type of Burke's, one capable of building a self-conceived framework of synthetic thought. The trouble with such an instrumental mind as his own, Cowley confessed, was that its quality was "determined by the objects given it; a poor object, such as my articles for *Charm*, will blunt the tool." For one who had the highest of ambitions and ideals, who believed that the essay was only "a minor form" and that only poetry, drama or the novel were to be considered as "final ends," who conceived of "the good life" as "one in which all one's powers are exercised to the most dangerous degree"--for such a one the example of Paul Valéry took off the sharp edges of the much lamented frustrations of a book reviewer's life. After all, Cowley, too, had often written on subjects not of his own volition, and in each specific instance had struggled to transform his assignment into a consideration of his central preoccupations. Valéry, in effect, endowed Cowley's own admittedly diffuse and fragmentary efforts in criticism with a new intellectual and moral respectability. As he reminded himself in his notebook two years later: "Valéry has been more than a literary training to you; he has given you a methodology, which you are trying to apply in your own life; he has been a guide to conduct."⁶²

Beyond resolving the personal literary ethics of Malcolm Cowley, Valéry loomed as a quintessential force in modernism, one whose intellectualism (or "anti-inspirationism," as Cowley called it in a 1969 letter to Burke) was profoundly appealing to Cowley in the 1920s. Everything in Valéry, he noted with approval, was "directed toward a defense of the intellect, of the conscious mind." As such his essays marked a necessary antidote to all those dangerous forces in contemporary

culture which, conjointly, represented "a pretty general attack on the freedom of the intellect:"

[The conscious human intelligence, Cowley explained,] has need of defenders in our time. Against Freudianism, for example; not in its legitimate applications, but in its literary aspects, where it results in the notion that poems are comparable in every respect with dreams. Against the Super-realists. Against that school of writers led by Anderson and Lawrence which counsels drift and surrender to our instincts. Against the metaphysics of Behaviorism. Against the sociological theory of art--that it is determined entirely by social and economic factors; add X to Y and Shakespeare is the result. Against determinisms in general. Against Spengler's idea that, ours being a declining civilization, we have nothing left but to sail ships and make ourselves millionaires. . . .

But among all the enemies of conscious thought, it is specialization which is the most paralyzing. It leads to the belief that a real gulf exists between the different activities of the mind; as, for example, between the arts and the sciences. By confining even the great talents to one side or the other of this gulf, it limits the possible progress in both fields of endeavor. Moreover a specialization, any specialization, becomes a fixed idea, which is a form of hypnosis.

Here obviously lay the cornerstone not merely to the thought of Valéry, but to Cowley's aesthetics in the 1920s; here, also, lay the possibility, opened up by Valéry, of "an ideal to be pursued by our own generation." That ideal was represented by Leonardo da Vinci, the "universal man" of the Renaissance, whose methodology, in the words of Valéry, was rooted in a pursuit of "the central attitude from which all the enterprises of learning or science and all the operations of art are equally possible, and a successful cooperation between analysis and action is singularly probable." Yearning for the possibility of intellectual synthesis in an age of wasteful specialization, Cowley hoped "a new Leonardo" would arise "to include the whole field of intellectual activity in his scope."⁶³

Critical interest in Paul Valéry was at its height in the mid-1920s. Symptomatic was the generous attention given Valéry in the pages of The Dial during 1925 and 1926. In March 1925 Paul Morand had announced the recent publication in France of a new edition of Variété; in his "Paris Letter" he had singled out "La Crise de l'Esprit" as "without doubt the most important essay which has appeared in Europe since the war." The June 1925 issue of The Dial had contained Lewis Galantière's translation

of "A letter from Madame Emilie Teste" as well as a combined review-essay by Edmund Wilson of a book on Valéry by Albert Thibaudet and the English edition of Valéry's Le Serpent containing T. S. Eliot's "A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry." In December of that year Wilson had discussed the symbolic significance of Paul Valéry's recent succession of Anatole France to the French Academy in The New Republic, a treatise later incorporated into Axel's Castle. In January 1926 The Dial had published J. H. Lewis's translation of Valéry's "Pierre Louÿs," while in June and July it had printed Lewis's faulty rendering of "Note and Digression." In late 1926 Edmund Wilson had solicited several essays from the forthcoming Variety for advance publication in The New Republic.⁶⁴

Thus, when Cowley's translation of Variété appeared in March 1927, it could count on receiving wide and serious attention. "Variété is off to more than a fair start," Harrison Smith reported to Cowley; "the critics show every sign of being wildly enthusiastic about it." Carl Van Doren told Smith that Variété was "one of the best books published by anybody this year" and went about reading parts of it out loud. Christopher Morley sent "a most enthusiastic and lyrical outburst" to the publishers and spoke highly of Cowley's translation. Harry Hansen devoted an entire column to the book in the New York World. "I think that it really will cause the critical stir that we hoped it might," Smith exulted, "and it will certainly go down to our credit and to yours."⁶⁵

The publishers' enthusiasm was borne out by the critical response. Eugene Jolas wrote Cowley from France, complimenting him on a "superb" translation: "You are the only American I know whose translation and interpretation of the modern French writers is congenial." Most American reviewers had similar words of praise for Cowley's "excellent" rendering of Valéry's difficult French into lucid English and took Variété as a seminal book in modernist literature. Matthew Josephson and Lewis Galantière, both critics with an expert knowledge of French writing, transformed their reviews into personal essays on the significance of Valéry, thereby acknowledging the invaluable service of Cowley's rendition to contemporary letters. Both pointed up Valéry's continuation in "the classical tradition of Racine" and emphasized the relevance of his efforts at intellectual unification in what Josephson described as "the age of the quantum theory and relativity, of mass production and political self-determination . . . the era of specialization, when

knowledge or science began to be pursued for the sake of utility or convenience." Clifton P. Fadiman denounced the "ear-splitting hullabaloo of admiration" surrounding Valéry as "merely a romantic reaction to the melodrama of his career," but granted that in Variety Valéry addressed "the most important contemporary critical problem: that of analyzing the exact extent and seriousness of the dissolution we see around us." Valéry's "brilliant war" on behalf of the intellect, he agreed with Cowley, was "a tonic antidote for current literary and philosophical romanticism." The young Thornton Wilder, whose novels The Cabala and The Bridge of San Luis Rey had been hailed enthusiastically by Cowley, described Valéry's primary objective as a poetic "reintegration of the Symbolist aims into the classic tradition," but, in a manner which anticipated Cowley's strictures against Valéry in Exile's Return, took him to task for pushing the French genius for logic and clarity to extremes: "Here [in Variety] the play of ideas has charm and weight and even excitement, but the mind remains an instrument and not a force; everywhere there is light without warmth. The book remains a monument to the pride of intellect."⁶⁶

Alyse Gregory of The Dial was the only critic who publicly questioned the "punctiliousness" of Cowley's translation in specific instances, though she granted that it seemed "ungrateful to criticize so generous a labour," one which had required so high a degree of "disinterested" effort and led to such "commendable" results. Though Cowley was aware that he had opened himself up to such charges by translating freely, he had done so in an effort to attain lucidity where Valéry remained obscure. Josephson, for one, had privately criticized Cowley's rendition in much sharper terms than Miss Gregory's: "in places you failed to realize, by narrow margins, the shade of meaning V[aléry] wanted. Often it is like a 'fielder's choice' in baseball; but in a work of critical philosophy like Leonardo the changes make quite a difference. I realize also," Josephson had granted, "that for these very reasons it was a stiff assignment, and a bald translation would have sounded dreadful." When a copy editor at Harcourt's had made unwarranted corrections in Cowley's manuscript, the translator had written to his publishers in "a tone of high moral seriousness" and confessed himself wounded in his "pride as a pedant" by a copyreader who professed to know "more Latin than Valéry, more French than La Fontaine, more Hebrew than the translators of the

Bible, more Italian than Leonardo da Vinci and more English than the recondite authors of the Oxford Dictionary." When, on top of this, Alyse Gregory criticized Cowley in public for having been "not wholly attentive" in translating Valéry's "impeccable" prose, he sent an indignant protest to Marianne Moore, pointing out the "demonstrable injustice" of several of Miss Gregory's criticisms, granting the legitimacy of others, but toning down his anger by praising her review as "a superb piece of writing, and probably the most intelligent comment which Variety has received in this country . . . one is always grateful for good writing in a desert of commonplaces."⁶⁷ Cowley's curiously mixed response to Alyse Gregory's review was symptomatic of his steadily deteriorating relations with the editors of The Dial, in particular Marianne Moore. He still made diplomatic efforts to remain on good terms with a magazine he valued highly, but frictions would come to a head in the near future.

At intermittent periods during his long career Cowley would return to Valéry and resume his struggle with the latter's "cold, glittering intellect." In 1928 he translated another four of Valéry's essays--"My Work and I," "Pure Poetry," "The Future of Literature," and "The Question of Europe"--which were published in March and April of that year in Irita Van Doren's Herald Tribune Books, their first appearance in English. Once again, the essays drew wide attention. Lewis Galantière, unaware that Cowley had translated the essays, wrote an open letter to the editor of Books ranking the anonymous translator with Scott Moncrieff as one of the best in the field. Clifton Fadiman expressed his personal admiration for Cowley's "beautiful rendering" of the essays and, on behalf of the publishers Simon and Schuster invited him to undertake a French novel. Edmund Wilson, about to embark on Axel's Castle, remembered Cowley's rendering of the essays and asked to borrow the originals for his chapter on Valéry. Cowley himself would devote a section to Valéry when he came to write his study of the Symbolist religion of art in Exile's Return, in which he strongly qualified his earlier endorsement. Thirty years after Variety Cowley was invited to translate Valéry's essays on Leonardo, Poe and Mallarmé for the standard English edition of the Collected Works of Paul Valéry (1972), a series of fifteen volumes sponsored by the Bollingen Foundation and edited by Jackson Matthews. A slow but perfectionist worker, Cowley struggled with the "fantastically" difficult

job during much of the late 1950s and early 1960s; several of his renditions appeared in The New Republic and in The Kenyon Review. In 1969 Cowley wrote a last essay on Valéry for Louis Kronenberger's Atlantic Brief Lives (1971), which formed a testimony to the persistent fascination of Valéry's disciplined and luminous intellect for Cowley:

I translated a book of [Valéry's] essays in 1926, then retranslated some of them along with others in 1958, so that I have lived with them for more than forty years. Sometimes on rereading them I find myself still puzzled by a passage in which I know perfectly what every word should mean. Sometimes I am shocked again by an opinion, for this author dislikes everything that is copied from life or that rises from the subconscious. Always I am held by the exact but graceful language, the breadth of vision, and the interplay of well-meditated ideas. Valéry did create a music of ideas, and the best of his essays--which are also the best of our time--are as soundly constructed as a Beethoven sonata.⁶⁸

As late as 1970 Cowley singled out Paul Valéry as "the strongest influence on my prose work." That influence, however, resided less in the substance of Valéry's thought (about which he later repeatedly expressed reservations) than in its methodology, and in the quality of his prose. In part Cowley was deeply attracted to Valéry because he possessed a type of mind radically unlike his own, a mind which, in its perennial search for underlying principles of unity and synthesis, resembled rather his friend Burke's. Valéry's aesthetics, too, correlated to a surprising degree with those of Burke; his notion of "the poet of the hypothesis," for example, seemed to tie in with Burke's "perpetual grailism," while Burke's idea of "perspective by incongruity" seemed foreshadowed in Valéry's observation that "nine times out of ten, every great improvement in a field of activity is obtained by the introduction of alien and unexpected methods and notions." Over the long years of their literary friendship Cowley would recurrently urge Burke to read Valéry, intuitively sensing their intellectual kinship, but Burke has remained remarkably silent on Valéry throughout his voluminous writings.⁶⁹

In 1926 Valéry might loom as preeminently "the saint of all hack writers, the exemplar of the dream that they can do works of genius to order," but

his example could hardly prevent Cowley from periodically relapsing into self-lamentation. In the very letter to Burke in which he had advanced the consoling notion of the "Instrumental Mind," Cowley bemoaned his present lack of accomplishment: "To take stock. Twenty-eight, good biceps, bad constitution, nothing accomplished. Or seemingly nothing accomplished. What frightens me is that I have no margin. Having finished one poem or one essay, I have no plans for another; I am a perfect vacuum, like a man after copulation who is very doubtful whether he will ever be able to copulate again." Plagued by illness--"I've spent most of the summer on my back, mapping the rivers and mountains on the ceiling"--Cowley was inclined to exaggerate his sufferings and his lack of resiliency. In his discouragement not even the company of literary friends could rekindle confidence. "Slowly our friends assume their wooden functions," he wrote Burke in the summer of 1926. The annual Fourth of July party on Tory Hill was "rather less drunken and less successful" than that of the year before. Slater Brown was deeply immersed in writing the novel which eventually became The Burning Wheel (1942), Susan Jenkins was in ill health, Hart Crane was on the Isle of Pines composing parts of The Bridge (at the end of July he sent Cowley the section "Cutty Sark"), and Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate more than ever gave Cowley the impression of "babes in the wood, unable to cope with the complexities of modern life."⁷⁰

Over the autumn months of 1926 Cowley critically reviewed the bulk of his variegated writings to see if he could collect or rework them into one or more publishable books. In November he drew up a list of six projected volumes in his notebook: "1. Traders in Darkness; 2. Charles Baudelaire; 3. A volume of Poems--Blue Juniata; 4. A volume of serious essays; 5. A volume of portraits; 6. A novel." The list needs annotation. In May 1926 Cowley had secured a commission from The Saturday Evening Post to write a series of five articles on the African slave trade, a historical subject that held his lifelong interest; over the summer he had begun assembling materials for a book, Traders in Darkness, and had actually reached an agreement with Harcourt, Brace and Company. The articles for the Post were never written (though Cowley wrote on the subject for a different project later in the decade), but his book on the slave trade materialized thirty-six years later as Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade (1962), written in collaboration with

Daniel P. Mannix. In late 1926, however, Traders in Darkness appeared high on Cowley's list of priorities, followed by the cherished but never finished biography of Baudelaire. He had, however, already decided on the title of his first book of poems, Blue Juniata, which had been germinating in his mind for some time and slowly took shape over the next three years. The volume of "serious essays" was to include his articles on Racine, Proust, Gide, Valéry, as well as essays (still to be written) on censorship, on "sterility" ("a disease of our era, but one which is passing"), on "driftwood" (Sherwood Anderson), and an essay variously projected as "We Romantics" or "In Defense of Romanticism." Here, to all appearances, lay the possibility of an important book, but one which suffered from a fatal lack of focus; in embryonic form, however, it anticipated Exile's Return, which embedded much of the thought here so nebulously outlined in a solid structural and thematic framework. The book of portraits was to contain the profiles, real and imaginary, he had written for Broom, The Bookman and Brentano's Book Chat, in addition to a follow-up series--including studies of Anderson, Frank, Ernest Boyd and, interestingly, the novelist Dawn Powell--about which he was negotiating with Edmund Wilson for publication in The New Republic. His projected novel, for the time being, was accorded relatively low priority.⁷¹

For all his complaints, Cowley's brain was seething with plans and projects. And for all his persistent fear of the compromise of success, he in effect deeply desired the sense of accomplishment which could come with the publication of a book. Publishers seemed willing enough, but a combination of stubborn skepticism, inertia and lack of disciplined endeavor prevented Cowley from bringing his plans to fruition. For the time being his ambitions continued to outrun his achievements, and magazine publication remained the only outlet for his writings.

The poetry reviews Cowley wrote between 1925 and 1927 gave evidence of his continuing struggle to accommodate his classicist predilections with a growing appreciation of the current and historical manifestations of romanticism. Increasingly he understood the latter as an inextricable component of the modern spirit. Increasingly, also, he saw that neither classicism nor romanticism was an ideal to be pursued exclusively, but that either might lead to unacceptable extremes. Simultaneously, he continued to seek ways of engrafting a classicist concern with formal elegance and control upon a modern sensibility essentially romantic;

after all, even his personal campaign against contemporary extremes of romanticism had been infused with a romantic moral fervor. Several reviews shed light on Cowley's unfolding thoughts on the subject.

In a review of the Collected Poems of H. D., written as early as 1925, he acknowledged the inutility of the dichotomy of "classicism" and "romanticism" and pointed up the impossibility of judging the traditions of one national literature by the standards of another. The poetry of H. D., however, seemed to reach out towards a paradoxical but possibly ideal synthesis, its "icy fire" combining the "cold" sobriety and "flawless" restraint of classicism with the subjective emotional intensity of romanticism.⁷²

Cowley's interest in romanticism now led him to explore the historical origins of the movement; in the late 1920s he wrote serious considerations of such important precursors of contemporary romanticism as Baudelaire, Poe, Shelley and Théophile Gautier. Gautier, one of the originators of the l'art pour l'art school in French letters, formed the subject of "The Art of Visible Things," a review printed in the March 1927 Dial, which contained the germ of Cowley's repudiatory analysis of the "religion" of art (as he here called it for the first time) in Exile's Return. "The subject falls in with my special interests," he had told Marianne Moore in late 1926. Tracing the influence of the doctrine of art for art's sake from Leconte de Lisle and José-María de Hérédia to Mallarmé and Valéry, Cowley argued that Gautier's attitude to art was "still a living force" and that there were "features of modern literature and literary theory" which could not be understood "without reference to his work." Mindful of the circumstances under which Broom had been suppressed, he used Gautier as the occasion for a plea against the dissociation of art and morality:

. . . The unprovable, but possible, theory that art is entirely useless, has been turned into the theory that art has no effect whatsoever on conduct. . . . Every time the Watch and Ward Society condemns a book, or the United States Post Office bars it from the mails, or a bill is introduced at Albany to forbid its publication, art for art's sake comes forward, in its revised and strictly modern form, to state that no harm was intended, that morality still reigns unchallenged, that the book in question, being a work of art, could have no possible effect on what people think or do. . . . But Plato, when he banished poets from his commonwealth as being dangerous to the established order, was paying them a less ambiguous

compliment.⁷³

Almost a year after writing "The Art of Visible Things" he returned to the subject in a review for the New York Herald Tribune and took a more outspoken stand, one not entirely consistent with his contention that Gautier's beliefs were a continuing influence, but indicative of his increasing hostility to such a pure aesthetics:

Among the ten million casualties of the war, less bitterly mourned than the others but less quickly forgotten, was the doctrine of art for art's sake. While others were dying on the battlefields it wilted away in the libraries where it had always lived; it suffered from a slow phthisis; it perished apologetically choked with dust. Today, though its ghost still walks the campus of Southern universities, though echoes of its voice are heard, we can be sure that it is only a ghost speaking in echoes.

In its place Cowley welcomed the refreshing "new voices" of European writers like Franz Werfel, who announced "a frank messianism" and were "unconscious of the boundaries between art and morality which once were drawn with such confidence." With obvious relish he noted that "the faded garlands of Walter Pater are gathering dust on the wall."⁷⁴ By fits and starts, without as yet a great deal of consistency or systematic effort, Cowley's thought was evolving towards the thesis he developed in Exile's Return.

In the summer of 1927 Cowley again took up the question of classicism and romanticism in The Dial. At the end of June Kenneth Burke, back on the editorial board of the magazine since the previous summer, asked him to do a long review of an anthology of Chinese and Japanese poetry, a subject which he knew held Cowley's interest. Soliciting the review, Burke criticized, tongue in cheek, what he viewed with increasing misgivings as Cowley's critical impressionism, his inclination to judge a book on the basis of his literary taste and intuitions rather than by a priori formulations of general critical principles and assumptions: the anthology, Burke prodded wittily, "seems like a fair opportunity for summing up on western Asiaticism, Schopenhauer, Spengler, Benda, Masses, Amy Lowell and The Quill. Or has the 'I like' triumphed?"⁷⁵

"The Golden House" took its title from Fir-Flower Tablets, the collection of Chinese verse translated by Amy Lowell which, only five

years before, had thrown Cowley into an ecstasy of classical delight. This time he arrived at a different estimate. His thought on the subject, he granted to Burke, was "rather disordered," but his review was lucidly written and structured. Acknowledging the wide influence of Oriental poetry on modern literature, Cowley explained its special appeal as a reaction against a standardized culture ridden by the tiring complexities of science, business and technology. Chinese verse, he observed in a try-out letter to Burke, was "part of the attack from the East which our inherited culture is now facing." It appealed, he said in The Dial, to "a homely need" which contemporary poets had failed to answer: "Our emotions have been simplified by the haste of a mechanical age; in some degree they have ceased to correspond to the complexities of our literature." In the same degree, he thought, the contemporary reader was ready to be "impressed by a literature of quietism and acceptance" and could admire "the unqualified statements of beauty [in Chinese verse] which our own poets can make no longer." Cowley remained deeply appreciative of the elegant serenity and imagistic concreteness of Chinese poetry, but he was now, much more so than before, aware of its limited range of subjects and its correspondent "poverty of emotions." Where, he wondered, were the poems on love and death, "the two great subjects of our lyric verse," where the sense of "struggle" which was the principal theme of Western epic poetry? Chinese poetry expressed "neither the sense of sin nor the sense of the infinite; neither the romantic revolt against society nor a romantic exultation in the terrors of nature;" ecstasy, the unconscious, horror--all seemed to be rigorously excluded from its poetic domain. Above all, what was lacking was "that search for the new which is the underlying motive of so great a part of modern poetry."

Clearly, what Cowley missed in Chinese verse was precisely the whole range of themes and emotions which of late had so strongly propelled him towards romanticism. On the wave of that enthusiasm his former ardor for Chinese verse as the epitome of a desirable classicism had cooled considerably. "The standing of Chinese poetry in our modern world will depend on the outcome of the battle that is again being waged between classics and romantics," he had written ponderously to Burke. In The Dial he concluded on a cautiously noncommittal note:

. . . if Baudelaire is one of our favourite poets (or Rimbaud, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, Poe)--then we are likely to

encounter Chinese poetry with tempered admiration. On the other hand, if we are attracted by the classical qualities of definiteness, harmony and restraint, we are apt to value it more highly; indeed, we may come to regard the T'ang dynasty as the true Augustan age, and to exult in the popularity of T'ang poets as evidence that the Augustan qualities are once more returning to favour.⁷⁶

Ever since his adventures among the European avant-garde writers in the early years of the decade, Cowley had been struggling to find a common denominator to the diverse and seemingly contradictory manifestations of literary modernism. In 1923 he had posited its "intellectualism" as an unifying principle, but three years later had come to feel the need to modify and subtilize his earlier conclusions. In the spring of 1926, prompted by his recent consideration of an anthology of modern French poetry in the Herald Tribune, he had begun a more general, in-depth examination of the influence of French modernism on contemporary American poetry. After a mortifying publication history involving rejections by The New Republic and The Dial, the essay appeared, with much delay and some damage to the topicality of its interest, in H. S. Canby's Saturday Review of Literature for May 7, 1927.⁷⁷

"French Poetry and the New Spirit" was Cowley's most elaborate effort to date to come to a broadly inclusive definition of modernism. It aimed to look beyond the individual and often paradoxical manifestations of modernity to the essential "modern spirit." The word "modern" had different connotations in different national literatures, Cowley granted, but the French poets of the last thirty years had made it "peculiarly their own." It was Rimbaud whose poetry and career had marked the literary "crisis from which the modern spirit was born," and who, with Baudelaire, Isidore Ducasse and Tristan Corbière, was an important precursor of modern French poetry from Mallarmé and Valéry to Apollinaire and Tzara. What all those poets had in common, Cowley reasoned, was not so much a poetic technique, which might run the whole gamut from the strictest regularity to the freest of verse forms, nor the search for a new idiom, which might lead some poets to the most extravagant experiments with language, while others chose to pursue a new traditionalism. Nor did modernism primarily define itself in terms of "a new mechanism of thought" in which "logic" was replaced by

"associationalism"--as witness Spengler's "morphological" rather than "causal" interpretation of history, or the present "general glorification of the subconscious." The one fundamental characteristic unifying all modern French poets, Cowley advanced, was "a state of mind, a certain moral attitude towards letters and the world. . . . The race of poets, who began by slowly purging their aesthetics of every moral element, have ended by developing aesthetics into a new moral code, which they applied first to letters, then to the literary life, and finally to life in general. . . . The moral principle which underlies the modern spirit is a belief in the viciousness of formulae; in the inherent virtue of search and discovery."

Cowley thus located the essence of modernism in the moral and aesthetic imperative he had first discovered in a cherished passage of Baudelaire's--the closing lines of "Le Voyage"--which he recurrently cited in his early reviews:

Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!

It was Baudelaire's "desperate descent" into the frightful maelstrom of the "unknown," in order to discover what was new, which had first signaled the modernist "morality of search." In art it had led to a conception of poetry as no longer "a vale of refuge" but "a chain of mountains to be climbed, a dangerous archipelago to be explored;" carried over into life, it had led to "acts and theories of violence," for the modernist artist must be possessed of "an aggressive temperament, an ardent thirst for adventure." Here, Cowley found, lay the common impulse behind such apparently disparate acts of the mind as Rimbaud's abandonment of poetry to smuggle rifles into Abyssinia, Georges Sorel's Réflexions sur la violence (1908), Paul Valéry's detached pursuit of pure or abstract consciousness, and Tristan Tzara's cheerfully nihilistic Seven Dada Manifestoes. Simultaneously, it helped to explain such sharply divergent phenomena as the recent revival of Neo-Catholicism ("the most aesthetic of the Christian cults")--vide Cocteau, Claudel and Maritain--and the embracing of Bolshevism by Surrealists and one-time Dadaists. Once the principle had been discovered, the applications, both in art and life, seemed endless, and the effect of literature on human conduct

unquestionable.

Cowley's claim that the modernist French writers had "begun perceptibly to influence our own literature" was not substantiated in his essay, but had been amply borne out by his earlier considerations of American modernists: Baudelaire's imperative, after all, lay equally behind T. S. Eliot's consistent urge to move into new territories of form and the imagination, and behind Kenneth Burke's "perpetual grailism." Later, Cowley would discover the same impulse in Hart Crane's frenzied derangement of the senses and in Conrad Aiken's "religion of consciousness."⁷⁸

In November 1926, months before his essay appeared in print, Cowley had sent a copy to Allen Tate, who had meanwhile exchanged his pastoral domicile at Addie Turner's for a janitor's existence in a basement apartment in Greenwich Village; Cowley's essay found him in the midst of an intellectual and spiritual struggle to discover himself in relation to his Southern antecedents which before long would yield his splendid "Ode to the Confederate Dead." Tate's response was bracing: "Your essay is excellent, the best statement on the subject I've seen," he wrote to Cowley in Sherman. He took issue, however, with what he misread as "the main idea of the essay--the technical definition of modernism, where you distinguish between the logical procedure of traditional poetry and the associational methods of modernism." The distinction, Tate rightfully objected, was far from "airtight" and invited the search for an alternative which avoided "questionable" terms like "logic" and "association"--after all, there was as much "association" in Victor Hugo as there was "logic" in Laforgue or Corbière. Modernism, Tate countered, arose from "the application of the historico-scientific method to the past" and was "simply the temporary, or permanent, chaos" following the exposure of the relativity of tradition. As a result, themes commonly available to poets in a traditional society were discredited and had "disappeared." Instead, in modern poetry the focus had shifted to the personal "vision" of the poet and themes become "casual, arbitrary and invented." Modernism, Tate argued, was marked by an essential "discrepancy between vision and subject" and he proposed "subjectivism" as a better phrase than Cowley's "association[al]ism." Tate's analysis implied a greater degree of cultural pessimism than Cowley's, though he could not entirely concur in the prophecies of doom advanced by Spengler,

whose Decline of the West he had reviewed for The Nation in May. What disturbed him, Tate told Cowley, was that, as a result of the failure of early nineteenth-century Romanticism to stem "the tide of the scientific spirit," the expected restoration of classical order and balance had failed to come about and that, instead, there had appeared "a still more violent Romanticism in the Symbolists." Tate doubted if "we shall ever have a balanced order again out of the materials of inherited culture."⁷⁹

In reply, Cowley pointed out that the heart of his essay lay, not in associationalism, as Tate seemed to think, but in an attempt to define the "moral attitude towards letters and the world" underlying modernism. His response to Tate revealed how strongly indebted Cowley remained to the literary ethics he had imbibed from Louis Aragon. It also testified to the influence of Valéry, in whose luminous mind he had just steeped himself, and showed a growing impatience with the moral conservatism of T. S. Eliot.

Remember [he wrote to Tate] that I'm talking about French poetry. In poets like Stevens or Eliot the moral attitude is different or lacking. Eliot impresses a French modernist as being pathetic or old-fashioned. Valéry, however, belongs to the modern spirit. Valéry attacks the trend toward subconscious writing. Evidently, then, subconscious writing--associationism--isn't fundamental to the modern spirit.

Valéry is accepted as a modern largely because of the fashion in which he abandoned literature, then returned to it merely as an exercise. He is accepted because of his moral attitude. . . .

If all this were pure theory, it would seem far-fetched. But I know it to be a fact. All I've done is to state the theory which is implicit in all the criticisms I've heard Louis Aragon making.

Cowley granted that Tate's "vision-subject theory" had the advantages of greater subtlety and exactitude, but feared it would become "involved, sooner or later, in the old antinomy of form and matter," a problematical area which he knew could only lead to a labyrinthine dead end. Moreover, he objected, Tate's antinomy did not apply to his personal experience: "None of my own difficulties seem to be of correlating subject and vision. I ought to universalize this experience of mine. I rather suspect that most poets would agree with me, except for the Eliot school." Tate's distinction, Cowley felt, hardly applied to the literary history of the last hundred years: not only did it seem impossible to "subtract the

subject from most of the romantic poets," but cherished poems like Byron's "Don Juan," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," or Baudelaire's "Femmes Damnées," exemplified a perfect integration of subject and vision. Nor was there, as Valéry had taught him, "any radical difference between the scientific spirit at its best and the spirit of poetry. Monks of art and monks of the laboratory--both are discoverers." Tate's definition of classicism as "the state in which poetry most closely meets the spiritual structure of society" seemed "excellent," but it left certain difficulties unresolved: did Tate, Cowley wondered, also mean that the ideal "subject" was "the spiritual structure of society"?⁸⁰

Cowley's response to Tate showed how much his effort to find a common denominator of modernism correlated with his personal desire to unify the disparate elements in his own life and writings. His exchange of letters with Tate contained the germs of their future divergence (Tate moving towards a reactionary traditionalism, Cowley towards a radical political consciousness), but it also indicates how closely, for the time being, Tate and he were moving along parallel literary tracks, each trying to come to terms in his own way and against the background of his own needs with the crucial literary and intellectual issues of the time: the conflicting claims of science and poetry, classicism and romanticism, aesthetics and morality, the subconscious and the conscious mind. During the youthful 1920s, notwithstanding their temperamental and intellectual differences, Cowley and Tate could feel engaged in a united literary endeavor; it was this feeling, that at heart they shared the same literary values and beliefs, which would prove a cementing force of literary friendship strong enough to survive the polarizing political storms and bitter enmities of the next decade.

By 1926 Cowley was gaining wider recognition as one of the most promising "modern" poets of the young generation. In the early months of that year William Carlos Williams had asked him to send in several of his poems--"such especially which seem to you tentative toward new forms"--for inclusion in a Contact collection of modern verse. Cowley had submitted two groups of poems (subsequently published as "Anthology" and "Leonora") as representative of "the sort of work I'm doing now" and had commented:

"I'm more interested in new forms of thought than new forms of verse. By new forms of thought I don't mean new ideas, but new ways of connecting ideas or impressions. Or images." Over the years Cowley had continued to use more or less traditional forms like blank verse or the sonnet, but in many of his poems had shown himself to be a much more unambiguously experimental writer than in his criticism. Thus, for all his distrust of the subconscious, earlier poems like "Nocturnal Landscape" (retitled "The Cast-Iron Panthers") or "Into That Rarer Ether" (retitled "Sunrise over the Heiterwand") exemplified precisely the "associationalism" he had posited as one of the manifestations of modernism. In his letter to Williams Cowley singled out a passage from "Kenneth Burke" to illustrate his search for new modes of connecting images:

I shall heap your lap with pears,
oranges, nectarines and rubies:
about your neck a chain of afternoons,
your head crowned with forgetfulness.⁸¹

There were other signs of recognition, not all of them equally welcome. William Stanley Braithwaite, the popular anthologist, invited Cowley to be represented in his Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1926 and solicited biographical information to be included in Who's Who in American Poetry, 1912-1926; the latter was announced as "a sesqui-centennial feature" of the Anthology, meant to "commemorate the anniversary of the Founding of the Republic." Inclusion in the volume was made contingent upon each poet's willingness to put in an advance order, at \$3.00, for at least one copy of the Anthology. "The method is simple and should not prove a burden to the 'proverbially poor poet,'" a note explained. Typically, Cowley bristled at the conditionality of the invitation and drafted an acerbic letter to the editors of Herald Tribune Books, expounding his motives for not complying with Braithwaite's request: "There is something about the whole proposition which shows the low estate of contemporary verse. We know that many people would be glad to pay thousands of dollars to see their names printed in the Social Register. Others would pay hundreds for a mention in Who's Who. . . . The poets seem to occupy the bottom of the ladder. They pay only \$3.00 to see their names in print and, as a special premium, they receive 'The Anthology of Magazine Verse,' . . . a volume worth fully half that sum.

An attractive proposition; still, Mr. Braithwaite, I think I won't subscribe. For you see, I am very much afraid that your Who's Who of American Poetry will somehow be confused with a sucker list."⁸²

A less suspect and more respectable venture was being prepared by Edmund Wilson and Allen Tate. In December 1925 Wilson had written to Tate that there was "quite a good deal of American poetry which ought to be published" and had singled out Cowley, Tate and Phelps Putnam as eligible poets, followed by Crane (about whose poetry Wilson seemed less enthusiastic), Rolphe Humphries, Laura Riding, John Peale Bishop and himself. He had urged Tate to join him in "some concerted action" leading to the publication of a new series of poets and considered approaching Boni & Liveright. Tate was enthusiastic about the venture, which promised to lead to the publication of "a good deal of fine poetry which, under the Untermeyer dictatorship, had little chance to appear," as he told Davidson. He promptly invited Cowley, who two years earlier had proposed a similar plan to Wheelwright. At the end of February 1926 Wilson reported that he had met with "absolutely no success" with the publishers, who seemed reluctant to bring out a series of which there was "no chance of a large sale." Wilson and Tate, however, were persistent and in May 1927, having found a new prospective publisher, Tate wrote to Cowley: "The poetry series comes nearer and nearer. . . . You are down, so far, for the first splash. Can you let me have the ms.? Red tape requires that it pass on to Wilson and [Mark] Van Doren, but Wilson and I are already for you; so the rest is courtesy." For reasons that remain unexplained, "the rest" was never done and the planned series of poets never launched. Perhaps no publisher could be found, after all. Perhaps Tate's ardor for the project cooled or was transferred to an anthology of the Fugitive poets, for which he tried hard to find a New York publisher throughout 1927; after being rejected by Houghton Mifflin, Liveright and Harper, Fugitives: An Anthology of Verse was published by Harcourt, Brace and Company in 1928. Perhaps the need for a poetry series was obviated by the simple fact that several of the poets whom Wilson had initially proposed for the series published their first books of verse not long afterwards: Laura Riding and Hart Crane in 1926, Phelps Putnam in 1927, and Allen Tate in 1928.⁸³

Cowley's book lagged behind, but was gradually taking shape. In April 1926 he had submitted a group of seven Pennsylvania poems to Harriet

Monroe for ensemble publication in Poetry. Miss Monroe had printed groups of his poems twice before--once in November 1919, once in February 1923--and to much effect; on the latter occasion Cowley's appearance in Poetry had elicited an invitation from Harold Monroe to contribute to The Chapbook, yielded an "Honorable Mention" from Poetry itself, and led to his election to the Poetry Society of America. Publication in Poetry ensured a high degree of visibility and Cowley, accordingly, was "tickled to death" when Harriet Monroe accepted his new batch and agreed to print them as a group, as he had emphatically requested: "To publish a few verses here, a few verses there, at the foot of a page, has very little effect. Especially in the case of long-winded, unemphatic, unfigured work like mine, where several poems together are required to create an atmosphere, to cause a state of mind." The following spring, he added, he hoped to bring out a book and he was persuaded that a group appearance in Poetry would be "the very best introduction to that book, the best assistance to its publication." He suggested that the group of poems in Poetry carry the same title as the prospective book, Blue Juniata. In a lengthy letter to Miss Monroe, he explained his desires as to punctuation and capitalization, indicating how intensely he approached the art of writing poetry in a spirit of conscious craftsmanship.

. . . I think the manner of printing is not an essential part of a poem. Essentially, a poem consists of spoken words. My aim is to punctuate and capitalize in such a way that the emphasis is on the words themselves. The best way to do this is to reduce punctuation to a minimum. . . . I write almost exclusively in iambic pentameter, and variations of iambic pentameter. In this metre, one of the chief beauties is the interplay between two separate units, the line and the sentence. When every line is capitalized, the reader is apt to miss the division between sentences . . . the whole question of punctuation and capitalization is the least important. . . . The words alone are essential, since words alone are the poet's tools for expressing his emotion. But there is no feature of a poem, not even the least important of all, which does not deserve (and sometimes receive) very close thought. Sometimes the placing of a single comma may be the result of a long chain of reasoning.⁸⁴

"Blue Juniata"--comprising "Bones of a House," "Chestnut Ridge," "Laurel Mountain," "Empty Barn, Dead Farm," "Bill George," "The Urn," and "The Streets of Air"--appeared in Poetry in November 1926. Conjointly, they formed the heart of the first section of the 1929 book and set the

tone of wistful sadness that was to mark the entire volume. When Ronald Levinson, who five years before had collaborated with Cowley on a satirical poem on H. G. Wells, saw the assembly in Poetry, he was moved to write to his old acquaintance: "I read with reverence your 'ghostly' epic of Pennsylvania. There is a nostalgic ache in whatever you write of that state. She gave you birth with groaning and travailing; you are, so to say, returning the compliment." Together, indeed, the seven poems stood as a tribute to a macabre, death-haunted landscape of youth, sprinkled with empty, abandoned farms as symbolic reminders of a vanished past:

Farmhouses curl like horns of plenty, hide
lean paintless shanks against a barn, or crouch
empty in the shadow of a mountain. Here
there is no house at all--

only the bones of a house,
lilacs growing beside them,
roses in clumps between them,
honeysuckle over;
a door, a crooked chimney,
mud-chinked, a yawning fireplace,
the skeleton of a pine;

a railroad thirty yards from the empty door.

The sole inhabitants of this lost country are the last survivors of a life-style receding into history: dying old farmers like Bill George, Simon Eliot, or the nameless father of "Laurel Mountain," accidentally killed by the slipping axe of one of his sons and buried with improvised ceremony, his head crowned with a spray of dogwood, in the rain-drenched, almost pantheistic hemlock woods.

The rain

beat steadily on our shoulders hunched in prayer
against a tall God like a hemlock tree,
his arms like crooked branches, his head bare,
his voice a cold rain dripping in the moss,
and hemlock needles tangled in his hair.

Severed from a landscape once rich and fertile, the poet now can hear only "rumors of home" and finds his imagination teeming with images of emptiness and drought, as he evokes in poem upon poem an emotional

wasteland where no spiritual salvation is forthcoming and man becomes "an empty sacrificial vessel waiting / without patience to be filled with God."⁸⁵

In his prose writings and his acts of literary rebellion Cowley had displayed a defiant innocence and exuberance which had easily accommodated an open-minded appreciation of the technical experiments and formal novelties of modernist writing. What had seemed lacking was a proper understanding of the deeper mood of spiritual despair and cultural disaster underlying modernism. Embracing Dada, Cowley had borrowed its rebellious stance and moral fervor, but, like Josephson, had intuitively sidestepped its nihilistic despair. Admiring T. S. Eliot's technical poetic innovations, he had been brashly impatient with the older poet's upholding of the superior, fertile past over a barren present, and had "instinctively" rejected the sense of contemporary history as "an immense panorama of futility and anarchy," as Eliot had famously put it in his 1923 review of *Ulysses* for *The Dial*. He had translated Valéry's "La Crise de l'Esprit," but had been unable to accept Valéry's doom-ridden perception of the mortality of modern civilizations. Nor did he have much patience with the apocalyptic prophecies of Oswald Spengler, which he experienced as false to his sense of the present. From Kenneth Burke's translation of *The Decline of the West*, instalments of which had appeared in *The Dial* between November 1924 and January 1925, Cowley retained the overall impression that "the morphology of history is a conception with many virtues--of which truth may be one--but that Spengler, as soon as he gets down to specific examples, is the same sort of ass as Max Nordau. To read Max Nordau's books today is perhaps a prophecy of the mood in which we shall read Spengler twenty years from now. Events are impertinent to prophets. . . . Spengler is a journalist when he speaks of contemporary events."⁸⁶

In his poetry, however, Cowley exemplified a personal and symbolic vision of spiritual bleakness and emotional drought, a poetics of loss and alienation from the nourishing roots of his childhood country, which marked him out as a quintessentially modernist poet, in sensibility as well as in technique.

With sixteen of his poems reaching publication 1926 was a good year for Cowley; only 1923 had witnessed the appearance of a greater number. During 1927 fewer poems reached print, though at least one of them

belonged with Cowley's finest. After a lapse of two years The Dial published another Cowley poem, "Leander," in September 1927. The poem had been written in the early spring of 1926 and had elicited an enthusiastic response from his friends. Both Tate and Brown considered it one of Cowley's best poems to date. Tate felt it displayed "a fine harmoniously functioning structural rhythm throughout," while Brown praised its lack of "self-conscious virtuosity" (a feature which he felt marred some of Cowley's other poems) and singled out its "absolutely simple and pure" poetic emotion. He detected the influence of Marlowe, but felt Cowley had finally struck his "real idiom." Tate, uncannily, heard echoes of Hart Crane, especially in its concluding line. John Brooks Wheelwright belatedly thought "Leander" a "real poem," with a music "finer than anything Poe wrote except 'To Helen.'"

"Leander" carried an epigraph from Rimbaud ("Un noyé pensif parfois descend") and recreated the classical myth of the man who nightly swam the Hellespont to his beloved Hero but was drowned one night when Hero's guiding lamp had been blown out. Not only did the poem's diction, rhythm and nautical motif recall Crane's denser and more complex verse, but its apostrophe in retrospect seems eerily prophetic of Crane's death at sea:

Regal and tired, O corpse that mapped the countries
of ocean, saw pelagic meadows where
the sea-cow grazes, traveller who skirts
the unicellular gardens of the foam--

southward you drift, where archipelagoes
of stars deflect the current, and waters boil
with Lava, through indefinite Marquesas,
spinning in the typhoon, and off Cape Stiff
in westerly gales your eyes commemorate,
still tropical, the wax and wane of moons.
Time is a secret frozen in your smile.⁸⁷

Cowley spent the winter months of 1927 in New York. In February he was hospitalized for several weeks in Pittsburgh. The illness which had knocked him out over the summer, then diagnosed as a "septic condition," turned out to be more serious: he now had to undergo "a not very dangerous operation" to remove a tumor on the bladder. On February 18 he

wrote to Marianne Moore from the Wallace Building: "My operation was rather more serious than I had expected, but I came through successfully, and yesterday was discharged from the hospital." Four days later, prodded by the environs of his adolescence, he dashed off an indignant letter to Burke signaling what he took to be another crisis in their friendship. Though both men had continued to meet regularly in New York, their correspondence had conspicuously fallen off since Cowley had moved to Staten Island in the spring of 1925 to embark on a free-lancing life. Burke, meanwhile, had seemed to withdraw more and more into a life devoted to aesthetic contemplation and the writing of the essays which became Counter-Statement. He had followed with bemused contempt the sort of compromises Cowley was permitting himself to make and had periodically reminded his friend of the higher duties of a disinterested pursuit of letters. He himself had refrained from participating in the 1926 group manifestation in The Little Review and allowed his correspondence with Cowley to become perfunctory, despite the fact that the latter, as he now pointed out in anger, had periodically "staked out a portion of [his] Soul" to his friend without receiving much of a reply. Cowley confessed himself "incapable of preserving an indifferent neutrality" in the face of Burke's silence: "By the simple process of not writing and not talking, we have got ourselves into a situation where we have our choice of talking it out or fighting it out." The "vague dissatisfaction" of their present relations was "worse than hostility," he wrote: each of his efforts to reestablish epistolary contact had run up against Burke's "indifference" or, worse, his "sense of duty," so that Cowley now felt "replaced by Friendship or Loyalty in the abstract." This time Burke responded promptly; his silence, he explained, was not to be attributed to indifference or resentment but to his present state of intellectual crisis--"I am battling like a fiend, battling for nothing less than my mind itself"--which had made him slink away from "the complications of friendship." With a good deal of implicit criticism, however, he also notified Cowley that for him any future relationships could only be rooted in a serious and uncompromising pursuit of intellectual matters: "I feel certain that there can henceforth be no decent contact between any of us, except on the basis of research and study. The psychology of the free lance has given us a society of dogs."⁸⁸

Burke's letter hit hard. With the exception of letters pertaining to

Dial-reviews, both friends relapsed into epistolary silence. In the late summer of 1927 they went on a long hiking trip together, on which Burke promised to "lay it all out" to Cowley, but their correspondence was not restored to anything resembling its former footing until the summer of 1928, when there was talk of repeating the sort of walk they had undertaken the year before, and Cowley, in a spirit of mocking banter, responded to the plan with a proposal to resume debating the eternal questions of adolescence from their present perspective as adult writers:

Is it not time for us to moot the world once more? Would eternal life be desirable if it existed[?] Who is God? Is space limited? Why literature, and is poetry more to be admired than prose? Is love really wonderful? Now that we have a good five-cent cigar, what does the country really need? If a bandit approached you with drawn revolver and announced that he was either going to shoot off your nuts or blow out your brain, would you kiss him? For answers see next week's Saturday Evening Post.⁸⁹

In early May 1927 the Cowleys left New York to spend the summer at the Briggs farm in Sherman. Before their removal they had expended most of their savings to rent and furnish a new city apartment on Sutton Place, at 501 East 55th Street, which they planned to maintain for business trips and pleasure dips into the city. Their new "palatial tenement," Cowley mockingly observed to Tate, rented for all of eighteen dollars, and featured three light rooms, gas, a fireplace and "an unlimited supply of cold water." It was located on the fifth floor in a building without an elevator. Back in Sherman the Cowleys resumed the life of country summer people, trying to regain a sense of rootedness in the land, to counteract "the absolute pastlessness of life in New York." One of Cowley's first acts upon arrival was to obtain a fishing license in the village and hunt the local brooks for trout, while Peggy delved into the Connecticut loam to restore her winter-ruined flower garden.⁹⁰

Over the summer Cowley made a trip with Foster Damon along the Jersey coast, to investigate fishing conditions in Barnegat Bay, off Long Beach Island, for an article for Charm. They tracked down tiny fishing villages hidden among the dunes, talked to local Jersey fishermen and sailed out in one of their boats onto the open sea. The experience was bracing to Cowley and inspired the idea of similar articles in the future. In August he wrote a long letter to Lucie Taussig, the editor of Charm, proposing

to write a series of articles on New Jersey "special industries" (pottery, zinc mines, silk-weaving, horticulture). He also suggested articles on "fighting forest fires, written after spending a couple of days in the forest-fire season with one of the state wardens," and on historic Jersey trees, with a story attached to each tree. The only article which he insisted on writing was one on slavery, an interest that surfaced soon in a different form. Of all the articles proposed, only three were finally written. Cowley's letter coincided with the end of his connection with Charm. In the fall Lucie Taussig was succeeded by a new editor, Elizabeth D. Adams, who discontinued the magazine's book page, thereby depriving Cowley of an assured \$50 a month.⁹¹

Cowley's upsurge of journalistic inspiration came in the wake of two "delightful" weeks spent on Cape Cod, eating lobsters and quahogs, visiting with John and Elinor Nef, acquaintances from Paris days, and talking with Conrad Aiken, whose "pen-portrait" appeared in an early fall issue of Brentano's Book Chat. In September Cowley spent two weeks in New York, visiting publishing houses, trying to "sell ideas" and to "get drunk on watered whiskey," but failing "consistently" in both areas, with the exception of a new job for the Boni Brothers: editing the account of a slave trader's life. He attended the celebration of the 250th anniversary of a Quaker town in Western Jersey and made a tour of Quaker settlements for his Charm article. His operation in Pittsburgh had put him \$250 in debt, the purchase of a new car had added another \$100, and late September found Cowley back in Sherman, "writing articles in black letters to blot out the red of my account books, and not succeeding very well," as he told Josephson. Over the summer he had made some extra money from laboriously rewriting, for the publisher Macaulay, "a very bad translation" of Henri Barbusse's novel Jesus, in which the French radical writer had rather unorthodoxly transformed his biblical subject into the first Communist preacher of equality and justice to the poor and downtrodden. Once more, Cowley was brought face to face with the oppressing compromises of a free-lance existence. "There is nothing to do, these days, except to write one's books and become successful; to accept new responsibilities and to write more books in order to keep up with them," he sighed.⁹²

In the fall of 1927 Cowley reviewed, for Charm, a new "yearbook" of contemporary American writing, The American Caravan, edited by Van Wyck

Brooks, Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford and Paul Rosenfeld. The volume, so the editors explained, was the result of "a spiritual as well as geographical canvas" of the nation and intended to break through the commercial taboos as well as "the passive and recessive attitudes of the leading magazines towards new fields of reality and fresh racy attacks" on established conventions. The American Caravan hoped to "accommodate a progressively broader expression of American life" and to serve as "an affirmation of the health of the young American literature." The encyclopedic volume offered a representative selection of over seventy American writers, established and unknown, and Cowley sympathetically considered the new publishing venture for Charm, singling out for special mention the "brilliant younger writers" Isidor Schneider, Edmund Wilson, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, Allen Tate and John Dos Passos.⁹³

Cowley himself was represented in the book by "Biography," a collection of poems and prose pieces he had written during slack office hours at Sweet's and submitted first to Williams, then, in April 1926, to Ernest Walsh for publication in This Quarter. Three of Cowley's poems, later included in Blue Juniata (1929) as "Leonora" and dedicated to Peggy Baird Cowley, recreated the mood and circumstances of his courtship of Peggy in the early days in Greenwich Village. They were printed in alternation with two fictional sketches, which contrasted the experiences of a naive rural boy of fifteen undergoing his first sexual awakening at the hands of a miner's wife, with those of the "lost," wandering adult writer, absorbing the melancholy, jazzy poetry of life among the skyscrapers, theatrical hotels and redbrick tenements of Manhattan, dreaming of "women who carry dogwood from the country," and cynically struggling to maintain the integrity of his imaginative vision against the commercial encroachments of the city:

Day coaches, pullmans and blind baggage: down the Ohio in a coal barge and through the Ozarks on foot. To change your city often is philosophy. When I was twenty-eight, I came to Manhattan, city of journalists, factory where ideas are duplicated under the Taylor System. No admittance, if you have nothing to sell. But critics can be bribed to let you ride in the caboose of letters; and on every street corner there are ambulant poets who sell glimpses of the stars or moon, through a brass telescope, for ten cents, two nickels, the tenth part of a dollar. Allagazam, ladies and gents, step up, ladies and gents, see the rings of Saturn, the eclipse of Venus, the dry

craters of the moon, the death of lyric verse. A dime, two nickels, the tenth part of a dollar. I bought a philosophy for ten cents, cut it into parcels, made each a paragraph, and sold them by the word.

We are the realtors of literature, dividing the countries of the mind into lots in Progress Grove or Endocardium Heights. We are the pimps of culture. We live in unreal cities and hatch our memories, a clump of hazel bushes, a sleepy rain, the clarified sunlight on the north side of a barn, in the morning, when the brain was purged of thought and even dream; slowly the sun climbed over the ridgepole and noon exploded with the noise of whistles in the valley.⁹⁴

That Cowley was not alone among the younger writers to suffer from occasional delusions of literary persecution was shown by Allen Tate's response to The American Caravan. When he saw the book, which featured two of his own poems, he dashed off an angry note to Cowley soliciting his cooperation against "one of the foulest outrages of our time." Tate's wrath was roused by the editors' dedication of the volume to "Alfred Stieglitz, Teacher" and by their foreword, both of which, he fulminated, exuded "the most hellish stink of Word-Fellow-ism." He felt offended in his artistic pride ("I reserve the privilege of my own dedication"), and proposed to offer "armed resistance" in an open letter to the editors: "It's a good chance to give the Brooks-Mumford school a blow." In reply, Cowley adopted a more balanced and dispassionate tone, aiming to temper Tate's tempestuous fury. He granted that the present dedication was an "imposition" to the contributors, making it "seem that Stieglitz was the teacher of you and me and God knows who besides," but agreed to sign an open letter only on condition that it "render justice to the disinterested labour performed by the editors." After all, Cowley argued, they had embarked on "a most difficult undertaking. . . . Their chance either for money or fame was pretty remote. They tried desperately to rake up material, in the face of a general indifference for which we ourselves are partly to blame." Any letter failing to acknowledge this, Cowley felt, would be "unjust" and would inevitably "fall back on our own heads." In other words, he concluded, "shit on them if we can, but let's not lose our pants."⁹⁵

Tate must have been impressed by Cowley's strategy of caution--he had learned his lesson from the bickerings of the past--for Cowley's letter, together with similar advice from Burke, made Tate decide to "let word-fellowism hang itself on its own error of taste." The American Caravan,

he granted, was a "good book" despite the editors, a fact which might be overlooked in case of an attack and ensuing counterattacks. He had mistaken the book for a "high-handed coup de main" on the part of the critical establishment against the younger generation, but still resented that he and his friends had been "misrepresented as (1) sympathetic with the aims of that generation or (2) as its acknowledged vassals having no aims of our own and contented to let Mumford give us his fuddled ideas." Such a misapprehension, he persisted, needed to be combatted "with the life's blood"--"The longer we wait, of course, the greater fools we become. Those fellows are our superiors in economy; we can't get money; and they command us by publishing us." Tate's hot-blooded temper was not easily calmed.⁹⁶

In late October 1927 Cowley received the Levinson Prize of Poetry. The award, consisting of \$100, was named after Salmon O. Levinson, one of the Chicago magnates who sponsored Miss Monroe's magazine, and was given in recognition of the distinguished quality of Cowley's contributions to Poetry, in particular his latest batch of poems, "Blue Juniata." Cowley first learned of the award, his first prize money, not from Poetry, but through long-distance phone calls from several Connecticut newspapers, whose copy-desk men, he wrote to Harriet Monroe, "were evidently eager to write the headline, HOME TOWN BARD WINS POEM PRIZE." Cowley felt "honored by the choice" but applied the money to a prosaically practical purpose: he took out \$25 for groceries and used the remaining \$75 as part of a down payment on "sixty acres of abandoned farmland and a hungry-looking house half a mile from Addie Turner's," just across the state line from Sherman.⁹⁷ He had been but a tenant on the Briggs place; now he finally had a farm of his own.

This time, however, neither poetic recognition nor the actual possession of a country home seemed able to alleviate Cowley's sinking hopes about the lack of progress and achievement in his literary career. As often in his moods of despondency and self-deprecation he poured out his misery in his notebooks. At a particularly bleak and desperate moment in late 1927 he observed: "Since last February I have written nothing in prose or verse of which I can be proud, and very little of which I should not be ashamed." Despite the methodology exemplarily offered by Paul Valéry, Cowley still despaired of finding a "common denominator" to his life and in the privacy of his notebook tried to find "certain

experiences in my youth which set a pattern, and to which I shall always return." Turning to his own poems, he searched for "the images that set my unconscious into fabricating lines"--symbols which recurred with a persistent emotional force: abandoned houses, receding mountain ranges, slow, cold rains--and noted the curious (and incorrect) fact that, with the exception of a "fairly admirable but fabricated" poem like "Those of Lucifer," the recently published "Leander" was the first of his poems which was "not based on an experience of childhood" and which went beyond the emotion of "primitive nostalgia" in his earlier verse. In an entry entitled "Meditations on My Not Writing" Cowley gave vent to his intellectual confusion and the feelings of uncertainty and loss which came with the poignant awareness that he remained, irremediably, one of the "wanderers outside the gates:"

With the realization that I should probably never return to Belsano, an epoch closed in my career as a poet.

Every individual poet, and every generation of poets, have words which are fetishes, words which are levers to set their machine-to-manufacture-images in action. Six years ago I was strangely moved by such words as "parade" or "procession" (why?)--and now "white hands" is an image full of mysterious charm. I wonder whether, by gaining the keys to our own processes of thought, we will be able to improve them, to produce poems to order--or whether we shall sink into silence.

I have questioned God, but not the virtue of writing.

But these keys, symbols, levers, have given me no key to that "common denominator" which is my own window on the universe. I am still, as I was five years ago, helpless and confused in the face of life. I act on instincts, and my choices are not deliberate. In my own eyes I am unadmirable. And, thinking of some of my meaner actions, I am led from the recognition of evil into that of good--of the supreme Good--of perhaps God. And the "perhaps" was an afterthought.⁹⁸

Battling what he felt were the weaknesses of his own character--stubborn inertia and a self-indulgent lack of disciplined endeavor--Cowley determined once again to aim for greater efficiency and purposiveness in his life, to resist more strongly the hedonistic temptations of his day, and to set apart a segment of "appointed time" for serious work of his own. In a moment of greater self-confidence he reflected upon his motives for writing in a more positive vein, but one still marked by deprecatory self-irony:

I Write Because . . .

It is not true that I write to amuse myself. At times, when I am in the act of making some impudent statement; when I consummate the unnatural marriage of two words or arrange the words of some commonplace sentence in a new sequence, I discover that I am chuckling. Usually writing bores me. I avoid the typewriter. I finish a paragraph, yawn, go to the kitchen for a glass of water, pick up the Saturday Evening Post, return, write another paragraph, go to bed. There are times when I sit at my desk as before a hostile audience. I have stagefright. On such occasions I find it the best policy to go for a walk, perhaps hold a conversation on another subject, then suddenly rush to the typewriter and work at a furious rate, taking myself by surprise. When I finish I am tired and without enthusiasm. There is more amusement to be found in the Zoo.

Certainly I do not write to benefit the world, having always believed that this purpose was an insane egoism. I do not write out of a sense of inferiority, to revenge myself on a world which misjudged my talent. The world is kindly and its mistakes are of another nature. I do not believe myself inferior. I can talk, eat, drink, dance, make love and earn a living as well as the next man. My personality is perhaps complex, but is lacking in complexes.

Reader, if I yield sometimes to the vice of writing, it is out of the desire to create you in my image. I write to impose my point of view. I write to endow you with my vices, my manner of judging people and books, the sort of cowardice which is peculiar to me. I write to expand my stature at the expense of yours, and with the gesture of stretching the arms which one makes sometimes after a full meal. I write from selfishness and conceit, with no desire to improve your character or my own. But there are many other reasons why I write.

To make enemies, for example: no form of flattering one's self is a more violent pleasure. I write sometimes to amuse my friends, but more often in the hope of puzzling them, to make them less eager to abandon me. I write to make myself attractive to the women I like, and so that I need not be introduced three times to strangers. I write also to earn money, but since I earn more money by working in an office, this can not be called a principal motive.

Often I write to collect my memories, and so form in my own mind an idea of the sort of man I have been. I try to gather the elements of my personality out of the past: the task is difficult, and though it is possible that I succeed at times, I never can recognize the result.

I write out of a desire to build, with the same purpose I had when a boy and built mud dams in the ditches after a rain. The desire to make is equivalent, I believe, to the "art instinct" which is mentioned in the older textbooks. One has a carpenter's pride in doing a good job, in turning a graceful line. One hopes to make something complete, organic, which will have a history separate from one's own. Indeed, when I succeed in making a poem of this nature, I cannot bear to read it afterwards, finding too many of my own faults embalmed in a work which is already alien to me.

The pleasure I take in reading my own work is rarely equal to the discomfort. What irritates me most are the little mannerisms, the simpers, which pleased me so much when I wrote. And besides, it is not always agreeable to recall one's past.

Often I have tried to reduce these various reasons for writing into one general principle, so as to say with conviction, "I write because. . . ." The attempt was beyond my powers, and I believe that nobody writes for a single reason.

Nor can I even say, "I write because I can't help writing." Writing is a vice, and I can take it or leave it alone. But when I leave it alone, my vanity begins to suffer. I think, "You are losing your ability to write." And to prove my own talent to my own satisfaction, I return to the typewriter. Mostly, however, I write because it is a habit, like cigarettes, like marriage, and like fishing down a stream instead of up, because all my life I have fished down a stream.⁹⁹

By the end of 1927 Cowley had still not succeeded in finding a solution to the dilemmas which had plagued him with painful tenacity ever since his return from France. It was only by closing the doors to "certain rooms of my soul," as he confessed to himself, and by cynically pursuing aims in which he did not truly believe, that he managed to remain afloat, intellectually, emotionally and financially, in the "atmosphere of frustration and purposeless tension" which, by 1927, had begun to mark life in New York. "I feel in an evangelical mood; I feel like preaching some new gospel to you, but I have absolutely nothing to preach," he moaned to Josephson. Whenever he could muster the moral courage to examine his personal situation with unsparing self-criticism, he lapsed into a mood of bleak disillusionment and, as his friends had come to expect, complained of dissipating his energies and wasting his precious talents on insignificant work. Even Josephson, who had suffered from similar self-questionings, seemed to have found a temporary solution to the intellectual frustrations of a poet's life in the America of the late 1920s and over the summer had escaped to France to do research for his biography of Zola, vicariously realizing Cowley's dream of doing a life of Baudelaire. From Paris Josephson wrote exhilarating letters home, celebrating his miraculous progress on his book and, in savory terms, describing his meetings with his former Dadaist friends to Cowley, one of the few Americans, he knew, who had personal knowledge of the "Olympian microcosm" of literary Paris and who understood "the miniature hurricanes and thunderbolts that rock its tiny stage." In 1927, however, Josephson was received rather coldly by his French friends, perhaps because, as he

told Cowley, he remained "sincerely, profoundly" hostile to Surrealism. Immersed in the fascinating life story of Emile Zola, Josephson responded to Cowley's complaints with ironic but severe advice: "I have known for months that you Go Out on Parties with Nice People and Drink Drinks. But where is the old sparkle when I sent you messages on t[oilet] p[aper]? . . . going out night after night and Drinking Drinks is not after all preferable to being buried in a book."¹⁰⁰ It was high time, Josephson implied, for Cowley to stop wasting his talents on a host of trivial things, to consolidate his literary energies, and to finally settle down to the serious business of writing.

In April 1928 Cowley finished "The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition." One of his major essays of the decade, it brought together many of his central literary preoccupations to date around a timely and controversial subject. In several articles Cowley had approached the subject of literary modernism from the perspective of French poetry; it was a natural corollary of his earlier explorations that he would search for a native American precursor of modernism who could take his place beside Rimbaud and Baudelaire. Poe was very much in the limelight of critical attention in the 1920s, but he remained, as T. S. Eliot was to write, "a stumbling block for the judicial critic." In the years after the First World War research had brought to light a substantial body of new information about Poe's background, life and career, but a proper appreciation of his literary merit remained hindered by a persistent moralistic suspicion that Poe was a man of weak, amoral, morbidly unwholesome character and that such a personality was by definition incapable of producing serious art. The early 1920s, it is true, had seen the emergence of critical studies of considerable depth and originality: D. H. Lawrence in his Studies in Classic American Literature (1923), Paul Valéry in his essay on Poe's Eureka in Variety, and William Carlos Williams in his In the American Grain (1925) had, each in his idiosyncratic fashion, adduced the arguments for recognition of Poe as a serious literary artist. The same period had also witnessed the appearance of a spate of new Poe biographies, many of which drew heavily on newly available psychoanalytic insights. One of the more sensitive of these was Joseph Wood Krutch's Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation (1926), which explained Poe's literary genius as the result of psychological, social and sexual maladjustments, in particular a "mother fixation" which induced sexual impotence and forced Poe to seek

compensation in an abnormal emotional world governed by terror, phantasmagoria and doom.¹

Poe lay at the heart of Cowley's critical concerns in the 1920s. Cowley had long been aware of Baudelaire's special fascination with the American poet; from France he had reminded American readers in May 1922 that the "reclamation" of Poe from the French was "the basis of our contemporary poetry;" and in his notebook he had taken Poe as an important initiator of "monistic formalism" and the notion of poetry as "pure idea." In a later entry he had singled out Poe as "the classical American example of the constructionist." On a memorable day in Brooklyn in June 1924 he had read aloud "The City in the Sea" to Allen Tate and Hart Crane, successfully defending its brilliance against Crane's slighting criticism.² With Crane and Tate, Cowley had formed a secret "Poe Society" as proof of their sense of aesthetic affinity with a poet whose career seemed appropriately symbolic of the fate of the modern artist amidst inimical social and cultural forces; "[f]or Americans, perhaps for most modern men, [Poe] is with us like a dejected cousin," Tate later wrote in a famous essay. In November 1926 Edmund Wilson had sought admittance to their informal lodge of Poe freemasons and participated in what Tate would soon refer to as a "fateful evening" of discussion about the recent deluge of Poe biographies.³

The winter literary supplement of The New Republic of December 8, 1926, opened with Wilson's "Poe at Home and Abroad." The essay launched a caustic attack on Joseph Wood Krutch's psycho-sexual interpretation of Poe and, by extension, on "the modern school of social-psychological biography," which, so Wilson advanced, did not merely misunderstand and underestimate Poe's works "from the point of view of their literary value," but led to complacent "caricature" of his personality and career. Wilson stood up against the sort of American criticism which regarded Poe as "a freak" who had his existence "somewhat apart both from literature and from life," and presented Poe as "a thorough romanticist" who, in his striving for "spiritual effect," in his attempt to make poetry approach "the indefiniteness of music," had formed a "bridge" between nineteenth-century romanticism and "modern symbolism." Wilson's essay was a brilliant apologia, but it obviously owed much to his recent talks with Cowley and Tate on the subject. "I hope I haven't stolen your thunder," Wilson had written to Cowley in late November 1926, admitting that he

"should never have thought of writing [his essay], if it hadn't been for that conversation with you." He had signed his letter: "Yours for the Poe Society." Tate had been furious about Wilson's borrowing of ideas tried out in private conversation, in particular since "the new brother" seemed to be making a habit out of the practice: he had assured Cowley he could name at least four instances in which Wilson had played similar tricks--only a week before, he had himself proposed an article on the biographers of Poe for The New Republic but the idea had been rejected by Wilson; two days later the magazine had miraculously changed its mind. Seething with a desire for vengeance, Tate had sought ways of exposing Wilson and had threatened to intimate "to Brother Herbert [Croly] that I appear in The New Republic oftener than he imagines." Wilson's shameless exploitation of "the economic value of an idea" was "really humiliating," Tate had fulminated to Cowley; he should be "expelled" from their Poe Society, or at least "disciplined."⁴

When, in early January 1927, Krutch answered Wilson's attack with what even Wilson granted was a moderate and balanced "counterblast" in The Saturday Review of Literature, the critical debate among New York literati reached the heights of controversy and Cowley was not prepared to stand by passively. Krutch, somewhat indiscriminately, took Wilson's essay as an example of "the newest school of criticism," one which aimed to "elevate aesthetics to the position of a separate science, which casts out psychology quite as definitely as it casts out sociology or morality," and which aimed to "discuss literature by principles which refer to art and to art alone." The most vital question in contemporary criticism, Krutch observed, was whether literature should be discussed "in its relations or in itself," a question that was particularly ticklish in the case of Poe, whose "whole effort" was "to penetrate into a realm of art which should be completely detached from the world of his own experience," but whose life and art urgently invited psychological criticism. Indeed, Krutch went on, "[w]hatever quarrel the aesthetician and the psychologist may have, there is no place where it may be more conveniently fought out than over the dead body of Poe." He viewed the present controversy as in essence one between the point of view represented in I. A. Richards's The Principles of Literary Criticism (1925) and that in Valéry's Variety and ended his essay with a plea for the validity of psychological criticism as an attempt "to bridge, in some

fashion, the gulf between aesthetics and the various other sciences which deal with the phenomena of human life," though he granted that it was an approach which left "open" questions concerned with "the art of rhetoric or effective expression."⁵

Cowley's thoughts on Poe had crystallized even before Wilson and Krutch had publicly taken their stands. In early October 1926, more than two months before Wilson's essay appeared in The New Republic, he had written to Marianne Moore of The Dial that he was "anxious" to review a new Poe biography by Hervey Allen, Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe, which he hoped would "consider Poe as a writer, instead of treating him as a psycho-analytic case." In November and December he had again written to Miss Moore to tell her how "tremendously pleased" he was with Allen's book and in January 1927, shortly after the appearance of Krutch's essay, had urged speedy publication of his review in The Dial: "I think I advanced several ideas which are important as ideas, and ought certainly to be expressed before the present Poe controversy dies down." Miss Moore, however, did not make much haste in printing the review, but suggested minor stylistic revisions which, together with Cowley's departure for Pittsburgh to undergo his operation, caused publication to be further delayed. On February 18, 1927, Cowley sent corrected proofs to Miss Moore from the Wallace Building, where he was recuperating, and again commented: "I hope you won't keep this review in the icebox; there has been considerable discussion of Poe since the recent biographies; what I have said belongs to that discussion; and if publication is too long delayed, my review is in danger of being outmoded, like Secretary Kellogg's war on the Bolsheviks."⁶

Impatiently awaiting publication of his review in The Dial, Cowley spoke out on the current Poe controversy in the pages of Charm and Brentano's Book Chat. In February 1927 he drew the attention of his New Jersey readers to the apparent irreconcilability between Poe's dissolute living and his artistic worth and expressed his personal belief that Poe, for all his flaws of character, "wrote like a fallen angel." He recommended Allen's Israfel as an accurate and factual biography which advanced "no clever little theory--no secondhand Freudianism which seems to explain everything that Poe wrote, and really explains nothing whatsoever." Instead, it managed to present Poe's life and career as a "breathless" story which was "just as relentless, just as pitiful and

proud as one of Shakespeare's tragedies." A month later, discussing the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson in Brentano's Book Chat, he recalled how, as early as 1919, his own "taste had been formed by reading Poe and Baudelaire, from whom I had learned to demand a sort of ecstasy, which even now [March 1927] I cannot define, although lately I found a name for it by reading Paul Valéry. It is pure poetry--something which is separate from plots, characters, ideas--something which, on the rare occasions when I encountered it, sent shivers of delight along my spine."⁷

It must have irked Cowley no end that his Poe review did not appear until The Dial's August 1927 issue. Tate shared Cowley's irritation and felt the delay in publication, together with Miss Moore's refusal to let Cowley expand his review into a full-fledged essay, was symptomatic of the younger generation's lack of power to resist the conservatism of the literary establishment. "[T]he best piece of Poe criticism ever written by an American appeared recently in the Dial," he observed to Cowley in hyperbolic praise. "It should have appeared six months ago; it should never have been stuck in the back of the magazine. It can be conveniently overlooked for many years. . . . Because we had no magazine to print it in, at the right time, in the right place."⁸

Cowley's Dial review suffered from the limitations imposed by Miss Moore's editorial astringency, but managed to convey the gist of his position on "the greatest American poet." Most recent biographers, Cowley observed, faced with the inexplicable discrepancy between the young writer of promise and proud force of character and the unbalanced drunkard plagued by dreams of insane grandeur and by paranoid delusions, had tried to give a simplified interpretation of Poe's deterioration: "Heredity, a weak heart, a 'mother fixation,' opium, alcohol, sexual impotence, or general waywardness: each has been advanced . . . as the reason both for his literary achievements and the disintegration of his character. . . . [T]ruth is confused with a plausible formula; there is a strange disregard for the value of literature as such; and genius--not Poe's alone, but genius in general--is . . . treated as a mental or physical disease." Allen's biography deserved credit for admiring Poe's poetry "for what it is," but its virtue was marred by the author's wavering between "the psychological attitude of Mr. Krutch" and "the aesthetics of M. Valéry." Probing into the causes of "our strange misapprehension of Poe's genius," Cowley pointed to the general critical

failure to "grasp the importance of his work as a whole." Following, or possibly anticipating, Wilson, he insisted Poe must be seen as "a product of international romanticism and the precursor of a symbolism which is nearly as universal," an artist who belonged to "the same great race which produced Byron and Coleridge, Chateaubriand, Baudelaire, and Hoffmann." Had he been given the opportunity, Cowley was persuaded, Poe's most important work would have been "in the field of aesthetics and pure philosophy" and would have yielded answers to "the great questions which have been troubling our minds since his day." Cowley's conclusion amounted to a personal acknowledgement of indebtedness:

[Poe's] work has helped shape our own attitude toward the art of letters. When we try to find the origin of our problems--such problems as the relation between poetry and science, the nature of pure poetry, the attitude of the poet to his audience, the proper function of psychology in criticism--we follow a path which leads from country to country and from author to author; from M. Valéry we proceed to Mallarmé, and from Mr. Eliot to Laforgue; but always, at the end of a vista, we find the proud, the still mysterious figure of Edgar Allan Poe.⁹

Cowley had more to say on Poe than was made possible by the restricted scope of a Dial review and he continued to look for an opportunity for more elaborate, in-depth discussion. That opportunity came when, early in 1928, the editor of The Outlook asked him to write the first essay in a series of "revaluations, by contemporary critics, of the great figures of America's literary past." The magazine advertised Cowley as "one of the most brilliant of our younger critics" and "a writer of distinction and originality" who was "particularly well equipped" to justly estimate Poe's influence and achievement. Cowley's contribution to the series, "The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," was an elaborate restatement and expansion of the position he had taken in his earlier review and betrayed the influence of both Kenneth Burke's theories of form and Paul Valéry, several of whose essays, translated by Cowley, appeared in the New York Herald Tribune of March and April of that year.

Notwithstanding the voluminous bulk of research since Poe's death, Cowley observed, the "mystery" of his genius remained "as deep as ever" and the misjudgments, especially by "professors of literature, moral

philosophers, and critics in general," as persistent: "Like carrion birds, they have gathered about [Poe's] carcass, choosing each a portion for attack, and leaving nothing but his bleached gigantic bones to be studied and reconstructed like those of some palaeozoic monster." Cowley repudiated the notion that Poe's appeal, like Shelley's, was foremost to the adolescent sensibility and that his poetry and criticism had no "use" (in Eliot's sense of the word) for the mature and serious literary artist. He explained the contemporary misapprehension of Poe as being partly due to current "literary fashions," which appeared to have no truck with the rich inventiveness, wide learning and exotic imagination of Poe but, in the demand for photographic, penetrating realism, tended to reduce the author to "a sort of reproducing or duplicating machine."¹⁰

The heart of his essay, however, was a belated attack on those critics who, like Krutch, sought to attribute Poe's genius to "an almost unparalleled collection of mental, physical, and environmental troubles and infirmities." When, almost eighteen months before, Krutch had publicly announced the existence of a "quarrel" between the aesthete and the psychologist in Canby's Saturday Review, Cowley had privately objected to Krutch's distinction. In an unpublished manuscript he had criticized Krutch for failing to differentiate between those critics interested in "the psychology of the writer" and those interested in "the psychology of the audience," a notion which he had derived from Burke or, as seems more likely, which both Burke and Cowley had first discovered in Poe's own writings. Poe, after all, Cowley had written in his manuscript, was "so little concerned with the psychology of the writer, and so deeply interested in the psychology of the audience, that when he set out to explain how he wrote 'The Raven,' his explanation was entirely mistaken and disingenuous—as concerns himself; but it is a masterly presentation of the psychological methods by which an author affects an audience."¹¹ In his essay for The Outlook Cowley returned to the distinction to explain why a concern with "the psychology of the writer" (as in most recent psychoanalytic studies of Poe) could never lead to "the highest type of criticism." By definition, he wrote (borrowing his differentiation from one of the essays by Valéry he had just translated), such criticism was "confined to the psychological causes of literary works, whereas the more important function of criticism is first to study, and then to judge, their psychological effects. The causal critics

have no real standards of judgment." The latter, he advanced, had approached Poe much as they would a pearl:

After weeks of reading, and perhaps after months of research, they will report that pearls are the calcareous excretions with which certain mollusks surround the dead body of a parasite within their shells. They will report that shells irregular in shape, stunted in growth, bearing excrescences, or honeycombed by boring parasites are those most likely to contain pearls. They will announce, in other words, that pearls are the result of an unhealthy irritation, and perhaps they will imply that all beautiful objects are similarly caused. Here ends their criticism of the pearl; they will have disregarded its symmetry, its luster, its color, its texture, and all the elements which give effect to its beauty.

If, however, psychological criticism could never explain the nature of Poe's genius, it still had its restricted validity. There was little doubt, Cowley granted, that Poe's physical and psychical infirmities "thwarted his genius by preventing its fullest expression;" they partly explained, among other weaknesses, the narrow range of Poe's emotions, the limited number of his effects, and his failure to "transcribe the real world or to create living characters." In one important respect, however, Cowley believed, Poe's maladjustments "encouraged" his genius, in that they provided him with a "motive" for developing his "bitter ambition" for power, fame and success. Here, as in the case of Baudelaire, Cowley was led to the paradoxical conclusion that personal morality did not inevitably preclude or coincide with literary ethics: "Just as the virtues of the king may be the vices of the man, it is sometimes possible for vices of character to become literary virtues. I submit that the wish for artistic success, when carried to such purity and intensity as in the case of Poe, is, from the literary point of view, not entirely vicious." Such early insights into the discrepancy between an artist's moral flaws of character and his "saintlike dedication" to his art would prove axiomatic; half a century later, they formed the basis of Cowley's much more subtle and profound formulation of the five "commandments" persisting in the depths of any artist's mind, a "pentologue" which, though it offered no guide to daily conduct, was in itself, "a moral code" of art.¹²

"The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition" was in essence, like Wilson's "Poe at Home and Abroad," an apologia for a misunderstood and underestimated

American artist. But Cowley, much more so than Wilson, was also critical of the technical weaknesses in Poe's poetry. Two of Poe's most serious "faults" were his "lack of visualization," which engendered a style "almost purely auditive," and an element of "theatricality" in his creation of effects. Cowley accepted Poe's conception of a poem as "a machine for producing emotions" (it was another notion he would revert to in his later criticism, as when, in A Second Flowering, he analyzed Hemingway's "system of practical aesthetics" in terms derived from Poe), but he acknowledged that Poe was "sometimes guilty of constructing his emotive machine with shoddy materials, and sometimes, in his eagerness to affect his readers, . . . adopted the methods of a charlatan;" as a result, Poe was capable of "magnificent artifices" but also of "mere tricks."¹³

In conclusion, Cowley more precisely related the current misapprehension of Poe's genius to the unjust neglect of a large portion of his writings, in particular the "Marginalia," Eureka, and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. If we would but base our appreciation of Poe on a familiarity with his entire oeuvre, Cowley was convinced, we should find that, despite his "narrow emotional range," Poe possessed "an exceptionally wide range of intellectual interests:"

We learn that, besides his wide acquaintanceship with literature, he was interested in music, painting, architecture, and the theatre; that he sought to apply his knowledge of history, exploration and mathematics; that he held original views on landscape gardening and interior decoration; that he tried to keep in touch with scientific discoveries, especially in physics, meteorology, psychology, and astronomy, that he was not only one of the first American writers to state the opposition between science and poetry, but also the very first to reconcile these hostile departments of the modern mind. He was the enemy of inordinate specialization, that vice of the nineteenth century which threatens to persist into the twentieth.

Cowley's plea for a consideration of Poe's merit on the basis of his total literary output was an early manifestation of a persistent element in his critical credo; he explicitly formulated it in 1961 as follows: "It is a mistake to approach each work as if it were an absolutely separate production, a unique artifact, the last and single relic of a buried civilization. . . . It seems to me that any author of magnitude

has his eye on something larger than the individual story or poem or novel . . . [and] wants it to serve as a chapter or aspect of the larger work that is his lifetime production, his oeuvre." It is precisely this "larger work"--considered both in its intrinsic and its extrinsic aspects--which Cowley would make into the subject of his most substantial and influential essays, both those on earlier American writers like Poe, Hawthorne or Whitman, and those on literary contemporaries like Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cummings and Aiken. In the late 1920s Edgar Allan Poe loomed for Cowley as "the most important American man of letters," one whose unparalleled influence made him "a part of the traditions of modern literature in half a dozen countries."¹⁴

In 1927-1928, taking his cue from the French perspective on Poe and choosing Baudelaire and Valéry for his critical lodestars, Cowley had been able to anticipate, in admittedly elementary fashion, the important revaluation of Poe which reached its height in the late 1940s in influential essays of greater depth and perspicacity by T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate. Like Cowley twenty years earlier, Eliot, in a famous 1948 Library of Congress lecture, discovered that "by trying to look at Poe through the eyes of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and most of all Valéry, [one became] more thoroughly convinced of his importance, of the importance of his work as a whole." Allen Tate's two major lectures on Poe--"Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" (1949) and "The Angelic Imagination: Poe as God" (1952)--likewise examined neglected or misapprehended aspects of Poe which had been germinally suggested by Cowley. The latter essay, in particular, reverted to Eureka, one of the works Cowley had singled out as being "unjustly neglected," to fathom and formulate the quasi-theological cosmology implicit in Poe's writings, and recapitulated the gist of Cowley's attack on Poe's psychoanalytic critics ("To these ingenious persons," Tate wrote, "Poe's works have almost no intrinsic meaning: taken together they make up a dossier for the analyst to peruse before Mr. Poe steps into his office for analysis").¹⁵

Cowley himself continued to consider Poe as an important precursor of modern literature, if one who was difficult to fit into the main current of American literature. Between 1941 and 1944, and again in 1952, he would recurrently name his New Republic column of miscellaneous critical commentary after Poe's "Marginalia," while in the mid-1940s he wrote major essays on Hemingway and Faulkner in which he acknowledged their

kinship with the "haunted and nocturnal" spirit of Poe--which Allen Tate later referred to as "the Dark Night of Sense" in Poe's writings. In late 1945 he again wrote on Poe, this time for The New Republic, reiterating his earlier complaint that most American appreciation of Poe was "of the wrong sort" and emphasizing his importance in the history of European and world literature: "He stands at the exact beginning of the doctrine of art for art's sake (or life for art's sake); he stands at the exact point of transition between the Gothic romance, set in a haunted German castle, and that modern type of story in which the terror, as Poe said, 'is not of Germany, but of the soul;' and he also stands at the exact point where Romantic poetry is transformed into Symbolist poetry." In 1949, the centennial year of Poe's death, he lectured on Poe at the Grolier Club in New York; it was one of several lectures delivered in the late 1940s which exemplified Cowley's continuing fascination with "the passage back and forth of literary ideas between France and the United States" and which expanded and deepened his earlier analysis of Poe's influence on avant-garde writing, from French Symbolism to Hart Crane and Ernest Hemingway. Though he continued to regard Poe as primarily a "constructionist," by 1949 his early distrust of the role of the subconscious in literary creation had considerably diminished and he could more readily acknowledge Poe's influence on Surrealism: his "real originality," Cowley then saw, lay in his combination of "the maximum of logic and intellection with a maximum use of subconscious material." Twenty years later, in 1969, he remarked to Burke that, pace Valéry's "anti-inspirationism," he had come to believe that the important factor about the use of dreams or the subconscious in writing was "the conscious reworking of inspiration into an intellectual construction." Still later, when, as literary editor at Viking Press, he was working with enthusiasm on Gay Wilson Allen's life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Cowley came to a belated recognition that Poe's constructionist approach to poetry (and, with it, the entire line in American poetry extending from Poe to Eliot and Wallace Stevens) was counterbalanced by an "expressionist" tradition in American poetry which originated with Emerson and ran through Whitman to Hart Crane, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, and the San Francisco School--all of them, Cowley observed in a letter to Allen in 1978, went back to Emerson "even if they don't read him." In opposition to Poe's "mechanistic" view of art as expressed in "The Philosophy of

Composition" (1846) he placed Emerson's "The Poet" (1844) as a magisterial if extreme statement of "the inspirational view of poetry," the belief that "poetry comes from the unconscious and that conscious form is secondary." Emerson looms conspicuously in several of Cowley's later essays, notable those on Aiken, Cummings, Damon and Wilder, as if in counterpoint to the haunting presence of Poe in his early writings.¹⁶

By the late 1970s Cowley could look back on a long and distinguished career in which, like Poe, he had "worked hard to establish professional standards of authorship." As a man of letters of a by then vanishing species, he had consistently worked in a line of literary endeavor which extended back to Edgar Allan Poe. As Allen Tate acknowledged in 1968: "[Poe] was the first committed and perhaps still the greatest American literary journalist on the high French model: a critical tradition represented today by Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley."¹⁷

In the late 1920s Cowley's interest in the origins of contemporary romanticism was further exemplified in two articles which examined related manifestations of, in this case, English romanticism: the tradition of the Gothic novel and the life and works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Both, Cowley advanced, deserved wider recognition and stood in need of juster appreciation. "The Haunted Castle," published in the fall of 1928 in The New Republic, displayed what would become two of the more important articles of Cowley's eclectic critical faith: first, his belief that a critic should "select works of art worth writing about, with special emphasis on works that are new, not much discussed, or widely misunderstood;" and second, a deliberate effort to read "with a sort of innocence . . . with a lack of preconceptions." In substance, his 1928 article contended that the Gothic novel, as created by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Charles Robert Maturin and Matthew Gregory Lewis, was "perhaps today the most neglected field of English letters." Contemporary critics seemed to realize "neither [its] intrinsic value, which is not small, nor [its] incalculable effect on European letters." Taking Lewis's The Monk as a case in point, Cowley found that, read "without preconceptions," the book possessed "an astounding power of imaginative evocation" as well as "a violent realism . . . a naturalism of the

passions, an accuratism of horror." In effect, Cowley claimed, its mixture of the imaginary and the real foreshadowed the literary methods of the Romantics: to writers as different as Poe, Coleridge, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Hugo, Balzac, Rimbaud and Ducasse The Monk had been little less than "a talisman, a magic mirror: it revealed new worlds of mystery, passion, terror, forbidden dreams." A "symbol of liberation" for the writers of the Romantic era, the haunted castle had persisted into modern literature, where, Cowley argued, it had come to assume a new symbolic function: "Built from the mind, it has returned to the dim regions from which it came. It has merged by slow degrees into the conceptions of abnormal psychology, without losing any of its horrors. For, we have learned that the mind, too, has its passages and labyrinths, and we are now finding them no less terrifying than those dungeons of Santa Clara where lizards crawled, where ghosts came stalking, and where a sudden gust of wind blew out the lamp."¹⁸

Cowley's tone somewhat deceptively seemed to imply a recognition of the subconscious as a venerated force in modern writing. In other articles and reviews, however, he continued to lash out at those critics who tackled the problem of a poet's literary genius "with Freud and a flourish," who proceeded too often "from assumption to hypothesis, without ever finding a plausible basis in fact." As he remarked acerbically in a review of a new translation of the works of Villon: "Personally, I am not endowed with the sort of second-sight which my contemporaries seem to acquire from reading one or two volumes of psycho-analysis." The popular tendency to "prove by numerology, psycho-analysis, hypnotism, and rather questionable scholarship that genius and inversion are only two sides of a coin" was a thesis to which he would not cease to object, he wrote to Irita Van Doren in the summer of 1928.¹⁹

Among the English Romantic poets Shelley held undoubtedly the strongest fascination for the young Cowley—perhaps proof of a lingering touch of adolescent romanticism in his own sensibility. Not only did echoes of Shelley's rhetorical lyricism steal into his poetry ("Leander," particular, seemed indebted in spirit and diction to poems like "Alastor" and "Ode to the West Wind"), he also recurrently mentioned Shelley in his reviews, quoted from his Defence of Poetry, but wrote only one review on the English poet in his entire career. In The Dial for June 1928 Cowley considered a massive life of Shelley by Walter Edwin Peck.

Peck's "authoritative" biography, Cowley granted, might be "a labour of disinterested scholarship," but it was fatally lacking in "creative sympathy" and marred by the author's assumption of the attitude of "a hostile judge, who, having weighed the evidence and balanced probabilities, now rises to pronounce his sentence." Peck's critical stance was one which consistently rubbed Cowley the wrong way; throughout his long career he would speak out against a violation of what he believed was a desirable attitude of humility and respect on the part of the critic before works of genius. Judgment was subordinate to the critical tasks of interpretation and definition, he observed in his 1961 critical credo; a critic could not "afford to be arrogant." Peck, however, not only committed the sin of critical pride, he also showed considerable "critical ineptitude" in pronouncing judgment on Shelley's flaws of moral conduct, an aspect disconnected with his achievement as a poet: after all, "[a]mong modern authors, Shelley was preeminently a man of works, a man who lived in his poems." By 1822, the year of his death, Shelley had given "the final, the most perfect expression, to a generous and impractical attitude which still persists," Cowley believed, and was preparing to move on into "new fields of poetry." He failed in the attempt, largely because the requisite "sympathy or support of at least a limited public" was withheld; indeed, Cowley boldly contended, Shelley's life was effectively "snuffed out by his critics." Shelley's dramatic death by drowning, moreover, seemed anticipated in his finest poems, notably "Alastor." In effect, Cowley concluded, Shelley had sacrificed his life to "a symbol"--"very much as if William Jennings Bryan had really been crucified on a cross of gold," he noted in a letter to Marianne Moore.²⁰

Cowley's letter was his last communication with Miss Moore as editor of The Dial; his Shelley review marked the end of his connection with the magazine. The long delay between Cowley's first request for the review in August 1927 and its final appearance in June 1928 crowned his dissatisfaction with The Dial, which had been steadily mounting ever since Marianne Moore had been appointed editor in the spring of 1925. Though Cowley had warmly greeted Miss Moore's accession to the editorial chair--"It will be extremely interesting to write for the Dial under your editorship"--in the summer of 1926 he had told Burke that he could not, in all honesty, congratulate him on returning to The Dial: the magazine,

he felt, was "getting Awful." Cowley's personal disappointment in the later Dial was representative of a wider critical response. The magazine's alleged opposition to experimentalism, its staid catholicity of taste, and its reputed partiality towards established European writers had been a thorn in the side of the pugnaciously modernist younger generation ever since the days of Broom and Secession; after 1925, such objections had only seemed to gain pertinency and the magazine, consequently, had estranged quite a few of its earlier sympathizers. William Carlos Williams, recipient of The Dial Award for 1926, two years later told Ezra Pound that he was "disgusted with The Dial for its halfhearted ways" and felt the magazine was "a dead letter among the publisher crowd." Editorial enthusiasm, indeed, had diminished with the general falling-off of excitement in the literary climate (there was, in the late 1920s, no annus mirabilis like 1922 which saw the equivalent of the appearance of Ulysses and The Waste Land) and The Dial seemed only to become more precious and sedately dignified. Commenting on the death of The Dial in The New Republic in 1929, Cowley objected that "even during its lifetime it had ceased to be receptive to new ideas; it published Cummings when he first appeared, but six years later it was closed to Hemingway."²¹

The merit of Marianne Moore's editorship of The Dial was hardly undisputed even at the time, but Cowley had his own reasons for being unhappy with her treatment of his work. One of Miss Moore's first acts had been to reject, in a tone irritatingly judicial, the group of pastoral Pennsylvania poems which later appeared in Poetry: "Although we enjoy in your poems the exact rendering of atmosphere, and feel the definiteness of your intention in the determining of cadence and of pattern, we feel nevertheless a lack of cumulative force," she had informed him in the fall of 1925. The only one of Cowley's poems to meet with her strict editorial standards and her esoteric demands of poetry was "Leander." Not only had Miss Moore rejected Cowley's important essay on "French Poetry and the New Spirit," she had also printed Alyse Gregory's niggardly appreciation of his translation of Variety, had unforgivably held up the publication of his Poe review, and, of late, had let him slave over a translation of an instalment of Proust's Le Temps Retrouvé which was never published in The Dial. Repeatedly Cowley's efforts had not elicited the kind of hospitable response which he had

hoped for.²²

More than anything else, however, Cowley was irked by Miss Moore's habit of making or proposing changes in his manuscripts. She approached the art of editing her magazine with the same punctiliousness she bestowed on the composition of her poems and repeatedly suggested alterations, even in Cowley's briefers. "I am sorry that changes should be made in the work of a contributor," Miss Moore explained in October 1925. "The changes we make are technical: if we were at liberty to differ in opinion from our contributors, we should often make others." Mostly, Cowley politely acknowledged that her proposals were improvements, but occasionally he resented the implied charge of carelessness and might curtly refer his editor to the Oxford Dictionary for arbitration. Miss Moore's delicate solicitude for good writing collided with Cowley's own high standards of craftsmanship and the conscientiousness with which he wrote his critical prose. "[I]n general I feel very nervous when someone starts in to change my work," he observed to Burke in 1927. A year later he was more explicit: "I don't work very well when I'm Marianne-Moore'd." Burke enjoyed the high respect of Marianne Moore--she spoke of him affectionately as "our critic" and proposed him for the Dial Award of 1928 over Wallace Stevens--and Cowley may well have hoped that his friend might tactfully alert Miss Moore to his sensitivity about her treatment of his work. Burke, who was fast becoming The Dial's most formidable and representative critic, may or may not have broached the subject to Miss Moore. By the spring of 1928, however, she seemed to have become aware that some of her suggestions rubbed Cowley the wrong way and told him that she wanted to be assured of his approval of her alterations in the Shelley review: "We cannot buy contentment with tyranny." By then, however, Cowley's youthful vanity was hurt beyond remedy and he decided to break off relations with the magazine, preferring to submit his more substantial essays and reviews to Edmund Wilson at The New Republic and to Irita Van Doren at the New York Herald Tribune, who rarely altered his manuscripts and instantly published what he wrote. When The Dial breathed its last in the summer of 1929, Cowley belatedly explained his step to Burke, granting it entailed "a confession of weakness:" "I ceased to write for the Dial, but only after long and conscientious efforts to get along with Marianne Moore; fundamentally she didn't like me, and fundamentally I need to be liked if I'm going to do my best work."²³

Though Cowley's grievances were partly justified, on the whole Marianne Moore had been quite generous and conscientious in her dealings with a touchy contributor. She had kindly agreed to serve as Cowley's reference for his Guggenheim application, over the years had been charitably patient with the many arrears and delays resulting from his slow and laborious working habits, and she had displayed a continued, if discriminating, hospitality to his writings: "you know, do you not," she had written at one point, "that we are delighted to consider any work which you would offer? The submitted work of no one of our contributors is invariably published by us and it is with the utmost loyalty and respect that we suggest that work be offered rather than bespoken."²⁴ For all his grumblings, The Dial had played a significant role in establishing Cowley's reputation as a poet and a practitioner of "modern" literary criticism. The Dial, moreover, paid well--\$20 a page for poetry, two cents a word for prose, and \$2 for Briefer Mentions, rates unmatched by other comparable magazines of the time--a not unimportant consideration for a free-lance poet-critic. As Cowley, oblivious of his earlier strictures, observed in 1958: "On the whole [The Dial] was the best magazine of the arts that we have had in this country. For the young American writer of the time, it was marvelous to have a magazine that would publish his best work, and pay him for it."²⁵

In early 1928, when his sympathy for The Dial was reaching its low point, Cowley began writing regularly for The New Republic. Two years before, Edmund Wilson had joined the staff of the magazine, to serve as an associate editor and principal book reviewer for the next five years; in 1928 he was about to take over the literary editorship from Robert Morss Lovett, who later that year was ushered out of office by Herbert Croly, the founding editor. At the time, Wilson already enjoyed considerable prestige and authority as a professional critic and in the eyes of many seemed on his way to becoming "the Sainte-Beuve of a new literature."²⁶

Cowley's connection with the liberal weekly that was to play such a decisive role in the shaping of his subsequent career was off to a confused and unpleasant start. Memories of the unfair, indifferent or inconsistent manner in which several of his earlier articles and

proposals had been treated by the editors still rankled, and when, in late October 1927, Wilson invited Cowley to review on a regular basis for Croly's magazine, he received a rather cool response. Cowley, in effect, entered a lengthy "bill of complaints" about his treatment by the magazine. Repeatedly over the last few years he had set out to write for The New Republic with "high hopes," Cowley told Wilson, but his hopes had gradually been "sugared, fermented, and turned to thin vinegar." His proposals for articles had been coldly received, his writings "published, lost, altered, neglected," until he could no longer be certain of the fate of what he submitted. The experiences of the past two years had left him with "a mild indifference which could easily turn into a grievance." Though he felt he had just cause for complaint, Cowley was prepared to swallow his offended pride and granted Wilson that "[w]ithin a certain range . . . one can write extremely well for the New Republic." Indeed, he added, "I should be glad to be connected with any periodical which you help to edit, and in spite of all difficulties I should like to write for the New Republic." All he asked was fair treatment and a reasonable assurance that what he wrote would be paid for, whether printed or not.²⁷

A stalwart intellectual who easily rubbed people the wrong way by his "patrician airs and dyspeptic disposition," Wilson repaid Cowley in kind. He dismissed the latter's letter as "a great farrago and galimatias of poppycock and balderdash" and regretted to see Cowley develop "literary delusions of persecution similar to those which afflict Ernest Boyd." Patronizingly, he offered a word of warning: "You must bear in mind, if you have never had experience in editing one of these magazines, that reviews of the kind which will publish the work of writers like you and me are always edited by persons of essentially the same kind--that is, unbusinesslike persons who are subject to all kinds of manias, abstractmindedness, metaphysical prejudice [and] partisan feeling." He advised Cowley to resign himself to such experiences, assured him that any commissioned review would be paid for, and once again expressed his eagerness to have Cowley, whom he believed to be "one of the best writers in the country," contribute regularly to The New Republic. In reply an undaunted Cowley pointed out that Wilson would do well to "distinguish between neurosis and superstition." He simply felt that "a jinx sat on [his] shoulders" every time he had tried to write for the magazine. Wilson, however, had managed to pour balm into his correspondent's

wounded pride. Cowley not merely confessed himself ready to write for the magazine; he even considered dropping his present reviewing work for Irita Van Doren, in deference to Wilson's superior editorial and literary standards.²⁸

Cowley's early reviews for The New Republic were assigned a modest place in "the back of the book," but they were precisely the sort of thing Wilson was looking for. "Your capacity for doing these trivial things well is astonishing," Wilson observed in March 1928 a propos of a short one-column review. Wilson's growing confidence in Cowley's ability to produce "first-rate" reviews to order soon led to requests for "leading" reviews and contributions to the magazine's more elaborate literary supplements, which Wilson hoped to make into "all-star affairs." Cowley consistently approached even his slightest reviews with a painstaking attention to craftsmanship and style, which earned him the admiration not only of Wilson but also of Bruce Bliven and Herbert Croly. The short book review, indeed, was rapidly developing into Cowley's special "art form." There is little doubt that, by making such high and uncompromising demands on himself, Cowley not only became an eminent practitioner of what Henry Dan Piper has called "the art of literary journalism," but also helped to raise the standards of professional book-reviewing in America. Edmund Wilson, for one, was quick to recognize Cowley's special talents in the field; in May 1928 he spoke of the usual "elegance and perspicuity" of Cowley's reviews and singled out for special praise his ability to give his reviews "that kind of independent existence as an article which is just what is lacking in most reviews."²⁸ When, two years later, The New Republic was on the lookout for a new literary editor, Cowley was quite naturally foremost in Wilson's thoughts.

While Cowley continued to write on French literature for the New York Herald Tribune, for The New Republic he tackled a wider variety of literary books and subjects. Moreover, he now began reviewing, if as yet incidentally, the sort of books that had left him indifferent before, books dealing with specific social, political or more broadly intellectual issues of his day and age. While he retained his sensitivity to problems of form and technique, several reviews displayed a dawning awareness of the darker underside to American society in an age of business and technology. It was a far cry from political radicalism, but

formed an embryonic indication that, by fits and starts, Cowley's critical horizons were broadening to include the public issues of his time, especially as they affected the fate of American writing.

The first series of reviews Cowley wrote under Wilson appeared in the early half of 1928 and included purely literary considerations of books of poetry by Donald Davidson and Humbert Wolfe, the letters of Baudelaire, fiction by Thornton Wilder, Sinclair Lewis, Wyndham Lewis and Julien Green, and two books of English grammar. The latter review displayed a typical and persistent, if somewhat naive, distrust of academic literary scholarship and professorial "authority" in the field of language; it advanced the argument that, "[i]deally, the precepts of grammarians should be based on the practice of the best contemporary writers." Americans badly needed "a final tribunal in all matters affecting the language," Cowley observed, a tribunal that should consist of actual "men of letters and men of words," much like the French Academy. Cowley's principal concern in these reviews remained, quite simply, with the quality of good writing. He criticized Wyndham Lewis for betraying a "seigniorial contempt" for style and, in his reviews of Wilder and Julien Green, betrayed how much the "classical" virtues of Racine remained his critical touchstone for contemporary writing. At Wilson's special request, he wrote a longer review of two books by William Beebe, Pheasant Jungles and The Arcturus Adventure, for the magazine's spring literary supplement. Wilson judged the article "first-rate" and found Cowley "excellent on Beebe's style--a matter which has never received any attention--and, in fact, on the whole subject."³⁰

A shift of emphasis, however, was noticeable even in Cowley's more or less exclusively literary reviews. When Wilson proposed a review of Sinclair Lewis's new book, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, on the grounds that it was "the sort of thing [Cowley] would polish off very pungently," the latter complied but in The New Republic observed that Lewis's once-vitriolic satire had lost much of its force and effectiveness: "this punitive expedition after the average American is no longer so thrilling as it was five years ago." Cowley was obviously "losing interest in a chase which, like an English stag-hunt, no longer ends with a kill," and urged Lewis to widen the scope of his social satire, to turn to "other weapons" and "other objects" for his "distinguished powers of constructive hate."³¹

"Style and Fashion," a review which Wilson praised as "more or less a masterpiece in its way," gave a more explicit indication of Cowley's growing unhappiness with the social and economic factors affecting current American writing. It demonstrated his ability to transform a review of two relatively unimportant books--one a biography of Horatio Alger, the other an account of the buccaneers in the Pacific--into an occasion for pointed generalization about larger cultural issues. In effect, the review amounted to an attack on the "styling" of books, the extension of commercial principles into the field of literature through the issuing of "yearly models" for fashionable consumption: "Just as General Motors, in 1927, issued dozens of models in two contrasting colors, so the more enterprising publishers engaged in the mass production of biographies. Not a few of these were manufactured in accordance with one ingenious formula," Cowley noted with disapproval; "they were designed to appeal to what are known as sophisticated readers by their skeptical and patronizing tone, and to hold the attention of readers in general by exploiting almost the same material as the true-story magazines." The application of consumerist criteria to publishing, Cowley charged, led to an unforgivable dilution of literary standards.³²

Two reviews which appeared in The New Republic in June and July of 1928 concerned social and political realities formerly outside Cowley's ken. "The Peasants of New York," a leading review, dealt with two books about the problems of Democratic city politics: graft in Tammany Hall and the "gangs" of New York. It entailed a personal recognition of the existence of an urban "underclass" to American capitalist society and implied a humanitarian sympathy, as yet unpoliticized, for this "urban peasantry."

There is, in New York, [so Cowley began his review] a large and politically powerful class which might be described as that of the urban peasants. Citizens and voters, they are, nevertheless, the victims of inherited poverty and the subjects of exploitation by their overlords. Americans, they follow traditions which are those of neither Washington nor Ford; they speak in peculiar dialects and adhere to their own peculiar code of morals. One might even say that they are attached, like serfs, to their own villages, which they call Manhattanville, Harlem, the Gas House, Hell's Kitchen, or Mulberry Bend. There, in the shadow of the skyscrapers, they live three and four in a room, without steam heat, electricity and bath. They gather on winter evenings round the kitchen stove, or in summer on the fire escapes, and repeat their folk tales in harsh voices, to

drown the roar of the Elevated.

Here, indeed, was the darker underside to Coolidge prosperity, a whole class of American citizens which failed to profit from a booming national economy. Cowley, however, refrained from pleading the cause of social and political justice, but focused on the exposure of graft and corruption in the Democratic party machine. In his book on Tammany Hall M. R. Werner brought to light some "almost incredible facts," Cowley agreed, but he refused to accept Werner's "completely damning" picture, for the simple reason that "[i]t neither allows for the possibility of change, nor gives fair emphasis to the immediate and sometimes ephemeral benefits which Tammany offers in exchange for the right of imposing distant and abstract wrongs." It was one thing to look at the problem from the standpoint of an abstract political and moral ideology, Cowley observed; it was more complex and ambiguous to consider the matter from the voter's perspective of pragmatic politics.³³

It was Herbert Croly himself who suggested that Cowley review The Inquiring Mind by Zechariah Chafee, Jr., a Harvard Law School professor who specialized in stock-issues of liberalism like social injustice and the suppression of civil liberties. Cowley's review evinced a good deal of skepticism about political liberalism. He depicted Chafee as "a conservator of the existing order, a defender of the classes now in power," whose liberalism at first glance seemed to boil down to a mere sense of "fair play," but who, upon closer inspection, seemed unprepared to preserve the present system "if loss of liberty be the price." Chafee's "dynamic stability" led him into an impracticable tolerance for all sides as well as into "paradoxical" beliefs, Cowley noted: "He writes to prevent revolutions by giving the widest latitude to revolutionists. . . . He loves freedom so intensely that he is willing to enforce it, if necessary, by compulsory arbitration." With a good deal of bemused skepticism, Cowley gave a summary picture of the "particularly appealing" liberal "utopia" envisioned by Chafee:

It is a country in which individual efforts would be rewarded, in which inequalities would exist as a spur to ambition, but in which there would be justice for all. Citizens, protected from the bureaucracy, would be allowed to live as they pleased, and only free speech would be compulsory. The whole nation, acquiring, testing, rejecting or accepting new ideas, would live in the glow of dynamic tolerance. And all this would be

accomplished without revolution, perhaps without legislation; we need merely convert our administrators and judges to the liberal frame of mind.

There was, Cowley concluded, "one insurmountable difficulty" blocking the attainment of this liberal paradise: "true liberalism" would always be "a doctrine with few adherents." For all Chafee's noble idealism, Cowley remained cynical about the possibility of working social change through current American politics: "our civilization seems unable to produce ["dynamic" liberals] in sufficient numbers, and we are left blundering toward the polls to make our immemorial choice between men who believe in extremes and men who believe in nothing whatsoever."³⁴ In 1928 Cowley voted for Governor Alfred E. Smith.

On the wave of his enthusiasm for Cowley's high-quality reviews, Wilson solicited other articles: "we are in the market for all kinds of special sketches, satires, and whatnot. . . . The more amusing, the better." Cowley promptly obliged and wrote a satirical "Portrait of a Publisher," in which, expanding on the central idea of "Style and Fashion," he launched a more scathingly radical attack on the spirit of economic consumerism in publishing. Cowley's imaginary publisher, Mr. Pontevedra, conceived of publishing as "the business of marketing beauty," a luxury trade which appealed, not merely to his readers' aesthetic sense, but to their "desire for the exclusive" and their "hopes for social superiority." He established sumptuous offices in fashionable Fifth Avenue quarters and, conscious of the "arbitrary" correlation between price and value, began manufacturing books with an exclusive, snobbish appeal; in the end he had "transformed the publishing of books into the art of producing bibelots" and his books had assumed "the air of French hat-boxes or packages containing Viennese candy." Not merely did Pontevedra produce books, he also "manufactured" authors by insidiously controlling and commercially exploiting their attitudes, styles, indeed, their personalities: "Like a great designer among his mannequins, he gave each of his collaborators a character to be worn in public, like a gown." Mr. Pontevedra would begin a book by choosing a properly exquisite fabric for its binding, then settle on a matching subject with a guaranteed popular appeal and pick out a manipulable writer. Cowley ended his "Portrait of a Publisher" with the picture of a young struggling poet and essayist, the author of a series of studies in contemporary aesthetics,

buckling under the seductive pressures and promises of success held out by Pontevedra.

. . . Coggsweil [the young writer] hesitated. He objected not in the least to royalties or rewards, and yet, before entering this promised land, he turned to look back at the world of letters he was leaving. It was a difficult and complicated world, in which books grew slowly from within and were never tailored to meet a hasty order. It was a small world full of jealousies and arbitrary failures, a world in which success, in which popularity was distrusted. It was really a very difficult and unattractive world; young Coggsweil wondered why he had lived in it so long. And yet . . . Rising suddenly, he took Mr. Pontevedra's scarlet pen, and signed the contract which promised to glorify him as Florenz Ziegfeld glorifies the American Girl.³⁵

Cowley's satirical portrait, projected as part of a series which he hoped to turn into a book, showed an uncanny insight into the psychology of consumerism and displayed an early special knowledge of the economics of bookmaking. His critique of prevailing publishing standards, however, was too trenchant to suit the liberal tastes of the New Republic editors. Both Bliven and Croly deemed the article too transparently a portrait of Alfred Knopf and feared it would "bring down a lot of trouble on our heads." To Wilson, who had no power to overrule an editorial decision made by his seniors, fell the task of informing Cowley that his portrait could not be printed. "I feel now that I was very foolish to have encouraged you to write it," he wrote apologetically; "I might have foreseen this." He solicited other articles of the kind, with a promise of higher remuneration, and offered to pass on Cowley's portrait to Seward Collins of The Bookman.³⁶

Here was another article first ordered, then rejected, by The New Republic, and Cowley may well have felt he had again just cause for grievance. At any rate, he wrote only five more reviews for the magazine between the summer of 1928 and the fall of 1929, when he himself joined the editorial staff and could be assured of both payment and publication. In October 1928, however, it needed a personal plea from Herbert Croly to keep Cowley within the flock of New Republic contributors: "Everything that you write makes a particular appeal to me personally, and if we could arrange to have more of your MSS. in the paper it would, I am sure, strengthen the New Republic's service to its readers." Croly's personal

communication with Cowley was one of his last: shortly after, he suffered a massive stroke which forced him to abdicate from editorial responsibility and withdraw to California, where he died in May 1930. At the end of October 1928 Bliven, writing on behalf of Croly, assured Cowley once more that "the hospitality of the New Republic towards your work is just as high as you have been given to believe."³⁷ For the next twelve months, however, Cowley submitted the bulk of his articles to Irita Van Doren at the New York Herald Tribune, where he could be certain of unquestioning hospitality to his writings.

Meanwhile, "Portrait of a Publisher," which Cowley had hoped to sell for \$40, was given, gratis, to The New Masses, where it was hailed enthusiastically by the editor Michael Gold as a devastating critique of publishing under American capitalism: "Many thanks for the portrait of a publisher, or rather, Mr. Knopf-Liveright-Coward McCann," Gold wrote to Cowley; "It's damn good, and just what I hoped for. If we can get a few more as savage and photographic we will have so good a number it will lose us all our book ads, I hope. Damn it, why is there only one poor little magazine like ours in America to print this kind of thing. The country is really too smug for words. Anyone who talks out gets to feel like a kind of freak after a while." Gold hoped Cowley could suggest other potential contributors with "a really magnificent hate on the whole works" and urged him to visit "a left-wing needle trade workers camp" not too far north of Patterson, New York. Though Cowley was as yet far from sharing Gold's revolutionary political vision, he sympathized with his sentiments and the moral fervor of his letter; already, he was keeping one eye on what the radical literary left was doing. "Portrait of a Publisher" appeared in The New Masses of January 1929.³⁸

In Cowley's satirical vision Mr. Pontevedra had allowed neither time nor money to his translators. "Even the luxury trades have their economical moments," he had observed in his portrait. Beneath his irony, however, lay a serious grievance. Himself dependent for a large part of his income on translation fees, Cowley's concern with rendering foreign works into English went beyond matters of language, technique and the problem of cultural perspectives. From the first he not only pleaded for the recognition of translation as a serious art but early set himself up as a champion of the legal and economic rights of professional translators. When, in March 1928, he received an invitation to join the

Authors' Guild of the Authors' League of America, he seized upon the opportunity to draw attention to the "miserable situation" of translators and pointed to the "very great services" which the Guild could perform on their behalf. Speaking as one who counted himself among "the proletariat of literature," he argued that translators were "underpaid, under-recognized, and subjected to competition from American amateurs and English hacks." In a situation in which low publishers' fees ruined professional standards translators were badly in need of an "organization of their own." The Guild, he urged, could perform an invaluable service by drawing up a standard contract for translations, providing guarantees for the translator's share in English rights, protecting his interest in serial rights, and, in general, impressing upon publishers "the idea that they would gain by skilled work."³⁹

Cowley's plea was symptomatic of his growing concern with the social and economic position of American writers, artists and translators—the "workers at the writer's trade"—towards the end of the decade. His endeavor to attain professional recognition for translators was not an incidental one. Sixteen years later he conducted an acrimonious correspondence with, ironically, Alfred Knopf about his rendering of André Gide's Imaginary Interviews (1944)—a difficult job on which Cowley had spent more work than was justified by Knopf's meager remuneration of \$500—in which he sharply criticized the prestigious publisher's underestimation of the art of literary translation, and, in effect, was forced to reiterate the substance of his 1928 plea to the Authors' Guild: a sad reflection on the lack of improvement in the social and professional position of translators since the late 1920s. Another twenty years later, in 1964, he responded with enthusiasm to a proposal of Lewis Galantière for the formation of "a group of literary translators" and promised to bring to bear his influence as President of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.⁴⁰

The summer 1928 issue of transition featured another group manifestation by Cowley, Josephson and friends. In late 1927, working on his Zola biography in Paris, Josephson had met Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul and had so infected the editors of transition with his optimistic

proclamation that a new awakening of literary activity was about to take place in America that Jolas had asked him to become contributing editor of his magazine and to keep transition au courant of current developments in the United States. Jolas, very much taken with Joyce, Rimbaud, and Surrealism, appears to have hoped that the allegiance of Josephson and Cowley, whose Broom and Secession had early published an impressive array of Dadaists and Surrealists, might signal a broader American shift to the sort of neo-romantic subjectivism he was propagating in transition. His magazine, moreover, had been launched with high hopes for American literature--there were in America "unmistakable signs of artistic awakening," Jolas had proclaimed in the opening issue⁴¹--and transition thirteen, accordingly, was an "American Number," featuring work by, amongst others, Berenice Abbott, Archibald MacLeish, Gertrude Stein, Cowley (his poem "Seven O'Clock"), William Carlos Williams, Man Ray, Kay Boyle, Laura Riding, John Herrmann, Murray Godwin, Paul Bowles and Katherine Anne Porter. In addition, there was a twenty-page group manifestation by Cowley & Co entitled "New York: 1928."

The project had been initiated by Josephson, who, even before his return to America, had issued a call for joint action in letters to his friends, explaining his purpose was to demonstrate to Europeans and Americans abroad the infeasibility of expatriation and the need to confront the reality of America at home. Back in New York, Josephson and Cowley organized another all-day writing session comparable to the ones which had given birth to Aesthete 1925 and the Little Review manifestation two years before. On a day in January 1928 Cowley and Josephson, joined by Brown, Burke, Coates and three pseudonymous ghosts resuscitated from the past--"Will Bray," "Walter S. Hankel" and "H. L. Mannikin"--had reconvened in Suites 1711-1712 of the Hotel Chelsea, where, between jokes and bantering arguments, they had hammered out the collective statement which, Jolas had vainly hoped, would express a trend of current literary opinion in America sympathetic to transition. The group manifestation, Josephson reported to Jolas, had been "executed against great odds." Proceeding in the manner of a court deposition, he declared that "although America suggests mass life primarily, individuals seem to be exasperated to greater egotism, and, unlike our Parisian friends, work with difficulty in a common cause; that all of the men contributing had taken a day off from their jobs; that some wanted to

drink and make merry in hedonistic style rather than write; that some wouldn't come at all; that one man kept telephoning all day, etc. A great many Meisterstuecke were ferociously torn up after a day of intense excitement."⁴²

"New York: 1928" was a miscellany of satirical pieces of verse, prose and mock-advertisements which owed much in spirit to Aesthete 1925, but also showed that, for all its witty and ironic contentiousness, a shift in attitude was taking place among the participants. Indeed, Josephson told Jolas, the time had been "extremely inopportune" for a group manifestation, many members feeling that "they really did not feel the same grievances" they had expressed in Aesthete 1925. Among the few features harking back to the lambasting mode of the earlier manifestoes was Cowley's poem "Tar Babies;" it satirized those "talented" poets whose poetic barings of the beauty of their souls were in reality but ill-disguised attempts at sexual conquest, who obsequiously kissed "the hands of the great," and who slickly and suavely complained about the manners of critics "in a style that creeps across / your cheeks like a barber's fingers." A series of satirical annotations to the poem contained an exposure, written some four years before, of the literary trappings and "white shirt-front of modernism" and attacked the logrolling practices of literary journalists like Floyd Dell and, in particular, Harry Hansen, whose "critical morals," Cowley suggested, existed "no more than do sexual morals among the Papuan aborigines."⁴³

A number of mock-advertisements from the "Prince Llan Agency" similarly persisted in the spirit of earlier attacks on Mencken's American Mercury and "the Waldo Frank school" of Freudian fiction, but in general the target of satire had shifted and underneath the overall tone of zaniness a serious purpose of criticism shone through. The critique, in effect, had a double aim: savage and seriocomic attacks on notorious expatriates like Pound and McAlmon were counterbalanced by scathing satires on the insipidity of American culture in an age of mass production and consumerism. Much of the project was an ironically enacted ritual of exorcism of all those forces in contemporary mass culture--standardization, materialism, "the Voice of the Machine, the Tyranny of the Mob"--which the group experienced as antagonistic to the possibility of art and the literary life. Robert Coates contributed a wistful, surrealistic satire about a salesman who, teetering on the brink of

mental collapse, desperately tried to sell the secret of salvation and success to anonymous faces behind anonymous tenement doors, but was finally overcome by the disorienting, estranging nature of life under capitalist consumerism. Josephson exposed the dogmatic fallacy of "the positivistic notion of perpetual advance or evolution toward perfection" which he saw underlying the self-confident proclamations of the Ford Motor Company that America stood at the dawn of a new industrial and commercial era. Only five years earlier, in Broom, he had celebrated Henry Ford as the technological wizard of the new America. Under the pseudonym of "Will Bray" he now attacked the psychology and economy of consumerism, and, posing as the prophet-like founder of a new lodge of "Knights of Press-Agency," ironically criticized the artist's subservience to machine-age America: "The poets and prophets of industry hold mightier seats of power than the Petrarchs, the Miltons, the Bossuets of an older day. They bend their minds to rendering obsolete tomorrow that which was in usage today; to transform human behaviour overnight, to supplant natural pleasures with mechanical ones." Now was the time, he advanced, for the "strategic power" of this "intellectual class," so "obviously the oppressed class of today," to be fully exploited: intellectuals must "unite and prepare themselves to taking over control of society in the future," so that new ideals might be propagated and new wants be "conceived in the interest of man, rather than in the interests of purposeless machines."⁴⁴

Revolutionary embers were smoldering underneath the tone of mocking banter, to be politicized in the future. Cowley, in mock-apocalyptic fashion, envisioned the imminent revolution as already having taken place and commemorated the epochal event in a poetic "Tablet" which opened the group manifesto:

TABLET

THERE WAS NO DICTATOR--THE REVOLUTION CHOSE RATHER TO FUNCTION THROUGH EXISTING AGENCIES--LEGISLATIVE RIGHTS WERE USURPED BY ACTORS' EQUITY--THE ADVERTISING MEN'S BRANCH OF THE AMERICAN LEGION BECAME A COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROCEEDED TO EXECUTIONS--THE MAYOR WAS THROWN UNDER THE WHEELS OF THE SUBWAY--THE POLICE FORCE WAS JAILED--THE COMMISSIONER OF THE PORT WAS DROWNED--POETS IN DROVES WERE HANGED TO THE LAMPPOSTS UNDER THE SMALL BRIGHT LEMON-COLORED STARS--THE STREETS WERE LUMINOUS DURING THE EXECUTION WITH RED ORANGE YELLOW BLUE GREEN INDIGO AND DAYLIGHT BULBS FURNISHED BY COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK

EDISON COMPANY--BROADWAY WAS CLOSED TO TRAFFIC--AT THE CORNER
OF ALL EVEN NUMBERED STREETS WERE NIGGER ORCHESTRAS--OFTEN WE
DANCED NAKED AT THE BURNING OF A CHURCH--UNDER RED SKIES--IN
THE GUTTERS FLOWING WITH URINE--BLOOD--AND WINE

--Malcolm Cowley--⁴⁵

A substantial part of the contents of "New York: 1928" was given over to a bitter renunciation of expatriation as a mode of literary escapism by a band of writers who, excepting Burke, had themselves once lived and worked in Europe but who now, with the zeal and vengeance of new converts to nativism, turned upon those who had remained abroad. The manifesto, indeed, was shot through with the notions of "exile" and "return." A group of occasional poems written by Slater Brown, and including his famous couplet on McAlmon, set the tone of the attack. Two sample specimens read:

FRY TWO!

The vulgarity of these United States
Is something every Exile hates.
In Paris, though, they turn the table
And act as vulgar as they are able.

WE SEE THEM EVERY THREE YEARS

Exiles oft return to the lands of their mother
With their hats in one hand and their palms in the other.

It was Josephson, however, who put his personal stamp on the whole manifesto by its final feature, an "Open Letter to Mr. Ezra Pound, and the Other 'Exiles.'" He attacked the American expatriates as a band of "forlorn wanderers" and "fugitives," who vainly had sought salvation in the "hollow land" of Europe, turned their backs upon America as "an intolerable land of boobery and buncombe," and proceeded to surrender to "an ingratiating and inexpensive epicureanism." For a while, he granted, he and his friends had gone "adventuring along the same trails," but in the end they had grown "tired" of their "aesthetic wanderlust" and come to "demand constants." Now, they were "once more" concerned with "the conditions of existence" and were eager to exchange "the passive principle of flight and exile" for "an active principle for the artist." Josephson's attack struck at the heart of the aesthetic program of "The

Revolution of the Word" behind transition: he dismissed Pound's elitist, privatist art as "a genteel, bourgeois sport" and denounced "the whole game of 'making words play with each other'" as a form of "Futurism prolonged." Europe, Josephson proclaimed, was doomed to go America's way; its "unrestricted individualism" would inevitably give way to a form of social "collectivism," its "genteel milieu" be submerged in "the new mass society," its "obsolete type of political idealism" lose out to the realization that man had become "an economic animal." Such an aesthetic orientation as Pound's had shot its bolt and Josephson urged Pound to "return, to America, whom you long for, no doubt, in the jealous way of lovers! Return!" America might be, he granted, "a cruel mistress," but one which held "an irresistible fascination" for the artist, whose obligation it was to confront American reality at home and try to stem the tide of materialism with the power of the mind:

We may become centurions of Soap for a time, pro-consuls of hydro-electricity; we may sing before the microphone; dance before the television box. A period of training, a phase of discipline will elapse, and in the end the force of mind will leaven this society which has known only material preoccupations. The dispersed and scattered beauty of automobiles and spotless kitchens and geometrical office buildings will have been organized and given direction through our understanding of the ensemble. A spiritual equilibrium will have been reached, in which we shall have been active factors.⁴⁶

Eugene Jolas was disappointed in the group manifesto, which in his eyes fell barely short of a call for revolutionary social action. In an accompanying "glossary" he grudgingly admitted that the "critical categories" worked out in "New York: 1928" were to be accepted as "an important document of the new American spirit, although one may disagree with them." At heart, indeed, Jolas did not believe that "the poet's task [was] to use whatever force there is in him for the dissemination of subversive ideas," as he wrote in another place. "I regard it as a waste of time for the poet to let himself be deviated from his most important business--that of creating." In the following issue of transition he probed further into the vexing question of expatriation and conducted an "inquiry" among American expatriates into their reasons for living in Europe.⁴⁷

Josephson's thoughts on the issue of the artist's position in the

urban-industrial America of the late 1920s and his perception of the inutility of expatriation had been sharpened by his recent revisit to France and his falling under the spell of Zola. He had been quick to formulate his thoughts and by January 1928, the time of the group session at the Hotel Chelsea, had arrived at an intellectual stance which was more radical and more articulate than Cowley's, but pointed the direction in which Cowley, too, was more slowly moving. As several of his articles had indicated, in the early half of 1928 Cowley, like Josephson, was beginning to feel increasingly out of sorts with the political, economic and cultural situation in America. They rejected "escape" into expatriate life as a viable alternative, were becoming convinced of the writer's duty to actively strive to affect society through his ideas, but as yet refrained from translating their dissatisfactions into political action. It was symptomatic of Cowley's wavering position at the time that his critique of the consumerist "styling" of books in The New Republic of April 1928 appeared simultaneously with his translations of Paul Valéry's essays "Pure Poetry" and "The Future of Literature: Will It Be a Sport?"

Later that year Cowley obliquely returned to the subject of literary exile in a front-page review of the diary of Dostoevsky's wife, Anna Grigorevna, for the New York Herald Tribune. In a much expanded version the article later became the section "Historical Parallel" in Exile's Return. In 1928 it fitted in with an awakening interest in Russia and the possibility (or impossibility) of culture under the Soviet experiment; more particularly, it explored the parallelism and divergence between the wave of Russian expatriation after the middle of the nineteenth century and that of American writers in the 1910s and 1920s. The case of Dostoevsky, Cowley advanced, was "of special interest to Americans," since it bore directly on "a question that troubles the majority of our writers. It is the problem of provincialism and expatriation." The problem in the Russia of the 1860s had admittedly been "far more acute than it has ever been in America," but there were pertinent correspondences. Among the Russian haute bourgeoisie the Russian language itself had become "a neglected, almost a foreign tongue." Writers had been inclined to adopt gallicized or anglicized idioms, becoming in effect "workmen struggling with half-foreign tools," much in the manner of contemporary American writers who hesitated "whether to use the English expressions they learned in school or the words they hear on the

streets." Writing with an acuteness of perception that could only come from personal experience, Cowley was groping his way toward the theory of deracination he was to develop fully in Exile's Return:

. . . the members of what might be called the literary middle class led a troubled life: their economic position was uncertain, and almost all the intellectual styles they followed came to them from abroad. If they stayed at home, they had the feeling of being provincials. If they emigrated, many of their troubles were ended: they lived nearer the source of literary fashions; they lived in an atmosphere that seemed more favorable to art; they lived more cheaply; and finally they acquired a certain distinction at home, a cachet derived from the very fact of their expatriation. On the other hand, they lost the close contact with their own people . . . they were uprooted from the soil.

In October 1927, proposing to Bellamy Partridge to write an article on the subject for Brentano's Book Chat, Cowley had distinguished between expatriates like Eliot and Pound, who became "completely denationalized" and wrote about "Europe or the past," and those like Hemingway, Wescott or Louis Bromfield, who turned "nostalgically toward America." Writing for the Herald Tribune, he similarly distinguished between two "generations" of Russian expatriates, symbolized by Dostoevsky and Turgenev, whose meeting in Baden-Baden in the late 1860s Cowley compared to an imaginary encounter between Ernest Hemingway and T. S. Eliot: the older writer had "definitely cast his fortunes with Europe" and "spoke rather coldly of the homeland," while the effect of expatriation on the younger writer had been "to emphasize his hatred of Europe, his mystical faith in Russia, and every national element in his character." Exile had turned Dostoevsky into a "patriot" ex patria: his novel The Possessed had begun much in the spirit of a Sinclair Lewis satire on provincialism--"Better still, it might have been written by a young American in Montparnasse as he sat at a marble-topped table covered with coffee stains and thought of his own home with contempt not wholly unmixed with affection"--but, unlike Lewis, Dostoevsky's "love for Russia" was "wholly conscious:" he had, in a manner, "invented the Russian soul." "Obviously," Cowley concluded his review, "when a nation becomes conscious of its soul, it thereby ceases to fear provincialism." The implications remained unstated, but correlated with the more radical urgings to Ezra Pound which Josephson had voiced in transition: it was

the duty of the American writer to return from exile, in spirit if not in body, and to help create the American "soul." Only then could the "burden of inferiority," as Cowley put it in Exile's Return, be lifted and the conviction gain ground that "American themes, like other themes, had exactly the dignity that talent could lend them."⁴⁸

Shortly before participating in the group session at the Hotel Chelsea Cowley had finished a long essay on the slave trade, a historical subject which combined his taste for daring, romantic, picturesque adventure with a dawning awareness of the cruelty and human expense which resulted from the inexorable workings of an unjust economic system. While reading about the subject for his earlier commission to write a series of articles on the trade for The Saturday Evening Post Cowley had come across a dusty volume in the New York public library; upon examination, it turned out to be the fascinating memoirs of a virtually forgotten slave trader, Théophile Conneau, as told to a then prominent Baltimore journalist in 1854. Cowley had managed to rouse the interest of the publishers Albert and Charles Boni in reissuing the book in modern dress and in the summer of 1928 appeared Adventures of an African Slaver, Being the True Account of the Life of Captain Theodore Canot, Trader in Gold, Ivory & Slaves on the Coast of Guinea: His Own Story as told in the Year 1854 to Brantz Mayer & Now Edited with an Introduction by Malcolm Cowley. Beautifully illustrated by Miguel Covarrubias, the book stood first of all as a labor of love and a feat of disinterested historical scholarship on the part of the editor. He had poured months of research into the introduction and epilogue to the book and carefully reedited Mayer's "majestic sentences" which, he observed in his essay, "curl their length like serpents over the page. Always he found a moral to adorn their tails. His style is turgid, bombastic, sometimes ungrammatical, and generally euphemistic. . . . And yet, it has a dignity which is not unappealing in these days of mountebank writers and simple declarative sentences." Cowley's concern for style remained a first priority--his own authoritative historical introduction, a model of its kind, was uncommonly well-written--but he also cleverly pointed up the "romantic ghoulishness," as one reviewer put it, implicit in the illegal slave trade, an aspect which gave Canot's

account some of the appeal of a picaresque novel. Cowley, indeed, had added to the romantic glamor of his subject by omitting many of Mayer's moralizings, by playing up Canot as "a more interesting Trader Horn," and by emphasizing his reputation as "Captain Gunpowder," a phrase which occurred only once in the manuscript. But he had also drawn attention to the extremes of injustice fostered by an economic system of human exploitation which resembled nothing so much as "a hothouse in which cruelty flourished, like some cancerous plant of the tropics."⁴⁹

Cowley early displayed an uncanny feeling for what books would do well in the literary market, an intuition which would serve him well in his later capacity as publisher's editor and literary advisor. Adventures of an African Slaver was hailed enthusiastically by the reviewers, most of whom followed lines set out in Cowley's introduction. The Dial gave the book only brief mention, but granted that "the modern editor" had done "an excellent job" and wondered why, since this book was "a success," "shoddy like Trader Horn" should also succeed. Harrison Smith wrote a lengthy, front-page review of the book for the Herald Tribune, in which he gave free reign to his admiration for Cowley's resurrection of the forgotten "Mr. Gunpowder," and in a personal letter admitted he was "sore as the devil" that he had not risen to the bait when Cowley had proposed the book to Harcourt, Brace, before carrying it to the Boni brothers: "After this when you say a book is good, you will find us hot on the trail." He had not appreciated, Smith wrote, "just how magnificent a subject" Cowley had been working on and seriously urged him to take up again his own book on the slave trade. The history of the Atlantic slave runners, indeed, fitted in with the current interest in primitivism and black culture as modes of being which had remained impervious to the encroachments upon modern, sophisticated white civilization by science and technology. Contemporary writers, in rebellion against the realities of a machine-age culture, for some years had been seeking out Negro jazz clubs from Harlem to Paris, hoping to recapture a part of the Negro's supposedly pure, vital and untainted wisdom. A book by Cowley on the slave trade, Smith believed, might "transfer the interest in the negro from Harlem to Africa and the West Indies." There was "dynamite" in such a book, Smith was convinced, but Cowley, though he got a \$500 advance, did not return to the subject until over thirty years later.⁵⁰ Smith's hospitality to Cowley's endeavors, however, would shortly bear fruit in

different ways.

For the moment, Harcourt, Brace had to make do with Cowley's translation of Catherine-Paris, a third novel by Princess Marthe Bibesco, French-Rumanian authoress of aristocratic birth. The novel, which appeared in late May 1928, painted a portrait of life in the international milieux of the East-European aristocracy on the eve of the war, as seen through the ironic eyes of a witty, intellectual girl raised in Paris, but, as most reviewers noted, it was less a novel of character than a hymn to the City of Light. Cowley's rendering of the book, which again received wide critical attention, was welcomed as, "for American readers, a perfect translation." Lewis Galantière spoke representative words of praise in the Herald Tribune: "I hope Catherine-Paris will be read widely, for it is the product of a fine analytical intelligence, an exquisite sensibility and a superior gift for the writing of delicately cadenced prose. As concerns this last, we owe our appreciation of it to Mr. Cowley, of course, from whom we have learned to look for irreproachable translations."⁵¹

While, in the wake of the transition manifesto, Josephson was preparing to embark on a tour of several large Midwestern cities to write a series of articles on living and working conditions in urban slums and industries--trying to "get out of the Ivory Tower . . . and learn at first hand what sort of country we were living in"--Cowley in his own way undertook to investigate the social changes taking place in America in the late 1920s, but, characteristically, turned back to his native rural region around Belsano to see how it and its inhabitants were holding up under the advance of mass production and technology. In August 1928 he spent two weeks in Belsano and reported on his observations in an elegiac prose tribute to the country of his childhood in Harper's Monthly Magazine. After thirteen years of virtually unbroken absence, Cowley found his home region socially and physically changed in fashions which, in part, seemed "typical of a whole cycle in American rural life." At the instigation of his Harper's editor he had played up the representative nature of the changes and his essay was ambitiously subtitled "A Study in American Evolution." He described the article to Burke, somewhat self-deprecatingly, as "a collection of nostalgic rhetoric with a few noble periods, partly inspired by [Maurice] Barrès's Les Déracinés, a noble book" he had been reading in preparation of a translation of another

Barrès novel. The notion of deracination and its applicability to the experiences of his own generation was already much on Cowley's mind and infused his "salute in prose" to Belsano. The essay combined a rich feeling of lyrical wistfulness for a lost past with a painful awareness of the havoc wrought by industrial capitalism. It opened with an evocation of Cowley's native soil as he had left it in 1915: its natural resources of timber exhausted, its deer driven away, its trout streams polluted, its young men faced with the impossible options of becoming imprisoned in a stunting, puritan life or of growing into "landless men, trees without roots--the homeless peasants of the machine." For farmers and miners, he recalled, life had then been a tragic battle against poverty and starvation, in which social feeling was "almost lacking" and the spirit of a rugged individualism still strong; what had counterbalanced such "unsocial harshness" was "a fund of local patriotism" attached to tribal "totems" like trout, white pines and deer.⁵²

Returning in 1928 Cowley, contrary to his expectations, noticed many signs of physical improvements--increased population, occupied rather than abandoned farms, well-kept roads, a new brick school--but also found changes in social attitude: a strict and stunting Protestantism had lost influence to a new liberalism in manners and morals, while the "old" individualism had given way to a "new collectivism" and a responsible awareness of belonging to a local community. Though one of the disturbing side effects of the new spirit had been a widespread conservatism and unconcealed membership of the Ku Klux Klan, by 1928 the Klan seemed "practically dead"--"The forces which produced the Klan were perhaps as strong as ever," Cowley observed, "but fortunately the group instinct and the spirit of regionalism were being directed toward less questionable ends," such as a better enforcement of forest and game laws and, in general, a greater degree of communal supervision. As a result, forest fires had diminished, the white pines were slowly returning, deer and trout had become again as profuse as in Cowley's grandfather's day. The country itself no longer lived in the past, but, though its economic problems remained unsolved, had "found salvation of a sort:" the young men no longer migrated to the city but, loyal to the region, stayed "at home."

Cowley's article was informed with a cautious optimism for rural

America. "Our nation is much less standardized than its critics like to believe; they generally overlook the importance of our regionalistic forces, not all of which are losing their power." Regions which were capable of holding the "stubborn loyalty" of their inhabitants, and rural communities which managed to tap the necessary resources of local pride and patriotism, could very often solve apparently unconquerable economic problems, Cowley believed. With the young men staying and the aged leaving to milder climates, his country was becoming "what America is always supposed to be, and very seldom is--a land of youth." Cowley's confident hopes for regional America, however, were counterbalanced by a nostalgic realization of what had been lost: "I was glad to see the village improved; I admired the new spirit of collectivism less for itself than for its effects; but still I could not help looking backwards. My country had once possessed a tragic power, a sort of cold majesty that was melting in this more genial age." He ended his "salute" with an appropriately elegiac evocation of his childhood past and concluded affirmatively by proclaiming a faith in the future that would prove unwarranted soon enough:

The history of my country, like that of so many American districts, and perhaps like that of the nation as a whole, had been a slow exhausting of resources. The men in coonskin caps, the fierce Scotch-Irish of the frontier, had driven away the larger game. Their sons, who cleared the fields, had cut almost the last of the virgin forest, and the next two generations had worn out the arable soil. My country today was fed with minerals, but the coal in time would be exhausted, and then? . . . I had no fear for what would come. The hills had shown a power of recuperation: the trees were creeping back into the desolate choppings where fire had raged; the fields were resting for other tasks under a blanket of white-top and goldenrod. The people, too, were preparing for the future; they felt a common aim; they would find other resources inevitably.

Out of the village, borne by the low winds that precede a storm, came the ring of hammers from the carpenters at work on the new school.⁵³

For all its ending on a naively optimistic note not unworthy of the propagandistic pictures of a golden future dawning in the Soviet Union which Cowley would contemplate a few years hence, this was not the voice of an incipient revolutionary persuaded of the need to change or overthrow a viciously corruptive capitalist system. Rather, it was the voice of one who firmly believed in the indestructible resiliency of the

regionalist spirit, in conservationism, in the recuperative powers of nature, in the durability of the old pioneer spirit directed towards a new civic collectivism on a small, local scale. Cowley, as he avowed in 1984, would always be "a Little American" at heart, "a partriotic native of some American neighborhood," whether Blacklick Township in Cambria County, Pennsylvania, or, as it would be for the larger part of his life, Sherman, Connecticut. "I like and love America," Cowley affirmed fifty-six years after writing his country elegy, "but not in any abstract fashion, having learned to distrust abstractions. I like the people, or most of them, I like the landscapes when they aren't defaced, and I feel at home in almost any of the small communities in which Americans flock together. . . . I detest superhighways, shopping malls, Standard Metropolitan Areas, chemical pollution, and international struggles for power. . . . Perhaps the America I love best is the country of my boyhood, with open fields to run barefoot in and never a chainlink fence in days of travel over dirt roads." Regionalism, a harkening back in spirit to an older, more innocent, rural America, would always remain the moral touchstone, in matters both literary and political. Even at the height of his radicalism, Cowley would continue to judge the social and political well-being of the nation by its capacity to provide a decent life for its small or marginal farmers, just as he would measure the feasibility of plans for social change by its effects on the literary profession and the lives of American writers.⁵⁴

In the summer of 1928, shortly after returning from his trip to Belsano where he had written a first draft of his article, Cowley had sent his "congratulations in excelsis" to Allen Tate, whose first book of poems he had just received, and commented: "I think that you are fundamentally, like me, a regionalist poet. Your years in New York--and my years also--are only an extended episode. Eventually," he added prophetically, "I think we shall both retire, you to Tennessee, I to Cambria County, and continue a friendship in letters and visits." Immediately on receiving Cowley's letter, Tate replied: "I have always believed you were a regionalist poet because you are a good poet. The good in all poetry has a provincial origin, no matter how much it may be disguised. The contemporary menace to poetry lies in the complex causes that force us into an exile from which we can't return." The trouble with an expatriate poet like Eliot, Tate observed in confirmation of Cowley's

beliefs, was that he had "dried up his native roots" and expected to "renew them with the urine of St. Thomas."⁵⁵ For the moment Cowley and Tate seemed to be moving along parallel regionalist lines; the underlying differences in their conceptions of regionalism came to the surface soon enough, as Tate began moving towards Agrarianism, a mode of regionalism Cowley was not prepared to follow or endorse.

Tate had for some time been struggling to define his personal relationship to the traditions of the Old South--it was in 1928 that he finished his "Ode to the Confederate Dead"--and later that year he carried his personal dilemmas with him to Paris. On April 15, 1929, writing from the City of Light, he confessed to Cowley that he could no longer suppress his "views, or emotions" on the significance of "the late War between the States," as he had done from his eighteenth to his twenty-fifth: "they are not very comfortable; but I have given in to them simply because they are mine, and I can't pretend to believe in any others." In early June Cowley spoke out against the conservative implications of Tate's evolving Agrarianism, differentiating it from his own, more purely local, conception of regionalism, and revealing in the process that his rising social consciousness was aimed at correcting the nefarious industrialist present rather than at recapturing a way of life rooted in the traditions of the past:

. . . your regionalism, since it extends to eleven states and a whole civilization, is almost a form of nationalism. . . . I myself should approve of it more completely if it were confined to a country or a township. The culture of the old South, like the culture of Athens, was confined to a very small ruling class. It was surprisingly high . . . and at the same time somewhat sterile; only in Poe, an outcast from the ruling class, did it find a satisfactory expression. Since Kant's Critique of Practical Reason, most of us have been obsessed with an idea of social justice--not to employ human beings as instruments--and I doubt that a purely aristocratic society will ever again be possible. . . .

As an article of unreasoned faith, faith in the present is pragmatically effective.⁵⁶

In reply, Tate insisted that his position was really "much closer" to Cowley's than his friend imagined: "The question of regionalism, known usually as local autonomy, is not sectional. There is too much made of the Old South, for it is no more gone than the Old East, or Old Pennsylvania. The Civil War brought the defeat of independent agrarian

communities everywhere. It seems to me that the Old South may be made into a convenient symbol of the good life for everybody." More than a year later, after Tate had joined eleven other Southerners in taking a public stand against industrialism, Cowley, meanwhile an editor on The New Republic, promised to review the Southern Agrarian Symposium I'll Take My Stand (1930) in person, rather than assign it to a Northern reviewer whose "city background would make him unable to treat it justly." "I have a lot to say about it," he announced: "My own answer to the Southern agrarian dilemma is localized machines, operated by electricity, which can change the small plantation once more into an economic unit and fight the factory system with some chance for success. . . . But the machines would have to be introduced cautiously, without draining the country of money as tractors have done: tractors don't have colts and don't make manure." Over the next few years Cowley and Tate continued to debate their different conceptions of regionalism as a viable alternative to the crisis in industrial capitalism. Though they would be led into opposite political directions, on a deeper level than the political their literary friendship remained intact, despite recurring frictions; clinging to "the notion that literature was more important than region or politics," both could remain committed to the establishment of a "republic of letters," an ideal which originated in their shared experiences in the 1920s. In the early 1930s Cowley would pay several longer visits to the Tates in Tennessee, write part of Exile's Return at Cloverlands, and become friendly with many of the Southern Agrarians, including Andrew Lytle and Robert Penn Warren. As Warren emphasized in 1982, Cowley would be one of the very few radicalized New York liberals who actually took the trouble to come down South and seek out the Agrarians in their own den. In 1973, contemplating the decline of farming in his part of Connecticut, Cowley acknowledged, in a half-serious, half-mocking spirit, his feeling of kinship with Tate: "I'm an agrarian, a defeated agrarian. Except for the accident of being born in Pennsylvania, I too would be an anti-Slavery Southern Nationalist."⁵⁷

Social life on Tory Hill was gay and hectic during the summer of 1928.

The novelist Nathan Asch, then a resident in "the Tates' part" of Addie Turner's house, recalled how "we, the writers rejected by New York booming with the market of the twenties, consoled ourselves with the gaiety we could engender ourselves." Slater and Susan Brown threw their annual Fourth of July party, with lots of dancing, revelry and liquor from the local bootleggers, and there were other festive occasions like the whirling birthday party thrown on July 21 by Hart Crane, who had just returned from a catastrophic six months' stay in California from which he never fully recovered; that summer his friends for the first time began to recognize the physiological symptoms of the early stages of alcoholism. "Everybody speaks of that summer in terms of parties," Cowley recalled. Not all was frenzied revelry, however: "What I remember with more pleasure are the long, intensely quiet mornings, the games of croquet at the Browns', where we gathered on Sunday afternoon, the weekday afternoons spent fishing by myself or walking in the woods with Hart, and the talks about poets and poetry." Crane was trying hard to persuade Cowley to collect his poems into a book and both men saw each other almost daily to lay the groundwork for Blue Juniata. On top of his regular reviewing Cowley had also embarked on a translation of Maurice Barrès's novel La Colline Inspirée, a job which Matthew Josephson, temporarily a book editor at Macaulay's, had helped him secure; Josephson was doing other friends similar services and would be instrumental in publishing first novels by Robert Coates and Hamilton Basso, as well as Flowering Judas by Katherine Anne Porter, the latter published through his mediation by Harcourt, Brace.⁵⁸

Cowley's writing and translating were proceeding slowly. At the end of July, three days after Crane's birthday party, he complained to Burke that "too many people have been dropping in to see us" and that, as a result, he was doing "little work." "I really descend to the depths of poverty every summer," he wailed; "it's my idle and unhappy season; the other seasons are busy and unhappy." Crane, meanwhile, was growing restless in the Turner house, where the presence of Nathan Asch and his wife "so acted upon his nerves that he drank, drank," Cowley reported to Tate; in August, with Cowley departing for Belsano, Crane moved to New York, where he found refuge for a while in the Cowley apartment on Sutton Place: "He now has a job in a New York advertising agency, and is much calmer. He intends to spend Labor Day in the country," Cowley wrote to

Tate on August 28. Crane remained a source of solicitous concern for his friends, who commonly took his transgressions with a generous dose of humorous tolerance, but were growing increasingly worried. Once, after a bibulous evening at the Browns', Cowley and Peggy woke up to find Crane lying face downward between them, embracing both. It was one of the less violent and more tender manifestations of the erratic behavior of a poet already irredeemably lost.⁵⁹

On August 24 Cowley turned thirty. He had contemplated writing a poem on the occasion and told Burke he had already "thought up some melancholy lines to contrast with a jovial metre." In his notebook he was less lighthearted and entered a serious stock-taking letter to himself, reviewing his literary progress over the last two years and sounding a warning against personal pride:

Epistle to Malcolm Cowley. Two years ago the words "Success" and "Failure" were an obsession with you. They are no longer. You are no longer afraid of being a never-was; you are terrified of becoming a has-been. . . .

Two years ago you read in that son of a bitch [J. B.] Watson's book [Behaviorism (1925)] that a writer's thirtieth year was decisive behavioristically. If he continued to write for the same magazines at the same rate of pay, he would probably continue to continue writing for the same magazines at the same rate of pay. This last year has been my thirtieth, and you have risen, not vastly, but enough to give you infinite hopes. You need those infinite hopes, which you endeavor to translate into possibilities, and some of which you may render into facts. Perfectly American, you are most pleased by receiving large checks. You fancy yourself as a businessman. On this side you are in more than a little danger.

I wonder if people realize your tremendous conceit, your contempt for most other people (except for your friends, whom you respect partly out of your own vanity), your new appetite for praise? . . . On this side, too, there is a danger, tremendous danger that you will lose the clearness of vision, the judgment of motives on which you depend, in your pride. . . . This pride is essential to you; without it, you are only a hack with a style--something perhaps a little worse than a hack without a style. This pride enables you to form projects, forces you to carry some of them out, and will preserve--perhaps even create--a sort of integrity you prize now more than ever. But if your pride continues to increase as it has during the last year, it will give you all sorts of false values, it will prevent you from judging your effect on others, it will open you to acquaintanceship with stupid people, who are certain to destroy the ones they cultivate, it will make you into an ass. Careful, Malcolm.⁶⁰

Some time before, suffering from a feeling that his writings and actions were too dependent on the contingencies of circumstance and inspiration, Cowley had begun to make a concerted effort to take his own career in hand and direct it towards self-chosen aims. In late 1927 he had taken the private decision which, with Crane's active help, would lead to the publication of Blue Juniata two years later: "From now on," he had written in his notebook, "I'm going to endeavor to put my poems before the public. I've hidden them so long that I've almost lost faith in them." The decision signaled a change in his attitude to writing poetry: henceforth he would consciously set himself a subject, then aim to write a poem on it. In later years he would come to realize that such extreme constructionism rarely led to good poetry and that "real poems did not come from a deliberately chosen subject; they had to be waited for; they could not be willed into being." The problem, he acknowledged with greater perspicacity in A Second Flowering, was "how to achieve a continued readiness to accept and shape the poems when they did appear," to strike a subtle balance between spontaneous creation and calculated revision. A poet needed to preserve "an inner monologue, a trickle of words directed to an inner audience, which silently approves the words or demands that they be repeated and revised."⁶¹ In the late 1920s, however, Cowley approached his poems much in the spirit of Poe and Valéry, as first of all a conscious problem in poetic composition, in the creation of an effect.

As a first step in his new poetic program he set out to write a poem on Sacco and Vanzetti, admittedly a subject on which he had "thought little and written nothing." He methodically outlined the poem in his notebook in November 1927--beginning, as usual, with a passage of poetic prose later recast into metrical patterns and stanzaic forms--and commented: "An easy conception, but difficult of execution; if I succeed, it will be my first manufactured poem, the portal to years in which every poem must be manufactured. Frenzy, adieu!" The poem underwent further polishing and revision before it appeared as "For St. Bartholomew's Day" in The Nation of August 22, 1928, to commemorate the execution in Boston of the two Italian anarchists exactly a year before. The poem registered the belated impact of a public tragedy on Cowley's sensibility, but, for all its moral and political indignation, left the impression that an artificially worked-up emotion underlay its stirring rhetoric of revolt

and disenfranchisement:

Then die!

Outside the prison gawk
the crowds that you will see no more.
A door slams shut behind you. Walk
with turnkeys down a corridor
smelling of lysol, through the gates
to where a drunken sheriff waits.

. . .

A doctor sneezes. A chaplain maps
the routes of heaven. You mount the chair.
A jailer buckles tight the straps
like those which aviators wear.
The surgeon makes a signal.

Die!

lost symbols of our liberty.

Beyond the chair, beyond the bars
of day and night, your path lies free;
yours is an avenue of stars:
march on, O dago Christs, while we
march on to spread your name abroad
like ashes in the winds of God.⁶²

The execution of two men widely believed to be innocent of the crime with which they had been charged, following upon seven years of imprisonment and legal investigations shot through with racial and political prejudice, was the one political cause of the late 1920s which brought writers and intellectuals of disparate political plumage together for a common purpose. For the fiery radical as well as the judicious liberal, the affair became a crucial challenge to one's moral and political conscience, one which did not allow for passive bystanding but compelled emergence from one's personal isolation. Writers like Mike Gold, Dorothy Parker, John Dos Passos, Katherine Anne Porter, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Howard Lawson, Lola Ridge and many others issued protests and appeals, picketed the Boston State House and engaged in other forms of political action. Matthew Josephson followed the impending execution from Paris, and, with other Americans abroad, found himself treated with hostility by impassioned Frenchmen who took a radical stand in what by that time had become an international cause célèbre. To Burke Josephson confessed his sympathy for the protesters and dissenters, who had exchanged their artistic isolation for political activism in a manner which strikingly resembled Zola's stand in the Dreyfus affair.⁶³

Like Burke, Cowley had not participated in any of the protest demonstrations but had followed the mounting hysteria in newspapers and periodicals from the position of a quiet observer living and writing in rural isolation; apparently, like most, he "never really expected the executions to occur." There is little in his letters and notebooks of those years to support Daniel Aaron's observation that Cowley's political radicalism dated from the time of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, as it did in the case of so many future fellow travelers. He had talked to several of the writers who had joined in the "strange nocturnal march" on August 22, 1927, but three months later had acknowledged in his notebook that he had done little thinking and no writing on the subject. His poem on the "dago Christs" may have been "the gesture of a shaken writer determined to take a stand on a tragedy he had not publicly protested," as Elinor Bulkin has suggested; still its radical sentiments seem too much in the nature of a rhetorical pose. It was not until eight years after the tragic events of 1927 that Cowley wrote extensively on the case for The New Republic and explained the conversion to radical politics of the "intelligentsia" as, in part, "a sequel to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, a return to united political action" after the defeat of radical protest in 1927. Even Exile's Return, the book he published in 1934 at the height of his radical faith, made not the slightest mention of the affair. When, a year later, he argued that "the effects of the Sacco-Vanzetti case [had] continued to operate in a subterranean style," to surface with the Depression, he seemed to be speaking less from personal experience than as the contemporary historian of an entire class of intellectuals, one in whose leftist perspective the case had come to loom with large significance. Still, his general observation may have held a kernel of personal truth. In August 1929, two years after the executions, he confessed to John Brooks Wheelwright: "To tell the truth, I went a little sour on Boston in 1927, and I should remain sour on Boston even if it suddenly appeared that the two Dago Christs were really bandits." Whatever the precise degree of the radicalizing impact of the Sacco and Vanzetti affair on Cowley's thought, its effect was undoubtedly to reinforce his disgust with the moral obtuseness and thwarted perceptions of justice displayed by the guardians of the country. To the extent that his future revolutionary stance was rooted in such a feeling of cultural disaffection, Cowley's later

political commitments, like those of many others, may be said to have been the "echoes of a crime." In 1928, however, he could feel at most, with his friend Josephson, that the affair illustrated "the perfect impotence of Individualists in the face of mass-realities," without being propelled into revolutionary activism.⁶⁴

Some of the delayed impact of the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti became visible in Cowley's long review of Josephson's biography of Zola, which appeared in mid-October in the New York Herald Tribune. Zola and His Time, Cowley wrote, was "vigorous, absorbing, hastily written, superbly documented, and rich, amazingly rich." Typically, he approached the book through its style rather than ideas, but his literary sensitivity led him infallibly to the heart of Josephson's commitment to Zola. "I cannot help complaining against the style," Cowley commented with ruthless frankness, "which is full of impurities, gallicisms, latinisms, freshly coined words, awkward expressions. It is like a vat of must, of wine in fermentation. There is scum on the top. Not all the dregs have settled. But the whole mixture bubbles and ferments; it has life." At a given moment, however, he noted, the style underwent a magical transformation: "the scum miraculously disappears from the top, the yeast settles to the bottom and the must becomes clear wine." The moment occurred when Josephson began his long discussion of the Dreyfus affair, three chapters written with "fire" and deserving of the highest praise. Cowley devoted more than half of his review to Zola's role in the Dreyfus case and played up the parallelisms with the Sacco and Vanzetti affair, "America's Dreyfus affair," as Bruce Bliven had called it in The New Republic. "Both cases attracted political zealots for their own ends and disinterested thinkers for the love of justice. Honest men were divided about them both," Cowley granted without so much as a spark of radical sentiment. Josephson nowhere mentioned the two Italian convicts, but his account of the Dreyfus trial, written at the time of the Boston executions, was inspired with "the fire that is aroused only by contemporary problems." He quoted Josephson's lament that there were "no more Zolas today" and acknowledged that Zola's public stand in his famous letter J'Accuse was "a superb step." He ended his review by borrowing the words of Anatole France to applaud the candor and courage which had made Zola "a moment of the conscience of mankind." Indirectly, in his own cautious and quieter fashion, Cowley was ranging himself on the side of the writer who

recognized his responsibility to society. The career of Zola, he wrote in his review, "reveals new judgments of the literary life. It opens horizons."⁶⁵

A week later, reviewing a selection of the works of Rémy de Gourmont by Richard Aldington, Cowley revealed how much he had internalized the example of Zola as a new touchstone of the literary life. Once, with Burke, he had cherished de Gourmont as a hero of literary art. Now, he still granted that the Frenchman was "a matchless critic" whose critical studies and excursions into philosophy would continue to exert an important influence, but felt that, even at his best, de Gourmont was "no longer exempt from criticism." With greater force and self-confidence than ever before he spoke out against the Symbolist ideal of a monastic literary life:

We have learned of recent years to consider a man's literary works as part of a larger unity in which his life is also included. In Gourmont's case, his whole career has come to be judged unfavorably; it is found to be too specialized, too lacking in liberality and courage; it represents what we now regard as a false ideal of the literary life.

. . . Gourmont spent his workdays in a library and his leisure moments in second-hand book shops. Except for a few bookish love affairs, he lived entirely in the past and in the printed word. At the end of his thirtieth year . . . he yielded completely to his fear of life, and, like a hermit crab, retired into a shell which was not his own. Books were his wall against the world.

While his contemporaries were "endeavoring to affect the literary and political life of the time," de Gourmont was writing novels which now seemed "as moldy and airless as the study in which his life was passed." His books, Cowley noted, displayed "merely the unhealthy eroticism of a hermit, of St. Anthony creating his own temptations."

Cowley's insistence that the writer leave his artistic hermitage and become involved in the larger world about him has to be set against his persistent wariness of surrendering a precious individuality and independence to a dogma, creed, school or party. For all his criticism, he also upheld de Gourmont as "an enemy . . . of all forces that attack personal liberty," a last bold defender of individualism against oppressive political systems, be they democratic or socialistic. De Gourmont's skepticism--"Truth tyrannizes; doubt liberates," he had

written--was clearly congenial to Cowley; it was a mark of the ambiguity of his position that he ended his review by acknowledging that de Gourmont was "most convincing to our own age" at those moments when he spoke as "a messiah of the skeptics."⁶⁶

Between the lines of Cowley's contrasting evaluations of Zola and de Gourmont a sensitized reader could catch glimpses of another crisis of self-confidence. There was, obviously, much fearful self-recognition for Cowley in Aldington's observation that, "instead of concentrating his genius, [de Gourmont] dissipated it through a mass of writings all of high quality, but few or none of the highest." Had Cowley, too, possibly "diluted his thought" and "stored it in too many diverse receptacles"? A week earlier, speaking with implied but unmistakable self-reference, he had described Josephson's book as the work of a thirty-year old writer who had "accumulated a vast store of ideas and observations without seizing the opportunity of diluting them into other literary receptacles." His friend had wisely saved his best critical energies for the big job, without dispersing them over a host of little articles and projects, as he himself had been doing. Contemplating the lives of Zola and de Gourmont, Cowley once again was besieged with self-doubt and uncertainties: "Should we decide, deliberately, to be Great Men?" he asked Burke, not without irony, on October 16. "The ambition is not impossible. One rationalizes, one learns a methodology, one pursues a course; in a country of drunkards and cretins, the result is not too much in doubt, but is it worth the sacrifices it entails?" A day later, swamped with free-lancing work which only partly held his interest, he complained: "Temporarily, perhaps permanently, I have no soul." Looking back to boyhood days of carefree innocence when thoughts of a glorious career as a writer had not yet been sullied by sordid compromise, Cowley revealed, with less equivocation and more subtlety than he had in his reviews, precisely where he stood. The example of Zola, amalgamated with that of Paul Valéry, shone radiantly:

It would be nice to be permanently adolescent [he wrote to Burke]. Still, I should not like to return to the sense of futility that brooded over our own adolescence. We had determined to be writers, and writers, in America, play no part in public affairs. They are specialists, in other words cripples. I should like to have the courage to proclaim that nothing human is alien to my interests. Perhaps it is true that if, like Leonardo, we discover a methodology, we can apply

ourselves to everything. If some American writer would take a stand in favor of the widest interests possible--a stand like that of Zola in the Dreyfus case--he would improve the status and resolve the doubts of us all. But to reach this point he would have to have a long training in pride, in the noblest conception of himself. The pride of a good writer is to be disinterested, to observe everything, to be able to predict economic and social movements, and yet to draw no profit from his powers of prediction.⁶⁷

The writer's proper place was squarely in the midst of contemporary life; he should aim to affect the social and economic realities of his time, in particular as they pertained to the position of the artist in an age of mass culture, but should do so without surrendering his independence, integrity, and disinterestedness. Only if he stopped being dependent on his writing for his livelihood, Cowley implied, could such an ideal be attained.

Meanwhile, money was much on Cowley's mind. He was struggling to pay off a longstanding debt to Isidor Schneider, who needed the money for a year he was hoping to spend in Europe on a Guggenheim fellowship, and cast about for means of making a final "furious onslaught" on "the castle of debt." His transaction with Schneider, he felt, was "beginning to resemble German reparations" and might soon require "the service of a Dawes Committee." Two weeks of editorial work for Harold Loeb in November yielded \$250, \$150 of which went to pay off Schneider's loan. Through Harold Loeb, in whose financial expertise he had enough confidence to swallow his scruples, Cowley tried, for once, to seize his share of the "easy money" available under a boom economy and, with Burke, invested part of his meager capital in stocks. Within a week their shares dropped below the profitline, though the losses were apparently negligible: "I liked the sensation of being in the stock market for a week," Cowley remarked jovially to Burke. "I feel that a writer in this age ought to be prosperous; Voltaire got his financial friends to make a fortune for him; why shouldn't we, if we can find the financial friends, and if their advice amounts to anything, as it didn't in this case?"⁶⁸

The free-lance market, indeed, offered greater assurance of a profitable return on his efforts, if hardly satisfaction. He continued to slave over his translation of *La Colline Inspirée*, and in October learned to his relief that Harper's had accepted his essay on Cambria County, at \$250. He submitted a proposal for articles to The New Yorker but balked

at the magazine's suggestion that he write one or two of the articles on speculation. Through Burke's mediation he received a commission from Donald Freeman, managing editor of Vanity Fair, to translate a series of articles by French writers, including Morand and Valéry. The assignment, which yielded about \$15 a day at Cowley's pace of work, soon proved a hackwriter's nightmare. Writers like Morand and Valéry excepted, the articles were trash, and Cowley's translations were subjected to gratuitous editorial cuts and disastrous "improvements" into the bargain. "Me and the job don't get along extra well," he told Burke in early December. "They'd have to give me lots and lots of praise and feed my greedy vanity to make me relish that diet of thin pap. What shit they publish!" He was "coquetting" with luring translation offers from three different publishers and considered turning over his Vanity Fair commission to Slater Brown. He asked Brown to do a couple of trial translations but was disappointed in their quality ("too many gallicisms") and for a while struggled on unhappily. When Burke impishly suggested that translations might lead to articles for Vanity Fair, Cowley responded with a burst of moral indignation: "I swear that you have a sneaking ambition to be Alexander Wolcott [sic]. Who else would actually look forward to writing the shit that [Frank] Crowninshield [the editor of Vanity Fair] publishes? And, as a matter of fact, one doesn't work up to Vanity Fair articles; one makes a decent reputation in other fields, and then Crowninshield begs for the privilege of publishing your used toilet paper." For all his grumblings at the abomination of the undertaking, Cowley did not make good his threat to break off the deal and continued to do occasional translations for Vanity Fair until the late spring of 1929, when Freeman departed for Europe.⁶⁹

Though, with the help of Zola and Valéry, Cowley had arrived at a clearer conception of a desirable conduct of the literary life, he remained unable to work out a practical solution to the frustrations of a free-lancing career. At the end of 1928, he descended anew to the depths of self-complaint. He stayed in the country until deep into the harsh winter season, slaving over The Prophetic Hill, as his translation was provisionally titled, frittering away much of his energy on the chore of keeping the farm comfortably heated in the bitter subzero cold. "Sunday night in southern Labrador," he wrote to Burke; "the wind howls around the chimneys; the snow, having softened a little in the sun, even at ten

degrees below freezing, is now forming a hard crust; the kitchen stove is swallowing wood like a pack of wolves, and the house is snug. I've spent a purely physical day, not thinking, not reading, but chopping a little wood, eating, playing cards, and stepping outside from time to time to sniff the air like an overdose of cocaine." A recent study on abnormalities of human behavior had made him realize with renewed poignancy how much of his own life was wasted on trivial actions leading nowhere. "Character is a sum of past actions and a potentiality for actions in the future," he observed to Burke, in line with some of his earlier notebook speculations. "I am coming round to behaviorism, not as a philosophy--I detest Watson and his allies--but as a handle by which to move the world." For one who, four years earlier, had written in his notebook "The good man is the man who makes his own conditions, who makes himself free," Cowley had pathetically failed to live up to his personal standards of morality and he now realized as much: "none of my difficulties will be solved until I learn to plan my day, to be master of my leisure instead of its slave." How was it possible, he wondered, that he never found the time to do serious writing yet spelled out the newspaper every day and every week devoured The Saturday Evening Post? "[A]ren't we ignoble with our false sense of the practical?," he preached, less to Burke than to himself. "Aren't we all forgetting that danger, idealism, and madness of a sort are physiological necessities?" Once again Cowley stood face to face with his inability to consciously direct his life along the lines of a self-imposed discipline, to withstand the compromises endemic to a free-lance life. He was certain, however, that his troubles were not uniquely his own but were symptomatic of the position of the artist in late 1920s America: "I'm becoming more and more convinced that the principle problem for an American writer is one of living. . . . The authors of intelligence who fail because of aesthetic shortcomings are rare in comparison with those who surrender either to the need for making more money or, in other instances, to the narrower vistas imposed by the effort to spend less."⁷⁰

Six weeks later, reestablished in a cramped apartment at 33 Avenue B in New York, he wrote to Edmund Wilson to express his disgust at the cutthroat competitiveness of literary New York and to voice his hope that Wilson, who was going through a nervous breakdown that winter (the "price," Cowley told Tate, for his "Babylonian and Alexandrian nights" of

immoderate living), would recover soon and return to New York "with a new store of malice to join in that battle of malice which is literature." Wilson was fighting his private battle to survive as a writer in America, but to Cowley he seemed one of the few miraculously able to transcend the hampering conditions of the literary life. "Think," he wrote encouragingly to Wilson in mid-February 1929, "you have a special distinction: you're the only writer I know who has been successfully leading a double life--that is, who has been earning a living out of literature and at the same time writing good books. I ought to know the difficulty of this double task, since it seems to me that I've rather failed in both sides of it."⁷¹ In early 1929 it was Edmund Wilson's disciplined professionalism which pointed the way towards a conduct of the literary life.

In early April 1929, when the first signs of spring appeared in the streets of New York, the Cowleys fled back to the country around Patterson. It had been a turbulent and disorienting winter in the city. Cowley's marriage to Peggy had for some time been falling apart at the seams. There had been affairs, on both sides, and Cowley found it painful to contemplate the contrast between his own relationship, childless and unstable, and those of his friends, most of whom were by now the fathers of steadily expanding families. "Ah, this bloody everlasting talk of gestation and parturition, abortions and diapers. I don't know what to say when I hear it. I sneak off and get tight," he told Tate on the verge of his escape to the country. Cowley had plunged into the variegated social and sexual distractions of winter life in New York and now turned away in disgust. "Too many parties; too much seduction, sodomy, cunnilinctus and abortion; too much money spent; no sleep," he told Wilson in late March. Increasingly, also, the oppressing underside to American prosperity became an inescapable reality of life in New York and Cowley, returning alone from his nightly escapades, had felt faint stirrings of conscience at observing the first signals of an impending economic depression. On April 2, 1929, he wrote to Tate:

What a flurried winter! I've been a rounder; I've seen my old friends seldom and strange faces often; I've come home at seven in the morning to watch the bread lines stretching for three blocks along this Main Street of Jewry. That was on Good Friday; the men standing in line were impassive and averaged from forty-five to fifty years, the cast-offs of our industrial civilization, which hires no men over thirty-five; I had a rather drunken phantasmagoria of being Christ and of descending myself into something or other.

Not all of his time, however, had been spent "in the backwash of the

romantic movement," he assured Tate. Indeed, all through the winter he had been "working immoderately, working badly," struggling to complete translations, hurrying off "articles for which the figurative presses were waiting," and "thinking hardly at all."¹

Over the winter Cowley had made significant progress on assembling his book of poems, but nevertheless, with a persistence that at times seemed comical, he continued to bemoan his failure to control the conditions of his life. In early April Josephson, himself in the midst of an affair with Katherine Anne Porter, observed to Wheelwright: "I see Cowley now and then. He has magnificent plans: but something always keeps him one gasp behind them. . . . [He] claims passing months without having 'a single idea,' [but] sometimes indulges in remarkable confessions." Shortly after, looking back on his last three years from his quiet vantage point on Tory Hill, Cowley confessed to Foster Damon that he was not sure whether he had made the right move in becoming a free lance; perhaps his precious, if precarious, independence had been preserved at too dear a price. "These have been flurried years," he told Damon. "I don't know whether or not I was right to quit my last job and depend on the world of letters and pseudo-letters for a livelihood. I have no time for work that isn't immediately remunerative (in other words, I can't finish a book without going too heavily in debt). I keep loping along, three jumps in front of destitution, like a horse pursued by a pack of wolves, and I must even do my reading as I run. On the other hand, I'm my own boss; I can tell publishers to go to hell, and generally do; I've earned a sort of independence—at what a price in fullness of life."²

It was one of the redemptive features of a difficult winter that it saw the beginning of a new important friendship. On one of his lonely nocturnal ramblings through the city Cowley, "at loose ends" after abruptly leaving a dinner party at the Josephsons', had drifted to Lee Chumley's speakeasy in the Village, where he fell in with a group of young strangers who were living it up in the hedonistic fashion of the decade. They were the members of a younger age-group than Cowley's own, who felt, if possible, more "lost," who were frantically rebellious in a more radically uninhibited fashion, and who seemed acutely aware of their uniqueness as a separate generation. It was not the first time that Cowley, so proudly a member of a generation which made a cult of youth, had found himself confronted with youngsters who looked down on him and

his coevals as "relics of an age that was passing." At one of the Fourth of July parties on Tory Hill he had met a remarkable specimen of the sort, the daughter of George Cram Cook, and had grimly observed to Burke: "She speaks of Her Generation, which makes one feel very old. And it really is a generation, with marked characteristics, chief of which is a total lack of sexual scruples."³

Among the group at Lee Chumley's that evening one young man stood out, "almost like a young prince, distinguished by his air of affability and his easy self-assurance." Peter Blume, a handsome young man of twenty-two, with Roman features and an "aureole of red-gold curly hair," was already determined to become a painter. In 1911, aged five, he had emigrated, Cowley soon learned, from Russia. Since 1925 Blume had been living the penurious bohemian life of a professional artist in the Village and had been associated with the painters of the Daniel Gallery (Sheeler, Demuth, and Kuniyoshi among them), which with the Stieglitz gallery was one of the few actively sponsoring a radically modernist American art. Blume was struggling along on a moderate allowance from the Daniel Gallery, and Cowley was impressed by his absolute imperviousness to money: "I was never to meet a young artist who thought less about money, so long as he had enough of it to buy paints and canvasses." In early 1929 he described his new acquaintance to Burke as "a good painter, a ladies' man, and a deep thinker--as most modern painters insist on being."⁴

Blume had known about Cowley for some time. His literary friends regarded Cowley as "the most promising of poets who were coming along at that time" and Blume had been reading his poetry as it appeared in various little magazines. He had been greatly impressed by Cowley's translation of *Variety*, in particular by his ability to transform Valéry's abstruse and reflective prose into lucid, natural English without simplifying its complexity. Cowley did not know Blume at the time of their first encounter, but shortly after both men met again, at Romany Marie's and other Village speakeasies, and began taking long walks together in New York. On one of these early walks, Blume remembered, Cowley confessed he was not interested in "just being a poet;" he wanted to become an all-round "man of letters."⁵

Cowley and Blume struck up a close and intimate friendship, which was to last the rest of their lives. There was more than a commitment to

modernist art and a life-style of financial struggling to draw both men together in the late 1920s. Both had had an affair with the same woman; Blume's had just broken off at the time of his meeting with Cowley and he was temporarily "roosting" in other people's studios, while searching for another place where he could work, without interruptions, on a bigger scale. Through Cowley he learned of four unheated rooms for rent at Addie Turner's for eight to ten dollars a month. Blume accepted the rooms without a moment's hesitation and Cowley drove his new friend to the country in an old ramshackle Model-T Ford, an expedition on which Blume received his first driving instructions. Over the summer of 1929, living across the hall from Hart Crane's one-time quarters, Blume worked almost uninterruptedly on his first major painting, Parade, which he finished in January 1930.

In a special way, Blume's picture displayed his aesthetic affinity, in a different realm of art, with Cowley's efforts on behalf of a modern American literature fully responsive to contemporary reality. As Blume explained in a 1981 interview: "The sense of promise was omnipresent in the Twenties--the skyscrapers, the Ford assembly line, the new sense of the machines, the whole business. . . . And then there was the promise that we could approach art as a distinctively American art form, that is, with what we learned from European modernism. The particularities would be recognizably different . . . and our own." At the time Blume was aiming to make his own "new synthesis" of Cubist and Futurist techniques with a distinctly American realism, one which would surrender "the idea of absolute purity of form" and initiate "the revolution of content." Parade was the first painting in which his new style reached its full realization. It depicted a looming urban-industrial landscape of conveyors, big air ventilators and tenement walls painted over with advertisements, set against a lowering sky darkened over by polluting plumes of smoke. In the foreground marched a human figure bearing aloft an iron suit of armor, the symbol of a threatening dehumanization in an age of mass industry and technology. The figure, wearing a brown beret with a slightly French look, was Malcolm Cowley.⁶ Parade was the first occasion when Blume had actually realized a "conceptual synthesis," a deliberately chosen "composition," before setting out to paint it, and Cowley, sensing his kinship with Valéry, in his notebook classified Blume as a "constructionist" artist, together with Dante, da Vinci, Racine and

Flaubert.⁷

Living in the country Cowley found himself more intensely worried about money than ever before. In early May 1929 he made a big loan to make his final payment of \$732 on the farm; he received the deed to the property, but was left "completely, beautifully and prodigiously broke." The hateful translation work for Vanity Fair had come to an end and other "easy little sources of income" he had had in the past six months were also "temporarily closed." Once again he was faced with the unpleasant task of having to write himself "out of the hole" at the rate of two cents a word. Cowley's attitude to money was careful and conservative. For all his periodic bohemian dissipations, he retained from his middle-class upbringing a hatred of being financially (or morally) " beholden" to anyone and had "a horror of running into debt." Once or twice, he yielded to temptation and took some of the "quick and easy money" which, as Fitzgerald was to say, was "in such profusion around you" in the Jazz Age, either by speculating on the stock market or by accepting the advances of publishers who looked with uncommon kindness on the experimental endeavors of his generation. More commonly, he retained an attitude of disdainful prudence, partly from fear that a high income would pose a threat to his literary independence and integrity by involving him in a commercial culture inimical to art. Thus, he refrained from buying on the instalment plan and, like a thrifty and conscientious Pennsylvania-Dutch housewife, dutifully paid cash for his groceries. In April 1929, flirting with the idea of accepting another \$500 advance on his projected book on the slave trade, he cautioned himself to be "much warier" about such easily attainable solutions to his present penury and, in early May, broached the possibility of financial assistance to Kenneth Burke, whose bank account had recently been fattened by a \$2000 Dial Award. His efforts to transfer part of his money problems to his friend, however, only met with "moral lectures" in which he was urged to bring the conduct and conditions of his life in tune with his precarious finances. In reply to Burke's upbraiding, Cowley acknowledged that his present money worries, bad as they were, were the "penalty" for a self-chosen mode of life and determined anew to battle his way out of his bankruptcy. He even toyed with the idea of abandoning his free-lance independence: "Just now," he told Burke on May 8, "I should be willing to take a job if it represented a real financial advance--in other words

\$100 a week, or, if the position were very easy or had other honors attached to it (like one on the New Republic), \$75 a week, but these are my minima." A week later, once more in the dumps, he wrote to Burke: "I have a very bad conscience over being almost thirty-one, and having done really nothing whatsoever, and being broke, and losing part of my interest in general ideas, and this and that and you know the old litany." He had been forced to give up his car in order to redeem his loan, and found country life "surprisingly cheap" without it; "another bad month," he hoped, would put him back on his feet financially. Five weeks later, he had completed a translation of The Green Parrot by Princess Marthe Bibesco for Harcourt, Brace, finished his rendering of Barrès's The Sacred Hill for Macaulay and made substantial progress on a translation of Raymond Radiguet's Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel for Norton; indeed, he told Burke, he had been "working like hell this spring; I never turned out so much in an equal space of time." Now that some of his most pressing financial problems had been solved, he felt "a little more confident." Five days later, after three days in New York, the thread of his hopes had once again snapped: "I'm back in Patterson broke, completely and definitely broke, starvation broke, with only the rainbow of prosperity in front of me." This time, however, he was growing so tired of balancing on the check-bouncing edge of bankruptcy that he contemplated concrete steps towards leaving the free-lance life: he had been tentatively offered a half-time job as assistant to Carl Van Doren at the Literary Guild, where he would be expected to read manuscripts and interview publishers, at \$75 a week. Should the job fall through, publisher Harrison Smith had offered to put him on a drawing account in the fall; the second possibility, Cowley granted, was "nearly ideal."⁸

Meanwhile, "the unfaithful slave of the typewriter," he continued to ply the writer's trade. For some time, he had been seeing less and less of his friends, but found himself clinging more persistently to the past he had shared with them. Their parties, once the light of his life, increasingly seemed to depress him. The annual Fourth of July celebration on Hardscrabble Road was "terrible," he told Burke; "too much drunken philandering, too much strong punch." The mood of the times was changing, as the decade was beginning to spiral towards a frenzied climax. At the parties Cowley attended there was harder drinking, more desperately uninhibited lovemaking, more bitter quarreling; the carefree innocence of

the "good winter" of five years ago was giving way to laughter that was "keyed too high," to horseplay that was strained and hysterical. "It seems to me that this year might well be known as the era of ill feeling," Cowley told Burke at the end of September 1929. "Everybody is quarreling, has quarreled, or is about to quarrel with everybody else." His own immediate future was yet uncertain: the job with the Literary Guild was "still hanging fire," and it was equally undecided if Harrison Smith would actually "subsidize" him. Shortly after, in early October, Cowley was asked by Bruce Bliven to join the staff of The New Republic.⁹

Cowley's doleful self-evaluations must not be taken at their face value. Though his discouragement was real enough, he had been uncommonly productive and resilient for most of the winter and spring. For one thing, 1929 saw the appearance of three French novels translated by Cowley, at least one of which affected him profoundly. In May appeared The Green Parrot by Princess Marthe Bibesco; it was hailed by most reviewers as Cowley's "just and sensitive" rendering of a "romantic variation" on the incest theme, played out against the background of the exiled Russian nobility in France. Raymond Radiguet's The Count's Ball, which appeared posthumously in December, was one of two novels by a young author who had died at twenty. Reviewers' comments indicated how much the novel fell in with Cowley's personal literary enthusiasms: the book was greeted as an "interesting specimen of the 'new classicism' in postwar French literature," one "intensely modern in its viewpoint," yet executed on "a highly moral, and at the same time highly sophisticated plane." George Stevens, Cowley's editor at W. W. Norton, was euphoric about his translator's "perfectly gorgeous job." His praise was symptomatic: "How you have managed to keep the French feeling and yet to preserve a style that does not read like a translation is more than I can understand." Shortly after, Cowley contracted with Norton for a book of essays which over the next five years would grow into Exile's Return (1934).¹⁰

Cowley's standards of craftsmanship had not suffered from the prosaic fact that he had undertaken the translations largely to work his way out of his financial predicament. The Green Parrot brought in \$400; Radiguet's novel \$350. His third translation, Barrès's The Sacred Hill,

yielded more money--for six months, between May and October 1928, he registered a \$125 advance in his notebook--but it was also a much more arduous task over which he slaved intermittently from the spring of 1928 through the spring of 1929; "it has proved to be incredibly difficult," he told Wilson in the midst of his struggles, "and I'll probably fall dead of poverty over the last page of the manuscript."¹¹

Cowley was far from happy with his rendering of The Sacred Hill: when he learned that Burke intended to review the novel for the Herald Tribune, he confessed that he had not been able to maintain the high level of translation in the early chapters through the entire book. It is not unlikely that Barrès's mannered and rhetorical style clashed with Cowley's inclination towards natural elegance and lucidity. For once, indeed, the reviewers' response fell somewhat short of the expected unanimity of praise, though even the sternest critic granted that, if the book did "not sound quite right in English," the "fault" was less the translator's than Barrès's own.¹²

In his introductory essay to the novel, completed on June 11, 1929, Cowley described Barrès's style as "subtle, grave, musical and complex," but pointed out that it lacked the bright limpidity of the typically "'French' style." He also gave his readers a rare glimpse of the trials and rewards of the translator's art:

During the long process of translating a novel, one lives in a state of dangerous intimacy with the author. One learns his thoughts and half-thoughts, including a few that were never set down on paper; one adopts his mannerisms for the moment, and appreciates his virtues; but especially one comes to detest his literary vices. Sometimes an author may be pretentious, illogical or hasty without revealing these faults to the public, but he can scarcely conceal them from a man who is forced to analyze his work sentence by sentence before recasting it into another language. Few authors pass through this ordeal without suffering to a degree in the eyes of their translators. Maurice Barrès is one of the few, and the more one labours over his prose, the more one learns to respect his solid attainments.

The Sacred Hill held a particular fascination for Cowley, not so much because it was "a magnificent study of religious aberration," as because it strongly appealed to his personal regionalist instincts. Without showing any sign of disturbance at the reactionary implications of Barrès's nationalism (which propelled Montherlant and Drieu la Rochelle

into racist and totalitarian directions) Cowley found Barrès a congenial author fully aware, like himself, of the dangers of deracination. In his introduction he praised The Sacred Hill as "a study of local patriotism" and betrayed his feeling of affinity with its author:

[The Sacred Hill] deals with the countryside that was both the birthplace of Barrès and the symbol of his love for the undying past. It deals with people who were so fiercely attached to their own soil that they endowed the landscape with a life of its own; and the author, who shared their emotions, has made the hill of Zion-Vaudémont something more than a mere background; it is perhaps the most important character in his novel.

The book was so intensely "localized in place, time and subject," Cowley remarked, that it could become "timeless and almost universal." He ended his introduction with a long personal memory of the wondrous ascendancy gained over a western Pennsylvania community close to Belsano by a Protestant clergyman, whose religious rise and subsequent downfall had remarkably resembled that of Barrès's protagonists.¹³

More important, however, than any of Cowley's translation projects was the fact that, at long last, he had taken the decisive steps towards the publication of his first book of poetry, Blue Juniata. Even so, the book might not have seen the light until much later without "a pure act of friendship" on the part of Hart Crane. Since the previous summer Crane had unselfishly devoted himself to the project of prodding Cowley into bringing his poems together in a book. On July 16, 1928, he had announced to Isidor and Helen Schneider that he intended to do his utmost to find a publisher for Cowley's poems before a year had passed. "He'll never do much about it himself," Crane wrote, "and his collection is really needed on the shelves these days." By the summer of 1928 some ninety-five of Cowley's poems had appeared in magazines and, even after subtracting the thirty-odd discardable juvenilia, a solid sixty poems remained as the potential core of a book. As Cowley later acknowledged, however, Crane had rightly intuited that he would have been "very slow" about assembling them into a publishable manuscript. Relishing the "immediacy" of magazine publication (and the concomitant promptness of remuneration), Cowley supposedly felt "no urgent desire" for a book, preferring for the time being to remain "unclassified and free to move in any direction." His actual ambition to attain book publication, however, appears to have been

greater than his recollection suggests, for as early as 1926 he had contemplated a Blue Juniata in his notebook. Still, he needed Crane as a catalyst to conquer whatever scruples or reservations he may have had. In July 1928, at Crane's repeated insistence, Cowley bundled a group of his poems and together they made a selection and thought about structure and sequence. Crane felt the poems would gain by appearing in an emotional sequence that was inevitably "right" and conceived of the book as very much an organic whole. He approached Cowley's verse with respect for its integrity and restricted his interference to questioning one or two lines he felt could be improved. Notwithstanding the fact that his personal taste ran counter to Cowley's deliberate effort to keep his lines as close as possible to the natural rhythms of prose—a tendency Crane had publicly chided as "a genial pedestrianism"—he adopted a strategy of reserve in the matter of alterations, thus proving he was, what John Unterecker called him, "a perceptive and careful editor."¹⁴

In early August Cowley went off to Belsano and Crane set himself up in his friend's New York apartment, hoping to find a publisher for the book. At the end of October he urged Cowley to bring the manuscript along on his next trip to the city: "I have a suspicion," he wrote, "that something will come of it now." A month later he dashed off a chaotic letter showing the aftereffects of a drunken night on the town and reported the safe arrival of the poems: "I'll be careful with the mss. And your book'll be out within 7 months. . . . About time!" On December 1, 1928, he had once again carefully gone over the arrangement of the poems, omitted one of them, changed the order of three others, and painstakingly retyped the entire manuscript. He was tickled to death with the success of his efforts:

It has been a pleasure for me to spend part of the last two days in typing the mss. of your book. Certainly I have been on more intimate terms with the poems than ever, and my enthusiasm has been heightened thereby rather than in any way diminished . . . Really the book as we now have it has astonishing structural sequence. Most of the more doubtfully important poems come in the central section. There is the fine indigenous soil sense to begin with in the Juniata, and the eloquent and more abstract matter mounting to a kind of climax toward the end. Hope you don't mind my enthusiasm!

On the verge of his departure for Europe, Crane returned the original

manuscript by registered mail, sent one copy to a "secret" arbiter" at a New York publishing house, and took another copy along with him to try and place it with an English publisher. The reason for Crane's secrecy about the New York publisher soon became apparent: his "arbiter" was Gorham Munson, then an editorial advisor for Doubleday, Doran. In an in-house memorandum to John Farrar Munson explained Crane's role in the selection of poems and advised favorably: "I strongly recommend Cowley's work. He is 'modern' in his technique, but lucid, and very able. He is certain to have a succès d'estime and will adorn your list in much the same way that Phelps Putnam did." Disinterestedly, Munson put aside the quarrels of the past, but emphasized to Farrar that "owing to some past personal differences with Cowley" he was "not to appear in the transactions." In early January 1929 Doubleday, Doran offered Cowley a contract. Within the year, Crane had made good his promise of getting his friend's poems accepted by a publisher.¹⁵

Now, however, his selfless efforts stranded on Cowley's own admittedly "stiff-necked character." With Pennsylvanian stubbornness he rejected the offer of Doubleday, Doran, less out of a lingering resentment towards Munson than from a proud unwillingness to be obliged to any one but himself for the structure and publication of his book. Three weeks before, Harrison Smith had left his position at Harcourt, Brace and established a publishing house of his own in partnership with the English firm of Jonathan Cape. Smith was "stealing authors right and left," Cowley told Foster Damon, and when Cowley submitted his manuscript, he promptly accepted it for publication. Smith had earlier given proof of his belief in Cowley's promise and, only the summer before, had observed: "I have always been confident that all you needed in your career was the completion of a book." Cowley was flattered by the ironic coincidence of finding his book simultaneously accepted by two publishers, but he was pleased even more by the feeling of proud independence which came with the luxury of being able to "tell publishers to go to hell." Smith offered "much better terms" and "a good sized advance" (\$125 against royalties of ten percent on a first printing of a thousand copies) and promised to really try and sell the book. But Cowley also opted for Cape & Smith for other than material reasons; as he explained to Harriet Monroe, Smith seemed genuinely interested in preserving the art of poetry in an age of consumerism and commercialism:

"He no longer intends to treat poetry as a weak sister in the family of books; he intends to publish it in such form and with such advertising that it wins back its popularity and economic self-sufficiency." In the same letter Cowley told Harriet Monroe how grateful he was to her and to Poetry for having helped to boost his confidence in his own poetry: "Nowhere else could I have seen enough of my poems printed together to think that they justified a book, and to feel what sort of book they would justify."²⁹

Meanwhile, Hart Crane had moved on to France, still carrying Cowley's manuscript, and had plunged into Parisian bohemian life with Harry and Caresse Crosby. The Crosbys took Crane up into the circle of American expatriates centering around transition and the Black Sun Press--Laurence Vail, Kay Boyle, Eugene Jolas--and frequently invited him to their sumptuous country-estate. In Paris Crane entered upon some of his most notorious drunken brawls and soon, he told Cowley, was gaining a reputation as "the best 'roarer'" in the city. But he had not forgotten his friend's poems: on January 23, 1929, after their second meeting, Harry Crosby noted in his diary that Crane had shown him "a Mss of poems Blue Juniata by Malcolm Cowley." Crane and Crosby talked about it at greater length on subsequent occasions and Crane was on the point of persuading Crosby to publish the book through the Black Sun Press, when he learned from Cowley that Blue Juniata was being brought out in America. Crane hailed "the good news" ecstatically, but urged Cowley to at least thank Munson for his interest; Munson deserved "some real credit," Crane felt, since the knowledge that Doubleday, Doran were about to publish the book had probably intensified the interest of Hal Smith and prompted him to offer better terms.¹⁷

Having picked his own publisher, Cowley took the book home to his New York apartment and spent much of his winter in the city "once more revising the interminably revised manuscript." Discontented with the shape of the manuscript as Crane had put it together, he now completely recast the structure, placing the poems in a sequence that was "autobiographical" rather than "emotional," as Crane's had been, and dividing the book into five sections, three of which were introduced by retrospective prose notes infused with what seemed an inescapable note of ironic, elegiac nostalgia. The new arrangement was chronological by subject matter, not by date of composition; the opening section, Cowley's

lyrical-poetic recreation of the country of his childhood, consisted of poems written and revised at various moments between 1919 and 1929, while the last section, a coda entitled "Old Melodies: Love and Death," abandoned chronology altogether and was held together by more universal or existential themes--love, death, the "tyranny" of time, the emptiness of alienation, the longing for salvation. The new structural sequence enabled Cowley to expand the book from Crane's original thirty-seven to fifty-four poems and to include some poems which, in isolation, did not come up to his rigorous standards. In early April 1929 he explained his intentions to Tate in Paris:

I was impressed by the idea that, in reprinting only poems that reached a certain technical standard, I was giving a false and incomplete picture of the author. Moreover, if I restricted the book to the poems I approved of wholly, I should not have 37, but perhaps 16 or 20, and these 16 or 20 without any very definite unity. By including other poems, however; by correcting their worst faults and arranging them in sections, I could give some idea of the development of a poet and produce a book with a unity that a shorter volume would not possess. I think I succeeded to some extent, and I think that the book as a whole is better than any single poem in it. At any rate, it's not a scrapbook, a collection of unrelated poems by the same author.¹⁸

Blue Juniata was in type by the middle of June. With some trepidation Cowley sent galleys to Crane in Paris. Crane responded with characteristic generosity and warmth, and without the slightest hint of resentment at Cowley's abandonment of the original structure. On the contrary, he was rather proud that his initial efforts were bearing fruit:

Since reading the proofs [he wrote Cowley on July 3, 1929] I'm certain that the book is even better than before. And the notes!--When you first mentioned them to me I admit having trembled slightly at the idea. But since seeing them I haven't a doubt. The maturity of your viewpoint is evident in every word. Humour and sincerity blend into some of the cleverest and most adroit writing I know of, leaving the book a much more solidified unit than it was before. . . . Wherever I have noted changes they seem to be for the better. . . . I like the added bulk of the book. Really, Malcolm--if you will excuse me for the egotism--I'm just a little proud at the outcome of my agitations last summer. "Blue Juniata" will have a considerable sale for a long period to come, for the bulk of it has a classical quality--both as regards material and treatment--that

won't suffer rejection by anyone who cares or who will later care for American letters.

When, with some delay, Blue Juniata appeared on August 8, 1929, Crane was the first to receive an inscribed copy: "If it's bad," Cowley wrote, "the sin be on your head." Crane cherished the book as a prize possession; he still carried it with him on his return voyage from Mexico on the Orizaba in 1932.¹⁹

Critically as well as commercially, Blue Juniata was quite a success. When Smith's firm went bankrupt in the early Depression, precluding a second printing, all but some twenty copies of the original thousand had sold. But it was the critical response that must have exceeded even Cowley's expectations. Blue Juniata received wide and responsible critical notice, not all of it unambiguously laudatory, by some of the best critics of the time and clinched Cowley's reputation as one of the significant poets of his generation. It was Allen Tate who gave the book its most thoughtful and eulogistic review. Tate had long admired many of Cowley's poems and, in a recent survey article on contemporary American poetry for The Bookman, had already drawn attention to Cowley as "one of the most finished writers in America," who was "deeply affected by the post-bellum literary movements in France," not always to his benefit, but who was "one of those rare American poets genuinely gifted with rural and regional feeling." Tate's personal predilections were even more strongly reflected in the review he wrote for The New Republic. In March, before Cowley had finished transforming Crane's manuscript into his own expanded version, Tate had sent Wilson a careful consideration of the book, which Wilson thought gave "an excellent account" of Cowley. Wilson had gone through the manuscript himself and considered Blue Juniata "certainly a very sound and distinguished piece of work." Tate revised his review to incorporate Cowley's additions and on August 29 Cowley told Wilson: "I read with pink ears the review you published of Blue Juniata; really, Allen overstated the case." Tate's review, indeed, was of the sort first-book poets only dreamed of, but it was not uncritically euphoric. Tate presented Cowley as he would have liked to see himself: "a highly trained man of letters," who, as one of few Americans, offered "a fine example of the discipline of craftsmanship" and "successfully cultivated more than one type of literature." Cowley, he noted, had "done almost every kind of writing, and done it well." But Tate pushed beyond flattery to a more

precise and remarkably astute estimate of the strengths and limitations of Cowley's writings, both in poetry and criticism:

This is his first book, and it corrects one's previous belief that the finely ordered surface of his style was somewhat deficient in coherence and depth. No American at present writes a more lucid prose than Cowley, and yet it is now clear that prose, certainly critical prose, is not his true medium. His mind is basically concrete and unspeculative; he brings to facts and observations an even emotional tone that is the mark of a genuine style; but in criticism Cowley's instinct for exact definition is not strong; and the necessity for a certain amount of abstraction only violates the even tone of his style. It is in poetry, at least for the present, that Mr. Cowley may be seen at his best.

In a somewhat self-serving reversal of what Burke called the hierarchy of literary forms, Tate pointed up the beneficial effect on Cowley's poetry of the "long discipline of prose" and singled out "Leander" for its fine display of "the loose orderliness of highly conscious prose—without any falling off in the poetry." Apart from its "high" intrinsic value as poetry, Tate saw Blue Juniata as a "unique" document of Cowley's, and his own, generation, "the record kept by a member of this generation who broke with his past, witnessed the moral collapse of Europe, and returned to make the best of the confused intellectual life of post-war New York." Tate astutely diagnosed what Lewis Simpson later described as the poetics of exile (and nostalgic return) at the heart of Cowley's imaginative conception of his, and his generation's, experience. Out of his Pennsylvania childhood, Tate judged, Cowley had "written his best poems." His regional verse was perhaps "superficially less brilliant" and technically "less striking" than his other poems; it was also "far more moving, less self-conscious." Tate defined Cowley as essentially "a romantic poet" with an "almost unerring sense of form," whose work as a whole held "no great moments," nor any "disconcerting lapses." Cowley, he concluded, was "one of our most distinguished talents," who, in "The Urn," had created a lyrical poem "unsurpassed in our time."²⁰

Naturally, Cowley was pleased with Tate's review and the effect he felt it might have on his standing in the literary and the publishing world, but he also acknowledged that he could only agree with Tate's "flattering judgment" in his "most sanguine moods. Then I arch my back and purr. If I were a lady poetess, I should know how to reward you

concretely." Earlier, he had admitted that Tate's "mild strictures" were wholly just: "I have not a wide range of emotional or intellectual interests; I have a wide range of factual interests and a considerable intensity of emotion that I don't often manage to express." With typical self-deprecation he added: "I think you exaggerate the quality of my craftsmanship. Certainly, in revising my poems, I found much that grieved me." From Paris, Tate promptly wrote back in disagreement: "I don't believe I exaggerate the quality of your craftsmanhsip. It is perfectly consistent of you to underestimate it." It was a "ticklish" business, he granted, to review books by friends, but "when the books are good, I think we are obligated to review them."²¹

Kenneth Burke must have felt the same and for much of what Cowley felt was a "pious" and "tactful" review steered clear of judgment and evaluation; instead, with an instinctive sympathy particularly noticeable in his description of Cowley's poetic "record" of a dying Pennsylvania countryside, he evoked the emotional and intellectual background to the different autobiographical sections of the book. Burke praised specific poems like "Leander," "Sunrise over the Heiterwand," "Two Swans" and "Day Coach" and singled out Cowley's special note of "indefinite regret." While accepting the contemporary as "the only possible of worlds," Burke wrote, Cowley had supplied to it "a Baudelairean corrective of nostalgia." He, too, noted the perennial "hankering after something native" in his friend's verse and deemed it unfortunate that Cowley was best known as a critic and translator; his poetry was "by far his most important contribution" and some ten of the poems in Blue Juniata were "permanent acquisitions to our literature." Burke, like Tate, had written a "far too complimentary" review, Cowley told Wheelwright.²² But more of the same was to come.

In a flowery and impressionistic review for Poetry Harriet Monroe rose to lyrical heights of praise. She admired Cowley's disciplined craftsmanship--"he beats his poems out of iron, or sometimes bronze, and hammers them into a sturdily beautiful shape, a shape that bears his own impress"--and eulogized his capacity for making the characters in his poems "glow with an inner fire, quiver with intensity of life." Like no other poet, she raptured, Cowley had felt "the beauty and lyric agony" of urban as well as rural landscapes; she ended on a passionately personal note:

These poems . . . throb to the depths with passion inexplicable, inevitable. Still more when the poet gives us himself, his own intense ecstasy and agony over the rich and violent clashes and harmonies which make up the outrageous magnificent symphony of life . . . he shakes us with a sense of the utterly fantastic grotesqueness of this dance of death on a little ball swinging in space which we dignify and celebrate as human life. . . .

We find a thinker in this book, and a man who lives profoundly to the depths of his being. We find also a singer who feels the value of harshness and discords to emphasize his harmonies. . . .

These are man-size poems.

Cowley must have felt at least embarrassed by such excessive praise, but apparently could not help feeling gratified in his vanity. "I felt bashful and schoolboyish when I read your review of Blue Juniata," he wrote to Harriet Monroe; "I doubt that my poems deserve all the nice things you said about them. But say them again; I like to hear them." Monroe's enthusiasm for the book led to its being chosen as the selection for Poetry's book club, the "Poetry Clan," while Cowley was invited to be a judge in a Poetry poetry contest, together with Witter Bynner, Padraic Colum and Sara Teasdale. The experience proved interesting enough, despite Cowley's ambivalent feelings about the poetic distinction of his fellow judges: "I was glad to serve on a committee with poets whose work one can always respect, even though one sometimes disagrees with its tendencies."²³ Indirectly, Blue Juniata had initiated Cowley into a literary role he would frequently be asked to undertake in the future, whether as judge for the National Book Award or for one of the many awards granted by the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Others critics were less indiscriminately enthusiastic. Louis Untermeyer, who had been warned by Crane that if he missed Blue Juniata he would "regret it for countless years," found Crane's ardor wholly "justified," he told Cowley. In his review for The Saturday Review of Literature Untermeyer spoke of an "auspicious debut," praised the book's structure—it had "a continuity and growth one seldom finds in a book of poems, a round development more characteristic of the novel"—but delicately objected that Cowley penetrated "fewer surfaces than he leaves undisturbed." He heard the "accents" of Cummings, Aiken, Eliot and

Laforgue, but judged that in his best poems ("Two Swans," "Blue Juniata," "Mine No. 6," "Day Coach" and "Winter: Two Sonnets") Cowley had "grappled with his influences" and seemed "finally to be in possession of himself."²⁴

John Chamberlain agreed that Cowley had been "so completely honest with himself" that it was now possible to put him "into perspective" as the representative poet of "a generation still imbued with an indefinite sadness and in love with the mood of nostalgia, but more alive and less likely to retreat into the cloister than Mr. Eliot." Cowley, he felt, fortuitously combined an awareness of tradition with a headlong involvement in contemporary life. He heard echoes of Masters in the Pennsylvania poems, of Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" in "Nocturne," of Crane in "Leander," and felt Cowley was at his best in more general poems like "There is a Moment," "Winter: Two Sonnets" and "Leander," which he rated "the richest thing Mr. Cowley has written, a poem of gorgeous words . . . much less baffling" than any of Crane's.²⁵

Edwin Seaver was struck by Cowley's "genuine and refreshing lyrical gift" and "a corresponding precision and limpidity of language." He recognized "the young poet's inalienable right to experiment," but also noted "the eclecticism that for better or worse distinguishes contemporary art as a whole," and hoped a second book of poetry would show a "more definite direction." Horace Gregory, by contrast, felt that Cowley had transformed his various influences into "a distinguished style"--"Not even Hart Crane," he judged, "can surpass Mr. Cowley's verbal excellence." By making "the relationship of humanity to industrial and machine-made life" into the material for "authentic" verse, he felt Cowley had shown "the potential vitality of contemporary poetry;" his influence, Gregory thought, was "certain to be recognized."²⁶

A recurrent motif in many reviews revolved round Cowley's uncanny faculty for absorbing and reflecting the various literary influences to which he had exposed himself over the past ten years. Many critics noted the influence of Sandburg and Masters in the early poems, heard echoes of Eliot and Laforgue, and sensed Cowley's kinship with the Dadaists, as well as with Crane, Cummings and Wescott. Not all were equally convinced that Cowley had shed his chameleon colors and found his own voice. Several found it difficult to establish the exact point at which the representative quality gave way to the unique authenticity of true

poetry. A characteristic, if extreme, complaint was voiced by Ralph Cheney in Contemporary Verse, who described the book as "a record of the spiritual pilgrimage of the sad young men" which led nowhere. He found Cowley's poems "exceedingly smart" but "devoid of emotion"--"He arranges words into poems as laboriously and cold-bloodedly as though he were piecing together mosaics"--and berated Cowley for setting his sails to the shifting winds of literary fashion. In Commonweal R. Ellsworth Larsson, likewise, pointed up the typicality--both in technique and point of view--of Cowley's poems. He described Blue Juniata as "a sort of handbook of contemporary literary history" and noted that "the direction of Mr. Cowley's writing is toward a complete assimilation of the French tradition," something which was "true of the majority of our modern experimentalists." Both complaints were registered in magazines not particularly conspicuous for their hospitality to avant-garde art.²⁷

The critical dilemma was voiced with similar urgency in the sensitive and balanced review written by the young Morton Dauwen Zabel for The Nation. Cowley was "a new and definitely interesting poet," Zabel felt, one who possessed a "sharp awareness of the characteristic quality of his experience." Throughout his review he strongly stressed the "symptomatic" nature of Blue Juniata, variously describing the book as "a diagram of the sensations and disillusioning conflicts" of the younger generation, a "self-confessed logbook of literary youth in America" and "a guidebook to an exciting interval of intellectual and aesthetic adventure." Like many others, he noted that, for all the "variety and unexpectedness of experiment" in the book, the "inconstancy of its various inspirations" was "patent on every page." But unlike some others, he judged that Cowley had "kept his own voice among the discordant chorus of voices in which the lyric ambitions of so many youthful poets have been drowned." Zabel was the only critic to single out "Towers of Song" (one of the "imagistic" poems which Cowley himself felt were "false" to the rest of his work) as the "climax" of Blue Juniata. Cowley's stature as a poet, Zabel concluded, was "already revealed," but he hoped that the poet would learn to write "somewhat more independently of his generation's peculiar ordeal."²⁸

More acerbic criticism came from Yvor Winters and Conrad Aiken. In early August Cowley sent a copy of Blue Juniata to Winters in California, who promptly volunteered a review. He submitted it to The Nation but,

finding the book already bespoken for, turned to R. P. Blackmur, then managing editor of The Hound & Horn, a literary quarterly which had been appearing as "A Harvard Miscellany" from Cambridge since 1927. Blackmur, a largely self-educated poet-critic six years younger than Cowley, had been an early admirer of his poetry. In a late 1924 letter to Cowley S. Foster Damon had mentioned the nineteen-year old Blackmur as a promising and intelligent writer with a "tremendous" enthusiasm for Cowley's work.²⁹ Blackmur's early admiration persisted through the decade and when, on a visit to Damon in Providence in June 1929, he was shown the proofs of Blue Juniata, he immediately informed Cowley of his determination to have the book reviewed in The Hound & Horn, either by Damon or himself. In the same letter Blackmur made it clear that, with the recent demise of The Dial, he hoped to have "a first lien on all the material written for God by Kenneth Burke and yourself." Cowley responded guardedly; he distrusted the magazine's subtitle, fearing it might be too exclusively and provincially hospitable to Harvard writers, but consented to appear in its pages and suggested that Blackmur might want to broaden the magazine's literary boundaries by soliciting contributions from Josephson, Tate, Wilson, Putnam, Crane and Cummings, most of them not Harvard-grown. In the summer issue of The Hound & Horn Blackmur printed three of Cowley's poems--"Kelly's Barroom," "Nocturne," and "The Rubber Plant"--which would shortly appear in Blue Juniata. By that time The Hound & Horn had itself become somewhat embarrassed by its subtitle, which was dropped with the next issue. Shortly after, The Hound & Horn merged with The Symposium and Blackmur's position as managing editor was terminated. In November 1929 he informed Cowley that the proposed merger had not changed "the tentative arrangements" between The Hound & Horn and Cowley and Burke, but Cowley did not contribute any further poems (or articles) to The Hound & Horn, even though the projected unification of the two magazines fell through. By then, he was too busy working and writing for The New Republic, a job which Blackmur envied him, and was no longer dependent on other magazines for publication of his writings.³⁰

In August 1929 Blackmur was struggling to write his own review of Blue Juniata when he received Winters's unsolicited contribution, which he promptly accepted. In his first review for The Hound & Horn Winters, who was aware that he already enjoyed "a slight reputation for a bad disposition," spoke out with the boldness one might expect. His

ast stringent criticism of Blue Juniata clearly reflected his own critical preoccupations. It was not to the book's credit, Winters charged, that "its less successful poems might serve as an outline history of the fashions that [had] risen and fallen" during the past ten years. Cowley had only rarely "mastered" his various influences--in particular those of Laforgue and Eliot--but rather adopted them "from the outside with little or no awareness of their organic causes." In disagreement with most reviewers Winters did not rate Cowley's Pennsylvania poems his best work: "the group as a whole is more moving than any of its parts, the reason being a kind of stylistic dilution of an emotion that is nevertheless quite genuine of its kind, so that the poetry never permits of very close scrutiny of any given point." Ironically, Winters condemned what Tate had praised. He objected to the prose-like diffuseness of Cowley's "unorganised catalogues and progressions" (as in "Blue Juniata") and demanded more "firm and closely organized" poems like "William Wilson," "There is a Moment," and, especially, "The Lady from Harlem," which he quoted in its entirety as a perfect realization of "an organic, not a sought and theoretically correct emotion." It was where Cowley was "endeavoring to study and master himself," Winters observed, that he proved to be "one of the eight or ten most distinguished poets of his generation [who] might become . . . something more." Winters's critique was sharp but not wholly unjust; there was, in many of Cowley's poems, a tendency towards the disorderly looseness of prose as well as an emotional artificiality. What Winters failed to grasp was that the former was part of a deliberate poetic strategy ("my chief interest has always been rhythm rather than image," Cowley had written to Burke) and the latter partly caused by the revisionist zeal of a "constructionist" poet. Winters, however, seemed to be carried away by his own preoccupations when, in a private letter, he dismissed the "feeling" in Cowley's country poems as "a peripheral and slightly sought-after experience." Rather, such criticism seemed to apply to a poem like "For St. Bartholomew's Eve," which very few reviewers even bothered to mention.³¹

"My chief quarrel with you would be that you have tried to find your salvation in so many places other than your own conscience: now in Laforgue, later in Dada, later still in a nostalgic collapse into your native countryside," Winters wrote to Cowley upon finishing his review. Conrad Aiken registered similar objections, but did so more violently and

without bringing his embarrassing charges before the public. In May Aiken had promised to review Blue Juniata for The Bookman, but two months later found himself forced to make a painful confession: Cowley's book failed to live up to his central requirements of good poetry. On July 26, 1929, Aiken poured out his disappointment in a long, anguished letter:

Damnation! Here for years I've been urging you to get [Blue Juniata] out, to get it off your chest, and harboring a clear enough notion that I liked these things . . . and now that they're out, and I re-read them, I disastrously find that they no longer very much move me, and that I want something more or something else. . . . But to be seriously truthful: these things seem to me excessively able: they often show a technical brilliance, you can sling almost any manner you want to; and there is a toughish something through all sorts of manners which I can hear as your voice, see as your profile, distinguish as your manner of dressing, your stubborn way of thinking. And yet, there is also the fact that reading them through is disconcertingly like seeing a cross-section of the poetry of the last ten years: as if you had changed your style in accordance with the fashions--no doubt unconsciously, but detectable all the same. . . . [You have been] so preoccupied with poetry as technique . . . that somehow you've forgotten to get down to the real business of the poet: viz., consciously or unconsciously to give the low-down on himself, and through himself humanity. It's as if you come to it from outside. . . . But you? what you think or feel which is secretly you? shamefully you? intoxicatingly you? drunkenly or soberly or lyrically you? This doesn't come out. . . . The stuff is so good, and yet so (somehow) superficial! As if you'd adopted one palette after another and demonstrated your skill, but nevertheless avoided the final business of self-betrayal. . . . I always think of you as the most individual and honest of your generation: all you've got to do is tap that. . . .³²

Aiken's critique emerged directly from his personal aesthetics of ruthless self-revelation,³³ but in 1929 there was enough truth in his charges for Cowley to feel pained by the harsh disapprobation of a poet who had been, in so many ways, his literary mentor and preceptor. Only two months earlier Cowley had informed Burke of his decision to compose his poems by "deliberate determination" rather than by "inspiration." Shortly after reaching his thirty-first birthday he implicitly acknowledged the pertinency of Aiken's observations in his notebook, if not for the poems he had written, then at least for those he was going to write. His recent purchase of "The Rhymer's Lexicon" was "symbolic," he felt, of his decision to abandon "the idea of writing poems as they come

to me" and, henceforth, to apply "all my technical knowledge to the task, deliberately, as if I were a carpenter making a book-case."

. . . There is no age for writing poetry, but there are ages for writing particular types of poems. At 31, what I write will be less personal, more objective. I shall pick out a theme--preferably a "big" theme and one involving motion, history, and contemporary life; Hart's "River" was almost ideal. Having treated the theme exhaustively, I shall set out at an emotional tangent, as in Leander.

The regularity of the verse will be in inverse ratio to the warmth with which I am writing. This is an old idea of the Romantics, and it is not wholly false.

I shall make no attempt whatsoever to be original. From Eliot I shall freely borrow the indirect statement, from Hart a certain handling of images, from Cummings the vocabulary of contemporary life. If I write about myself, I may even borrow Phelps Putnam's fantastic treatment and pedestrian metres. I may possibly use Eliot's treatment of a subject on two or three planes, present and past, fact and dream, incident and emotional reaction. I shall carefully avoid the vocabulary of these poets, and shall hope that by absolutely sacrificing originality, I shall gain it and be admitted into the Heaven of the Beatitudes.³⁴

Cowley's half-cynical reflections proved self-defeating; perhaps they were the symptoms of a fear that he was entering a period of infertility as a poet. It was not until six years after the publication of Blue Juniata that another new poem by Cowley reached print. It was not until 1941 that a second booklet of poems would appear, significantly entitled The Dry Season, holding a mere seventeen poems, two of which had appeared in The Little Review and transition in 1926 and 1928 respectively. Its title poem bespeaks that "the flow of inspiration" had indeed temporarily run dry:

The springs were dry,
the stream bed stony there, its pools half-stagnant,
with snakes beside them dozing and the trout
gasping and dying at the water's brim . . .

It is August, the dry season of your life.
Take out your heart and wring it between your hands;
no pain will dart, no blood will drip from it.
No blood is there.³⁵

Cowley was essentially a one-book poet, who would struggle for the rest of his long literary life to perfect and adapt the original fifty-

four poems in Blue Juniata. "Baudelaire is the archetype of the class," he observed to Tate in September 1929. "My next book of poems, when written, will probably be an expansion of the New York section of Blue Juniata; then I shall perhaps try to expand the country poems; then finally to revise and reissue the whole book." For the next thirty-nine years Cowley would follow, sometimes with long interruptions, the "program" he outlined to Tate, as he continued to digest and recreate his experiences into what he was hoping to make into "the full record of a life, so far as my poems could give it." In 1968 appeared Blue Juniata: Collected Poems, which expanded the autobiographical structure of the original book to encompass eighty-six poems, including seventeen new ones besides The Dry Season; it took until 1985, when the addition of six new poems completed Blue Juniata: A Life, before the book received the subtitle truly fitting what had become "the integrated record of a life."³⁶

In 1929 Blue Juniata represented Cowley's testament de sa jeunesse, his poetic equivalent of George Moore's Memoirs of My Dead Life. "Every novel, every poem, every essay, merits just so much of its author's life, and no more," Cowley had observed to Wilson in February 1929. "There's a time when everything ought to be published (that is, buried, for publishing a book is exactly equivalent to burying a part of one's past)." Blue Juniata, in effect, marked the beginning of a process of retrospective evaluation of his early life which would culminate five years later in Exile's Return. In the prose notes to his book Cowley expressed reservations about certain "questionable" qualities--"a sort of crooked sentiment, a self-protective smirk"--in the poems of this "dead adolescent." He may have been smartly anticipating his critics or he may have been voicing a sincere feeling of apologetic self-deprecation, when he confessed to his readers: "I have ceased to value many of these poems; their emotions and their technique are too impermanent. They still impress me, however, as having a certain documentary importance, and as marking a chapter in the history of our wandering, landless, uprooted generation." Cowley's wistfully ironic prose notes were infused with an incipient awareness of the deficiency of his "spectatorial" attitude to art and life. "We had been born with illusions, unlike the present generation," he noted about his postwar time in Greenwich Village, "but having lost them at a very early age, we felt the need of replacing them

with others; and we had come to erect the sordid into a kind of religion." He now acknowledged that his expatriate years in France among "the Valuta schweine" had been lived through without much understanding of the human, social and economic realities underlying the frenzied excitement of life among the European avant-garde: "I saw a chaotic Europe that was feverishly seeking the future of art and economics. I saw the picturesque rather than the enduring." It would not be long before such a mode of half-nostalgic, half-repudiatory stocktaking would lead to the realization that his "real exile" had been from "society itself."³⁷

Cowley spent the three weeks before the appearance of Blue Juniata in Belsano. There, where the ancestral house was "cool" and the hemlock woods "dark as a cathedral," he hoped to find momentary relief from the summer heat and the mounting strains in his marriage. His trip was in part a "flight from idleness" and he expected that, out among "the goldenrods, woodchucks and Methodists," he would be able to finish some articles for The New Republic and the Herald Tribune. He had hopes of enticing Burke to join him on his return expedition to the haunts of childhood and through June and July urged his friend not to miss this occasion for "the fruitful cultivation of an atmosphere that threatens to be forgotten." When Burke seemed to be hedging, Cowley grew more emphatic: "If you don't come to Belsano we shall both be very sorry. It's an opportunity for a flight backwards into adolescence, into a life with only the future shadow of women (walks along dusty roads, Chopin at twilight on an out-of-tune piano, books, possibilities, Mother in the kitchen)."³⁸

Cowley returned from his trip with a renewed determination to consolidate his attainments. But when he surveyed the host of articles and reviews he had written over the years, he was appalled by the ephemerality of many of his writings. "Here I've been writing reviews," he lamented to Burke, "and sometimes very good reviews, for the last ten years, and they're wasted, old, purely topical, occupied with specific books instead of general ideas. I'm not entirely lacking in general ideas, but for proof I can only point to my notebooks, not to my published work." Burke had repeatedly warned Cowley against precisely

this sense of futility, urging him to delve for general principles of criticism rather than spend his energies on the more pragmatic (and more quickly remunerative) task of reviewing specific works, and Cowley was now forced to acknowledge that Burke's admonitions had been painfully pertinent. "Reviewing is a form of suicide," he observed to John Brooks Wheelwright. In his notebook he registered his doubts about the value of a career, in which he had written enough articles to fill three or four volumes, without having the substance of a book:

The Reviewer. . . . Book reviews are impermanent by definition. In almost no case can they outlast the book which is their subject. Even if they deal with a book of permanent value, their life is apt to be short. The world's attitude changes towards books of permanent value. The discoveries made by the reviewer become the property of the public; nobody wishes to read them over. I wrote one of the first essays in English on Proust; reading it over seven years later I found that only a few paragraphs of it were worth saving.

Given the impermanence of the medium, reviewers can be forgiven for utilizing impermanent and unimportant emotions--their friendship for the author or the publisher, their malice against either or both, their desire to succeed in the politics of literature, their wish to be considered brilliant or prophetic. Even the few really dishonest reviewers can be forgiven more easily than can dishonest novelists or poets.

Honest reviewers have another sort of vice . . . they adulterate what they are writing by introducing personal reminiscences, yearnings, prose poems, and abstract theories of aesthetics, none of which have any rightful place in a review. Yet these paragraphs which make the form impure are apt to be the best paragraphs.³⁹

It was Irita Van Doren who opened a way out of such bleak assessments by commissioning Cowley to write a number of leading essay-reviews for her Herald Tribune book section and inviting him to be the magazine's "visiting critic" for the fall. Cowley jumped at the chance to write a series of articles "in the same direction" which he hoped could give unity and focus to his projected book. "It could be either about French or American literature," he speculated in a letter to Burke: "personally I should like to make it American and to deal with the problems that are confronting ourselves." To begin with, he contemplated an essay on "The Literary Life" which revealed how much he was moving towards the pursuit, for his own generation, of a line of broader cultural criticism first laid out, then abandoned, by Van Wyck Brooks: his essay would be one in

which he "described the opportunities afforded by a career of letters, distinguished between men of letters and writers pure and simple, pointed out that very few American writers have achieved a literary career, demanded a higher code of literary ethics, etc."⁴⁰

The extensive outlines and drafts he made in his notebooks indicate that Cowley was now developing many of the ideas he later embedded in a critical-historical framework in Exile's Return. The later sections of his 1920s notebooks, indeed, read like first drafts of the book. Conjointly, the six major articles he wrote for Irita van Doren in the second half of 1929, together with a full-length article for The New Republic on "The Literary Business," demonstrate that, even before the impact of the imminent Depression could make itself felt on his thinking, Cowley had come to think of literary culture as indissolubly embedded in a social and economic context. Taken together, the seven essays amounted to his personal stocktaking of American letters in the recent past and an exploration of its prospects for the future as these appeared to him on the threshold of the 1930s. Cowley's impulse to sum up the literary achievements of a passing decade was shared by others of his age-group; Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke and Gorham Munson together produced a similar series of evaluative essays for The Bookman, reviewing the decade's attainment in American poetry, fiction and criticism, respectively.⁴¹

Cowley's essays bifurcated, quite naturally, into two directions: three of them comprised his evaluation of the present attainments and future prospects of his literary generation, while the others were concerned with the interdependence of the fate of contemporary writing and the state of American civilization. The first two articles appeared in late June of 1929 and gave evidence of the persistent urgency of Cowley's feeling, voiced three years earlier in Charm, that "history is never more fascinating than when it describes the adventures of our own generation."⁴²

"Our Own Generation" marked the beginning of Exile's Return; its opening sections contained the substance of the "Prologue" and the chapter "Big-Town High School" of the book. By 1929 his contention that, "in a very restricted sense of the word, we composed what was probably the first real 'generation' in American letters," no longer sounded as preposterous as it had eight years before in "This Youngest Generation;" nor did his claim that "already it seems that this wartime generation

will be rather important in the history of American letters" sound like unwarranted optimism or prejudiced overestimation: Dos Passos, Hemingway, Wescott, and Wilder, Cowley could now claim, had "already established their positions," while Burke and Crane had, likewise, made "permanent contributions to American literature."

In the second half of his essay Cowley probed into the reasons why the feeling of oppression and disillusionment which had weighed on his generation at age seventeen had now disappeared. If, at thirty, it was no longer "lost," this was partly the result of the "new forces" in the intellectual world after the war (Einstein, Freud, Proust, Joyce), partly of a new conduct of life adopted by a whole age-group. Cowley did not hesitate to project a personal life's motto--Copey's "solvitur ambulando"--onto an entire generation: "We ourselves have found that most of our philosophical difficulties can be solved, not by philosophy itself, but by living on, by changing one's angle of approach, and often simply by changing one's place." The war itself, he claimed, had had emotional and intellectual consequences that had been "generally disregarded"--"It destroyed our sense of dull security and taught us to live from day to day. It gave us a thirst for action and adventure. It presented us with violent contrasts, with very simple tragedies, and so led us back to the old themes of love and death." The cumulative effect of all those changes had been to destroy "the definite ideas, the purely Anglo-Saxon tradition, the feeling of limited opportunities" of their adolescence and to replace them by "almost nothing--nothing except a vague sense of tremendous possibilities" and a childlike "feeling of wonder" toward life in general.

At thirty, Cowley pictured his generation as standing at "a sort of cross-roads from which any number of paths will lead us toward a variety of destinations." He was aware of the diversity of literary paths open to his contemporaries, but he withheld from recommending any one of them at the exclusion of the others. Cummings and Hemingway were moving towards an "almost pure thoughtlessness" in their efforts to "convey the exact color of the passing moment;" Burke and Tate, by contrast, seemed to be proceeding towards "the pure intellectualism" of Valéry; Wilder and Wescott steered an intermediary course by pursuing "a certain moral tone, a note of personal dignity;" Eliot's classicism had "exercised a very deep influence on half the members of our generation;" while Dos Passos

and Mike Gold were guiding themselves "recklessly by the red signboard that points towards Moscow." Less feasible directions, Cowley felt, were pointed by Joyce's and Stein's experiments with "the abstract value of words" and by the Surrealist explorations of the subconscious. Cowley's concluding paragraphs bespoke a cautious eclecticism and an open-minded pluralism, but also reflected his personal uncertainty about the literary future and indicated a need to first digest and evaluate the impact of the modernist upheaval before plunging ahead into new and as yet undetermined territories of art and life:

There is a feeling among us that the time for pure experiments has ended and that much of value has been discovered, but not reduced to order, and that our task is rather to consolidate the gains of the last decade and exactly to map the territory which has already been partially explored.

The industrial world spins on toward the future; the world of science questions the fundamental axioms on which it rests; the thunder of new wars, new changes, is heard in a restless sky. We hasten to select a path, any path; to create a path for ourselves, or else to plunge blindly ahead. For, we have come to believe--most of us have come to believe--that the choice of a literary direction is no longer of fundamental importance to ourselves. We should meet with the same difficulties along any path, and if we struggle ahead; if we remain in the atmosphere that is most conducive to struggle, we shall perhaps arrive at the same goal. It is not a fixed goal, after all; it gleams forth now here, now there; like the holy Grail it appears to some and hides itself from others. And like the knights who pursued the Grail--they had been tested in many battles and had lost the first flush of youth--like Bors and Lancelot and Gawain, we are undertaking a search which depends not so much on our direction as on our conduct of life itself.⁴³

Two years later, such an open-ended "grailism" had come to seem inviable under the impact of his radical political commitments. In 1929, Cowley preferred to keep his options open and shrank from a definitive choice in public.

In the privacy of his notebook, however, he was less unequivocal and summed up his personal beliefs in the form of a "credo" which not only indicated his vacillating awareness that some sort of choice was inevitable but also, for all its lack of political coloration, pointed the direction in which he would eventually move:

Beliefs.

1. The highest ideal for a writer of my generation is to

influence the generations that come after him.

2.This influence should have an earthy basis in a regionalism that is neither sectionalism nor chauvinism.

3.It can be exerted through essays, history, fiction, drama, poetry—all the paths are open and I must choose my own.

4.It should involve an interest in social and economic forces.

5.However, it should remain disinterested. Often it may happen that the intellectual may foresee--war in Europe--growth of New York into Nassau or Westchester--further rise or decline of the automobile industry. He can turn this knowledge into essays or even into greater imaginative effort--into novels, plays, poems, but he cannot build munition plants, buy lands in Nassau county, go long or short of automobile stocks, without committing treason to the intellect.

6.Success in one's career as an intellectual should come neither before 30, when one is still unripe, nor after 40, when one is apt to be embittered.

7.It now remains for me to choose my path and go ahead.

8.To be a man means exercising one's power of choice to the fullest.⁴⁴

Despite the note of determination in his eight articles of literary faith, for the moment Cowley remained surer of what he rejected than what he was prepared to advocate. His stance was very much that of the writer out of sorts with the prevailing tendencies of contemporary mass culture but shrinking from commitment to a possibly doctrinaire program of social change.

In his second essay for the Herald Tribune Cowley opposed the ethics and aesthetics of his own age-group to the tendency of cultural pessimism and nihilism exemplified by Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, Oswald Spengler and, most recent and American, Joseph Wood Krutch, whose examination of The Modern Temper (1929) was currently arousing sharp debate. In his notebook he had already taken his stand on an affirmative humanism which carried the dormant seeds of radicalism:

We are informed (vide Krutch) that human life is essentially mean; that we are no more the center of life in the world than our world is the center of the solar system, or that in turn of the vast universe--which itself is now deprived of its theoretical infinity; that human life is brief and aimless--but what of all this. Our prophets of despair have developed certain functions of the imagination at the expense of others. They can conceive of an inhuman universe; they cannot conceive of a vast human society in relation to which the life of the individual is petty but not without possibility of lasting effect; they lack the concept of history. Greatness is relative. We are little or great in relation to something. We have perhaps lost the concept of God, but we have replaced

it by that of society--the existence, the power, the reality of which cannot be questioned. . . . And so, essentially, we are a humble generation; having accepted the theoretical losses of our immediate predecessors, we are consolidating the real and sufficient possessions they have left us, and we are building our own limited happiness among the debris of their illusions, a cottage in the ruins of a palace.⁴⁵

Writing for publication Cowley took issue with Krutch's belief that modern man had lost "the faith in life which is requisite for the building of a Chartres or the carving of a Venus de Milo" and challenged his conviction that (in Cowley's paraphrase) "aesthetic principles cannot be applied to questions of conduct." Krutch's logic, Cowley pointed out, was in conflict with the emotions betrayed by his style: his argument that we had lost the sense of tragedy and human dignity once possessed by the Elizabethans was expressed in prose "dignified and even noble." Style, Cowley implied (in the process revealing his aesthetic kinship with Hemingway), harbored in itself a moral quality and Krutch's language was not that of "an absolute cynic, empty of hopes and aspirations" but betrayed that "a high moral purpose" underlay his ideological indictment. Krutch's pessimistic conclusions, Cowley argued, were belied by a whole group of younger writers in whose works one definitely found the "note of tragedy" as well as "a feeling that is both modern and strangely Elizabethan." These writers--Cowley dubbed them "the new primitives"--had solved or dismissed the cultural pessimism of Krutch and Spengler in a simple but effective fashion: "They proclaim the dignity of life in their own way, by living." As a result their works radiated "the sort of headlong enthusiasm that one associates with the beginnings of things, with the first step towards a new culture."⁴⁶

Insofar as Cowley's repudiation of the "prophets of despair" was less an intellectual refutation of faulty logic than an emotional or instinctive rejection, he proved himself a characteristic member of the "new primitives," whose work, he advanced, often "avoided the expression of ideas" but was confined to sensuous impressions, simple emotions and acute perceptions. In essence, however, Cowley tried to rise above the anti-intellectual and anti-traditional bent of these coevals. Aiming to define their commonly held ideas, he observed how the "new primitives" represented "a definite break with literary tradition" in that they wrote as if no one had ever written before them and replaced "the language of

Tennyson and Keats" by "the American language as spoken in poolrooms, speakeasies, beauty shops and Pullman smokers." They shunned the Freudian subject of "the human soul, with its dreams, its warped desires, its uncertain flow of consciousness," and turned away from this "misty-mid region of the soul" to "the definite, brightly colored fields of reality." It would not be long before Cowley would urge American writers at large to abandon the portrayal of man's inner world and to turn their interests to "the violent contrasts and struggles of the outer world."⁴⁷ In the last analysis, however, Cowley carefully dissociated himself from the "new primitive" indifference to the "complicated traditions" of the past and, indirectly revealing his indebtedness to T. S. Eliot, felt his way towards an intermediary position of criticism and endorsement:

We, [the new primitives'] more cautious contemporaries, are neither contemptuous of the present, like Dr. Spengler and Mr. Krutch, nor are we willing to dismiss the past. We regard the traditions of literature as a complex and precious system of relationships which we cannot abandon and can alter only laboriously, slowly, with the utmost caution. The task, however, is one that seems worthy of our most patient efforts. And so we proceed on our own difficult path, while we observe the bold progress of [the new primitives] with curiosity and a sort of admiring dismay.⁴⁸

The difficult task he so cautiously set himself here would constitute a lifelong endeavor: Cowley's most substantial essays, in particular those written in mid-career, would aim to recover a "usable past" for American literature and to demonstrate the place of the major writers of his generation in an American literary tradition harboring Poe and Emerson, Hawthorne and Whitman. In his conclusion to "The New Primitives" Cowley adopted a critical perspective not unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald's "double vision." Writing about "his" generation, Cowley would typically strive to combine "the maximum of critical detachment" with "the maximum of immersion in the drama" of his literary times; he would fuse the roles of spectator and participant into a perspective which was so uniquely his own that it could be representative.⁴⁹

In early October 1929 Cowley discussed at length a new work by the "new primitive" par excellence: Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms. In line with his earlier Book Chat portrait Cowley examined the reasons, both literary and extra-literary, for Hemingway's "legendary" fame,

finding "the principal explanation . . . in his having expressed, better than any other writer, the limited viewpoint of his contemporaries." He analyzed the way in which Hemingway's "subtractive" style and "strict behaviorism" led to a general effect of "deliberate unsophistication"--and did so in plain, lucid critical prose which highlighted the degree to which he himself shared his generation's distrust of emotional falsification, its effort to "redeem" the American language by discarding "the big words."⁵⁰ He also pointed out, however, that Hemingway's style was changing so as to accommodate more complicated emotional registers as well as a subtler and more sophisticated range of intellectual interests. Already, on the strength of passages like the retreat from Caporetto, it did not seem unwarranted to mention Hemingway "in the same breath" with Stendhal.

Besides being an astutely perceptive review of A Farewell to Arms, Cowley's essay encompassed a critical revaluation of his and his generation's war experience and its effect on postwar literature and life: it formed, in effect, the heart of the section "Ambulance Service" in Exile's Return. The ambulance service, Cowley now advanced, had in reality been "a sort of college extension course for the present generation of writers." In its way, the service had been "almost ideal," but its most important effect, he now advanced for the first time, had been to instil in an entire generation "a spectatorial attitude" towards the war. Cowley took A Farewell to Arms as exemplary of such a stance--Frederic Henry being "a spectator who was beginning to lose interest"--but his essay also entailed a half-guilty recognition that, insofar as the "curious air of detachment" had continued to mark his and his generation's attitude towards postwar life and society, it had pushed a whole age-group of writers into a self-defeating and possibly futile direction.⁵¹

The four remaining essays testified to Cowley's growing awareness that the fate of writing was inextricably linked up with the social, moral and economic forces at work in American society. Implicitly they amounted to a personal acknowledgement that, insofar as his own attitude to art and life had been based on the principle that "[a]rt is separate from life; the artist is independent of the world and superior to the lifelings," he had steered by a faulty compass. "The old idea that literature pure existed merely for entertainment, advanced no thesis, and

produced no effect on readers, has been pretty thoroughly exploded," he observed in a notebook entry on "Propaganda and Art." On the threshold of the 1930s Cowley was exploring issues that were to become major preoccupations over the next few years. There was little doubt, he observed in an entry about Burke's theories of form, that "art might be judged by the effect it produces on the reader," but that certain "types" of effect were "better than others--better, that is, in relation to society as a whole, which is the final creator and criterion of value." With increasing urgency he was feeling his way towards a coherent vision of art and society which could provide a meaningful antidote to his feeling that his early years had possibly been wasted. Several poems in the last section of Blue Juniata had pictured the poet as a solitary man waiting vainly for some form of, perhaps religious, salvation; in his notebook he confessed himself still searching for "a word, one word to unlock the corridors of dream." A final notebook entry was entitled, grandiloquently but symptomatically, "Toward a Philosophy of American Life;" in it, he considered the thwarting effects of mass consumerism, cultural standardization and machinery on the quality of human life, was disturbed by the seemingly general breakdown of moral character, and noted that "an increasing number of people seem unable to adjust themselves to modern civilization; they 'break' after thirty; the 'young men on the make' whom we admired in college become simple drunks, or develop strange manias, . . . their wives sometimes change into real monsters of debauchery & self-indulgence." Increasingly, also, he became convinced that "escape"--whether into a pure and purposeless art, into the past, into exotic lands, primitive cultures, private social islands, rural regions, or frenzied sexual abandonment--always boiled down to "a form of treachery" and that one "must, instead of finding backwaters in the river of history, flow with the current and try to direct it."⁵²

In public, however, Cowley remained, as always, sanely balanced and refrained from taking the stand towards which his private speculations were inevitably, if as yet hesitantly, pointing. A full-length article for The New Republic, appearing in early July 1929, indicated that Cowley's conception of his function as a man of letters was already moving towards that of a mediator between the world of commercial publishing and the literary community at large, a conception that would lead him to assume an influential position as literary consultant to

Viking Press twenty years later. In "The Literary Business" Cowley examined in more serious fashion the tendencies in American publishing which he had scathingly satirized before in his "Portrait of a Publisher," while probing into the economic conditions that had produced the new phenomenon of the book clubs. To conceive of publishing as one of the "luxury trades," to apply to it the standards of commercial salesmanship and to adopt "the sensational methods of the circus and the stage," Cowley observed, had led to a dangerous increase in the promotion of a dull and mediocre (because economically dependable) literature. If the new tendencies had perhaps the "redeeming" effect that publishing was "no longer a corpse floating in the backwaters of American business," they also were marked by an unforgivable "lack of efficiency." Because the "business" of literature was "largely a game of chance," Cowley advanced, books were priced at a level that was barely justified by their production costs. Here lay the raison d'être for the phenomenon of the book clubs, which to Cowley signified merely one more step in "the gradual 'socialization' of the country, in the process of reducing every citizen to a unit of sales resistance." From such a mode of thinking it would be but a step to a more radical critique of the wasteful and deleterious methods of capitalist consumerism and a concomitant plea for efficiency and centralization which Cowley was to advocate, along with others on The New Republic, before another two years had passed. In 1929, however, he was content to note that the effects of the book-club system might be "partly harmful" but also had "certain compensations:" for one, it had "added vastly to the interest in the literary business;" for another, it had "given literature itself a sort of dignity that it lacked . . . in the days of Chatterton and Keats." The book clubs, he concluded, formed no threat to publishers, but he hoped the latter might be led to "revise their methods" by pruning the "dead wood" from their lists, confining themselves to "books that are really worth publishing" and even reducing their prices.⁵³

Three long articles published in the New York Herald Tribune in November 1929 reflected Cowley's intense preoccupation with the position of the individual in an industrial society in which the pressures were all towards a dehumanizing standardization. In "Machine-Made America" Cowley aimed to construct "a philosophy of American life" by synthesizing the bleak cultural analyses of James Truslow Adams's Our Business

Civilization, Ralph Borsodi's This Ugly Civilization, and Edward O'Brien's Dance of the Machines, three writers who considered the quality of human life under industrial capitalism from the point of view of the intellectual and professional classes, the "quality-minded" people at large, and the creative artists, respectively. Cowley was "impressed" by the unanimity of their collective agreement that under the present system educated and uneducated Americans alike were not only the "slaves" of machinery but were being pressured to sacrifice "all the finer arts of life to the maintenance of a high material standard." Cowley, however, was as yet not prepared to accept such a "dark picture" of life under capitalist consumerism and argued that there were still "compensations for individuals" in a relentlessly standardized society. He now probed more deeply into the question of "style and obsolescence," which he saw as the sine qua non of the modern industrial system: it was only through perpetually creating "new styles" for consumption that the system could maintain itself at all. Believing that "style" represented, in effect, "the whole element of originality or creativeness in modern life," Cowley affirmed a near-Emersonian faith in the possibilities of individualism against the strong pressures for social and cultural uniformity: "if we are able to trace any style to its source, we usually find that it was created by an individual, by some one so sure of himself that he was able to direct public opinion, instead of being directed by it." It was still possible, Cowley concluded, for "certain gifted individuals to disengage themselves from social uniformity" and attain "the sort of independence that is necessary for the creation of styles." In this way the mass of consumers might be led by a cultural elite, "an aristocracy of style makers, highly rewarded, left in comparative independence, and existing side by side with our present aristocracy of business."⁵⁴

In a companion essay Cowley examined the various modes of "escape" resorted to by American writers in an effort to "achieve independence from mass production and uniformity," but found that, whether they fled to tradition and the church (Eliot), the Italian Riviera (Pound), Spain (Hemingway), the South Seas (Gauguin), or a life of "sophisticated savagery" in the shadows of big city skyscrapers, each escape route was "open to individuals, but not to society as a whole." There was little evidence at present, he thought, of "that passion for universalizing one's problems and solutions which produced the guild socialists, the

anarchists and the communists" in the years before the war. On the contrary, Communism was declining and losing the support of the intellectual classes, most of whose members were going for "personal means of salvation." The American writer, Cowley argued, might agree with the Communists in condemning the social and human injustice of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the miserable living conditions of the Southern textile workers, or the recent bloody strikes at Gastonia, North Carolina, but one could do so without becoming convinced that "such defects of the capitalist system could not be remedied without destroying the system as a whole." Cowley, moreover, was "appalled" by the prospect of America following the Russian example of collectivist management: "What became of personal freedom in a Communist state?"

Deadlocked between the equally inviable alternatives of revolutionary Communism and "exile" or escape, Cowley turned to Adams, Borsodi and O'Brien, each of whom offered a different panacea to current social and spiritual ills. Predictably, he was drawn most strongly to Borsodi's proposal of a return to a self-sufficient, small-scale system of rural household economics. Borsodi's program, Cowley observed, tied in with the spreading "fashion" to migrate from the larger cities to the surrounding countryside, as well as with the recent revival of household industries. In the final analysis, however, he concluded that even Borsodi's program offered "no solution for society as a whole;" it offered at best "a personal evasion."

In reality, Cowley now advanced, there was no need to "escape" from American life. Conditions, after all, were not "so bad that we cannot face them without losing our separate individualities;" there were still sufficient opportunities for a meaningful exercise of the creative spirit within the limits imposed by the social system. Moreover, more was lost than won by cutting one's ties with one's native culture:

The frantic consumption of factory-made products is not imposed on us by law and neither are we compelled to hold standardized opinions. Without permanently leaving our own communities--unless those communities are worse than any which I myself inhabited--one can achieve a certain measure of individual freedom, of artistic living and even of artistic success.

Moreover, there is much to be gained by remaining with our own people and by not departing too widely from their mode of life. The present generation in American letters offers a certain negative proof of this assertion. It is by no means a lost generation, but it is certainly uprooted; and it seems to

me that its members have paid a heavy penalty for deserting their own background. They are forced to write about indefinite subjects for an indefinite audience. They are tempted to become either disciples without conviction or prophets without a people . . . It is entirely possible that the quality of their writing might be improved if they accepted the responsibilities of settled men. . . .

[The present system, Cowley concluded, still offered] an extraordinary opportunity for those capable of leadership, and such an opportunity is a sort of duty from which they can escape to other countries or economic systems only at a certain cost to themselves.⁵⁵

On Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, the collapse of the stock market had triggered off an economic depression which would profoundly affect the nature, if not the substance, of Cowley's literary thought. The articles published in the Herald Tribune in November 1929 were written before the impact of the economic upheaval could have made itself felt; as Cowley was to write later, the 1930s did not really begin until "several months or more than a year" after the Crash, and 1930 itself would be a "strange year" which served in essence as "an epilogue to the Boom." In November 1929 Cowley's essays carried at best the dormant seeds of a future radicalism in his insistence that the writer could reap artistic profit from maintaining his links with the larger human community around him. Before long, such convictions were to be politicized and transformed into the confident (but soon subverted) expectation that American writers would choose the workers' side in helping to change American capitalist society; in 1929, however, Cowley's beliefs pointed less towards Marx's revolutionary vision than towards Hawthorne's nonpolitical awareness of the tension between artistic isolation and a humanizing commitment to maintaining one's place in the "magnetic chain of humanity." By late 1929 Cowley had effectively embarked upon a lifelong concerted endeavor to "redeem" (in Lewis Simpson's words) the American writer from his condition of "exile" and alienation on native grounds. In "The Escape from America" he had struck a vein which, on a level deeper than and incorruptible by politics, he would continue to mine in his subsequent career as a mediator between the small American community of letters (a "republic," as he and Tate envisioned it, with its own code of literary ethics) and the larger community of society. By 1929 he had become convinced that the American writer had no business being a refugee, exile or spectator of

contemporary reality, but must become involved in the culture of his native land, to the benefit of his art and of himself. Implicitly he had already come to recognize that writers, as he formulated it in 1949, had "a double duty," both to "the public" and to "the values of their own profession."⁵⁶

As a coda to his series of evaluative essays Cowley examined the opportunities offered by American society for the flowering of a mature poetry. For his point of departure he took Alfred Kreymborg's compendious "outline" of American poetry since 1620, Our Singing Strength (1929). By being indiscriminately sympathetic to some 450 American poets—including the author of Blue Juniata--Cowley found that Kreymborg had created the "false and unfortunate" impression that American poetry as a whole was "extraordinarily rich," whereas in reality it was "meager of achievement." If the present, in particular, seemed "rich in promise," Cowley feared that "most of all promise [was] doomed never to be fulfilled." His most serious objection against Kreymborg's "census," however, was that he had failed to consider poetry as the outgrowth of a particular situation: he spoke of poets "as if they were divorced from their homes, their daily occupations, their financial worries, their ambitions--from all the sad business of being a poet." It was simply impossible to predict whether a major American poet would arise without taking into account the conditions under which poems had to be produced in the United States, Cowley advanced. At present the social and economic pressures on the young ambitious poet were absolutely stunting; if exceptionally prolific, he might hope at best to earn "approximately as much as the striking mill-hands in North Carolina." More commonly, he was forced to waste his energies on "uncongenial occupations," only to find that, if lucky enough to get a book of poems published, his sacrifices far outweighed his rewards: "it will be as if he had bundled together his best years, his highest ambitions, his most secret dreams, and dropped them all together into a well--into a well so deep that not even an echo rises from the black waters underneath." Admittedly, the situation had its redeeming features: poetry remained "the last branch of literature . . . substantially free from commercialization" and the poet retained his freedom to experiment. But there also yawned a fatal abyss between artist and audience: the poet's "amateur standing" prevented him from being taken seriously by "a public which sets a cash value on everything." Such

a misconception of the value of poetry was due not only to "hostile" social and economic forces, but also to literary critics like H. L. Mencken who insisted that poetry belonged to "the youth of the race" and should be abandoned at the age of "intellectual maturity." Too much of American poetry, Cowley acknowledged, was "the result of obvious emotional maladjustments," whereas the world's greatest poetry was written by "men who had reached an age of intellectual and emotional maturity." The situation was, admittedly, debilitating;

[Most American poets] wrote to escape from oppressive realities, but this poetry of escape . . . is usually very bad poetry. The qualities we admire in literature are, after all, the qualities we admire in life. Weakness, infantilism and inability to face reality are virtues of neither. . . . What American literature needs is not more poets . . . but mature poets who are willing to devote their whole time to the most difficult of the arts. The present situation makes them very rare.

Cowley could think of only one poet over thirty-five who, against all odds, had "clung monastically to the writing of verse as his one profession"--Edwin Arlington Robinson. If Robinson, however, was the "nearest approach" to the ideal of the major poet, he had paid the heavy price of a life of poverty and a "corresponding poverty of sensations" in his poetry; "one cannot fail to wonder," Cowley concluded, "whether it might not have been less bleak and rigid if conditions . . . had allowed him to lead a less restricted life."⁵⁷

By the end of 1929 Cowley had become convinced that the fate and future of American writing were indissolubly linked up with the fate and future of American society. From an awareness that current conditions of American life hampered, even blighted, the full fruition of a mature art of poetry it would be but a small step to an awareness of the necessity for social change. A final entry in his notebooks showed Cowley wavering on the brink of political commitment. It ended on a questioning note, from which flowed all the major political, social and artistic dilemmas he would have to confront in the following decade:

The Career Open to Talent. There is a problem whose social importance has often been overlooked: it is that of finding the career open to talent--la carrière ouverte aux talents. Early in the history of the American Republic, this career was sought chiefly in politics, though the statement is especially true of

the South; in the North there were also manufacturing and trade; in New England there was divinity. For the two generations that followed the Civil War, business replaced politics as the surest road to prestige; more recently literature has been taking the place of both. Clay, Calhoun, Webster, if they had been born a century later, might all have been writers.

For the young man who feels that he is more than usually gifted, there is no assurance of political rewards, no certain road from pleading before a jury to pleading before a body of voters, and thence to presenting their case before Congress. Politics is a game for disreputable bosses or wealthy amateurs. As for business, it impresses the young man as being controlled by luck and pull and office politics; mere talent is no guarantee of success; it is even mistrusted. Ambitious people turn to other careers: motion pictures, amateur athletics, aviation, engineering. The more articulate turn to literature, a field in which talent is almost certain to be recognized.

All this involves a change in the status of letters as a profession. The day of art-for-art's-saking writers has ended. Isn't it time for writers to assert themselves and to assume the social responsibility they cannot well avoid?⁵⁸

By an ironic twist, Cowley's thought by the end of 1929 had swung around to the bleak cultural assessments of the early Van Wyck Brooks, whose indictments of "the failure of American culture" he had deemed far too pessimistic at the beginning of the decade. The pressures of his personal experiences, together with his observations of his friends' struggles to attain a satisfactory conduct of the literary life, now led him to acknowledge, at least by implication, the restricted validity of Brooks's plaint against American culture and his demand for a new leadership in letters. Brooks, however, had long since abdicated from his earlier role and turned his energies towards recovering a "usable past" for American literature. At the end of the 1920s Cowley had gained the confidence and maturity of insight to step forth boldly in defense of the writing profession in America and to assume that responsible function for the literature of his own times; it was a function from which he would never abdicate. Cowley's own explorations of the "usable past" would come later, in particular in the 1940s, after he had joined with Brooks in a concerted political endeavor to create a viable sense of literary community through the League of American Writers. In a nonpolitical fashion Cowley's efforts to safeguard American writers against the "oppressive realities" of American society and to establish a congenial cultural atmosphere in which writers could "devote their whole time to

the most difficult of the arts" would be perpetuated in the various offices he fulfilled in his later career, both as a member of the board of directors of Yaddo and as chancellor and president of the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters.

At the breaking point between the hedonistic 1920s and the sober-minded 1930s it was the revival of interest in the New Humanism of Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More and a host of disciples which forced Cowley to formulate his personal philosophy of art and life more explicitly and elaborately than he had done so far. Against the materialist and moral excesses of contemporary American culture Babbitt and More sounded a moral réveil. They found their inspiration in a "classical" past of propriety and decorum, raised the Puritan moral sensibility to new heights of respectability, and vituperated against the spontaneous, subjectivist eruptions of present-day romanticism. For Norman Foerster, one of the Humanist advocates, the "ultimate ethical principle" was that of "restraint or control;" More spoke of the "inner check;" Babbitt preferred the term "frein vital." The social implications of Humanism were clearly reactionary and traditionalist; the "true consummation of a democracy," it felt, lay in a "natural aristocracy" of taste, education, manners and decorum. In literature the Humanists pleaded for a "classical" rather than romantic mode of writing, one which would enunciate the moral discipline of the author and aim to enhance the moral sensibility of the reader. They displayed a severe hostility to "modern" literature--whether realist, naturalist or romanticist--and had great difficulty finding any contemporary writer who lived up to their standards. Paul Elmer More typically denounced Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer as "an explosion in a cesspool" and contemptuously spoke of Gertrude Stein as "that adventuress into the lunar madness of literary cubism."⁵⁹

It was this pronounced antipathy to contemporary writing which set off the anti-Humanist reaction on the part of those deeply committed to modern literature. In early March 1930 Cowley, Tate and Wilson circulated an open letter, addressed to the Humanists, among their friends and literary allies; they ironically presented themselves as critics who, desiring "to study the Humanist principles in practice, would be glad to know of a contemporary work of art either produced by an American Humanist or encouraged and approved by one." On March 26, 1930, the Open

Letter appeared in The New Republic, signed by thirty-three writers who, with the exception of Krutch, Rosenfeld and Mark van Doren, made up a roster of the younger literary generation. In reply, Frank Jewett Mather, another Humanist follower, pointed out that, since Humanism was "not an esthetic but an attitude in morals, a humanistic masterpiece is likely to emerge only from a society in which humanistic morals are dominant," but nevertheless proposed More's Shelburne Essays and E. A. Robinson's "Cavender's House" as distinguished Humanist masterpieces. Both Wilson and Cowley remained unconvinced. The one work of creative imaginative writing deemed worthy of unambiguous praise in the Humanist symposium Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilisation (1930) was a "dull," "correct" and "didactic" novel by Dorothy Canfield Fisher.⁶⁰ Clearly, Cowley had reason to fear that, should Humanism come to rule the waves, literary creativity would be ground to death between its decorous millstones.

In late January 1930 C. Hartley Grattan invited Cowley to contribute an essay to a symposium against the Humanists on the topic: "The Humanists and the Contemporary and Experimental in Literature." Cowley seemed to Grattan the natural choice to write an article which would "in some way indicate the inadequacy of Humanism as a literary philosophy." Each article in the symposium, Grattan stipulated in a later communication, was to contain "an expression of the author's personal philosophy of criticism."⁶¹ Cowley took up the challenge. In taking his stand against Humanism, he arrived at his fullest articulation to date of a personal credo which, if it would undergo subtle modification and deepening over the years, remained the cornerstone to his literary and ethical beliefs.

In preparation of his essay Cowley thoroughly read up on the subject: in addition to Norman Foerster's Humanist symposium, he plunged into William Graham Sumner's Folkways (1907), read Babbitt's Democracy and Leadership (1924), several of More's works, as well as articles like Seward Collins's "Farewell to the Twenties" in The Bookman, which of late had virtually become a house organ of the New Humanists. He purposed, as he put it in his notebook, to attack the disciples of Babbitt and More "on what I conceive to be humanistic [not Humanist] grounds--namely, that their practice, if not their theory in itself, is hostile to the development of creative writers." "Show us," he orated, "a great American

poem or novel based on the philosophy of Babbitt, as Dante was based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, or even as Melville was based on Transcendentalism, and perhaps we shall suspend our disbelief."⁶²

In his essay Cowley granted that the more general attitude of "humanism" on which he took his stand was "very difficult or impossible to define. . . . Partly it is an emphasis on the qualities it considers to be essentially human. Partly it is a defense of human dignity, of human possibilities; partly it is an opposition to all the forces that threaten them, whether these forces be religious, social, governmental, economic, or those of an anti-human philosophy." By contrast, the "doctrinal" Humanism of Babbitt and More wished to "apply fixed standards to literature" and appealed not merely to the more "conservative" among the younger generation (Munson had devoted two long chapters to Babbitt and More in Destinations and contributed to the Humanist symposium), but even enlisted the support of the New York Times, which felt that it was "somehow . . . safe and reactionary." The Humanists, Cowley charged, had "unconsciously confused their specific cult with the general attitude" and thus falsely claimed "all the humanist past for their modern doctrine."

Cowley's critique of Humanism was twofold: it was incomplete as a "system of ethics," and it wholly disregarded the social and economic realities of the present. Both objections were interrelated: it was only by considering "man in relation to society" that a "complete system of ethics" could have been developed, Cowley argued. The failure of Humanism was that it had "confined" itself to the morality and psychology of the individual in an age which was "increasingly corporate." Cowley rightly pointed out that the New Humanist emphasis on inner moral regeneration as the cure-all of all problems was "perhaps the most unreal" solution for such "realities of the present system" as unemployment, low wages and unbearable working conditions, but in his eagerness to expose the irrelevancy of the Humanist prescription, he was inclined to replace his opponents' stock of reactionary presuppositions with the prejudices of his own dawning radicalism.⁶³

Economically, socially, [the Humanist] doctrine is based on nothing and answers no questions. Out of what society does Humanism spring, and toward what society does it lead? Has it any validity for the mill-hands of New Bedford and Gastonia, for the beet-toppers of Colorado, for the men who tighten a

single screw in the automobiles that march along Mr. Ford's assembly belt? Should it be confined to the families who draw dividends from these cotton mills, beet fields, factories, and to the professors who teach in universities endowed by them? Can one be Humanist between chukkers of a polo match, or can the steel workers be Humanists, too--once every three weeks, on their Sunday off?

For all their disregard of the specific issues of the present, the Humanists had an implicit social program, but one, Cowley believed, which produced "the lamest utopia ever imagined;" it offered no alternative to the aimless and wasteful functioning of capitalism, to the increasing centralization of capital, to the "purely automatic" and "dehumanizing tasks" demanded of factory workers, to a structural unemployment of two million. Instead, Babbitt seemed to "contemplate the salvation of society through a private-school system culminating in a Humanist university."

Reading the Humanists, Cowley experienced a curious sense of déjà vu, as if he were "carried back into the atmosphere of the classroom," of life among the social elite on the Gold Coast. Humanism, he felt, grew from the moral atmosphere of Eastern university life, in which professors inculcated in their students the timeless values and standards which were, in essence, leisure-class ideals. Their thought was marked by "a snobbery both intellectual and social--a snobbery which does not seem out of place in a professor's drawing room, but which becomes grotesque when applied to literature and art. . . . It is as if Parnassus were a faculty club, at the doors of which More and Collins stood armed with blackballs." The Humanist ideals, Cowley was to write in Exile's Return, seemed merely "the student virtues [of Harvard] rephrased in loftier language."⁶⁴ Cowley's critique of Humanism thus implied a repudiatory analysis of the cultural universalism in which he had been steeped at Harvard and which, shortly after, he would posit as a disastrous phase in the deracination of an entire generation of writers.

In 1930 a sharp cleavage existed between the world of academic scholarship and the literary profession, and Cowley, with a distrust that would persist even after both worlds had come together in the 1940s through the efforts of New Critics like Ransom and Warren, typically took his stand in defense of the contemporary writer against "angry professors" whose moral, social and intellectual prejudices distorted their literary judgments. By taking their "Puritanism" to "heights of

chaste absurdity," the Humanists arrived at an unforgivably reductive approach to literature, Cowley charged. Babbitt believed, "not without justification, that morality and esthetics cannot be separated, but he destroye[d] the value of his esthetic judgments by confusing morality in general with the one virtue of chastity." As a result, the Humanists were incapable of dealing with literature as literature: Babbitt delivered "lectures on the sex-life that could not be surpassed by the professor of Mental Hygiene in a fresh-water college," while More's puritanism led him to elevate Trollope as a major artist over Poe and to advance the detective story as "the only form of literature today wherein you may be sure that the author will not play tricks with the Ten Commandments."

It was to the credit of the Humanists, Cowley acknowledged, that they had directed attention towards the past, "toward questions of permanence, toward a judgment based on centuries." In his notebook, however, he avowed that by emphasizing the past at the expense of the present the Humanists had violated, or at least restricted, a vital function of the critic: "[I]t is pretty obvious that the critic has no single function. He is a prospector, a judge, an interpreter of the creative arts, and he generally insists on being a creative artist himself. He discusses the relations between the art of the present and that of the past; he revalues the past in terms of the present, but he cannot, without the cost to himself of a certain disloyalty, neglect the present entirely, nor always read an old book each time a new book is published."⁶⁵

By reaffirming "the connection between ethics and esthetics" the Humanists had perhaps helped to "rescue" art from the "moral vacuum" of a pure aestheticism, but they had overreached themselves by making art "the servant of morality." It was, Cowley observed in his notebook, an essential "humanizing function" of literature and art to create value; it was, he felt, "extremely doubtful whether anything in the world of nature or of men has any value that men do not put into it. They transform questions of expediency into moral questions--the only sort of questions which have real power over the human mind."⁶⁶ In his essay he now publicly enunciated a set of literary beliefs which would remain axiomatic, through the political turmoil of the 1930s and beyond.

All good art--at least all good literary art--has a thesis. Its thesis is that life is larger than life--that life as portrayed by the creative imagination is more intense, more varied, more

purposeful or purposeless, more tragic or comic, more crowded with moral decisions, than is the life we have been leading day by day. Sometimes we are discouraged by the contrast; sometimes we merely escape into the world of art. Sometimes, however, we try to reinterpret our lives in the light of the artist's vision. The new values we derive from his work, when projected into our own experience, make it seem more poetic, dramatic or novelistic, more significant, more sharply distinguished from the world of nature--in a word, more human.

But art has another humanizing function perhaps no less important: it is the humanization of nature itself. The world about us was alien in the beginning; vast portions of it are alien to us today. Before man can feel at ease in any milieu, whether that of forest, plain or city, he must transform the natural shapes about him by infusing them with myth. Perhaps I am choosing a too pretentious word; perhaps I should merely say that certain streets in New York are rendered habitable for me by snatches of old ragtime, that I never saw a telephone until I saw it in one of Charles Sheeler's drawings, that my memory of Hawthorne transforms and humanizes a New England village like this. I might say that this creation of myth, by whatever name we call it, has continued since the earliest times; that it is, indeed, a necessity of the human mind. It is a sort of digestive process, one that transforms the inanimate world about us into food without which the imagination would starve.

The masterpieces of the past could not fulfill these functions for the present. With Emersonian confidence Cowley proclaimed: "Our own myths, our values, must be renewed from generation to generation. They will so be renewed as long as artists live: they will be renewed in spite of the critics who cling to exiled legends and values long since dead." He concluded by affirming his conviction that it was "one of the real tasks for American critics today . . . to assess our contemporary literature on the basis of this double humanizing function."⁶⁷ It was a task which Cowley would faithfully strive to fulfill for the duration of his career.

By 1930 Cowley had come to the end of his literary apprenticeship. He had laid the foundations for the "little bundle of beliefs" he would carry with him through his subsequent career and had established a reputation as an important practitioner of an advanced mode of "modern" criticism. He had gained a distinguished name as a critic and translator of French literature and come to be recognized as a dependable historian and chronicler of his literary times, the self-appointed guardian of the

literary talents of his age-group. He had, also, made his own modest but far from negligible contribution to the literature of his "lost generation" in a well received poetic debut. Moving at the nerve center of American literary life between 1915 and 1930, both at home and abroad, he had confronted the variegated and perplexing manifestations of international modernism and, in a personal search marked by contradictions and ambiguities, evolved his own kind of critical perspective--humanist, pluralist and eclectic--from which to judge its attainments and define its effects on contemporary American writing. His personal experiences as a struggling writer in American society, together with his observations of the possibilities of the literary life in France, had led him to a broadly inclusive conception of the man of letters as one who would, ideally, adopt "the whole of literature as his province" and who, by religiously devoting himself to the art and profession of letters, might be a useful mediator between the writer's obligations to his art and the oppressive realities of society. On the threshold of the 1930s such an ideal was as yet more promise than fulfilment. It would come under severe pressure in the following decade, as Cowley for a while thought to have found a viable road to the establishment of a sustaining sense of literary community through the instruments of revolutionary politics. Divested of its political coloration, however, it would come into its own after the Second World War and reach a second flowering.

By 1930, also, Cowley had embarked on what would be a distinguished, if not unblemished, career as the last independent literary editor of The New Republic. Three weeks before the Crash he had been appointed by Bruce Bliven in the modest capacity of part-time copy editor and proofreader, replacing T. S. Matthews. Already known for his "passion for getting words right," he soon proved a worthy junior editor. When Edmund Wilson took a leave of absence in the summer of 1930 to finish Axel's Castle, Cowley was deputed to replace him. When, the year after, Wilson left his post to embark on his travels as a roving reporter through a Depression-ridden United States, Cowley was the natural candidate to succeed him as presider over "the back of the book." The literary editorship of The New Republic also presented a personal solution to the problem of a faulty "mechanics" of life which had plagued Cowley throughout his early life: it provided him with precisely that "external discipline" which, as he

had complained to Wheelwright, he so badly needed. Because, as Cowley told Burke in August 1930, working on The New Republic was less a job than "a manner of life," it opened the way towards a mode of the literary life which, if it brought along its own drawbacks and limitations, was at least more satisfying than the tribulations of a free-lance existence. As literary editor of an influential liberal "journal of opinion" Cowley would find himself placed in a strategic position to observe and comment on the intellectual, literary and political crosscurrents of a turbulent era in American history. From his editorial desk at The New Republic he could thus hope to realize a Zolaesque ideal of the man of letters as one who was concerned with "every department of human activity, including science, sociology and revolution," but who would retain a sufficient degree of independence and disinterestedness to take his stand on social and political issues "without committing treason to the intellect."⁶⁸ If that ideal was not entirely made good by its actual practice, the internal logic of Cowley's formative years nevertheless pointed towards his assumption of precisely such duties as those of the literary editor and leading critic of The New Republic.

Between 1919 and 1929 Cowley had made a complete volte-face in his literary beliefs: from an early embrace of a Symbolist aesthetics he had moved to a repudiation of its anti-social and anti-human implications and a rejection of the "religion of art" as a false ideal of the literary life. From disaffiliation he had moved towards accommodation, from spectatorial aloofness towards involvement. His literary apprenticeship came to a close with his realization that he must stop being a literary wanderer outside the gates. With the awareness that the American writer had no business being a stranger on native grounds, the literary exile could believe he had come home.

It has been Malcolm Cowley's luck to come to maturity as a poet and critic during a period of high excitement for American literature and to live through the years of his literary apprenticeship at a time when "youth in itself was a moral asset."¹ From the first he had been--and would continue to be--an alert and sensitive witness to the complex interplay of cultural and historical forces from which emerged, between 1915 and 1930, a distinctly modern American literature. As one of the first, he had registered the impact of European modernism on the writers of his own exuberantly young generation and, by writing its collective literary history as he watched it unfold, helped to establish the premises of critical interpretation of its defiantly new literature. He had started, even before the end of the war, from a thorough immersion in the aesthetics of Symbolism, in the belief that there, as Edmund Wilson was to confirm in Axel's Castle, lay the sources and fundamental principles of what he valued in contemporary literature. From the French Symbolist poets he had recovered, as had Eliot and Pound before him, a near-religious sense of literary vocation, together with a high ideal of formalist craftsmanship. Soon, however, he had come to the recognition that, as R. P. Blackmur observed in 1934, serious literary art does not ever "escape into thin air without first influencing the moral and spiritual life of its readers."² It was a recognition that he shared with Eliot, but one which Cowley was determined to understand first of all in terms of the united literary effort of his own generation. Innocently, buoyantly committed to the present, he shared its rebellious search for authenticity and originality, its radical revolt against the genteel past, its self-mythologized determination to find new forms and a new voice to celebrate life in its own time. In the process Cowley never lost sight of his formalist ideals; rather, they were engrafted upon a broader

endeavor to recover what Lewis P. Simpson has called the "humanistic amplitude" of modern literature and embedded in a Brooksian concern with the establishment of an organic American culture.³ Cowley would continue to critically follow the internal and external evolutions of American literary modernism throughout his long career. As his perspective deepened and matured, his appreciations underwent subtle modification, but the gist of his early critical reservations remained intact.

Cowley has been lucky in belonging to a literary generation which produced an impressive body of creative work complex and challenging enough to require a sustained effort at interpretation and elucidation for an American audience largely untrained to appreciate its often idiosyncratic and innovative achievements.⁴ In response to the unfolding "second flowering" of American literature Cowley could thus help to evolve the set of critical instruments and the historical perspective necessary for a proper evaluation of its distinctive place in the larger context of international modernism. In the process he could help, in his own fashion, to make American criticism come of age.

The writers of his generation have been fortunate in possessing in Cowley a conscientious literary chronicler and historian as well as a devoted apologist for and loving curator of their talents. From the very first Cowley was extraordinarily generation-conscious. In "This Youngest Generation" (1921) he had been the first to delineate, boldly if tentatively, the moral and aesthetic contours of a literary age-group as yet largely unpublished. By 1929 his early claim of its prospective importance had been validated and he could begin, in "Our Own Generation," to estimate its ambitions, its achievements and its intellectual history. It was a self-imposed literary obligation which he would strive to fulfill for over half a century more.

In the 1920s Edmund Wilson, too, had alertly scanned the literary horizon for the important writers of the younger generation and, by 1929, had written perceptive reviews of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Crane, Cummings and Dos Passos which helped to mold the public's estimate of these writers in ways Cowley could as yet only hope to emulate.⁵ Even as a young man Wilson radiated an air of authority and maturity. As an editor on established journals like Vanity Fair and The New Republic he early found a congenial and influential position from which to speak out on contemporary writing, at a time when Cowley was still struggling to

resolve the ambiguities of a free-lance existence. Possessed of a "tireless intellectual energy" which Cowley, three years younger, could only envy, Wilson in the 1920s came close to being the intellectual and literary conscience, not merely of his friend Fitzgerald, but of an entire generation.⁶ But even in his early years Wilson seemed to speak from a different perspective than Cowley's. Where Cowley, moving in the circles of the national and international avant-garde, combined an outsider's detachment with an insider's familiarity with the ethics and aesthetics of his contemporaries, Wilson seemed to write from an almost patrician perspective located above his literary subjects. Where Wilson, only a year older than Fitzgerald, sounded at times much like a member of an earlier generation, one closer in intellectual sympathies to the writers of the Progressive Era than to those of the wild and hedonistic 1920s, Cowley's tone unmistakably aligned him with a disaffiliated and rebellious league of youth. Also, as Henry Dan Piper has noted, whereas Wilson always remained "the metropolitan cosmopolite," Cowley retained a "grass-roots attachment to the land and rural America." If Cowley has perhaps lacked Wilson's massive erudition, he has displayed a greater sensitivity to the technical nuances of poetry. Unlike Wilson, who "never bothered to understand how people act in groups" and whose writings always seemed marked by a touch of aristocratic aloofness, Cowley's work, both in poetry and prose, was from the start infused with a strong sense of literary community and displayed a genial democratic temperament.⁷

Cowley's important evaluations of the specific works of his generation would come later, in particular once he had taken over Wilson's editorial desk at The New Republic and had found an authoritative platform from which to speak out.⁸ But if Wilson, in certain respects, had been earlier, Cowley clung to his rôle more faithfully; and, whatever the extent of his indebtedness to Wilson's example, he always remained his own man. In the end, with Wilson moving on into the broader fields of history and economics and evincing a talent for "monumental," if sometimes eccentric, scholarship as well as a formidable ambition to preside over "all literature as his imperium," it was Cowley whose critical focus remained consistently on the literary and social record of native American experience. If Wilson was "the Sainte-Beuve of a new literature," Cowley was the Boswell of his generation. A truly barometric chronicler of his literary times, Cowley had first

predicted the arrival of a new age-group on the literary scene, then aimed to define its achievement at an early stage. Later, treading in the footsteps of the early Brooks, he would seek to establish its connection with the traditions of the past, while, following Eliot, he continued to review its attainments in the light of the shifting present and to judge the present in the light of his changing perceptions of the past. Still later, speaking up as "the Ishmael of his generation," he would persistently, and sometimes near-sentimentally, defend its achievements against the "jackals" and "parricides" of various critical and political persuasions.⁹ At the end of a long career spanning over seventy years he would bask in the glow of the by then classic stature of his generation: one of the last survivors of his age-group, he had become its elegiac obituarist.

Exile's Return: A Narrative of Ideas (1934) was the first book of its kind to give an authoritative design of interpretation to the social, historical and literary forces at work on the lost generation. To all intents and purposes, Cowley had already begun to write the book in the late 1920s: in the fall of 1929 he had opened negotiations with the publisher W. W. Norton for a volume of "Fifteen Essays." Exile's Return started concretely as another group manifestation by Cowley and company. In the spring of 1931 Elizabeth Ames, the director of Yaddo, the artists' colony at Saratoga Springs, invited Cowley to organize a writers' conference there. Cowley conferred with Josephson and the plan arose to gather their friends and hammer out "a collective book of memoirs." In early May 1931 Cowley, Josephson, Burke, Coates, Wheelwright and Evan Shipman reconvened in upstate New York. "At Yaddo we had a high old time," Cowley recalled thirty years later. "Evan Shipman found a horse room and a bootlegger. We talked, we explored the countryside, and I wrote. Some of the others pretended to write, but they didn't get anything done. I was launched on my book. Soon afterwards I signed a contract with W. W. Norton and he picked a title: 'The Lost Generation.'"¹⁰

Between 1931 and 1934, moving forward by fits and starts, Exile's Return slowly took shape. At Yaddo Cowley wrote first drafts of the

sections that became "Case Record," "Significant Gesture," "The French Line Pier, 1923," "Women Have One Breast," and "Manhattan Melody:" together, they formed the account of his Dadaist shenanigans and their immediate aftermath in New York. Revised and expanded over the summer, they appeared as a series of five articles in The New Republic in the fall of 1931.¹¹ Subsequently, Cowley turned back to his years in high school and university and traced his and his coevals' adventures through the war and in Greenwich Village; in the fall of 1932 The New Republic printed the sections "Mansions in the Air" and "Ambulance Service," and in January 1933 an early version of "War in Bohemia" appeared in Scribner's Magazine. In May 1933, discouraged by the slow progress of his book, Cowley took a leave of absence from The New Republic and spent ten weeks at Cloverlands in Tennessee, near Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, where, between fishing expeditions on the Cumberland River and visits to the Tates and other Agrarians, he filled out the story and composed his repudiatory analysis of Dada as the culmination of the Symbolist religion of art; revised and completed during the fall, "Readings from the Lives of the Saints," "A Discourse over the Grave of Dada" and "The Death of a Religion" were published in The New Republic in January 1934. During February Cowley wrote "Connecticut Valley" and "No Escape," neither of which was prepublished as a magazine article, and in March 1934, after borrowing the diaries of Harry Crosby from his wife Caresse, he spent two lonely weeks at an old inn in Riverton, Connecticut, to write "Echoes of a Suicide," the symbolic account of the end of an era. On May 1, 1934, Cowley finished the epilogue which he would remember as "the high summit of my revolutionary enthusiasm."¹²

The interruptions that marked the writing of Exile's Return were only partly caused by the pressures of a busy and responsible job on The New Republic. Dramatic changes in Cowley's personal and political life recurrently stalled the writing and laid the foundations for a change of directions. In early 1931 he made the painful decision to separate from his wife. Peggy left for Mexico, where she was joined by Hart Crane; over the winter of 1931-1932 they became lovers. Given a new lease on life, Crane again found the strength and inspiration to write poetry and Peggy's letters to Cowley from Mexico glowed with radiant happiness. Cowley found it difficult to believe, though, that Crane's new life was "anything more than a respite from his private hell." His premonitions

proved to be tragically right: in late April 1932, sailing home from Mexico on the Orizaba, Crane made his leap off the stern of the ship. Death and divorce: the "echoes of an era that had ended."¹³

But the sense of an ending was counterbalanced by the determination to make a new and responsible beginning. In June 1932 Cowley married Muriel Maurer, a beautiful New York fashion editor he had met a year before at the Blumes'. Their marriage was to last. During the same time, Cowley's political radicalization peaked in a series of public acts of commitment. In 1931 he protested the torture and killing of twenty-four young Chinese Communist writers in a campaign to suppress the Chinese revolution and joined the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. In 1932 he was a member of a delegation of writers, including Waldo Frank, Edmund Wilson and Mary Heaton Vorse, which went on a mission to Pineville, Kentucky, to distribute food to the striking miners. Having personally witnessed the human misery and the hopelessness of their lives, Cowley made a "public confession of faith" by marching in that year's May Day Parade. In July 1932 he reported on the flight of the Bonus Army, driven out of Washington by Federal troops, as it passed through his native Pennsylvania region. That same summer he joined the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford and participated in the political campaign for the Communist Party Presidential candidates by helping to write the campaign pamphlet Culture and the Crisis. Later that year he reported on the National Hunger March on Washington for The New Republic, together with Robert Cantwell.¹⁴

Rather than political caution, it was a combination of literary reservations and a stubborn need to retain his freedom to criticize which, in 1932, kept Cowley from taking the ultimate radical step: he never joined the Party. As Daniel Aaron has pointed out, Cowley rarely wrote with the zeal of a convert. Nevertheless his radicalization was part of a process of personal change that was religious and emotional before it was intellectual.

I would never be more than a fellow traveler [Cowley wrote in The Dream of the Golden Mountains], and yet I was an ardent one at the time, full of humility, the desire to serve, and immense hopes for the future. Because any disaster seemed possible in that strange year [1932], so did any triumph. Suddenly the range of possibilities had widened and deepened, as had the picture of our relation to history. It was as if we had been walking for years in a mist, on what seemed to be level ground,

but with nothing visible beyond a few yards, so that we became preoccupied with the design of things close at hand--friendships, careers, love affairs--and then as if the mist had blown away to reveal that the level ground was only a terrace, that chasms lay on all sides of us, and that beyond them were mountains rising in the golden sunlight. We could not reach the mountains alone, but perhaps we could merge ourselves in the working class and thereby help to build a bridge for ourselves and for humanity.¹⁵

During the 1920s Cowley had repeatedly sought a unifying principle of order and discipline in his life. In his moments of despair and disorientation he had turned to his notebooks to give voice to his longing for "salvation" and to search for a key "to unlock the corridors of dream." To Burke he had sounded a half-ironic cry for a "messiah." As Hamilton Basso rightly intuited, Cowley's involvement with the radical movement of the 1930s was in part "a religious manifestation: a longing for 'order,'" inspired by a feeling that in the 1920s his life--personal, political and literary--had been set in self-defeating directions.¹⁶

To the extent that Exile's Return argued the case against the literary past, it amounted to a confession of personal failure and a testimony to a newfound belief. The entries Cowley made in his notebook during his stay at Cloverlands testify to the strong doubts about the value of his earlier beliefs and the validity of his present undertaking which plagued him throughout the writing of the book.¹⁷ The early 1930s, in the words of one historian, were "a time of penance for past sins and declarations of future rectitude." Read in the context of its time, Exile's Return was a symptomatic book: a bidding of "farewell to a whole period in my life," it breathed a sober air of repentance for a misspent past. Exile's Return was part of a broader tendency to discredit the moral, political and artistic courses sailed in the 1920s; it built up to the acknowledgment that "all that is dead now," but it did so with a subtlety of insight and a degree of literary eloquence that raised it far above the level of a crude and intolerant attack. Its critique of the past centered in Cowley's analysis of the Symbolist ethics and aesthetics at the heart of modern literature. Though he granted that the religion of art had left "a great heritage," on the wave of his radical enthusiasm he was considerably less certain than before of its lasting contribution. His analysis of the lives of its "saints"--Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Proust and Valéry--and his discussion of its extreme manifestation in Dada left

his readers little room to doubt that Cowley had become thoroughly convinced that in its dissociation of art from life, in its pursuit of a pure and purposeless poetry, in its hermetic and narcissistic subjectivism, the religion of art had proved "essentially anti-human" and "anti-social." As an ideology and an ethics, Symbolism was the equivalent in literary art of a bankrupt individualism in the economic and political sphere.¹⁸

The shedding of "yesterday's burdens" prepared the way for new convictions and Exile's Return pointed a clear political moral. Active participation in a movement for revolutionary change of a system that seemed to be "convulsively dying" was only a natural corollary of Cowley's recognition of the futility and aimlessness of earlier literary ideals. Exile's Return greeted the end of the 1920s with visible "relief." It now appeared that the collapse of the stock market promised to put an end to the madness, hysteria and despair of a decade which had culminated in the seemingly symbolic suicides of Harry Crosby and Hart Crane, and that the ensuing depression had accelerated the realization that the "real exile" of American writers was "from society itself, from any society with purposes they could share, toward which they could honestly contribute and from which they could draw new strength." Cowley's argument in the book radiated his belief, voiced with didactic eloquence in the epilogue, that involvement in the class struggle could put an end to the enfeebling isolation of the American writer, that "the desperate feeling of solitude and uniqueness" could be redeemed by "a sense of comradeship and participation in a historical process vastly bigger than the individual."¹⁹ It was here, in the search for a nourishing sense of community, that the artist could hope to find surcease from the oppressive sense of alienation endemic to his spectatorial stance.

As we have seen, Cowley's repudiation of Symbolism antedated his conversion to radical politics. Even before the stock-market crash of 1929 he had, in opposition to the privatist ethics and aesthetics of Symbolism, evolved a broadly humanistic insistence on the inseparability of art and life, on the interdependence of artist and audience, art and milieu. His earlier humanism was now given a new dimension of historical understanding and the pragmatic coloration of a radical political vision, but it remained the premise of his convictions, both literary and

political. Cowley's argument against the literary past in Exile's Return was only a natural outgrowth of the values and beliefs he had developed during his own odyssey through the postwar years; for all its denunciation of "a literary period that was mistaken in its general aims,"²⁰ the book also stood as the crystallization of the "little bundle of beliefs" Cowley would carry with him as his most essential literary baggage throughout his long career. It was one of the subtle incongruities of the original version (one only partly remedied in its revised and expanded edition) that the curiously trivializing tone in which it described the adolescent irresponsibilities of an earlier time was partly belied by the note of wistful and compassionate regret with which it evoked the intellectual and emotional mood of a literary era now passé. Its tone of ambiguity bespoke the survival of at least a partial allegiance to literary values discredited with such apparent determination.

Appearing in the midst of a "violent reaction against the 1920s," Exile's Return met with a devastating reception. Many of the younger reviewers hailed it with qualified praise. Older reviewers, however, writing in established magazines of wider circulation, had "a grand time demolishing the book," so that "the weight of hostile opinion seemed overwhelming" to Cowley. Not only did his political opinions come under heavy fire, but the brunt of the excoriations was leveled against the book's claim that the achievements and vicissitudes of the 1920s exiles comprised a story worth retelling at all. Cowley felt much like "a criminal chained and taunted in the marketplace," as all his personal doubts about the validity of the undertaking seemed confirmed by the fusillade of clobbering reviews.²¹

When Exile's Return was reissued in 1951, in a much revised and expanded edition, it was as lyrically and extravagantly acclaimed as it had once been abusively condemned. The critical somersault was only partly due to the nature and extent of the changes, which mostly served to divest the book of its politics and to place the story in a maturer, if also a more mellow and nostalgic, perspective.²² This time, however, the literary Zeitgeist worked much in its favor: by 1951 Cowley's claim

of literary stature for the lost generation had been more than validated (partly as a result of Cowley's own critical efforts on its behalf²³) and, coming out on the wave of a critical rehabilitation of the 1920s, the book's true meaning and significance were more clearly visible. By 1951 Cowley's perspective, too, had subtly changed. In the wake of the series of revaluations he had edited (and partly written) in 1937 as After the Genteel Tradition, he could now acknowledge, more precisely and disinterestedly than before, the influential rôle played by the writers of an older age-group (Mencken, Dreiser, Lewis, Anderson). He could more dispassionately evaluate the nature of the impact of Symbolist aesthetics (and, by extension, the whole tradition of European modernism) on the literature of his age-group. And he could more clearly recognize its connectedness with an American literary tradition which extended back to Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, James and Stephen Crane.²⁴

Cowley's strategy in Exile's Return was highly selective. Writing on the tangent plane of the personal and the communal and adopting the dual perspective of a detached spectator and empathetic participant, he aimed to use his own experience only insofar as it could be made symbolic or representative. Because he had lived through virtually all the formative phases of his generation's literary experience, Cowley, in almost Emersonian fashion, could feel justified in making the self exemplary. The documentary record of his early life reveals that his account is only in a limited sense to be trusted as accurate autobiography. Predictably, and notwithstanding Cowley's acknowledgment that "each life has its own pattern, within the pattern of the age, and every individual is an exception," not all members of his age-group have felt equally comfortable with being fitted into his generational paradigm.²⁵ In giving imaginative form and structure to real events and experiences Cowley had inevitably done some degree of violence to individual deviations from the overall thematic pattern. Insofar as the writing of history is always an act of imaginative reconstruction, however, it had been Cowley's luck that history and personal experience coincided and helped to give, as he put it to Burke in 1931, "a good novelistic structure" to his critical narrative. The pattern of generational experience outlined in Exile's Return is indeed fictional as much as historical; and it is precisely for this reason that it could so influentially shape the public concept of the lost generation and could become, among the countless histories and

memoirs of the time, "the one epic-making one."²⁶

Drawing on the ancient mythical pattern of exile and reintegration, odyssey and homecoming, Exile's Return exemplified a sui generis form of literary history. Infused with a genuine gift for poetic lyricism, it survives as a work of the literary imagination, one which derives much of its effectiveness from the orchestration of interpretative metaphors, the building of dramatic narrative line and the intensity of Cowley's personal connection with its subject matter. His "narrative of ideas" is informed with an essentially novelistic understanding that abstractions and ideas do not live unless they find concrete embodiment in character, action and situation. It is this fundamental grasp of the nature of imaginative recreation which forms the basis of what Kenneth Burke has called Cowley's "personalistic" mode of writing literary history and criticism. It is partly for such literary reasons that Exile's Return deserves to be seen, not merely as the "irreplaceable" literary record of what Van Wyck Brooks has called "the most dramatic period in American literary history," but also as an integral part of the artistic legacy of the lost generation.²⁷

Part of the ongoing appeal of Exile's Return comes from its recovery of a universal, timeless fable from the historical experience of a specific age-group. The generational rite of passage it outlines is one reenacted in one form or another by every new age-group, as it grows to maturity and finds itself subjected to the alienating realities of modern existence. Because, at its deepest level, Cowley's poetic history of exile exemplifies what Lewis Simpson has described as "that curious modern feeling that the self has of being dissociated from an integral self," Exile's Return has gained with time something of the timeless appeal of a legend.²⁸

Since 1934, and even more so since 1951, our understanding of the nature and necessity of literary exile has changed profoundly. Set against the experiences of Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Mann, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and countless other writers and intellectuals for whom exile has been a painful, unwanted, and often politically enforced mode of cultural severance and linguistic dislocation, the expatriate experience of Cowley and his coevals emerges as a particularly happy and luxurious form of literary banishment; it was engaged in with a good deal of bounce, in the full, if partly ironic awareness that their severance from

the homeland was voluntary, temporary and, often, revocable at a moment's notice. As Warner Berthoff has pertinently suggested, for the members of Cowley's age-group "exile" was in part merely "crisis language . . . for the familiar custom of the European lehrjahre."²⁹ Today we may well feel with Leon Edel that the question of literary nativism or expatriation has "ceased to be a controversial issue" for the American writer. But our changed historical perception of the problem does little to diminish the status of Exile's Return as "a classic document of literary history." Even its most fervent detractors, like Geoffrey Wolff and Kenneth Lynn, have had to acknowledge its influence and authority as "the book which did more than any other to popularize [the legend of the lost generation] even as it was among the first to validate the great importance of the literature which made the legend possible." More than half a century after the book's first appearance, the appraisal of Robert E. Spiller, made in the mid-1970s, remains valid: "Anyone who does not absorb and understand Exile's Return is not prepared to comment on any American literary event between 1915 and 1975."³⁰

The complex and painful story of Cowley's literary and political odyssey through the 1930s falls outside the scope of the present narrative. It will not do, however, to trivialize or excuse the political errors into which Cowley allowed himself to fall, in particular in the second half of the decade, once his earlier political idealism had begun to seep away and he had come to feel a sense of disillusionment and moral fatigue. The literary historian or biographer of those years faces the difficult task of disentangling Cowley's often conflicting modes and motives of behavior. He will have to weigh the justice of the serious upbraidings Cowley received from trusted literary friends like Allen Tate, Edmund Wilson and Hamilton Basso, who recurrently challenged Cowley's pursuit of what Alfred Kazin has euphemistically called "a sophisticated literary Stalinism."³¹ He will also have to find a dispassionate answer to the fierce attacks leveled against Cowley by a long line of, often overly zealous, political enemies, from Trotskyist sympathizers like Felix Morrow, Eugene Lyons and James T. Farrell in the late 1930s to Neo-Conservatives like Kenneth Lynn and Joseph Epstein in the early 1980s.

Their bitter critiques will have to be considered in the light of their own literary and political presuppositions and be set against more balanced appraisals of Cowley's radical years by Daniel Aaron, Alfred Kazin, Robert Alter, George Core and Lewis P. Simpson. Cowley's own memoirs and historical accounts of the tangled reasons for his conversion to and subsequent disaffection from his radical hopes will have to be measured against the historical documentary record of his published writings and his unpublished journals and correspondence. Such an effort may reveal why a man of good will, who tried to maintain "a shopkeeper's honesty" about his beliefs, was unwillingly led into false positions because he failed to voice in public the doubts and reservations he confided to his notebooks. It may help to establish the reasons why, in their cumulative effect, Cowley's self-confessed "sins of silence, self-protectiveness, inadequacy, and something close to moral cowardice" have left him with a sense of guilt about the second half of the 1930s.³² Perhaps, also, it may help to estimate the extent to which Cowley allowed his literary values to be distorted by his political convictions.

What needs to be emphasized here is that Cowley, like Wilson, has remained at heart "a man of the twenties." Even at the height of his radicalism he never truly abdicated from the ethical and aesthetic standards and the ideal of the man of letters he had evolved by 1929. Underneath the glowing fervor of his often naive political sentiments Cowley's basic literary beliefs remained surprisingly intact. Alfred Kazin has not been the only one to feel that in the 1930s Cowley seemed "to unite, through his love of good writing and his faith in revolution, the brilliant Twenties and the militant Thirties."³³ Slanted as some of his literary judgments may have been, he rarely or never made the mistake of confusing correct political opinions with literary gifts. Undue emphasis on Cowley's political mistakes, real enough though they were, obscures the basic soundness of his literary intuitions and fails to register the many and repeated reservations he expressed about the crudity of revolutionary writing, the dogmatism of leftist literary thought, and the limitations of Marxian criticism.³⁴ If Cowley's lack of political prescience made him cling to a Stalinist line long after more perceptive literary fellow travelers had seen through its fallacies, in the literary realm he retained a rugged independence of judgment and remained loyal to a critical pluralism and eclecticism. Even in 1934 he

maintained that "there is no single theory of the function of art that has not finally confined and narrowed and impoverished art, whether the theory be that of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schopenhauer, Mallarmé, Plekhanov or the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers."³⁵ To denounce Trotsky for his "archidiabolical pride" and elevate the personal qualities of Stalin was ultimately, as Wilson saw, less "real" to Cowley than to explore the enriching impact on Yeats's poetry of his "baptism of the gutter," or the humanizing effect on Baudelaire's art of his revolutionist engagement. Typically, Cowley wrote on Karl Marx, not primarily as a strategist of revolution, but as "a man of letters, . . . the spiritual contemporary of Baudelaire and Flaubert."³⁶ For all his belief in the bankruptcy of the religion of art, Cowley continued to seek ways of accommodating the dubious technical attainments of Symbolism with the benefits to be reaped from involvement in the revolutionary movement. The latter, he said in his speech at the American Writers' Congress on May 1, 1935, could offer the writer not merely an indispensable sense of a responsive audience and a whole new range of subject matter in the sorrows and sufferings of the working class, most importantly it could give the artist "a new perspective on himself" by providing a "sense of human life, not as a medley of accidents, but as a connected and continuing process. . . . It gives the values, the unified interpretation, without which one can write neither good history nor good tragedy."³⁷ Literature, not politics, remained the touchstone.

Throughout the 1930s Cowley remained consistently concerned with the creation of a sustaining cultural climate for the American writer. Persuaded that the revolutionary movement could put an end to an impoverishing artistic isolationism, he gave it his seemingly unambiguous allegiance as long as he remained convinced that it offered the best practical instrument to foster the "double humanizing function of art." His efforts as Vice-President of the League of American Writers were but a natural continuation and expansion of his earlier, nonpolitical efforts to maintain a viable sense of literary community among his friends; they take on a wider resonance of meaning when placed in the context of Cowley's ongoing endeavors on behalf of the "commonwealth of letters," both at Yaddo and at the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters. At heart, Cowley's commitment to the revolutionary ethos of Marxism was part of a larger attempt to recover, in the words of Lewis

Simpson, "the humanistic amplitude of literature" and to incarnate "the moral polity of letters."³⁸ As long as this seemed feasible, Cowley was content to work within the League of American Writers and endorse the moral prestige of Communism. When he finally withdrew his support of revolutionary politics, he did so less for political reasons than because he had come to feel that the movement no longer seemed beneficial to writers but had succumbed to an "academic and inhibited" doctrinalism, a "mental inertia" which precluded "the capacity for fresh observation or independent thinking" which he believed were indispensable for a living and human art.³⁹ When, in 1941, he came to settle his intellectual accounts in a sober investigation of Communism as a "religion," he rejected it essentially because it had come to violate his deepest humanist beliefs: not only had it failed to develop a sense of human limitations, it had also proved incapable of offering a safeguard against pride, a restraint against egotism and lust for power. Most seriously, by using "living men and women" as political instruments, by recognizing "no absolute value except society," by clinging to a "bare and simplified picture of the individual," it had become impervious to human dignity and proved itself "inferior to even the decayed and diluted Christianity of the western world."⁴⁰ Cowley's "religion of humanity" had lain at the heart of his attraction to revolutionary Communism; it likewise formed the core of his rejection of it.

After the failure of his radical hopes and his definitive withdrawal from politics in the wake of his painful experiences in Washington in 1942--attacks by the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities made him decide to resign as Chief Information Analyst for Archibald MacLeish's governmental agency, the Office of Facts and Figures--Cowley remained sensitive to the social and historical ramifications of American writing, but avoided political controversy, not always successfully, and aimed to survive the expected counterpurge, with grace and self-respect, from his position as a "Little American" in Sherman, Connecticut. With a "sense of release and opportunity" he now returned to his "proper" field of interest: the history of American letters, of the present and the past. Though his political aberrations continued to haunt him and cast a long

shadow over his subsequent life--from being blacklisted as Walker-Ames lecturer at the University of Washington in Seattle and testifying at the Hiss trials in 1949 to a resurgence of attacks upon the publication of The Dream of the Golden Mountains (1980)--the long view of Cowley's distinguished career in letters would seem to corroborate the verdict of George Core that he was "never a traitor either to the Republic of Letters or to the American Republic."⁴¹

The 1940s, in particular, were "high years" of literary maturation and fruition for Cowley.⁴² Set free from financial worries by a generous five-year grant from the Mellon Foundation, he now joined in the large-scale critical-historical endeavor of those years to recover a "usable past" for American literature and helped to define the contours of a national literary tradition by writing sensitive and influential revaluations of Hawthorne, Whitman, James and the naturalists, as well as of Hemingway, Faulkner and Fitzgerald. From the 1920s Cowley retained an awareness of the inevitable and paradoxical tension in American writing between isolation and community, romanticism and classicism, expression and construction. If, in the 1930s, he had overemphasized the writer's obligation to portray the meaning and dignity of the "outer" world, he now sought to redress the balance and, in the mid-1940s, arrived at a subtler perception of the problem. In Hawthorne, especially, Cowley discovered a congenial writer obsessively aware of the paradoxical "relation between the inner and the outer world." But Hawthorne, as if in disproof of Cowley's earlier admonitions, had created his greatest art in a state of hermit-like isolation: while being a "mere spectator, condemned to live in the world without any share in its joys or sorrows," he had written a rich store of moral fables dramatizing the evil of solipsistic pride and urging involvement with the democratic community of mankind. He had, repeatedly and guiltily, confessed his inability to portray, imaginatively and realistically, the "outer" world of contemporary reality and produced instead a "literature of loneliness . . . in which persons, however real in themselves, tend[ed] to dissolve into symbols and myths." In this, Cowley saw, Hawthorne had been the precursor of "a continuous literary tradition" in American writing, one "deep," "lyrical," "psychological" and symbolic, rather than broadly democratic, optimistic, epical and realistic.⁴³

From the 1930s Cowley retained his conviction, now deepened and

depoliticized, that an artist gained in compassion and human understanding by being wrenched out of an often necessary spell of loneliness and alienation, by learning to reconnect himself to humanity at large through some profoundly moving experience. But such a recovery of a new sense of human involvement, he now saw, did not always work unambiguously to the advantage of his art. Hawthorne had been drawn out of his desperate isolation by the discovery of human love, but his greatest work was the product of his dark and brooding Salem years. At the polar opposite of the tradition established by Hawthorne stood Walt Whitman, reputedly the optimistic and epical bard of American democracy, the singer of the self containing the vast "multitudes" of the outer world. Whitman, indeed, by the end of his life had "moved from his private world into a stable relation with society." But his greatest poems, paradoxically, had emerged from the experience of a personal saison en enfer, from a period "when he stood apart from society with the sense, at times, of belonging to a confraternity of the damned." Underneath the public "mask" of the healthy, virile celebrant of democracy lay the "real but almost unknown" poet, one "wounded and alone," "a democrat . . . from below, feeling his brotherhood with the crippled and diseased."⁴⁴

Throughout the postwar decades Cowley hoped to avert what he saw as a fatal "divorce of contemporary literature from contemporary life" and continued to admonish American writers to make an effort towards "intellectual and emotional understanding of what was happening in the world" about them. For better or worse, however, he now also recognized that it was Hawthorne who was the archetypal American artist, who stood "at the beginning of a double line that runs through James to Eliot . . . and through Stephen Crane to Faulkner and Hemingway." Hemingway, Cowley had already perceived in 1944, for all his deliberate effort to write "truly" of the "real" world, had been wrongly placed in the naturalist tradition; in essence he belonged with "the haunted and nocturnal writers [Poe, Hawthorne, Melville], the men who dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world." Faulkner, like Hawthorne, was "a solitary worker by choice," Cowley observed in his introduction to The Portable Faulkner (1949); his works, he reaffirmed twenty years later in The Faulkner-Cowley File (1966), were produced in accordance with an essentially "Symbolist system of values."⁴⁵

In mid-career Cowley wrote sensitive critical and historical studies of American literary naturalism (Dreiser, Norris) and explored its continuance in contemporary writing (Algren, Ellison, Bellow). His reappraisals of Hemingway, Faulkner, Hawthorne and Whitman, however, had persuaded him of at least the restricted validity of the Symbolist aesthetics he had once so fiercely repudiated. The best writers of his own age-group seemed to have followed the line of Hawthorne, admixed with a hopeful Emersonian democratic individualism, rather than the deterministic line of Dreiser and Norris; they had combined Symbolist standards of craftsmanship and perfection with a buoyant determination to be the "true" and "honest" historians of their own time and to speak in their own, often vernacular, language. By reading the past in the light of the present and by reconnecting the literature of his own times to that of the past Cowley had helped to "clear away important misconceptions"--a favorite phrase--and aimed to redeem his generation's "detachment from the native traditions."⁴⁶

The insights Cowley developed in his "middle years" were a natural outgrowth and modification of his earliest beliefs; they remained the basis of his later interpretation and evaluation of the attainments of "his" lost generation. A Second Flowering (1973), the culmination of a lifetime of thought about the literature of his age-group, is infused with Cowley's double perception of the writers of his generation as both individualistically oriented and tribally inclined, as both isolated and autonomous artists unswervingly committed to the production of high art (an image rooted in the Romantic or Symbolist tradition) and, in essence, "historians . . . of a living community in a process of continual and irreversible change" (an image rooted in Cowley's classicist perception of culture as the outgrowth of a larger-than-personal situation).⁴⁷

A Second Flowering also testifies to the persistence of its author's concern with the morality of artistic production and the correlation between art and character. In the final analysis, Cowley pictures the writers of his generation as "heroes" of the literary vocation, an "elite" by virtue of their intensely moral dedication to the production of enduring works of art as well as by "such inner qualities as energy, independence, vision, rigor, an original way of combining words (a style, a 'voice'), and utter commitment to a dream." Determined at all cost to carefully husband their talents and preserve the integrity of their

aesthetic purpose, all of them, Cowley feels, tried to maintain a very high standard of professional ethics, even if the price to be paid in terms of human companionship, personal disaster or mental equilibrium often seemed exorbitantly high.⁴⁸

Insofar as A Second Flowering posits these writers as loyal adherents to a moral code of art which originates in the tradition of Symbolism, it signals Cowley's modified return to the religion of art and completes the curve of his literary development from the 1920s to the 1970s. --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade (1978) is even more explicit on this point. Ending with Cowley's attempt to formulate a "pentologue" of art, the moral "commandments" persisting in "the depths of an artist's mind," the book amounts to a belated renewal of faith in the ethical premises of the religion of art and rehabilitates the image of the artist as a "saint" or "martyr." Once denounced as an anachronistic ideal of the literary life, Marcel Proust is now assigned a place of honor in the "Book of Martyrs," together with other "priests of consciousness" like Flaubert, James, Mallarmé, Mann and Aiken. In his late years Cowley has thus come to reaffirm a set of moral and aesthetic imperatives for the literary artist first discovered in the 1920s. In the late 1970s, as if in testimony to the remarkable consistency of his conception of the writing profession as "a priestly vocation with its own strict ethical code," he explored, in effect, the implications of an aesthetic maxim he had first jotted down in his notebook in the early 1920s: "No complete son-of-a-bitch ever wrote a good sentence."⁴⁹

In the practice of his criticism Cowley has remained loyal to the values and beliefs he developed in his early years. When, in "Criticism: A Many-Windowed House" (1961), he explicitly formulated the theoretical and methodological assumptions underlying a lifetime of writing about literature, his critical credo formed a testimony to the pluralism, humanism and eclecticism which had formed a persistent trait of his critical approach. Cowley's writings have continued to reflect his early conviction that any single point of view is inevitably narrow, incomplete and ultimately false, whether it is founded on historical, biographical, psychoanalytical, expressionist, moral or political principles. He likewise rejects an exclusively textual approach because to view the work of art as "pure" and completely autonomous would involve "a disturbing amount of make-believe." The critic would have to disregard not only the

particular time and place of composition, but also the interrelations with other works by the same author and the peculiar tendencies prevailing in a certain group of writers; to Cowley this would simply be the creation of another critical fallacy.

Literature is not a pure art like music, or a relatively pure art like painting and sculpture. Its medium is not abstract like tones and colors, not inorganic like metal and stone. Instead it uses language, which is a social creation, changing over the years with the society that created it. The study of an author's language carries us straight into history, institutions, moral questions, personal stratagems, and all the other aesthetic impurities or fallacies that many new critics are trying to expunge.

Written at a time when the New Criticism had gained dominion over the field of literary criticism, Cowley's essay struck a note of mild rebelliousness which seems outdated today, but it anticipated the subsequent interest in recovering the possibilities of historicism for literary criticism.

In Cowley's view criticism is best approached as one of the literary arts, if a minor one; consequently it should be well written, in an articulate and literary fashion of its own. The correct and only justifiable attitude for the critic to take is one of humility in the face of the works he is criticizing. Although criticism can never be entirely impersonal and can never reach a scientific degree of objectivity, it should nevertheless be based on verifiable information in order to be persuasive. Aware of the possible unreliability of an author's statement of intentions, Cowley still finds his "probative evidence" primarily in an author's personal testimonies--letters, notebooks, outlines, public statements. If the critic rejects these sources as insubstantial or immaterial, he runs the risk of falling into an "unintentional fallacy:" he may impose meanings on a work which are not there or he may substitute his own fantasy or creation for the author's.

For all his skepticism about the restrictions imposed upon the critic's liberty and usefulness by any exclusive approach, Cowley always starts and ends with the text itself and is willing to accept the adage of the textual critic that "the principal value of a work lies in the complexity and unity of its internal relations." Simultaneously, however,

he moves beyond the possibly confining implications of such a notion:

It is a mistake to approach each work as if it were an absolutely separate production, a unique artifact, the last and single relic of a buried civilization. Why not approach it as the author does? It seems to me that any author of magnitude has his eye on something larger than the individual story or poem or novel. He wants each of these to be as good as possible, and self-subsistent, but he also wants it to serve as a chapter or aspect of the larger work that is his lifetime production, his oeuvre.

For Cowley this larger work is an essential part of the critic's subject matter. By studying the interconnections between separate works of art and analyzing the progression of recurrent themes through the entire oeuvre the critic is able to chart the development of a career, to distinguish between phases within that career and, consequently, to avoid the mistake of viewing an author as "a single and permanent aggregate of qualities." An important part of Cowley's critical effort is directed towards establishing what he has called a writer's central "fable:" the central truth (embodied in a recurrent situation, theme or symbol) around which everything in the oeuvre falls into place and for the expression of which the whole life's experience of the writer becomes available. In order to diagnose the "fable" the critic will need to consider "internal questions" of style, structure and imagery, but will also have to take into account "external relations" like the nature of the audience, the regional and social background of the author, the implied moral of the fable. He may even be obliged to study the society in which the author wrote and lived if this would help to elucidate or establish his meaning.⁵⁰ Cowley's approach has thus consistently led him into such extra-literary fields as history, biography, psychology or sociology. The approach goes back to one of Cowley's earliest and most consistent convictions: the fundamental relationship existing between literature and life. Although at different moments in his career he has interpreted that complex relationship in different ways and with different degrees of loyalty to each specific solution--from a relatively pure aestheticism to a view of art as a potential instrument of political revolution--he has remained antagonistic to any critical method which extricates or dissociates the element of human life from art.

"Criticism: A Many-Windowed House" was partly written in response to

what Cowley viewed as the excesses of the New Criticism in the 1940s and 1950s, a period when the "career open to talent" was preeminently the critical consolidation of the modernist attainment, rather than vigorous experimentation in the creative arts, as had been the case in Cowley's formative years. In these years, inevitably, Cowley's approach fell into critical disfavor and at times came under heavy fire. The case against his "historical" and contextual criticism was made most fiercely in 1954 by a one-time critical disciple, John W. Aldridge, who, in his search for modes of critical "heresy," thought he had found a perfect specimen in Cowley's The Literary Situation (1954).⁵¹ With the New Critical mode of highbrow criticism at the peak of its prestige, Cowley's reputation suffered and he was sometimes condescendingly dismissed as a "middlebrow" or "sociological" critic. At the same time Cowley enjoyed a high respect in academe on the basis of his reclamation of Faulkner and his pioneering studies of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, while founding fathers of the New Criticism like Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and R. P. Blackmur, unlike more zealous and dogmatic disciples, continued to recognize the soundness and bedrock solidity of Cowley's literary criticism.

Impervious to the shifting tides of critical and literary fashions, Cowley has steered clear of what he has called "critical endogamy" and has resisted any monolithic or reductive approach, whether he found it in the distortions of literary nationalism in Bernard DeVoto's The Literary Fallacy (1944), in the psychoanalytical excesses of Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel (1960), or in the "meta-Freudian" reading of Faulkner in John T. Irwin's Doubling and Incest--Repetition and Revenge (1975).⁵² Persistently skeptical of the exclusivism of literary canon-making, he has continued to explore underestimated writers and neglected aspects of the literary life and profession--Horatio Alger, Lafcadio Hearn, S. Foster Damon, Robert Coates, Erskine Caldwell, James Thurber, Nelson Algren--and has not been afraid of voicing "dissenting opinions" on canonized authors like Robert Frost and Ezra Pound.⁵³ He has, also, continued to look with an open mind at modes of writing, both historical and creative, outside the range of attention of the New Criticism--as witness his critical homage to Van Wyck Brooks, his exploration of "the middle-American prose style," and his reclamation and authoritative interpretation of Whitman's Leaves of Grass: The First

(1855) Edition (1959).⁵⁴

Malcolm Cowley has remained faithful to the ideal of the man of letters he first evolved in the 1920s, an ideal rooted in the "classical" tradition of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Following the French Encyclopedists, he has aimed to create, for his own times, une société de gens des lettres and to act as a sensitive mediator between "high" literary art and the "common reader." As Lewis Simpson has pertinently suggested, Cowley's endeavor to assuage the American writer's seemingly ineluctable condition of alienation has infused his approach to the literary profession with "a poetics of literary community," together with a pragmatic understanding of the interrelatedness of all aspects of the literary trade. Cowley has indeed written with equal expertise on the "business" of literature, the sociology of the writing profession, the economics of book production and the changing state of the publishing world; to be sensitive to the importance of an editor like Maxwell Perkins came rather naturally to him. In this context Cowley's "A Natural History of the American Writer," a near book-length study of the literary profession in America included in The Literary Situation, offers the best example of its author's typical sense of the literary artist as part of a tribal community: it presents a pragmatic image of the American writer as the member of a living community, one subject to "normal" professional, domestic, marital, social, economic and psychological pressures. If its approach seems partly to emerge from the conformist Zeitgeist of the 1950s and at times lapses into the sociological, it has nevertheless remained a characteristic feature of Cowley's broadly eclectic vision of the American writer.⁵⁵

In a literary career spanning over seven active decades Cowley has combined an astounding multiplicity of functions: he has been poet, critic, literary historian, editor, literary consultant to publishers and, in general, "middleman" of letters. His awareness of the literary profession as "interdependent at all its levels" has prompted him to speak up in its defense whenever he saw it threatened. On behalf of the "little American republic of letters" he took his own firm stand against the "Philistines" in the controversy over the Bollingen Award to Ezra

Pound in 1949.⁵⁶ At the same time he recurrently expressed his skepticism about the inroads made into the writing trade by commercialism and collectivization and voiced his fear that writers might lose their status as "independent craftsmen" to become officials in a bureaucratic structure, possessing technical virtuosity but paralyzed by timidity, conventionality and lack of personal courage. During the McCarthy years he was disturbed by the pervasive mood of anti-intellectualism, by the decline of the reading habit, and by the potentially dangerous effects of an alliance between creative writing and academic careerism.⁵⁷ At the same time he himself worked within academe as a teacher, writer-in-residence and lecturer at writers' conferences.⁵⁸ Always, however, he has felt slightly out of place among academic scholars--even as a participant in The Literary History of the United States (1948) he felt odd man out among professors of literature--and has been most at ease among writers, artists, publishers and editors. Few, indeed, have had Cowley's talent for friendship and the geniality of temperament to associate on terms of equality with an astonishingly wide and varied circle of literary friends and acquaintances, from Faulkner and Hemingway to younger writers like John Cheever, Ken Kesey and Tillie Olsen and visual and sculptural artists like Peter Blume, Arshile Gorky and Alexander Calder. As critic, teacher and roving scout of new talent for Viking Press, Cowley has continued to exhort, advise and practically assist young writers, urging them to meet the challenges of contemporary reality, to find new forms and to speak in their own voices.⁵⁹ His early discovery of John Cheever, his efforts on behalf of Jack Kerouac's On the Road, and his encouragements of Ken Kesey, Larry McMurtry and Peter S. Beagle (members of Cowley's class in creative writing at Stanford in 1961) are merely the better-known examples of a long list of services rendered to numerous writers.⁶⁰

By the mid-1950s, however, the newer forms of fiction he himself had called for were not much to Cowley's liking. Though his conception of the novel remained open and flexible enough, it insisted too strongly on a mimetic, realistic, humanist art to accommodate the bulk of postmodernist experimentation. Rather than to a John Barth, a Donald Barthelme or a Thomas Pynchon, Cowley found himself attracted to a classical realist like Thornton Wilder or conservative writers who intuitively grasped the shaping force of social reality in individual life--John P. Marquand,

John O'Hara, James Gould Cozzens and Willa Cather. He also found himself sharply at odds with the newer developments in criticism: approaches like Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Deconstructionism were regarded as modes of critical heresy by Cowley, "a humanist by instinct" who by 1978 had come to feel "increasingly alone and beleaguered."⁶¹

At some point in the late 1950s Cowley's rôle as the barometric chronicler of his literary times, one possessed of an almost "seismographic" sense of shifting cultural forces,⁶² had lost much of its dramatic momentum. The 1960s were for Cowley a time of revaluations of his radical past, which were now given a new impetus by the emergence of the New Left and a concomitant revival of interest in the "old" left. With the help of Henry Dan Piper he collected his New Republic articles of the 1930s in book form and wrote much of what later became The Dream of the Golden Mountains. In literary criticism, too, his career became increasingly dominated by retrospection and the ongoing critical revaluation of the high years of American literary modernism, the living heart of Cowley's career. By contrast, his account of the "love generation" of the 1960s in --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade evinced the troubled perplexity of a man of letters confronted with a generation desirous of social change but impervious to the order of literary ethics and aesthetics in which Cowley breathed most naturally: the instruments of cultural change no longer seemed primarily literary.⁶³ It also showed that Cowley's best critical and historical writing depended on a degree of personal and imaginative connection with its subject matter.

By the mid-1960s Cowley had become an official member of the literary establishment. He had been elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1949, served as its President from 1956 to 1959 and again from 1962 to 1965, and in 1964 had been "elevated" to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Since then, he has remained an active force in the "commonwealth of letters." He has continued to conceive of American writers as a community of individual craftsmen, each fiercely devoted to his or her special talent and vision, yet all engaged in a united literary endeavor. For Cowley, as for Edmund Wilson, the advancement of literature has been "in great part a collaborative venture." Like Allen Tate's, his "true home" has been in the timeless and placeless Republic of Letters, a realm which he has defined, in typical pluralistic fashion, as a "loose federation composed of many dukedoms and

principalities."⁶⁴ As its "roving diplomat" he has moved with ease, tact and generosity between the realm of serious criticism, literary history and academic scholarship, and the pragmatic world of publishing, editing, writers' conferences and artists' colonies, between a disinterested pursuit of letters and the literary marketplace.⁶⁵ True to his prescription for the man of letters, he has himself written in many genres. In old age his lifelong loyalty to his literary friends has given him still another, sadder rôle: more than anyone else in the literary republic he has become its retrospective celebrant and elegiac poet-in-prose. In recent years Cowley's stature and influence have been confirmed by many literary awards and honorary degrees. The honors culminated on May 20, 1981, when he received The Gold Medal for Belles Lettres and Criticism of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Appropriately, the award was presented to him by Kenneth Burke. With typical modesty Cowley has spoken of himself as a "poet and critic," never as a "man of letters." Nevertheless, at the end of his life, after a "second flowering" in his own career which saw the publication of nine books since his sixty-eighth year, Cowley could look back on a literary life in which, in his own fashion, he had fulfilled the ideal of the man of letters he had first developed as a young man. It seems a graceful irony of literary history that in the 1980s Malcolm Cowley should have come to approximate the status of William Dean Howells, who once symbolized all that his age-group was in revolt against: that of Dean of American Letters.

NOTES

Unless indicated otherwise, all references are to letters and unpublished manuscript material in the Malcolm Cowley Papers in the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois. References to letters and manuscripts in Cowley's personal files are indicated as "Sherman, Connecticut." Magazines, newspapers and periodicals are referred to by their full titles throughout the notes. Likewise, all correspondents are indicated by their full names, with the exception of Malcolm Cowley ("MC") and Kenneth Burke ("KB"). All quotations have been taken from the original manuscripts, even when these have been published. Cowley's notebooks of the 1920s are in the Newberry Library; the new series of notebooks started in 1933 are in Cowley's personal files and are referred to as "n.s.." For a virtually complete, if not always correct, bibliographical listing of Cowley's published writings, see Diane U. Eisenberg, Malcolm Cowley: A Checklist of His Writings, 1916-1973 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1975) and the preliminary updated version of the checklist by Ruth M. Alvarez and Diane U. Eisenberg in the "Special Malcolm Cowley Issue" of The Visionary Company: A Magazine of the Twenties II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 205-230.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Malcolm Cowley

<u>BJ</u>	<u>Blue Juniata</u> (1929)
<u>BJCP</u>	<u>Blue Juniata: Collected Poems</u> (1968)
<u>CMC</u>	<u>Conversations with Malcolm Cowley</u> . Edited by Thomas Daniel Young (1986)
<u>DGM</u>	<u>The Dream of the Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930s</u> (1980)
<u>ER</u>	<u>Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s</u> (1951)
<u>ER</u> (1934)	<u>Exile's Return: A Narrative of Ideas</u> (1934)
<u>FCF</u>	<u>The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944-1962</u> (1966)
<u>FL</u>	<u>The Flower and the Leaf: A Contemporary Record of American Writing Since 1941</u> . Edited and with an introduction by Donald W. Faulkner (1985)
<u>LS</u>	<u>The Literary Situation</u> (1954)
<u>MWH</u>	<u>A Many-Windowed House: Collected Essays on American Writers and American Writing</u> . Edited, with an introduction, by Henry

Dan Piper (1970)

- SF A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation
(1973)
- TBOU Think Back On Us: A Contemporary Chronicle of the 1930s. Edited
by Henry Dan Piper (1967)
- VE The View from Eighty (1980)
- WT --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade: Chapters of Literary
History, 1918-1978 (1978)

Manuscript Collections

American Review and Bookman Papers: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Benét Papers: William Rose Benét Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Brooks Papers: Van Wyck Brooks Papers, Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Burke Papers: Kenneth Burke Papers, Fred Lewis Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

Contempo Papers: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Texas

Damon Papers: S. Foster Damon Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Dial Papers: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Dos Passos Papers: John Dos Passos Papers, Poetry Collection, Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York, Buffalo, New York

Galantière Papers: Lewis Galantière Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York

Hicks Papers: Granville Hicks Papers, George Argents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York

Josephson Papers: Matthew Josephson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Kenyon Review Papers: Gordon Keith Chalmers Memorial Library, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio

Little Review Papers: University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Loeb Papers: Harold Loeb Papers, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey

Lowell Papers: Amy Lowell Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Poetry Papers: Poetry Magazine Papers, 1912-1935, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Rascoe Papers: Burton Rascoe Papers, Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sandburg Papers: Carl Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, Illinois

Schneider Papers: Isidor Schneider Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York

Scribner's Archives: Charles Scribner's Archives, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey
Stallman Papers: Robert W. Stallman Papers, Barrett Library, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia
Tate Papers: Allen Tate Papers, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey
Warren Papers: Robert Penn Warren Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
Wheelwright Papers: John Brooks Wheelwright Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
Williams Papers: William Carlos Williams Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
Wilson Papers: Edmund Wilson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

¹VE, pp. 12-13; SF, p. 30.

²Cowley's later essays on Aiken, Cummings, Damon and Wilder are his explorations of the continuity of the spirit of New England transcendentalism in modern times. See SF, pp. 90-113, 114-129, and WT, pp. 35-50, 231-248. As literary advisor at Viking Press he has worked with enthusiasm on Gay Wilson Allen's biography of Emerson (dedicated to Cowley) and has collaborated with Carl Bode on a revised edition of The Portable Emerson (New York, 1981); the quotation from Emerson appears on page 11 of The Portable Emerson. For a consideration of Cowley as Emerson's "spiritual heir," see Adam Gussow, "Whatever Roots We Had in the Soil: Malcolm Cowley and the American Scholar," Horns of Plenty: Malcolm Cowley and His Generation I (Spring 1988), 5-15, 19-24.

³"Mother and Son," p. 9. The essay was written in May 1982 and published in American Heritage XXXV, 2 (February-March 1983), 28-35. Quotations in the text are from the original typescript.

⁴MC to Robert Penn Warren, July 9, 1967; MC to Henry Rago, September 28, 1967. The poem was published in Poetry CXII (June 1968), 149-50.

⁵BJCP, p. 3. The charred landscape of Cowley's poem bears an interesting resemblance to the "burned-over country" in which Nick Adams finds himself in the opening scenes of Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." I shall return to the special importance of Hemingway to Cowley below.

⁶ER, p. 14; MC to Conrad Aiken, January 14, 1961; "'Boy in Sunlight' was written in the fall of 1967, but it is based on a vivid memory that goes back sixty years. It was a rite of initiation: the countryside marked me as its own, as if a surveyor had scarred a witness tree." Reminiscent talk to the people of Sherman, August 30, 1968, unpublished. The poem, though not written until 1967, was projected much earlier, possibly as a result of Cowley's readings of Walt Whitman. In a notebook entry for November 27, 1955, Cowley had observed: "I keep thinking about the poems. In a sense it is the return of age to scenes of youth--I remember those scenes more vividly than I see today the Connecticut countryside. But also it is the craftsman's desire to get things right--to take those intimations of poetry and give them a permanent expression. . . . I must do the poem (my 'There Was a Child Went Forth') about the position of the boy by the landscape" (Notebook VII, n.s., August 9, 1954-February 14, 1957, Sherman). In 1955 Cowley's attention had been focussed on Whitman by the appearance of Gay Wilson Allen's biography The Solitary Singer, which he had reviewed for the New York Times Book Review on February 6. Several months later he had edited a "little anthology" of Whitman's poems for The New Republic of July 25, on the occasion of the centennial of the publication of Leaves of Grass. His critical commentary was later expanded into the "Introduction" to the reissue of the First (1855) Edition of Leaves of Grass (Viking Press, 1959), edited by Cowley.

⁷BJCP, p. 28; ER, p. 13; Allen Tate to MC, n.d. [September 1968]; BJCP, p. 5.

⁸The nearest equivalent to a full account is a moving tribute to his mother, "Mother and Son," written in May 1982; the most extensive evocation in prose of the country of his youth can be found in "My Countryside, Then and Now," Harper's Monthly Magazine CLVIII (January 1929), 239-245.

⁹MC to Margaret Binney Smith, June 17, 1966; MC to Donald C. McKenna, March 31, 1967; MC to George Swetnam, October 22, 1968; "Mother and Son," p. 5.

¹⁰"My Countryside, Then and Now," Harper's Monthly Magazine CLVIII (January 1929), p. 239.

¹¹ER, p. 15; "The Pyre," BJCP, p. 27.

¹²"Mother and Son," pp. 7-9; Robert Cowley, "Malcolm Cowley: Countryman," Country Journal (October 1983), pp. 63-64, reprinted in CMC, pp. 182-192; "Continental Highway," New Republic LXVI (February 25, 1931), 34.

¹³"My Countryside, Then and Now," p. 243; "The Living Water," BJCP, p. 134. The poem was first published in an earlier version as "The Source" in Poetry LXXII (April 1948), 18-19.

¹⁴Reminiscent talk to the people of Sherman, August 30, 1968, unpublished; SF, p. 208.

¹⁵SF, pp. 149, 248, 255; FCF, pp. 151-152.

¹⁶"My Countryside, Then and Now," p. 240; "Introduction" to The Portable Hemingway (New York, 1944), pp. xix, xxi-xxii. Cf. ER, p. 289.

¹⁷MC to Kenneth Burke, May 16, 1929; MC to Margaret Binney Smith, June 17, 1966; "My Countryside, Then and Now," pp. 244-245; Notebook VII, n.s., (August 9, 1954-February 14, 1957), entry for September 2, 1955; for the aspects of Hemingway discussed here, see Scott Donaldson, By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway (New York, 1977), pp. 72-77, 230-240; and Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N. J., 1972), pp. 82-86; MC to Allen Tate, April 21, 1966, Tate Papers.

¹⁸"Continental Highway," p. 35; "My Countryside, Then and Now," pp. 240, 245; "Malcolm Cowley: Countryman," p. 64.

¹⁹"The Waste Land," New Republic LXXXVIII (September 2, 1938), 187; BJ, p. 2.

²⁰"My Countryside, Then and Now," p. 240; "Dan George," BJCP, pp. 7-8.

²¹BJCP, pp. 15-18.

²²"My Countryside, Then and Now," p. 239; "The Waste Land," p. 187;

ER, p. 28.

²³MC to Mrs. David Thompson, November 17, 1967; MC to Robert W. Stallman, July 22, 1960, Stallman Papers; reminiscent talk to the people of Sherman, August 30, 1968; BJCP, p. 9.

²⁴"The Hill Above the Mine," BJCP, pp. 10-11. A similar promise is held out to the farmers of "Poverty Hollow" (BJCP, p. 12), who, against odds and fate, have continued to fight an exhaustive but losing battle against the dwindling resources of nature. The closing stanza of "The Hill Above the Mine" compares illuminatingly with the epigraph from Ecclesiastes to The Sun Also Rises ("... but the earth abideth forever . . .").

²⁵"My Countryside, Then and Now," p. 239.

²⁶"The Blown Door," BJCP, p. 25.

²⁷Lewis P. Simpson, "Malcolm Cowley and the American Writer," Sewanee Review LXXXIV (April-June 1976), 225.

²⁸BJCP, pp. 21-24.

²⁹BJCP, pp. 27-29; "Continental Highway," p. 34; MC to Kenneth Burke, July 27, 1970; MC to Margaret Binney Smith, August 6, 1970.

³⁰MC to Margaret Binney Smith, July 21, 1968; BJCP, p. 26. Published in Poetry as "Poem for Two Voices."

³¹Allen Tate to MC, November 27, 1973; MC to Walter Snow, August 27, 1971; BJCP, p. 142.

³²Lewis P. Simpson, "Malcolm Cowley and the American Writer," p. 225.

³³ER, pp. 32-33.

³⁴DGM, p. xi.

³⁵DGM, p. 227.

³⁶MWH, p. 24.

³⁷SF, p. 149; Bishop's epithet is quoted in DGM, p. xi; Alfred Kazin, Starting Out in the Thirties (Boston and Toronto, 1965), p. 19; DGM, p. xi.

³⁸Notebook VI, n.s. (August 25, 1950-July 16, 1954), entry for August 25, 1950, Sherman; "Continental Highway," p. 35; FCF, p. 152. See also the present author's "Malcolm Cowley: The Critic and His Generation," Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters IX, 4 (1979), 261-283.

- ¹"Mother and Son," typescript, p. 5.
- ²"Mother and Son," pp. 3-4.
- ³MC to Stanley Young, April 11, 1944.
- ⁴MC to George Swetnam, October 22, 1968. The original six Carnegie partners had agreed that, if anyone should leave the business prematurely, he was to be repaid his initial investment. For his share in the Carnegie Iron Works William Cowley's estate received close to \$4000, which his mother, Cowley's great-grandmother, spent on a trip back home to County Down in Northern Ireland. Cf. MC to Donald C. McKenna, March 31, 1967.
- ⁵For Swedenborg's following at the time, see Austin Warren, The Elder Henry James (1934; rpt., 1970), pp. 65-69.
- ⁶MC to Stanley Young, April 11, 1944; "Mother and Son," p. 2.
- ⁷MC to Donald C. McKenna, March 31, 1967; Warren, The Elder Henry James, p. 158; "Mother and Son," pp. 4-5.
- ⁸"Prayer on All Saints' Day," Sewanee Review LXXXVI (Fall 1978), 563. The poem was reprinted in Blue Juniata: A Life. Collected and New Poems (New York, 1985), pp. 151-153.
- ⁹MC to author, March 23, 1980.
- ¹⁰Cited in Warren, The Elder Henry James, p. 240.
- ¹¹Warren, pp. 82, 91-96, 244.
- ¹²Leon Edel, The Life of Henry James, Vol. I: 1843-89 (New York, 1977), pp. 31-34; MC to Granville Hicks, July 11, 1941, Hicks Papers; Notebook I (1922-1924), pp. 50-51; TBOU, p. 387.
- ¹³MC to Harry [Duncan], October 5, 1943.
- ¹⁴MC to KB, September 1, 1924.
- ¹⁵MC to Harry [Duncan], October 5, 1943; SF, p. 234.
- ¹⁶MC to author, March 23, 1980; DGM, pp. 51-52.
- ¹⁷Edel, The Life of Henry James, p. 95; Notebook I (1922-1924), p. 53; MC to author, March 23, 1980; WT, p. 99.
- ¹⁸The quotation from Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams appears on page 26 of the 1953 Standard Edition; MC to author, June 4, 1982.
- ¹⁹"Mother and Son," pp. 5, 6, 10.

- ²⁰LS, p. 144.
- ²¹"Mother and Son," pp. 8-12.
- ²²DGM, p. xi; MC to Alfred Kazin, May 18, 1962; LS, p. 146.
- ²³"Mother and Son," p. 7, 9-10; "Chopin," Peabody III (March 1915), 5. The poem is quoted in the special Cowley issue of The Visionary Company: A Magazine of the Twenties II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 69; MC to author, June 4, 1982.
- ²⁴MC to Alfred Kazin, May 18, 1962.
- ²⁵"Aspects of the American Scene," Charm VIII (November 1927), 30.
- ²⁶MC to Evelyn B. Byrne, March 21, 1969.
- ²⁷LS, p. 147.
- ²⁸MC to Carsten Ahrens, August 12, 1961; MC to Mary Whouly, July 14, 1966.
- ²⁹LS, p. 145.
- ³⁰ER, p. 15; MC to Jake Davis, June 1, 1967; MC to Hannah Josephson, May 16, 1936, Josephson Papers.
- ³¹MC to Stanley Young, April 11, 1944; "The Passion for Making Something: An Interview with Malcolm Cowley," The Student (January 1969), p. 7; MC to Betty Cox, September 8, 1960.
- ³²"To Lotta on Her Double Chin," Peabody III (January 1915), 14; "The Best Story of the Year," Peabody III (June 1915), 95-98. For Cowley's other contributions to The Peabody, see the updated bibliography in the special Cowley issue of The Visionary company (Summer 1987), pp. 226, 229. The poem and the story discussed in the text are reprinted in the same issue on pp. 70-74.
- ³³Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane, 1923-1932 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1969), pp. 26-27; MC to KB, July 29, 1966; MC to Jake Davis, July 28, 1966.
- ³⁴MC to Allen Tate, May 18, 1973.
- ³⁵SF, pp. 244-245; MC to KB, June 2, 1932.
- ³⁶MC to KB, n.d. [1916].
- ³⁷KB to MC, October 2, 1959.
- ³⁸Donald G. Parker and Warren Herendeen, "KB & MC: An Interview with Kenneth Burke," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 88-89, 96. The memory of their walks and talks together, the melody of their adolescent voices, would still reverberate in both men's minds sixty-five years later, even though by then their hearing had become considerably

impaired. In a 1981 poem, "An Epistolation," dedicated to Cowley, Burke claimed that he could still perfectly understand his ancient friend's voice, even when, as at a recent meeting of the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters, he was surrounded by a host of loudly talking others and had neglected to bring his hearing aid:

hence missing an awful lot of the verbatims
put forth by the various thinkeroos
as the official meeting doodled on

I natheless understood sans effort every word
that you as Ipse Dixit judgmentally pronounced
during our severely solemn deliberations.

Malcolm Cowley, "Notes to a Poem by Kenneth Burke, 'An Epistolation,'" The Visionary Company I (Summer 1981), 5-7.

³⁹Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (1948; rev. ed., 1955), p. 384; SF, p. 245; Allen Tate, "A Regional Poet," New Republic LX (August 28, 1929), 51-52.

⁴⁰"Letter to England," New Republic LXXXII (February 13, 1935), 22; TBOU, p. 255; SF, p. 26; Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (New York, 1959), pp. 9, 22, 29, 112; Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years, 1885-1915 (New York, 1955).

⁴¹ER, p. 18; "Prayer on All Saints' Day," Sewanee Review LXXXVI (Fall 1978), 564 (reprinted in Blue Juniata: A Life, p. 152).

⁴²ER, p. 19; "My Countryside, Then and Now," Harper's Monthly Magazine CLVIII (January 1929), 239-240.

⁴³ER, p. 18; Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (1942; New York, 1970), p. 92; Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence, pp. 121, 141; Brooks, The Confident Years, pp. 485-548.

⁴⁴"Letter to England," p. 22; TBOU, p. 256; "Wowzers on the Run," Brentano's Book Chat VI (January-February 1927), 30-33.

⁴⁵ER, p. 17; "Letter to England," p. 22; TBOU, p. 256; May, The End of American Innocence, p. 205; "The Smart Set Legend," New Republic LXXXI (January 16, 1935), 281; TBOU, p. 249.

⁴⁶ER, pp. 19-20, 27-28; MC to Cynthia A. Russick, December 13, 1970.

⁴⁷"Two Gentlemen on Literati Road: Cowley Interview (August 30, 1975)," Lost Generation Journal III (Fall 1975), 6. Reprinted in CMC, pp. 129-137.

⁴⁸SF, p. 235.

⁴⁹ER, pp. 21-22; Notebook I (1922-1924), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁰ER, pp. 17, 26.

⁵¹MC to KB, July 20, 1915; July 27, 1915. Chocolate plain cream,

Cowley wrote in answer to a question from the author on March 2, 1984, was "the soda fountain delight of our little high-school group. It cost only five cents at Reymer's, the leading soda-fountain in East Liberty. It was supposed to consist of a little milk, chocolate syrup, and soda. But one of our classmates had dropped out of high school and worked as a soda-jerk at Reymer's. He substituted ice cream for milk, for our special pleasure, and still charged us only five cents. Sometimes we drank three chocolate plain creams in succession. Kenneth Burke blamed them for our high-school pimples. Jake Davis . . . invented a Yiddish-sounding word for them: bokhofomod'gess."

⁵²MC to KB, August 2, 1915.

⁵³MC to KB, July 20, 1915.

⁵⁴MC to KB, August 18, 1915; August 25, 1915.

⁵⁵MC to KB, September 7, 1915.

⁵⁶MC to KB, May 2, 1949; "Mother and Son," pp. 10-11; MC to Stanley Young, April 11, 1944.

¹For Harvard University under President Eliot, see Samuel Eliot Morison, Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936 (1936; Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp. 323-399, and Herbert Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot (Boston, 1964), pp. 64-113. Also cf. Richard S. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings (New York, 1980), pp. 52-100; Townsend Ludington, John Dos Passos: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey (New York, 1980), pp. 50-85; Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (New York, 1959), p. 56.

²For Harvard University under President Lowell, see S. E. Morison, Three Centuries of Harvard, pp. 439-450.

³Morison, pp. 440, 444, 449; "Toward a Universal Man," New Republic XLIX (December 8, 1926), 69-71.

⁴Cf. Ronald Steel, Walter Lippmann and the American Century (Boston, Toronto, 1980), pp. 17-22; May, The End of American Innocence, pp. 142-147. James had died in 1910; Santayana had retired in 1912 to spend the remaining forty years of his life in Europe; Royce was still alive during Cowley's freshman year, but died in September 1916.

⁵Cf. May, pp. 58-60; Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot, pp. 89-94; Wendell's book, Howells fulminated in 1901, created the impression that American literature was "not worthy the attention of people meaning to be really critical." Edwin H. Cady, ed., W. D. Howells as Critic (London, Boston, 1973), p. 374; Eliot's observation is quoted in Richard Ruland, The Rediscovery of American Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), p. x.

⁶"Hemingway's Wound--And Its Consequences for American Literature," Georgia Review XXXVIII (Summer 1984), 235; cf. FL, pp. 253-254.

⁷ER, p. 34; May, pp. 60-61; Townsend Ludington, John Dos Passos: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey, p. 53.

⁸LS, p. 158; for a fuller listing of Cowley's Harvard predecessors, see Richard S. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror, p. 67; Edward Weeks to MC, January 29, 1957.

⁹LS, pp. 164-165; notes for a speech to the Signet Society, February 8, 1974, Sherman.

¹⁰See Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror, p. 66.

¹¹ER, p. 35; TBOU, pp. 212-213.

¹²Ludington, John Dos Passos, pp. 56-57.

¹³Quoted in Charles Norman, E. E. Cummings: A Biography (New York, 1969), pp. 45-46.

¹⁴For Cowley's contributions to The Harvard Advocate, see Diane U. Eisenberg, Malcolm Cowley: A Checklist of His Writings, 1916-1973 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1975); for his revaluation of the Harvard Aesthetes from his 1930s radical perspective, see TBOU, pp. 212-213, and ER, pp. 34-36.

¹⁵Morison, pp. 445-446.

¹⁶Notes for speech to Signet Society, February 8, 1974, p. 2; MC to Fredson Bowers, August 12, 1967.

¹⁷MC to KB, October 3, 1915; n.d. [October 21, 1915].

¹⁸Notes for speech to Signet Society, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹MC to KB, October 3, 1915; October 22, 1915.

²⁰MC to KB, November 2, 1915; October 26, 1915; November 9, 1915; November 14, 1915.

²¹KB to MC, November 6, 1915, Wheelwright Papers.

²²MC to KB, n.d. [November 1915]; "Backstairs," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 7, 1928, p. 4.

²³MC to KB, November 9, 1915; November 14, 1915; n.d. [early December, 1915]; December 4, 1915.

²⁴MC to KB, December 4, 1915; n.d. [November 1915]; n.d. [November 1915, different letter].

²⁵KB to MC, November 6, 1915, Wheelwright Papers.

²⁶MC to KB, n.d. [early December, 1915].

²⁷MC to author, May 12, 1984; MC to KB, December 15, 1915.

²⁸MC to KB, January 5, 1915 [1916]; MC to Phillip McKenna, June 17, 1966.

²⁹MC to KB, January 5, 1915 [1916]; January 18, [1916]; January 26, 1916.

³⁰MC to KB, January 18, [1916]; January 26, 1916.

³¹MC to KB, January 26, 1916.

³²MC to KB, n.d. [February 1916].

³³MC to KB, November 9, 1915; February 13, 1916; March 9, 1916. Cf. Morison, p. 420.

³⁴MC to KB, February 13, 1916; March 9, 1916; March 26, 1916.

³⁵Quoted in Charles Norman, E. E. Cummings: A Biography, p. 45.

³⁶WT, pp. 37-38.

³⁷MC to KB, March 26, 1916.

³⁸MC to KB, April 5, 1916; March 9, 1916.

³⁹Harvard Advocate CI (March 31, 1916), 42; Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York, 1932), p. 2.

⁴⁰Morison, p. 430; Donald Hall, "Introduction," The Harvard Advocate Anthology (New York, 1950), p. 14 and passim; Jonathan D. Culler, "Introduction," Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), pp. xx-xxvi.

⁴¹SF, p. 91; E. E. Cummings to MC, April 30, 1951.

⁴²Quoted in J. D. Culler, "Introduction," pp. xxvii, xx. The Advocate, Culler observed in 1966 on the occasion of its hundredth anniversary, "had stayed Georgian ten years too late."

⁴³MC to KB, n.d. [May 1916]; "Execution," Harvard Advocate CI (June 5, 1916), 114; "On Rereading Wordsworth," Harvard Advocate CI (June 5, 1916), 109.

⁴⁴MC to KB, n.d. [April 1916].

⁴⁵MC to KB, May 3, 1916.

⁴⁶See Stephen Steinberg, "How Jewish Quotas Began," Commentary 52 (1971), 67-76. Steinberg observes that "a climate of intolerance prevailed in many Eastern colleges long before discriminatory quotas were contemplated by college officials. From the turn of the century anti-Semitism was a common feature of campus social life" (p. 71). On November 2, 1971, Cowley wrote to his former classmate Jake Davis: "Yes, that Commentary article tells it as it was. I had forgotten what a prejudiced man A. Lawrence Lowell was, though I hadn't forgotten social anti-semitism at Harvard."

⁴⁷MC to Mrs. Andys K. Allport, May 21, 1976; MC to Joel Townsley Rogers, September 13, 1961.

⁴⁸MC to KB, September 27 [1915]; November 9, 1915; July 21, 1916.

⁴⁹MC to KB, April 5, 1916.

⁵⁰MC to KB, May 3, 1916.

⁵¹MC to KB, n.d. [late May or early June 1916].

⁵²MC to KB, n.d. [June 1916].

⁵³MC to KB, July 4, 1916.

⁵⁴MC to author, May 12, 1984; MC to KB, March 9, 1916; August 12, 1916; n.d. [August 1916].

⁵⁵MC to KB, July 21, 1916.

⁵⁶MC to KB, August 12, 1916.

⁵⁷MC to KB, July 21, 1916; August 31, 1916; September 8, 1916.

⁵⁸MC to KB, October 9, 1916; October 11, 1916; October 12, 1916; November 28, 1916.

⁵⁹MC to KB, November 1, 1916.

⁶⁰MC to KB, November 11, 1916. Cowley's personal experience ties in with Samuel Eliot Morison's observations on the prerequisites for social success at Harvard: "Since 1890 it has been almost necessary for a Harvard student with social ambition to enter from the 'right' sort of school and be popular there, to room on the 'Gold Coast' and be accepted by Boston society his freshman year, in order to be on the right side of social chasm. Family and race did not matter: an Irish-American, Jew, Italian or Cuban was not regarded as such if he went to the right school and adopted the mores of his fellows: conversely, a lad of Mayflower and Porcellian ancestry who entered from a high school was as much 'out of it' as a ghetto Jew. Nor did wealth matter: men who worked their way through College were respected, and eligible; but too much spending damned a freshman; a now prominent multimillionaire who came to Cambridge with a retinue of cars and servants, and hired a whole apartment, had no notice taken of him, and soon departed." Morison, Three Centuries of Harvard, p. 422.

⁶¹MC to Jake Davis, June 1, 1967; notes for speech to Signet Society, February 9, 1974, p. 3.

⁶²The basic society was a social organization called The Institute of 1770. Each year from 15 to 18 percent of the sophomores were admitted, in elections organized in tens. Election to the Institute was the first social shifting among the sophomores and up until 1904 its list of members, printed in the local papers, served as an index of social rating. In their junior and senior years members of the Institute could be elected to the Hasty Pudding Club. The first seven or eight tens automatically belonged to the D. K. E., the "Dickey." From there a socially ambitious climber would move on to a "waiting club," as a preliminary step towards election to one of the prestigious "final clubs," such as the elitist Porcellian Club. Since only about one fourth or one fifth of a given class were socially eligible, the pressure for social conformity was strong; originality and individualism were anathema: "students who belonged to the system were kept in line for three years and molded in a special cast by the persistent fear of being blackballed for something or other," Cowley recalled in a 1974 speech to the Signet Society. Cf. Morison, pp. 422-427.

⁶³MC to KB, November 11, 1916.

⁶⁴Morison, p. 424.

⁶⁵MC to KB, October 24, 1916; November 11, 1916; December 14, 1916.

⁶⁶Cf. Culler, "Introduction," p. xxi; TBOU, p. 273; WT, p. 39.

⁶⁷Alan M. Wald, The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan (Chapel Hill and London, 1983), pp. 22-25.

⁶⁸The story is told in full in Charles Norman, E. E. Cummings, pp. 48-58; notes for speech to Signet Society, p. 6.

⁶⁹Harvard Advocate CII (October 10, 1916), 4.

⁷⁰MC to KB, November 11, 1916; Harvard Advocate CII (November 8, 1916), 42. "To a Girl I Dislike" was reprinted in Donald Hall, ed., The Harvard Advocate Anthology, pp. 151-152.

⁷¹MC to KB, November 28, 1916; Harvard Advocate CII (December 20, 1916), 82.

⁷²MC to KB, December 14, 1916; Miss Lowell's compliment is quoted in S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle (1935; Hamden, Connecticut, 1966) pp. 398-399; TBOU, p. 280.

⁷³Harvard Advocate CII (November 22, 1916), 62-63.

⁷⁴Harvard Advocate CII (November 22, 1916), 63.

⁷⁵Harvard Advocate CII (January 17, 1917), 124.

⁷⁶MC to KB, November 28, 1916; December 9, 1916; December 14, 1916.

⁷⁷MC to KB, January 10, 1917.

⁷⁸MC to KB, n.d. [January 1917]; January 22, 1917; January 31, 1917.

⁷⁹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 36, 41.

⁸⁰MC to KB, March 15, 1917.

⁸¹MC to KB, February 3, 1917.

⁸²MC to KB, n.d. [January 1917]; Slate I (January 1917), 14 and (April 1917), 87; Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F. Ulrich, The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography (Princeton, New Jersey, 1947), p. 253; Max Lincoln Schuster to MC, June 17, 1953.

⁸³"James Thurber and the Avant Garde," unpublished lecture delivered at Ohio State University, March 21, 1970, at the dedication of the James Thurber Collection, p. 1.

⁸⁴Sansculotte I (January 1917), 1.

⁸⁵"James Thurber and the Avant Garde," p. 1; Burton Bernstein, Thurber: A Biography (New York, 1975), p. 52; MC to Mr. Bergman, March 31, 1967; MC to Lewis C. Branscomb, February 19, 1970; Hoffman, et al., The Little Magazine, p. 253.

- ⁸⁶MC to KB, January 22, 1917; February 26, 1917.
- ⁸⁷MC to KB, February 26, 1917; Sansculotte I (April 1917), 2.
- ⁸⁸Sansculotte I (January 1917), 5.
- ⁸⁹Sansculotte I (February 1917), 7.
- ⁹⁰Harvard Advocate CII (February 7, 1917), 152.
- ⁹¹MC to KB, January 22, 1917; Harvard Advocate CIII (February 28, 1917), 3. Reprinted in Donald Hall, ed., The Harvard Advocate Anthology, pp. 152-153.
- ⁹²MC to KB, March 21, 1917; Harvard Advocate CIII (February 28, 1917), 5.
- ⁹³MC to KB, March 21, 1917; Harvard Advocate CII (January 10, 1917), 105-106.
- ⁹⁴Cf. J. Donald Adams, Copey of Harvard (Boston, 1960), pp. 150-151; John Reed, "Almost Thirty," New Republic LXXXVI (April 29, 1936), 333; WT, p. 55; Foerster's comment is quoted in Herbert Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot, p. 81; Morison, p. 402.
- ⁹⁵MC to KB, March 15, 1917; "The Beginning Writer in the University," Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review LXIV (1957), 67; MC to J. Donald Adams, July 25, 1957. Cf. Adams, Copey of Harvard, p. 180.
- ⁹⁶MC to KB, March 31, 1917; n.d. [April 1917].
- ⁹⁷MC to KB, n.d. [March 1917]; a holograph copy of "Copey's Room" is among the Cowley Papers.
- ⁹⁸MC to J. Donald Adams, July 25, 1957; "The Beginning Writer in the University," p. 70.
- ⁹⁹MC to author, March 23, 1980.
- ¹⁰⁰ER, pp. 28-34.
- ¹⁰¹KB to MC, November 6, 1915, Wheelwright Papers; "On Rereading Wordsworth," Harvard Advocate CI (June 5, 1916), 109.
- ¹⁰²ER, pp. 32-34; "The Homeless Generation: Mansions in the Air," New Republic LXXII (October 26, 1932), 284; ER (1934), p. 37.
- ¹⁰³ER, pp. 30-34.
- ¹⁰⁴ER, p. 36.

¹Samuel Eliot Morison, Three Centuries of Harvard (1936; Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp. 438, 451, 456-459.

²SF, pp. 9, 92; the Advocate editorial is quoted in Jonathan D. Culler, ed., Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), p. xx.

³Richard S. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings (New York, 1980), pp. 136-137; SF, p. 80; Townsend Ludington, John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey (New York, 1980), pp. 124-164.

⁴For Burke's attitude to the war, cf. Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 38-39, 53-54; review of Egotism in German Philosophy, by George Santayana, Harvard Advocate CIII (May 14, 1917), 73-74; MC to KB, May 3, 1916; March 31, 1917.

⁵Harvard itself had produced a mythical example of wartime heroism and romance in the poet Alan Seeger, whose "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" was already a famous war poem. Seeger had been mortally wounded on July 4, 1916, and became one of the earliest American martyrs of the war. His collected poems had appeared in the fall and his Letters and Diary were published in May 1917. Seeger's poetry was widely known and admired at Harvard and encouraged those of literary sensitivity and ambition in particular to seek some form of military service. See SF, pp. 6-7. For the response of the younger literary generation to the war, see Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (1962; New York, 1965), pp. 71-77; ER, p. 37; Stanley Cooperman, World War I and the American Novel (Baltimore, 1967), pp. 44-56. David C. Duke, Distant Obligations. Modern American Writers and Foreign Causes (New York and Oxford, 1983) has an illuminating chapter on Cowley's experience of the war in comparison with Edith Wharton's and Alan Seeger's.

⁶Harvard Advocate CIII (May 14, 1917), 7.

⁷As David C. Duke has pertinently suggested, "[t]he educational dissatisfaction that so many of [Cowley's] younger generation of writers felt helps explain why they so eagerly rushed from the halls of academe to what they believed was a truer kind of classroom." Distant Obligations, p. 83.

⁸MC to J. Donald Adams, July 25, 1957; MC to KB, March 31, 1917; n.d. [April 1917]. Schenck, a protégé of Barrett Wendell and a literary acquaintance of T. S. Eliot, had done similar services to others.

⁹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 40; David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981).

¹⁰Quoted in Shi, p. 25. Josephson's first meeting with Burke is described in his Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 30-31.

- ¹¹Shi, pp. 26, 29-30; Josephson, pp. 30-32, 53-55.
- ¹²MC to KB, April 24, 1917; May 11, 1917; "Camion Service Notes," May 18 [1917]; MC to Charles Norman, November 10, 1962, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Texas; Brown's and Cummings's subsequent adventures laid the foundation for Cummings's The Enormous Room (1922). Cf. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror, pp. 138-158.
- ¹³Geoffrey Wolff, Black Sun: The Brief Transit and Violent Eclipse of Harry Crosby (New York, 1976), p. 41.
- ¹⁴Charles A. Fenton, "Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy: 1914-1918," American Quarterly II (1951), 327; ER, pp. 37-38.
- ¹⁵History of the American Field Service in France (Boston, 1920), Volume Three, Appendix C, pp. 440-441; cf. Charles Fenton, "Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy: 1914-1918," pp. 331, 336-338; ER, pp. 38, 248-249.
- ¹⁶MC to KB, May 11, 1917; MC to parents, May 20, 1917.
- ¹⁷A. Piatt Andrew, "The Origin of the American T. M. Sections," American Field Service Bulletin (Mallet Reserve Number), No. 84 (March 8, 1919), n.p.; cf. Fenton, p. 339.
- ¹⁸MC to KB, June 20, 1917.
- ¹⁹Andrew, "The Origin of the American T. M. Sections," n.p.; Fenton, p. 339.
- ²⁰MC to parents, May 20, 1917; "The Transport Sections of the American Field Service in France," brochure, May 1917, n.p..
- ²¹The war diary, a handwritten sheaf of loose sheets of paper, is among Cowley's papers at the Newberry Library. Entitled "Camion Service Notes," it is a rather slender and chaotic affair, but is important because it contains rough drafts of many episodes which later found their way into the American Field Service Bulletin; it forms the source of the section "Ambulance Service" in Exile's Return.
- ²²"Camion Service Notes," May 18 [1917]; Fenton, pp. 329-330.
- ²³"Four Books About Ourselves," Charm V (June 1926), 33; "Camion Service Notes," May 19 [1917].
- ²⁴"Camion Service Notes," May 20 [1917].
- ²⁵MC to KB, June 1, 1917; June 7, 1917; June 26, 1917; cf. "Camion Service Notes," May 31 [1917]; MC to parents, May 20, 1917; May 22, 1917.
- ²⁶"In 'Le Pays Reconquis,'" American Field Service Bulletin. Reprinted in the section "Camion Sidelights" in History of the American Field Service in France, Volume Three, pp. 88-90; "U. S. Volunteer Tells of French Battle Front Visit--No Union Hours," Pittsburgh Gazette Times, January 6, 1918, p. 3. Quotations in the text are from the latter, more elaborate, account.

²⁷History of the American Field Service in France, Volume Three, p. 259; quoted in Fenton, p. 340.

²⁸ER, pp. 38-39.

²⁹"Camion Service Notes," June 12 [1917]; "U. S. Volunteer Tells of French Battle Front Visit," p. 3; MC to parents, June 11, 1917; MC to KB, June 7, 1917; cf. also Cowley's 1933 memories of mutinies among French soldiers in "The Dead of the Next War," New Republic LXXVI (October 4, 1933), 216; TBOU, p. 46.

³⁰William E. Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity (New York, 1958), pp. 35-36; MC to "Popsie," July 9, 1917; ER, p. 40.

³¹"Camion Service Notes," June 12 [1917], different entry; MC to parents, June 11, 1917; MC to "Popsie," July 9, 1917; "Camion Service Notes," June 15 [1917].

³²"On the Road with T. M. U. 526" appeared in the American Field Service Bulletin and was reprinted in the History, Volume Three, pp. 72-77. For an early draft, see "Camion Service Notes," June 20 [1917]. Quotations in the text are from the History.

³³MC to KB, June 7, 1917; June 20, 1917.

³⁴"On the Road with T. M. U. 526," History, pp. 75-76.

³⁵BJ, pp. 63-64.

³⁶MC to KB, June 26, 1917; MC to "Popsie," July 9, 1917; MC to KB, July 4, 1917.

³⁷MC to KB, July 4, 1917; July 24, 1917.

³⁸MC to KB, July 31, 1917.

³⁹"Books for Your Christmas List," Charm IV (December 1925), 84; MC to KB, June 7, 1917; June 26, 1917; July 12, 1917; July 31, 1917.

⁴⁰MC to KB, July 12, 1917.

⁴¹MC to KB, July 12, 1917; July 24, 1917.

⁴²MC to KB, July 24, 1917; "Fourth of July in the Old T. M.," American Field Service Bulletin, No. 51 (June 29, 1918), n.p.. Reprinted as "Fourth of July, 1917" in History, pp. 91-96. Quotations in the text are from the History.

⁴³"Camion Service Notes," July 6 [1917]; History, pp. 91-96; ER, p. 39.

⁴⁴MC to KB, July 24, 1917; History, pp. 97-99; ER, p. 40.

⁴⁵MC to KB, July 24, 1917; "Camion Service Notes," June 25 [1917].

- ⁴⁶MC to "Popsie," July 28, 1917; n.d. [July 1917]; MC to KB, July 24, 1917.
- ⁴⁷MC to KB, August 25, 1917.
- ⁴⁸MC to KB, June 26, 1917; August 20, 1917.
- ⁴⁹MC to KB, August 20, 1917.
- ⁵⁰MC to KB, September 11, 1917; September 18, 1917.
- ⁵¹MC to KB, September 2, 1917.
- ⁵²MC to KB, September 18, 1917; September 23, 1917. See especially Bourne's "The War and the Intellectuals," Seven Arts II (June 1917), 133-146, and his "Twilight of Idols," Seven Arts II (October 1917), 688-702. Bourne's articles are reprinted in The War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919. Edited with an introduction by Carl Resch (New York, 1964).
- ⁵³Fenton, p. 339; MC to KB, September 11, 1917.
- ⁵⁴American Field Service Bulletin, No. 13 (September 29, 1917). Reprinted in Harvard Advocate CIV (February 1918), 280.
- ⁵⁵Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (New York and London, 1975), p. 8; Harvard Advocate CIV (February 1918), 280.
- ⁵⁶MC to KB, September 11, 1917.
- ⁵⁷MC to KB, September 23, 1917; October 19, 1917; November 2, 1917; December 14, 1917.
- ⁵⁸MC to KB, October 3, 1917; October 9, 1917; October 13, 1917; October 19, 1917.
- ⁵⁹MC to KB, October 13, 1917.
- ⁶⁰MC to KB, October 29, 1917; MC to mother, October 9, 1917.
- ⁶¹MC to KB, October 29, 1917; "Both Sides of a Push," in "Camion Service Notes," n.d.; "The History of a Push," Harvard Advocate CIV (January 1918), 241-242.
- ⁶²MC to KB, October 29, 1917.
- ⁶³MC to KB, October 29, 1917 [different letter]; November 2, 1917.
- ⁶⁴MC to KB, November 3, 1917.
- ⁶⁵ER, pp. 38, 41; John Dos Passos, The Best Times (New York, 1966), p. 68.
- ⁶⁶ER, pp. 41-42.
- ⁶⁷Dos Passos, The Best Times, pp. 56-57, 68; ER, p. 42.

⁶⁸See Cooperman, World War I and the American Novel, p. 227, and Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, pp. 191-230. Dos Passos shared Cowley's twinges of conscience over "playing hide and seek . . . on the fringes of the great butchery" with the problem of one's ethical and ideological commitment to the war. Dos Passos' sense of the war, however, was marked by a much stronger irony and cynicism than Cowley's. Typically, he continued to see the war in terms of a "gargantuan comedy;" once he compared his convoy of ambulances to a line of "elephants marching into Barnum and Bailey's." Cf. The Best Times, pp. 64, 71.

⁶⁹See, for example, Cowley's "Après la guerre finie," Horizon X (Winter 1968), 112-119, and his "American Writers and the First World War," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, 2nd. series, no. 18 (1968), 25-46.

⁷⁰MC to Warren I. Susman, March 8, 1965; William E. Leuchtenburg, F. D. R. and the New Deal: 1932-1940 (New York, 1963), pp. 198, 217-218.

⁷¹New Republic LXXVI (September 20, 1933), 161; TBOU, p. 41.

⁷²Cf. Fenton, p. 334.

⁷³ER, p. 41; Cooperman, p. 227; for comparable accounts of camion drivers see the section "Camion Sidelights" in History, Volume Three, pp. 66-114.

⁷⁴SF, pp. 5, 9-11.

⁷⁵ER, pp. 43, 46.

⁷⁶Cowley used the phrase "organized Byronism" in a letter to David C. Duke, May 2, 1968; David C. Duke, Distant Obligations, p. 99.

¹"Eugene O'Neill, Writer of Synthetic Drama," Brentano's Book Chat V (September-October 1926), 19; MWH, p. 191; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 33-34.

²MC to KB, December 7, 1917; December 14, 1917.

³MC to KB, December 14, 1917; January 13, 1918; Eisenberg, Checklist, p. 99; "U. S. Volunteer Tells of French Battle Front Visit--No Union Hours," Pittsburgh Gazette Times, January 6, 1918, 5th section, p. 3, reprinted in the special Cowley issue of The Visionary Company (Summer 1987), pp. 75-80; MC to Richard C. Johnson, April 13, 1972; Harvard Advocate CIV (January 1918), 240-242.

⁴MC to KB, December 14, 1917; January 13, 1918.

⁵Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 41; MC to KB, January 13, 1918.

⁶Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Playwright (London, 1968), pp. 396-397; Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), pp. 343-344; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 41, 271; Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane, 1923-1932 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1969), pp. 12-13, 26.

⁷Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 40-41; Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks, p. 10.

⁸MC to KB, February 17, 1918.

⁹MC to KB, February 17, 1918; February 25, 1918; notes for a speech to Signet Society, February 9, 1974, pp. 3-4, Sherman.

¹⁰MC to KB, February 25, 1918; "The Way Out," typescript of unpublished review of The Charnel Rose (1918) by Conrad Aiken, n.p..

¹¹"Conrad Aiken: A Man of Letters," Brentano's Book Chat VI (September-October 1927), 32; "The Way Out," n.p..

¹²In Aiken's insistence that the writer be "a surgeon performing an exploratory operation on himself, at whatever cost to his self-esteem," he had managed to avoid the hermeticism of the "merely private" and given his self-revelation a "public" value. In this, Cowley saw, Aiken was as much Emersonian as Symbolist or Freudian: "By finding words for his inmost truth, the writer--especially the poet--has made it part of the world, part of human consciousness. He has become a soldier, so to speak, in the agelong war that mankind has been waging against the subliminal and merely instinctive." In such a way Aiken had fulfilled the supreme task of any writer: that of "broadening, deepening, and subtilizing the human consciousness." WT, pp. 233-235.

¹³"Biography with Letters," Wake XI (Summer 1952), 26; WT, p. 232;

Joseph Killorin, ed., Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken (New Haven and London, 1978), pp. 13, 25, 38-39.

¹⁴"Biography with Letters," p. 26; MC to KB, March 2, 1918; March 17, 1918.

¹⁵WT, pp. 233, 237.

¹⁶MC to KB, March 2, 1918; interview with author, January 30, 1982, Sherman; MC to KB, March 25, 1918; undated letter [1918].

¹⁷WT, pp. 35-37, 38, 48.

¹⁸MC to KB, March 9, 1918.

¹⁹WT, p. 36; TBOU, p. 279; MC to KB, May 25, 1918.

²⁰MC to KB, April 27, 1918.

²¹WT, p. 39; Alan M. Wald, The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan (Chapel Hill and London, 1983), pp. 36-37, 174; Matthew Josephson, "Improper Bostonian: John Wheelwright and his Poetry," Southern Review VII (April 1971), 509-540.

²²MC to KB, March 2, 1918; March 9, 1918.

²³MC to KB, March 17, 1918.

²⁴MC to KB, n.d..

²⁵MC to KB, March 9, 1918; March 25, 1918.

²⁶MC to KB, March 9, 1918; Robert Lowell, "91 Revere Street," in Life Studies and For the Union Dead (New York, 1964), p. 15; "Louisburg Square," Harvard Advocate CIV (March 1918), 308.

²⁷"Sentimental," Harvard Advocate CIV (March 1918), 324

²⁸Ezra Pound, "A Study of Modern French Poets," Little Review V (February 1918), 3-61; WT, pp. 71-72; MC to KB, March 25, 1918.

²⁹"A Theme with Variations," Harvard Advocate CIV (April 1918), 337-338.

³⁰MC to KB, April 27, 1918; MC to Mrs. Leo Gurko, August 29, 1960.

³¹MC to KB, October 22, 1967; notes for a speech to Signet Society, February 9, 1974; MC to KB, February 25, 1918; May 11, 1918.

³²MC to KB, March 2, 1918; April 27, 1918.

³³MC to KB, March 17, 1918; S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle (1935; rpt. Hamden, Connecticut, 1966), pp. 449-450; WT, p. 39.

³⁴MC to Charles Fenton, October 17, 1957; MC to KB, May 11, 1918; May

25, 1918.

³⁵MC to KB, n.d.. William Jay Smith, The Spectra Hoax (Wesleyan University Press, 1961) gives an amusing account of both the Spectra and Earl Roppel hoax. See also Damon, Amy Lowell, pp. 453-457; MC to Witter Bynner, September 14, 1958; WT, pp. 39-43, gives Cowley's account of the Roppel affair. For the account given here I have depended on these sources, as well as on new material in the Cowley Papers and the Amy Lowell Papers in the Houghton Library at Harvard.

³⁶WT, pp. 40-41; Earl Roppel to Amy Lowell, June 28, 1918, Lowell Papers: quotations from Roppel's poems are from manuscripts in the Amy Lowell Papers; the letter to Bynner is quoted in a manuscript version of Smith, The Spectra Hoax, which is among the Cowley Papers.

³⁷WT, pp. 41-42; Amy Lowell to Earl Roppel, August 20, 1918, Lowell Papers.

³⁸"The Real Earl Roppel--The Brief and Meteoric Career of the Genius of the Catatonk," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post, July 24, 1920, p. 4.

³⁹Witter Bynner to Earl Roppel, November 11, 1918; Eric Schuler (Secretary and Treasurer of the Authors' League of America) to Witter Bynner, October 25, 1918; Nano Loring (Librarian Coburn Free Library, Owego, Tioga County, New York) to Witter Bynner, November 26, 1918.

⁴⁰Witter Bynner to Earl Roppel, n.d.; Louis J. Stellman to Witter Bynner, April 7, 1919; a clipping of "Bynner Seeks Lost Mystery Poet in N. Y." is among the Cowley Papers; Zoe Burns is quoted in WT, p. 43.

⁴¹Here may well have lain a source of the confusion and Roppel's lack of response: Clemenceau Cottage was at 86, not 186 Greenwich Avenue; Witter Bynner to War Department, Washington D. C., January 28, 1920; Witter Bynner to Major General Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps, September 10, 1920; Witter Bynner to Chief, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, September 10, 1920; Witter Bynner to Landlord or Householder, 186 Greenwich Avenue, New York, September 10, 1920.

⁴²Witter Bynner to Earl Roppel, July 25, 1921; Witter Bynner to MC, January 7, 1922; MC to Amy Lowell, August 30, 1921, Lowell Papers; Witter Bynner to MC, n.d. [1923]; MC to Witter Bynner, May 20, 1923, Lowell Papers.

⁴³The documentary record of Cowley's career from August 1918 to the summer of 1921, a period he spent alternately in Cambridge and New York, is sparse and incomplete. As Cowley saw more of Burke in person in New York, there was less need to keep up a continuous correspondence and more opportunity to talk. For long periods, between August 3, 1918, and June 10, 1919, and again between August 25, 1920, and May 5, 1921, there are gaps in a correspondence which virtually constitutes an intellectual autobiography. Our account of those years, then, will have to rely on scantly documentation.

⁴⁴WT, p. 41; S. E. Morison, Three Centuries of Harvard, p. 459.

⁴⁵"Foster Damon," manuscript record, dated December 4, 1918.

⁴⁶Amy Lowell to MC, July 26, 1918, Lowell Papers; TBOU, p. 280; Amy Lowell to MC, October 24, 1918, Lowell Papers; MC to Harriet Monroe, November 1, 1918, Poetry Papers; MC to Amy Lowell, November 1, 1918, Lowell Papers.

⁴⁷Hoffman, et al., The Little Magazine, p. 255; "Two French Towns, I: Ostel, II: Nouvron-Vingré," Youth: Poetry of Today I (October 1918), 5; "Bayonet Drill: Two Sonnets," Harvard Advocate CIV (November 1918), 18.

⁴⁸ER, pp. 46-47.

¹Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (1942; New York, 1970), p. 168. See especially Chapter Six, "The Joyous Season," pp. 165-185.

²ER, p. 48.

³ER, pp. 49-50.

⁴LS, pp. 162-163.

⁵ER, p. 50.

⁶WT, p. 51.

⁷MC to author, March 2, 1984; Allen Churchill, The Improper Bohemians: A Recreation of Greenwich Village in Its Heyday (New York, 1959), pp. 23, 69-70, 260.

⁸Peggy Baird Cowley to John Brooks Wheelwright, September 1921, Wheelwright Papers.

⁹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 41, 44.

¹⁰MC to author, March 2, 1984; Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Playwright (London, 1968), pp. 327, 340; the Herb Roth cartoon is reprinted in Albert Parry, Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America (New York, 1933; rev. ed. 1960), p. 271.

¹¹Harold Loeb, The Way It Was (New York, 1959), p. 134; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 47; Josephson's description of Cowley is quoted in David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 35.

¹²Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 47-49, 67-68.

¹³Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 49-50.

¹⁴MC to author, March 23, 1980, and March 2, 1984.

¹⁵MC to author, May 12, 1984; William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1951), pp. 135-142. Williams's memory was imprecise. The one visit Cowley paid to Grantwood was in the late spring of 1919, though he was invited to several evenings of the Others group in the spring of 1920.

¹⁶WT, pp. 51-52; ER, p. 51.

¹⁷Robert Morss Lovett, All Our Years (New York, 1948), p. 153.

¹⁸Review of The Poets of the Future, edited by Henry T. Schnitzkind,

Dial (April 19, 1919), p. 432. Cowley had first submitted the review to The Nation. In February its literary editor had returned the manuscript, explaining there was no opening for poetry reviewers on The Nation for the time being. W. R. Brown to MC, February 17, 1919.

¹⁹"Current News," Dial (May 17, 1919), p. 526; review of The Rising of the Tide, by Ida M. Tarbell, Dial (August 9, 1919), p. 122. The Jacquerie was an insurrection of French peasants against the nobility at the time of the Hundred Years' War, in 1358.

²⁰"Notes on New Books," Dial (October 4, 1919); review of The Writing and Reading of Verse, by C. E. Andrews and How to Read Poetry, by Ethel M. Colson, Dial (May 31, 1919), p. 572; "The Tools of Poetry," Literary Review of The New York Evening Post I (January 29, 1921), 8. Among Cowley's Papers at the Newberry Library is a "Scrapbook, 1917-1924," containing clippings of several, but by no means all, of Cowley's unsigned reviews for The Dial and The New Republic. Since in many cases their running heads are missing, not all clippings can be fully identified.

²¹For a consideration of the early years of The New Republic and an appreciation of Francis Hackett's career, see George Austin Test, "The Vital Connection: A Study of The New Republic Magazine as a Literary Journal, 1914-1922," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1960. David Seideman, 'The New Republic': A Voice of Modern Liberalism (New York, 1986) gives a history of the first twenty-five years of the magazine.

²²WT, p. 53; MC to Hylan Packard, July 6, 1967.

²³"Through Yellow Glasses," New Republic XIX (July 23, 1919), 401-402.

²⁴ER, pp. 51-52; WT, pp. 53-54.

²⁵Speech to Signet Society, February 11, 1974, p. 3; "Scrapbook, 1917-1924" contains items from the New York Central Magazine and the Official Metropolitan Guide; MC to KB, June 10, 1919.

²⁶MC to KB, July 8, 1919; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was (New York, 1959), p. 42.

²⁷"Parting--Gare du Nord" appeared in Youth: Poetry of Today I (June 1919), 92-93; "Sunday Afternoon (After Jules Laforgue)" appeared in Little Review VI (July-August 1919), 61-62.

²⁸MC to KB, July 8, 1919.

²⁹Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 51.

³⁰Cf. James M. Kempf, The Early Career of Malcolm Cowley: A Humanist Among the Moderns (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), pp. 39-40.

³¹Cf. Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (1962; New York, 1965), pp. 33-43.

³²ER, p. 66; Churchill, The Improper Bohemians, pp. 38-58; see also Alan Trachtenberg, "Introduction" to Critics of Culture: Literature and Society in the Early Twentieth Century (New York, 1976), pp. 3-13.

³³ER, p. 67; cf. James Gilbert, Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America (New York, 1968), pp. 39-41, 47.

³⁴ER, pp. 67, 69; Churchill, The Improper Bohemians, p. 166.

³⁵ER, pp. 58, 70-72.

³⁶"Wowzers on the Run," Brentano's Book Chat VI (January-February 1927), 30-31.

³⁷SF, pp. 14-15.

³⁸Cowley's age-group thus constituted what Christopher Lasch has called "the second of the lost generations." Coming in the wake of the prewar social revolutionaries and cultural idealists, Cowley and his friends inherited the forms and stances of rebellion from their predecessors, but soon found themselves left with the shells without the substance. The defiant and subversive modes of conduct of the earlier Villagers would, in the course of the next decade, harden into orthodoxy, a habitual stance of rebelliousness and liberation appropriated by the youth of middle-class America. Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type (New York, 1965), pp. 71, 255.

³⁹ER, pp. 54-57, 60-61.

⁴⁰ER, pp. 55, 73.

⁴¹Lovett, All Our Years, p. 153; SF, p. 14.

⁴²"A Life in the 1920's," unpublished manuscript, p. 1; MC to KB, July 8, 1919; ER, pp. 101-102.

⁴³Malcolm Cowley (with Howard E. Hugo), The Lesson of the Masters: An Anthology of the Novel from Cervantes to Hemingway (New York, 1971), p. 235; as Elinor Bulkin has pertinently observed, Cowley's search for an ideal life of art can best be seen in a religious context. "Malcolm Cowley: A Study of his Literary, Social and Political Thought to 1940," unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973, p. 17.

⁴⁴FL, p. 234; cf. Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 60-62, 65.

⁴⁵WT, pp. 70-71; MC to Edmund Wilson, March 12, 1936.

⁴⁶For T. S. Eliot, see John J. Soldo, "T. S. Eliot and Jules Laforgue," American Literature 55 (May 1983), 137-150. Quotations from Eliot are from this article. For the Laforguean poems by Eliot mentioned here, see T. S. Eliot, Poems written in Early Youth (London, 1967), pp. 29-32, 40-41; WT, p. 80.

⁴⁷WT, pp. 35, 72, 81.

⁴⁸WT, pp. 73-75.

⁴⁹WT, pp. 74, 81; MC to Warren French, November 12, 1960.

⁵⁰Warren French, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance (New York, 1953), p. 196.

⁵¹"Sunday Afternoon (After Jules Laforgue)," Little Review VI (July-August 1919), 61-62; MC to Jackson R. Bryer, February 5, 1964; Warren French has drawn attention to Cowley's memorable image of life as a potato peeling: "Laforgue did not think of that simile, but he undoubtedly would have if he had ever occupied a hall bedroom south of Fourteenth Street." French, Jules Laforgue, p. 196.

⁵²"Romance in a Major Key," Modern S4N Review I (August 1926), 11-12; BJCP, pp. 37-39; Yvor Winters, "The Poetry of Malcolm Cowley," Hound & Horn III (October-December 1929), 111.

⁵³"Four Horological Poems," Little Review VII (July-August 1920), 18-21; WT, p. 77; MC to author, November 2, 1984; BJ, p. 95.

⁵⁴WT, pp. 78-79; BJCP, p. 34.

⁵⁵BJ, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁶"One O'Clock at O'Connors," Pagan IV (January 1920), 52; BJ, p. 35.

⁵⁷WT, p. 72.

⁵⁸BJ, p. 5; the second quotation is from the original version of "One O'Clock at O'Connors" which appeared in Pagan, p. 52.

⁵⁹MC to KB, August 24, 1919.

⁶⁰MC to KB, August 30, 1919.

¹Notes for Speech to Signet Society, February 8 and 9, 1974, p. 3; Speech, February 11, 1974, pp. 3-4.

²MC to KB, October 23, 1919.

³Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 36. Cowley's parents would never be entirely comfortable with Peggy. Mrs. Cowley in particular could not help but feel that her only son and "hope for the future" was betraying his parents' ideals by allowing himself to live "in obstinate poverty" with a divorced and disreputable woman. She "detested" Peggy as a Greenwich Village type, one who not only was "irreligious," but a bad and slovenly housekeeper to boot. Though she remained polite whenever she met Peggy, Cowley did not return home to Belsano as often as he may have wanted to, and for the duration of his first marriage saw his parents only during short summer trips to the farm. "Mother and Son," pp. 11-12.

⁴Cf. David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), *passim*.

⁵MC to KB, October 23, 1919.

⁶MC to Alfred Kazin, May 18, 1962; WT, p. 35.

⁷Speech to Signet Society, February 11, 1974, p. 5.

⁸Notes for Speech to Signet Society, February 8 and 9, 1974, pp. 1-6; Speech, pp. 4-6; MC to Jake Davis, June 1, 1967.

⁹MC to Jake Davis, June 1, 1967.

¹⁰Members of Cowley's class who achieved distinction in their respective fields included George Brownell and Lloyd Garrison (law), Royal Little and Fred Warburg (finance), Robert Gross and Robert Hoffman (engineering), and Cass Canfield (publishing). Though Brownell, Garrison, Warburg and Canfield became, like Cowley, members of the Century Club, he did not readily take to them as friends, with the possible exception of Cass Canfield. MC to Mrs. Andys K. Allport, May 21, 1976; MC to Robert Cunningham, February 2, 1964.

¹¹MC to George L. Batchelder, Jr., April 11, 1964; MC to Mrs. Andys Allport, May 21, 1976; MC to KB, February 6, 1974.

¹²MC to Harriet Monroe, August 25, 1919; September 26, 1919; October 14, 1919, all Poetry Papers. The poems were "Moonrise," "Barn Dance" and "Danny" and appeared in Poetry XV (November 1919), 76-79.

¹³MC to Harriet Monroe, November 22, 1919, Poetry Papers. The "Fantastic Etude," presumably, was an early version of "Nocturne."

¹⁴"Nantasket," Harvard Advocate CVI (November 1919), 51.

¹⁵"Colloquy with Himself," Pagan IV (February 1920), 17. Mercifully, Cowley never reprinted the poem.

¹⁶WT, p. 54.

¹⁷Review of A Servant of Reality, by Phyllis Bottome, New Republic XXI (December 17, 1919), 86; review of Storm in a Teacup, by Eden Phillpots, and The Builders, by Ellen Glasgow, New Republic XXI (February 18, 1920), 364, 366; review of The Little Daughter of Jerusalem, by Myriam Harry, New Republic XXII (March 31, 1920), 168; review of Short Stories from the Balkans, translated by Edna Worthley Underwood, New Republic XXII (April 7, 1920), 192. In Cowley's scrapbook at the Newberry Library are undated clippings of two unsigned reviews for The New Republic, one of The Four Roads by Sheila Kaye-Smith, the other of Tumblefold by Joseph Whittaker.

¹⁸"Apples of Understanding," unpublished.

¹⁹"Necromancy," Harvard Advocate CVI (January 29, 1920), 181; "Agassiz and Agony," Harvard Advocate CVI (March 1, 1920), 219; "Eighteenth-Century Sonnet," Harvard Advocate CVI (April 1, 1920), 254.

²⁰MC to KB, October 23, 1919.

²¹MC to KB, November 16, 1919.

²²MC to KB, February 9, 1920.

²³Speech to Signet Society, p. 6; MC to KB, January 26, 1920.

²⁴Speech to Signet Society, p. 6; notes for Speech to Signet Society, p.6.

²⁵WT, p. 55; MC to William Wasserstrom, November 29, 1958; Scofield Thayer to John Brooks Wheelwright, June 17, 1920, Wheelwright Papers.

²⁶MC to KB, January 26, 1920. The manuscript of the entire Ode is among Cowley's papers at the Newberry Library. Burke remained associated with The Dial throughout its existence and served in a variety of critical and editorial capacities. In 1921 he was taken on the editorial staff and two years later replaced Scofield Thayer and Gilbert Seldes during their absence abroad. From 1927 to 1929 Burke succeeded Paul Rosenfeld as The Dial's music critic. Burke's discussions with his fellow editors helped him to work out his literary theories; his indebtedness to The Dial appears in part from the dedication of The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941) to J. S. Watson, the editor who was most congenial to the younger writers on The Dial. The majority of Burke's early stories, poems and essays first appeared in The Dial, and many of them found their way into his first three books, which in effect were outgrowths of his Dial-years: The White Oxen and Other Stories (1924), Counter-Statement (1931), and Towards a Better Life (1932). In 1928 Burke received the Dial Award, joining the company of Sherwood Anderson, T. S. Eliot, Van Wyck Brooks, Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. See Armin Paul Frank, Kenneth Burke (New York, 1969), pp. 22-23, and William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (1963; second, revised and expanded edition, 1982), pp.

296-298.

²⁷WT, p. 55; MC to KB, June 16, 1923; "Midsummer Medley," New Republic LXXX (August 15, 1934), 25.

²⁸See Diane U. Eisenberg, Malcolm Cowley: A Checklist of his Writings, 1916-1973 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1975).

²⁹Scofield Thayer to MC, May 25, 1923; G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review: A Critical History, 1920-1950 (The Hague, 1968), p. 33; Peggy Baird Cowley to John Brooks Wheelwright, September 1921, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, August 25, 1929.

³⁰"The Poet and the World," New Republic LXX (April 27, 1932), 303 (TBOU, p. 213); "Midsummer Medley," p. 25; Alyse Gregory's description of Scofield Thayer is quoted in William Wasserstrom, The Time of the 'Dial' (Syracuse, N. Y., 1963), p. 64; SF, p. 95. For a balanced and detailed consideration of the influence of the Monthly on The Dial see Nicholas Joost, Years of Transition: The Dial, 1912-1920, pp. 149-153. G.A.M. Janssens has qualified Cowley's claim and argued that "the significance of the Monthly [for The Dial] is primarily to be sought in the fact that it brought a number of later Dial regulars together and that it gave them an early opportunity of getting their work published. James Sibley Watson, Gilbert Seldes, E. E. Cummings, Conrad Aiken, John Dos Passos, and Herbert Seligmann were all connected with the Monthly in the years just previous to World War I. Their early association and experiences are of some importance to the history of the later Dial, but The Harvard Monthly can hardly be said to have served as its model." The American Literary Review, pp. 24-25.

³¹WT, p. 55. The publication history of the article--a review of two novels by the English novelist Sheila Kaye-Smith--reveals a typical strategy on the part of an impecunious but pragmatic apprentice writer. Cowley reviewed Sheila Kaye-Smith's The Four Roads in three different ways for three different magazines: first, as an unsigned 400-word piece for The New Republic; second, as a "briefer" for the fortnightly Dial ("Review later," the note promised); third, as one of two novels by Sheila Kaye-Smith reviewed for the monthly Dial. Though he managed to make all three reviews into independent articles with a minimum of overlap, he was remunerated thrice for writing about a single novel. Likewise, Reginald Wright Kauffman's Victorious was reviewed in both The New Republic and, in an omnibus review of war fiction, for the fortnightly Dial; Ellen Glasgow's The Builders in both The New Republic and as a "briefer" in the fortnightly Dial; John Gould Fletcher's Breakers and Granite in both the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post and (conjointly with a book by Conrad Aiken) in the monthly Dial; Amy Lowell's Fir-Flower Tablets in both the monthly Dial and Arthur Moss's Gargoyle; Conrad Aiken's Bring! Bring! and Other Stories in both H. S. Canby's Saturday Review of Literature and in The Dial. For each publication the review was newly composed and freshly written, so as to form, in effect, an entirely different article. Such practice anticipated Cowley's later habit of "beefing" his longer essays and distributing them over several periodicals. Cf. FCF, pp. 20-21.

³²"The Woman of Thornden," Dial LXVIII (February 1920), 259, 261.

³³MC to KB, February 9, 1920.

³⁴"Colas Breugnon," Dial LXVIII (April 1920), 513.

³⁵MC to KB, February 9, 1920; "A Life in the 1920's," unpublished manuscript; MC to author, November 2, 1984; WT, pp. 55-56.

¹MC to author, November 2, 1984; WT, pp. 56, 62; "Winter Tenement" (BJCP, p. 46) recreates Cowley's life with Peggy at 88 West Third Street.

²"Mother and Son," p. 11; "The Pyre," BJCP, pp. 27-29.

³MC to author, November 2, 1984.

⁴"Free Clinic," BJCP, pp. 41-42.

⁵MWH, pp. 67-68.

⁶"William Wilson," BJCP, p. 130; "Interment," BJ, p. 45; "Winter Tenement," BJCP, p. 46.

⁷"So Perish Time," BJCP, pp. 44-45.

⁸"Mortality," BJCP, p. 43.

⁹"A Solemn Music," BJ, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰See, for another example, "John Fenstermaker," BJCP, p. 136.

¹¹"Colonizing Manhattan's Lower West Side," New York Evening Post, April 10, 1920, Magazine, p. 5.

¹²"The Famous 'Shropshire Lad' and His Brother," New York Evening Post, May 8, 1920, "Book Review," pp. 1, 11.

¹³MC to KB, June 4, 1920; June 9, 1920.

¹⁴WT, p. 57; MC to author, November 2, 1984; MC to KB, June 4, 1920; June 9, 1920; June 19, 1920.

¹⁵MC to KB, June 4, 1920; Charles Norman, E. E. Cummings: A Biography (New York, 1967), pp. 110-113; Allen Churchill, The Improper Bohemians: A Recreation of Greenwich Village in Its Heyday (New York, 1959), pp. 255-256, 323, 329, 336-337.

¹⁶MC to KB, June 4, 1920.

¹⁷MC to KB, June 9, 1920.

¹⁸MC to KB, August 25, 1920.

¹⁹As an immediate offshoot of his proposal Cowley set to work on "Day Coach," a poem exemplifying his experiments with structure and motion. A later attempt to realize similar intentions in prose was "Race between a Subway Local and a Subway Express," a prose sketch which appeared in transition in January 1928.

²⁰MC to KB, June 9, 1920; June 19, 1920.

- 21 "Battling Dreiser--And Less Striking Writers," New York Evening Post, March 20, 1920, "Book Review," p. 2; MC to author, November 2, 1984; MWH, p. 191; "Doing your Play--Going at Home," Charm V (March 1926), 32; MC to KB, February 9, 1920. A typescript of the play "Barn Dance" is among the Cowley Papers.
- 22 MC to author, November 2, 1984; MC to KB, July 20, 1920.
- 23 MC to KB, June 19, 1920; July 20, 1920.
- 24 MC to KB, July 20, 1920.
- 25 BJ, p. 45; BJCP, p. 44.
- 26 MC to KB, August 25, 1920.
- 27 "Dr. Canby and His Team," Saturday Review XLVII (August 29, 1964), 54-55, 177; WT, p. 57.
- 28 "Mme. Duclaux on France," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (October 2, 1920), 3; "Gauchito Drama," I (November 13, 1920), 3; "The Era of Disillusion," I (November 20, 1920), 4; "The World's Timber," I (November 27, 1920), 4; "Women of Japan," I (December 24, 1920), 9; "Entertaining Plays," I (December 31, 1920), 5; "Motley Verse," I (December 31, 1920), 9; "A War-Time Squad," I (March 26, 1921), 6.
- 29 WT, p. 56.
- 30 "Colas Breugnon," Dial LXVIII (April 1920), 514.
- 31 Robert H. Ross, The Georgian Revolt, 1910-1922. Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1965), pp. 115-138, 165-200, 237-238, 241.
- 32 "Against Nightingales," Dial LXVIII (May 1920), 621-622.
- 33 Robert H. Ross, The Georgian Revolt, pp. 190, 193, 238.
- 34 Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, edited and with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (London, 1954), p. 12.
- 35 "Against Nightingales," pp. 621-625.
- 36 "Random Reflections," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (May 21, 1921), 6.
- 37 "Wells' Springs of History," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (March 19, 1921), 7.
- 38 Robert H. Ross, The Georgian Revolt, pp. 171-174; "Georgians and Post-Georgians," New Republic XXIV (September 15, 1920), 77-78.
- 39 "As to 'Poetic Arrivals,'" Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (July 31, 1920), 6.

⁴⁰"The Chinless Age," Dial LXX (January 1921), 73-76.

⁴¹"Motley Verse," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (December 31, 1920), 9.

⁴²The Fourteenth Chronicle: Letters and Diaries of John Dos Passos, edited and with a biographical narrative by Townsend Ludington (Boston, 1973), p. 302.

⁴³"The Tools of Poetry," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (January 29, 1921), 8.

⁴⁴An avid reader of literary magazines such as Poetry, The Little Review and The Dial, Cowley was sure to have come across the writings of Pound and Eliot, both of whom had found in Europe a more congenial artistic homeland. Though he would not go so far as either Pound or Eliot in their abhorrence of free verse--vers libre, Eliot had written in an early essay, had "not even the excuse of a polemic; it is a battle-cry of freedom, and there is no freedom in art"--Cowley evinced a strong ambivalence towards it. With Pound he might have insisted that America's literary excellence was to be attained through disciplined craftsmanship and a scrupulous attention to poetic technique. Pound, likewise, emphasized the need for a close study of poetic tradition, though he went to lengths of pedantry and erudite obscurity Cowley could and would not follow. Tradition, Pound had proclaimed in Poetry in 1913, is "a beauty which we preserve and not a set of fetters to bind us." The poet should aim to discover an organic form, a rhythm and cadence which "corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed." The serious artist, Pound felt, abjured abstraction, moral uplift, rhetorical excess and "emotional slither;" he aimed at precision and control, clarity and simplicity, intensity and concentration, so as to attain a "maximum efficiency of expression"--"Bad art is inaccurate art . . . The touchstone of an art is its precision . . . 'Good writing' is perfect control." T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on Vers Libre," in Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, edited with an introduction by Frank Kermode (London, 1975), p. 32; Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, pp. 9, 12, 43, 48-49, 56, 91.

⁴⁵Eliot's essay had appeared two years earlier in The Egoist. I have found no indication that Cowley either knew of or had read Eliot's essay.

⁴⁶"These Things Are Banal. . .," Dial LXX (June 1921), 703-704; Babette Deutsch, "Orchestral Poetry," Dial LXX (March 1921), 343-346.

⁴⁷"Comment," Dial LXXI (September 1921), 377-378; Scofield Thayer to MC, July 30, 1921, Dial Papers; John Gould Fletcher to MC, August 4, 1921; see also John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, n. d. [1921]. Wheelwright wrote to praise Cowley's review for The Dial, offering stylistic criticism and denouncing Fletcher's response. Copyright, Wheelwright thought, had "only a humanitarian significance and unhappily a legal one. Within the law and the narrow limits of decency and good manners it should be unscrupulously disregarded. Fletcher was neither decent nor well-mannered in his letter. He must have a small spirit, for he seems to have no inkling of the proper attitude toward plagiarism or at least to regret the attitude."

⁴⁸"Adam & Eve & Pinch Me," Dial LXXI (July 1921), 94-95.

⁴⁹See Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History (1937; 3rd ed., University of California Press, 1984), pp. 308-314; Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1931), p. 13; "Page Dr. Blum!" Dial LXXI (September 1921), 365-367. Cowley had recently been warned against the proliferation of musical terms in his criticism by John Brooks Wheelwright, who detected the nefarious influence of Aiken. See John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, n. d. [1921].

⁵⁰"Programme Music," Dial LXXI (August 1921), 222-226. Cowley's generous appreciation of Legends coincided with Amy Lowell's agreement to act as his literary agent for the time of his French stay. In October 1921 she informed Cowley that she thought his review "an honest and clear analysis of the book" and that he had maintained a precarious balance of judgment, falling into neither of "the pitfalls of over-praise or over-blame." She used part of Cowley's review to advertise her book, together with statements by D. H. Lawrence, John Livingston Lowes and John Farrar, editor of The Bookman. Amy Lowell to MC, October 28, 1921. She also used Cowley's review in defending her book against criticism from Padraic Colum. See S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle (1935; rpt. Hamden, Connecticut, 1966), p. 561.

⁵¹See, for example, the following items, all among the Malcolm Cowley Papers: untitled play, dated May 25, 1922; outline for a novel, 1921; "The Juneberries Have Withered," unpublished prose sketch.

⁵²MC to KB, May 5, 1921. Cowley's letter contains early drafts of the poems "For a New Hymnal" and "Poem for Two Voices," both not published until 1923.

⁵³ER, p. 80; Charles A. Fenton, "Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy: 1914-1918," American Quarterly III (1951), 334.

⁵⁴Peggy Baird Cowley to S. Foster Damon, March 17, 1921, Damon Papers.

⁵⁵Amy Lowell to MC, May 10, 1921; June 28, 1921, Lowell Papers.

⁵⁶MC to S. Foster Damon, March 17, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to KB, May 5, 1921.

⁵⁷Peggy Baird Cowley to S. Foster Damon, March 17, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to KB, May 5, 1921.

⁵⁸MC to KB, June 17, 1921.

⁵⁹MC to KB, June 17, 1921.

⁶⁰Harold Stearns, America and the Young Intellectual (New York, 1921), pp. 21, 160, 167-168.

⁶¹Harold Stearns, ed., Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans (New York, 1922), pp. VII, 135, 144, 146-148.

⁶²Stearns, Civilization in the United States, pp. 179-181; ER, pp. 75-76.

⁶³ER, pp. 74-75, 78-79; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁴SF, p. 53; ER, p. 81; for Josephson, see David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 47.

⁶⁵George Wickes, Americans in Paris (Garden City, N. Y., 1969), p. 3; Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p. 222.

⁶⁶Ezra Pound, "The Island of Paris: A Letter," Dial LXIX (October 1920), 408-409; see also Pound's Paris Letter in Dial LXIX (December 1920), 635; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 65.

⁶⁷ER, pp. 79, 102-103.

⁶⁸"A Liberal Policy," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post I (July 9, 1921), 5.

⁶⁹As Frederick Hoffman has observed, for the modern writer of the 1920s "the concern with form was basically a concern over the need to provide an aesthetic order for moral revisions." The Twenties, pp. 434-435.

⁷⁰Shi, Matthew Josephson, pp. 49-51; cf. Warren I. Susman, "Pilgrimage to Paris: The Background of American Expatriation" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1957), pp. 304-319.

¹Ezra Pound, "Remy de Gourmont," in Pavannes and Divisions (New York, 1918), p. 116; Gertrude Stein, Paris France (1940; rpt. New York, 1970), pp. 2, 11; "Exile's Return," New Republic LXVIII (September 23, 1931), 150.

²James M. Kempf, The Early Career of Malcolm Cowley: A Humanist Among the Moderns (Baton Rouge, 1985), p. 53; ER, pp. 102-103.

³MC to KB, n.d. [July 14, 1921]; n.d. [late August 1921]; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 9, 1921, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, November 28, 1921; September 27, 1922.

⁴MC to KB, July 12, 1921; July 13, 1921.

⁵MC to KB, n.d. [July 14, 1921]; SF, p. 54.

⁶SF, p. 57; MC to S. Foster Damon, September 5, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to KB, August 10, 1921; August 17, 1921. For Harold Stearns, cf. John Dos Passos, The Best Times (New York, 1966), pp. 162-163.

⁷Cowley's initial response to Paris compares interestingly with that expressed by T. S. Eliot in a letter to Robert McAlmon: "I'm glad to hear that you like Paris; the right way of course is to take it as a place and a tradition, rather than as a congeries of people, who are mostly futile and timewasting, except when you want to pass an evening agreeably in a café. The chief danger about Paris is that it is such a strong stimulus, and like most stimulants incites to meshing about and produces a pleasant illusion of great mental activity rather than the solid results of hard work. When I was living there years ago I had only the genuine stimulus of the place, and not the artificial stimulus of the people, as I knew no one whatever, in the literary and artistic world, as a companion--knew them rather as spectacles, listened to, at rare occasions, but never spoken to. I am sure Julien Benda is worth knowing and possibly Paul Valéry. But Paris is still alive. What is wonderful about French literature is its solidarity: you don't know one part of it, even the most contemporary, unless you know the 17th and 18th centuries. . . . If I came to live in Paris the first thing to do would be to cut myself off from it, and not depend upon it." T. S. Eliot to Robert McAlmon, May 2, 1921, quoted in Robert McAlmon, Being Geniuses Together. Revised and with complementary chapters by Kay Boyle (Garden City, N. Y., 1968), pp. 8-9. The full relevance of Eliot's appraisal would not be brought home to Cowley until his second year in France. Among those of his own age-group Hemingway, in particular, made a point of shunning the noisy idlers at the Dôme, Rotonde and Select, and preferred the quieter Closerie des Lilas to do his writing. He satirized the stereotypical café-dwelling expatriates in The Sun Also Rises and, retrospectively mixing bitterness and nostalgia in A Moveable Feast, spurned the make-believe artists compiling saucers on Montparnassian terraces as suckers for publicity who, instead of working, sought out their cafés as "daily substitutes for immortality." Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York, 1964), p. 81. Cowley, too, would come under fire from Hemingway before long.

⁸MC to KB, August 10, 1921; MC to S. Foster Damon, September 5, 1921, Damon Papers.

⁹Manuscript, dated August 10, 1921; MC to KB, September 17, 1921; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 9, 1921, Wheelwright Papers; "The Journey to Paris," Gargoyle I (October 1921), 8-12.

¹⁰MC to KB, August 17, 1921; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 9, 1921, Wheelwright Papers; undated manuscript draft for Exile's Return, Cowley Papers.

¹¹MC to KB, September 28, 1921; "Three Americans in Paris," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post II (January 14, 1922), 351; the poem on Ezra Pound appears, in a much revised version, in BJCP, p. 59; "Garçong! Garçong!," Brentano's Book Chat V (May-June 1926), 25.

¹²ER, pp. 97-99.

¹³"This Youngest Generation," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post II (October 15, 1921), 81-82. Among the later famous members of the Lost Generation whom Cowley could not name was Ernest Hemingway, who arrived in Paris in late December 1921 as a promising journalist for the Toronto Star; he came armed with letters of introduction from Sherwood Anderson, but in the literary field was as yet "unpublished and unknown" (Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story [New York, 1969], p. 110). William Faulkner, too, was yet to appear in print. F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose first novel This Side of Paradise (1920) had been followed the year after by a book of short stories, Flappers and Philosophers, was already on his way to fame, but apparently "too popular" for Cowley's then "rarefied taste" (SF, p. viii). Hart Crane had been publishing poetry in a variety of little magazines since 1917. Though it seems unlikely that, by 1921, Cowley would not have known of Crane's verse--if only because Crane had been a friend of Josephson's since 1919--he appears not to have taken much notice of Crane as a promising modern poet until the latter's appearance in Broom and Secession in 1922. Conspicuously absent in Cowley's tentative list of names was Matthew Josephson's; in October 1921 he was preparing to come to France and was as yet more promise than fulfilment. It was only after he met the Dadaists in late 1921 and became involved with Broom and Secession that Josephson began to flourish as a publishing writer.

¹⁴"This Youngest Generation," p. 82; MC to KB, December 23, 1921.

¹⁵See ER, pp. 101-102; Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (1942; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 314; MC to KB, January 2, 1922; "The Urn," BJCP, p. 142.

¹⁶MC to S. Foster Damon, October 21, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to KB, fragment of undated letter [October 1921?].

¹⁷MC to Mrs. Joseph Delteil, April 17, 1970; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 9, 1921, Wheelwright Papers; Peggy Baird Cowley to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d. [1921-1922], Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, fragment of undated letter [October 1921?].

¹⁸MC to KB, fragment of undated letter [October 1921?]; MC to S. Foster Damon, November 18, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to KB, October 27, 1921.

¹⁹MC to KB, September 17, 1921; MC to Amy Lowell, September 7, 1921, Lowell Papers; James Sibley Watson to MC, October 14, 1921; Amy Lowell to MC, October 28, 1921. The nine poems Miss Lowell sent to The Dial were "Mountain Valley," "History," "Local Town," "Three Hills," "Poem for Two Voices," "Prophetic," "Deathbed," "Nocturnal Landscape," and "Interment." See also S. Foster Damon to MC, September 19, 1921, and October 15, 1921.

²⁰MC to S. Foster Damon, November 18, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to Amy Lowell, December 9, 1921, Lowell Papers.

²¹Amy Lowell to MC, November 21, 1921; "Mountain Valley," Dial LXXI (December 1921), 670; MC to KB, December 9, 1921; December 23, 1921.

²²Harold Loeb, The Way It Was (New York, 1959), pp. 3-58.

²³MC to KB, June 17, 1921; Alfred Kreymborg, Troubadour (New York, 1957), pp. 287-288; Alfred Kreymborg to MC, September 23, 1921; MC to Alfred Kreymborg, September 27, 1921, Loeb Papers; Alfred Kreymborg to MC, September 30 [1921]; MC to KB, September 28, 1921; n.d. [October 1921]. Burke received the last Dial award in 1928.

²⁴MC to S. Foster Damon, October 21, 1921, Damon Papers; "Manifesto I," Broom I (November 1921).

²⁵Cowley's letter to Kreymborg about Broom does not survive, but Kreymborg's reply suggests that such was the gist of Cowley's critique: "I think there are more than 2 contributors (as prose writers) in Broom I who haven't appeared in Dial. Even so, what's the dif? Is Dial a group? Are its contribs to be restrained from publishing elsewhere? And isn't Dial composed of contributors (in good part) from The Seven Arts, Others and The Little Review--not to speak of London Mercury? Also Freeman and New Republic? What we need in America is 6 to 12 flourishing art magazines--and no one group in any of 'em. Then an artist may earn a living wage. . . . Also, the first issue or two had to be composed of men and women we already knew. There were few others, unknown, to write to. Those will see the magazine. Those will send in material. And we want 'em." Alfred Kreymborg to MC, October 25 [1921]. Harold Loeb recalled having misgivings about the issue similar to Cowley's. See The Way It Was, pp. 75-77.

²⁶MC to S. Foster Damon, October 21, Damon Papers; "Broomides," Broom I (November 1921), 94.

²⁷Emmy Veronica Sanders, "America Invades Europe," Broom I (November 1921), 89-93; Alfred Kreymborg to MC, November 9 [1921]. In an earlier letter to Cowley Kreymborg had endorsed the central argument in Sanders's essay: "The lady doesn't disparage French literature. She simply warns us against our proverbial knee-bending to Paris (and, may I add, to London). In her zeal, she probably carried her point too far. But it's a healthy one--one I've always accorded in. France isn't Europe--nor Europe, the universe." Alfred Kreymborg to MC, October 25 [1921].

²⁸Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 81. For Broom's Italian period, see Marjorie Rose Smelstor, "Broom and American Cultural Nationalism in the 1920's" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975), pp. 34-74. Though Josephson was not formally listed as Broom's associate editor until its November 1922 issue, his editorial influence was apparent from June 1922 onwards.

²⁹MC to KB, n.d. [October 1921]; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 9, 1921, Wheelwright Papers.

³⁰The poem quoted here is a much reworked version of the early draft; it appears in BJCP on pp. 133-134.

³¹MC to KB, October 27, 1921; "Rabelais Returns to His Own Home Town," New York Tribune, November 21, 1921, p. 3.

³²MC to KB, November 28, 1921.

³³MC to KB, November 28, 1921; December 23, 1921; January 23, 1922. Arthur Moss's Gargoyle did not pay for contributions. Cowley, indeed, needed any complement to his fellowship he could find. In early November his financial prospects were so low that he appealed to John Brooks Wheelwright for a thousand-franc loan: "We are now living on rocky bottom and the bottom is soon going to fall." MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 3, 1921, Wheelwright Papers.

³⁴Matthew Josephson to MC, December 5, 1921; for Josephson, see David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), pp. 53-54, 56-57.

³⁵MC to KB, December 1, 1921.

³⁶MC to S. Foster Damon, November 18, 1921, Damon Papers; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 3, 1921, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, January 2, 1922.

³⁷MC to KB, January 2, 1922; January 12, 1922.

³⁸MC to KB, January 12, 1922; MC to Robert Penn Warren, August 31, 1967, Warren Papers.

³⁹MC to KB, January 23, 1922; MC to Amy Lowell, January 24, 1922, Lowell Papers; MC to KB, February 27, 1922.

⁴⁰MC to KB, n.d. [October 1921]; Boileau: Selected Criticism, translated with an introduction by Ernest Dilworth (Indianapolis and New York, 1965), pp. vii-xii.

⁴¹"Love reason, then; let all that you write borrow both its luster and its worth from her alone. . . . The majority, carried away by a witless fury of composition, go far off the track of reason in search of their thought; they feel that they would demean themselves, in those monstrous verses of theirs, if they were to think what somebody else was equally capable of thinking. . . . The man who doesn't know when to stop never learned how to write" (Boileau: Selected Criticism, pp. 12-13). Rather than adopting Boileau's aesthetics for his own, Cowley empathized

with many of his attitudes. In Canto I of L'Art Poétique Boileau emphasized "the light of reason," precision of style and control of diction, spoke of clarity of thought as a preliminary for clarity of expression, and voiced his distrust of excessive originality. He expounded his belief in "the power of a word set in the right place," exemplified an overriding "reverence for language," admired "elegant playfulness" and "fine cadence" in verse, and admonished writers to revise and polish ceaselessly, to be open to criticism and to "be simple but with artistry; be great without pride, agreeable without artificiality." Boileau: Selected Criticism, pp. 11-17.

⁴²MC to KB, December 1, 1921; January 12, 1922.

⁴³MC to KB, December 1, 1921.

⁴⁴Notebook I, entries 1 and 2, pp. 1-2. The paradox continued to plague his considerations. Thus, entry 25 (Notebook I, pp. 19-20), entitled "The Fear of Ideas: Its Cause," reads: "If writers of the present generation are afraid of ideas, I think it is because ideas are not enough original. Ideas depend on other ideas; they may occur to several people at once, and after they are published they belong to the whole world. On the other hand a man's sensations are to some extent his private property. That is why originality belongs more to a literature of sensation than to a literature of ideas. But originality is a very secondary quality which our generation has overemphasized."

⁴⁵MC to KB, January 12, 1922; February 27, 1922.

⁴⁶Notebook I, entries 6 and 7, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁷MC to KB, January 23, 1922; Notebook I, entry 10, pp. 7-8; MC to KB, January 28, 1922.

⁴⁸Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (1931; rpt. New York, 1953), pp. 20-22; Kenneth Burke, "Approaches to Remy de Gourmont," Dial LXX (February 1921), 125.

⁴⁹MC to KB, January 28, 1922; Notebook I, entries 28 and 29, p. 22.

⁵⁰MC to KB, n.d. [late August 1921]; Notebook I, entry 54, p. 36.

⁵¹Notebook I, entries 4, 5, 13, 21 and 26, pp. 3-4, 11, 16-17, 20.

⁵²MC to KB, January 12, 1922; January 28, 1922.

⁵³MC to KB, February 8, 1922; February 27, 1922; March 12, 1922; March 13, 1922.

⁵⁴MC to Amy Lowell, January 24, 1922, Lowell Papers; MC to KB, January 23, 1922; Peggy Cowley to S. Foster Damon, November 16, 1922, Damon Papers.

⁵⁵MC to Amy Lowell, January 24, 1922, Lowell Papers; "'They Have Lived in the Golden House,'" Gargoyle II, 1 & 2 (January-February 1922), 24-27.

⁵⁶MC to Amy Lowell, March 15, 1922, Lowell Papers; "Bonded Translation," Dial LXXII (May 1922), 517-521.

⁵⁷MC to KB, March 13, 1922; Notebook I, entries 14 and 16, pp. 11-14. The entries are quoted in full in the present writer's "The Fabulous Ostrich of Art: Malcolm Cowley's Notebooks of the Twenties," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 142. As James Kempf has pointed out, the ongoing critical dialogue with Cowley may well have helped Burke to develop the theoretic conception of form he later advanced in Counter-Statement (1931), a book which reflected the progression of Burke's thought through the 1920s. In his "Lexicon Rhetoricae" Burke decomposes form into the following elements: "progressive form (subdivided into syllogistic and qualitative progression), repetitive form, conventional form, and minor or incidental forms." As an example of qualitative progression Burke used Cowley's sonnet "Mine No. 6," a poem Amy Lowell had recently sold to The North American Review, where it appeared in August 1922 as "Coal Town." See Counter-Statement, pp. 124-138; James M. Kempf, The Early Career of Malcolm Cowley, p. 71.

⁵⁸Notebook I, entry 12, pp. 9-11; see also entry 15, p. 12.

⁵⁹MC to KB, March 30, 1922.

⁶⁰MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, April 2, 1922; Notebook I, entry 20, pp. 15-16. Wheelwright shared Cowley's nascent defensiveness about American culture and subscribed to his repudiation of Stearns's symposiasts, whom he found "too sociologic and Freudian. They contribute to criticism much along these lines, but their values are all out . . . to resent evil is profitable only if there is no other way to further good. This school makes a living by insisting evil. They are neurotic, and if the truth be told, rather bourgeois themselves. That is what the 'revolt' in America consists in: the bourgeois denying their environment. They succeed in making acid the soil they must grow in." It was time, Wheelwright implied, to exchange destructive pessimism for constructive criticism. John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, n.d. [1922].

⁶¹"The French and Our New Poetry," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post II (May 6, 1922), 641.

⁶²MC to KB, March 30, 1922; "A Brief History of Bohemia," Freeman V (July 19, 1922), 439.

⁶³MC to KB, April 12, 1922; May 20, 1922.

⁶⁴"In Vindication of Mr. Horner," Freeman V (June 7, 1922), 308-309. Cowley's reappraisal of French classicism and his current anti-romanticism might seem to fit in with the critical temper of the times. As Susan Turner has observed, with traditionalism being conceived of in new ways (vide Eliot), it was becoming "modern" to explore the literary past; the degree of modernity, however, was dependent upon what segment of the past was held up for scrutiny. Susan J. Turner, A History of 'The Freeman': Literary Landmark of the Early Twenties (New York and London, 1963), p. 93.

⁶⁵MC to Van Wyck Brooks, November 27, 1920, Brooks Papers.

⁶⁶MC to KB, April 12, 1922; Susan Turner, A History of 'The Freeman', p. 95; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, May 3, 1922; Van Wyck Brooks, Days of the Phoenix (New York, 1957), p. 61.

⁶⁷Paul Rosenfeld, "Van Wyck Brooks," in Port of New York (1924; rpt. Urbana and London, 1966), pp. 57, 59, 61. For Brooks, see Raymond Nelson, Van Wyck Brooks: A Writer's Life (New York, 1981); "Benefit Show," New Republic LXXIX (August 8, 1934), 350; Leon Edel, "Introduction," Exile's Return (Limited Editions Club, 1981), p. xvii.

⁶⁸See, for example, Cowley's introduction to Brooks's Autobiography (New York, 1965), reprinted as "Van Wyck Brooks's 'Usable Past,'" in MWH, pp. 213-228.

⁶⁹As F. W. Dupee stated in 1939: "When [Brooks] appeals to the work it is in order to confirm some theory about the man. Literature gets dissolved into biography in such a way that the work itself with its four walls and established furniture as given by its author is often quite lost to view." F. W. Dupee, "The Americanism of Van Wyck Brooks," Partisan Review VI (Summer 1939). Reprinted in Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., Literary Opinion in America (New York, 1937; rev. ed., 1951), p. 563.

⁷⁰Claire Sprague, "Introduction," Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years (New York, Evanston and London, 1968), p. xxiv; Susan Turner, A History of 'The Freeman', p. 69.

⁷¹For Eliot, see John D. Margolis, T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922-1939 (Chicago and London, 1972) and Peter Ackroyd, T. S. Eliot (London, 1984). The quotation of Eliot is taken from Ackroyd, p. 75. Whereas Cowley arrived at classicism by way of Boileau and Racine and would move on to a qualified endorsement of Communism, Eliot came to classicism through the teachings of his Harvard mentor Irving Babbitt and the philosophy of T. E. Hulme and found a logical path extending from classicism to royalism and catholicism.

⁷²MC to KB, April 12, 1922. In 1923 Eliot launched a controversy over Romanticism and Classicism in the pages of The Criterion, which lasted for nearly five years without being resolved. In "The Function of Criticism" (1923) he defined the difference between Classicism and Romanticism as one between "the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic." In 1926 he described the tendency of The New Criterion as one towards Classicism--"a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason." As early as 1922 Cowley was differentiating between both concepts in similar terms. See John D. Margolis, T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, pp. 52-68; T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (London, 1932), p. 26; T. S. Eliot, "The Idea of a Literary Review," Criterion IV (January 1926), 5.

⁷³MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, April 2, 1922; MC to KB, April 12, 1922.

⁷⁴MC to KB, April 12, 1922; Notebook I, entries 18, 19 and 27, pp. 14-15, 20-21.

⁷⁵In Notebook I, entry 27, pp. 20-21, Cowley observed that "anything

is pertinent to a criticism which aids in conveying to the reader the precise nature of the book in question." Thus, it might be desirable to deviate into "psychological criticism," even though such was "only a frill of reviewing." More importantly, it was necessary to consider "what the book means to civilization," a question which involved an excursion into "moral criticism." A critical impressionism was deemed permissible, if only as an additional "aid" to definition.

⁷⁶"Keats and Hearst," Dial LXXIII (July 1922), 108-111; MC to KB, April 12, 1922; June 2, 1922.

⁷⁷Gorham B. Munson to MC, December 6, 1921. When Munson had not heard from Cowley by the end of January 1922, he wrote again, reiterating his proposal and request for advice and soliciting contributions which Cowley valued highly but which were unacceptable for a magazine like The Dial. The new magazine, he added, would "ignore rather than combat existing censorship" and was ready to engage in "literary bellicosities." Gorham B. Munson to MC, January 23, 1922.

⁷⁸Gorham B. Munson, "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," Sewanee Review XL (January 1932), 24-28, 31.

⁷⁹Gorham B. Munson, "The Fledgling Years," pp. 28-29; Matthew Josephson to MC, December 5, 1921; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), p. 154.

⁸⁰Gorham Munson to MC, January 23, 1922. The history of the founding, career and demise of Secession, its rivalry with Broom, and the ensuing feud among editors and contributors, is obfuscated by rankling personal sentiment and contradictory reminiscences. For a reliable and above-the-battle account, see Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "John Wheelwright, Gorham Munson, and the 'Wars of Secession,'" Michigan Quarterly Review XIV (Winter 1975), 13-40.

⁸¹MC to KB, January 28, 1922.

⁸²Gorham Munson to MC, February 19, 1922; March 8, 1922; MC to KB, March 13, 1922; Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years," p. 32. A copy of the circular is among the Cowley Papers.

⁸³Matthew Josephson, "Apollinaire: Or Let Us be Troubadours," Secession I (Spring 1922), 9-13.

⁸⁴Gorham B. Munson, "Exposé No. 1," Secession I (Spring 1922), 22-24.

⁸⁵Gorham B. Munson, "A Bow to the Adventurous," Secession I (Spring 1922), 15-19; "Day Coach," Secession I (Spring 1922), 1-3; Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years," p. 32.

⁸⁶MC to KB, n.d. [late 1922].

⁸⁷MC to KB, April 12, 1922; Peggy and Malcolm Cowley to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d. [1922], Wheelwright Papers. "Munson (who seems to have read us very well) has found a couple of sentences which reconcile our aims with Tristan Tzara, but the peace seems a little patched," Cowley wrote to Burke. To Wheelwright he voiced similar objections, emphasizing

that Burke and he were "at the opposite poles of literature" from Tzara.

⁸⁸Matthew Josephson to MC, April 25, 1922; May 2, 1922; MC to Matthew Josephson, May 10, 1922, Loeb Papers; Matthew Josephson to MC, May 25, 1922; June 18, 1922.

⁸⁹Matthew Josephson to MC, June 18, 1922; MC to KB, April 28, 1922; May 8, 1922. Cowley's "Poem" appeared in Secession III (August 1922), 13.

⁹⁰As Frederick Hoffman has observed, "an insatiable curiosity about sex was one of the most obvious characteristics of [the 1920s]. Frankness about sexual matters, together with an avid reading of books dealing with problems of sex, gave the subject an exaggerated importance," a situation which seemed to invite satirical exploitation. Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (1962; New York and London, 1965), p. 229.

⁹¹MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, April 2, 1922.

⁹²KB to MC, n.d. [1921].

⁹³Manuscript versions of several drafts of the play are among the Cowley Papers. The idea of the play may well have derived from Laforgue, whose highly original interpretation of Shakespeare's play, Hamlet, ou les Suites de la Piété Filiale was part of his Moralités Légendaires (1887). Cowley had earlier observed to Burke that he had discovered the germ of Laforgue in Shakespeare. MC to KB, January 26, 1920.

⁹⁴KB to MC, n.d. [1921]; October 21, 1921; MC to KB, May 8, 1922; June 2, 1922.

⁹⁵Notebook I, entries 32 and 33, pp. 23-24; Notebook V, unpaginated.

⁹⁶"Young Man with Spectacles," Broom III (October 1922), 199-203, reprinted in the special Cowley issue of The Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 81-86; MC to KB, May 20, 1922; Harold Loeb to MC, May 9, 1922; June 28, 1922; September 12, 1922, Loeb Papers.

⁹⁷Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 98-100.

⁹⁸Harold Loeb, "Foreign Exchange," Broom II (May 1922), 176-179.

⁹⁹Edmund Wilson, "The Aesthetic Upheaval in France," Vanity Fair (February 1922), pp. 49, 100.

¹⁰⁰Harold Loeb, "Foreign Exchange," pp. 180-181.

¹⁰¹MC to KB, May 20, 1922; Harold Loeb to MC, May 2, 1922; May 19, 1922, Loeb Papers.

¹⁰²Matthew Josephson, "Made in America," Broom II (June 1922), 266-270.

¹⁰³Under Josephson's editorial influence Broom was thus brought in tune with the aggressive modernism of Secession. In the same issue which featured Josephson's "Made in America" Loeb had greeted the first issue

of Secession as a congenial contemporary magazine and had wished it "every success" ("Comment," Broom II [June 1922], 271); Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 187-188.

¹⁰⁴MC to KB, May 20, 1922; Stewart Mitchell to MC, May 16, 1922.

¹⁰⁵I. L. Kandell, Executive Secretary of American Field Service Fellowships, to MC, May 8, 1922; MC to KB, February 8, 1922; February 27, 1922; May 8, 1922; May 20, 1922

¹⁰⁶MC to KB, May 20, 1922; June 2, 1922.

¹MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, June 29, 1922, Wheelwright Papers; MC to Harold Loeb, July 14, 1922, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, July 2, 1922.

²Ivan Opffer to MC, April 10, [1922]; September 20, 1947; WT, pp. 58-59.

³"Henri Barbusse," Bookman LVI (October 1922), 180-182; "André Salmon and His Generation," Bookman LVI (February 1923), 714-717; "Duhamel, M. D.," Bookman LVII (April 1923), 160-162; "Charles Vildrac," Bookman LVII (May 1923), 291-294; "Paul Fort," Bookman LVIII (November 1923), 253-254; "James Joyce," Bookman LIX (July 1924), 518-521; "Pierre MacOrlan," Bookman LX (January 1925), 585-589; MC to John Farrar, July 27, 1922, American Review and Bookman Papers.

⁴"Henri Barbusse," Bookman LVI (October 1922), 180-182. For Barbusse as a radical writer, see Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left (New York, 1961), pp. 68-72.

⁵Henri Barbusse to MC, July 13, 1922; September 2, 1922; September 12, 1922. Cowley continued to follow Barbusse throughout the decade. In 1926 he wrote a laudatory review of his novel Chains, in which he embedded his impressions of their first meeting. He described the book as a sensitive account of the oppression of the weak by the strong recurrent in human history and quoted the stirring appeal to revolution with which the novel ended. Barbusse replied with a letter complimenting Cowley on a "brilliant and amicable" treatment of the book. The year after Cowley supervised the American translation of Barbusse's novel Jesus (1927). In 1935, just a few months before the writer's death in Moscow, Cowley noted with approval in The New Republic that Barbusse was part of the "brilliant" French delegation at the Writers' International Congress for the Defense of Culture, held in Paris in June of that year. See "The Road of Excess," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 7, 1926, p. 17; Henri Barbusse to MC, March 24, 1926; and "The Writers' International," New Republic LXXXIII (July 31, 1935), 339 (TBOU, pp. 98-101).

⁶Cuthbert Wright, "The Country of Cockayne," Dial LXXII (May 1922), 493-497; MC to André Salmon, n.d.. Cowley presented Broom to Salmon as "une revue dans le genre du Dial, mais plus intelligente, plus 'avancée,' et beaucoup plus pauvre. . . . Broom n'est restraint dans son choix que par les difficultés de traduction et par le puritanisme du publique Américain;" MC to KB, July 2, 1922.

⁷"André Salmon and His Generation," Bookman LVI (February 1923), 714-717.

⁸"Duhamel, M. D.," Bookman LVII (April 1923), 160-162.

⁹"Charles Vildrac," Bookman LVII (May 1923), 291-294; Charles Vildrac to MC, February 28, 1923; MC to Amy Lowell, January 24, 1922, Lowell Papers.

¹⁰MC to John Farrar, October 28, 1922, American Review and Bookman Papers; S. Foster Damon to MC, July 15, 1922; MC to S. Foster Damon, September 9, 1922, Damon Papers; S. Foster Damon to MC, September 21, 1922. Seven years later Damon's appreciation of Ulysses had risen considerably. In 1929 he wrote a eulogistic analysis of the book for The Hound & Horn. See S. Foster Damon, "The Odyssey in Dublin," Hound & Horn III (1929), 7-44.

¹¹MC to John Farrar, November 12, 1922; John Farrar to MC, December 13, 1922. Both American Review and Bookman Papers; "James Joyce," Bookman LIX (July 1924), 518-521.

¹²See ER, pp. 115-119. Cf. Peggy Cowley to S. Foster Damon, September 16, 1922, Damon Papers.

¹³MC to S. Foster Damon, August 17, 1922, Damon Papers; for Williams and McAlmon, see Sanford J. Smoller, Adrift Among Geniuses. Robert McAlmon: Writer and Publisher of the Twenties (University Park and London, 1975), p. 126.

¹⁴MC to KB, July 22, 1922; MC to S. Foster Damon, August 17, 1922, Damon Papers; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 174; MC to KB, August 20, 1922; ER, p. 133.

¹⁵BJ, p. 49; ER, pp. 81-82; MC to S. Foster Damon, August 17, 1922, Damon Papers; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 174; MC to KB, August 20, 1922.

¹⁶MC to KB, August 27, 1922; BJ, pp. 49-50.

¹⁷MC to Harold Loeb, September 9, 1922, Loeb Papers; BJ, pp. 51-52; MC to John Farrar, October 28, 1922, American Review and Bookman Papers.

¹⁸Gorham B. Munson to MC, April 6, 1922; May 26, 1922.

¹⁹Gorham B. Munson to MC, February 19, 1922; MC to KB, July 12, 1921; Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," Sewanee Review XL (January-March 1932), p. 33; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, August 31, 1922, Wheelwright Papers.

²⁰Gorham B. Munson, "Interstice Between Scylla and Charybdis," Secession II (July 1922), 30-32. Munson's broadside appears on page 33 of the issue.

²¹MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, September 12, 1922, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, August 27, 1922.

²²Matthew Josephson, "Mr. Blunderbuss," Secession III (August 1922), 28-31. Cf. Paul Rosenfeld, "Guillaume Apollinaire," Vanity Fair XVIII (June 1922), 59, 106, 108. Tristan Tzara's "Some Memoirs of Dadaism" had appeared in a recent issue of Vanity Fair; it was reprinted by Edmund Wilson as an appendix to his Axel's Castle (1931), pp. 304-312.

²³John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, December 30, 1922; Gorham B. Munson to MC, February 20, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, January 30, 1923, Wheelwright Papers.

²⁴MC to KB, September 25, 1922.

²⁵MC to KB, August 27, 1922; "Matthew Josephson," Book Find Notes (January 1947), p. 6.

²⁶Almost half a century later Kitty Cannell fondly remembered their meeting in Tyrol and confessed that, ever since, Cowley had been "one of [her] favorite people." She remained a faithful reader of Cowley's works and used his writings in her later teachings. Kathleen Cannell to MC, November 24, 1971; MC to KB, September 10, 1922.

²⁷Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 130-131; MC to Harold Loeb, September 9, 1922, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, September 10, 1922. Loeb paid 12 francs a page for translation, \$4 for prose, \$6 for poetry.

²⁸Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 122; Matthew Josephson, "After and Beyond Dada," Broom II (July 1922), 346-350, and "Exordium to Ducasse," Broom III (August 1922), 3; MC to KB, September 27, 1922.

²⁹Harold Loeb, "The Mysticism of Money," Broom III (September 1922), 115-130.

³⁰MC to KB, September 10, 1922; MC to Harold Loeb, September 27, 1922, Loeb Papers; cf. MC to André Salmon, n.d..

³¹"Real [aesthetic] understanding must be left to the critic, to the intellectual," Loeb had written; "and instead, in America, the intellectual of late has been hammering the country for its emptiness of beauty and encouraging the greatest danger to America, the imitation of European art." "The Mysticism of Money," p. 130.

³²MC to Harold Loeb, September 27, 1922, Loeb Papers; "Young Mr. Elkins," Broom IV (December 1922), 52-56. Rosenfeld's essay on Anderson had appeared in Dial LXXII (January 1922), 29-42; it was later included in his Port of New York (1924). On November 1, 1922, Cowley told Loeb that he had bought an Underwood portable from Harold Stearns for 550 francs. The irony will not have been lost on Stearns.

³³ER, p. 133; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 192-193. Cf. Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 134.

³⁴Cf. [Karl] Westheim, "George Grosz," Broom IV (February 1923), 163-169; "Hymn of Hate," New Republic LXXXIX (December 23, 1936), 249; "Louis Aragon," New Republic LXXXVIII (October 7, 1936), 258 (TBOU, p. 301).

³⁵"Louis Aragon," p. 258 (TBOU, pp. 301-302); Aragon's impressions of Berlin are quoted in Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 197; ER, p. 133.

¹MC to Harold Loeb, n.d. [November 1922]; November 10, 1922, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, November 10, 1922; "Mortuary" appeared in Broom IV (February 1923), 170.

²MC to KB, November 27, 1922; MC to KB, undated postcard; "The Butlers of Giverny," unpublished manuscript; ER, pp. 32, 134.

³MC to KB, November 27, 1922.

⁴Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism (New York, 1939), p. 357; Gilbert Seldes to MC, May 31, 1922; MC to Scofield Thayer, August 3, 1922, Dial Papers.

⁵"Euphues," Dial LXXIII (October 1922), 447; Notebook I, part two, entry 18, p. 73; MC to Scofield Thayer, August 3, 1922, Dial Papers; "Two American Poets," Dial LXXIII (November 1922), 563-567; Nicholas Joost, Scofield Thayer and 'The Dial': An Illustrated History (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1964), p. 201.

⁶MC to KB, January 6, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, January 30, 1923, Wheelwright Papers. Cowley's letter was a response to an earlier letter from Wheelwright, in which he had denounced Cowley's essay as "smart aleck writing" and "extrinsic" criticism and had affirmed his belief in "tradition" over the dangerous "spook" of nationalism. John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, December 30, 1922.

⁷"Pierre MacOrlan," Bookman LX (January 1925), 588-589. Cowley's portrait of MacOrlan, written during December 1922, was the last in his Bookman series. "I have been very glad to do this work for you," Cowley told Farrar upon completing his task; "it introduced me to some very fine writers and set me out on a new path." MC to John Farrar, December 29, 1922, American Review and Bookman Papers; MC to KB, December 17, 1922.

⁸See, in particular, Enrico Prampolini, "The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art," Broom III (October 1922), 235-237; Robert Alden Sanborn, "A Champion in the Wilderness," Broom III (October 1922), 174-179; and Paul Strand, "Photography and the New God," Broom III (November 1922), 252-258.

⁹Matthew Josephson, "The Great American Billposter," Broom III (November 1922), 304-312; Matthew Josephson, "Instant Note on Waldo Frank," Broom IV (December 1922), 57-60; cf. MC to KB, October 22, 1922, and January 6, 1923.

¹⁰Pascin was a French painter of Bulgarian birth, who had left France for the United States at the outbreak of the war. He became an American citizen, traveled extensively through the United States, painting and drawing what he saw, and returned to Paris in 1920, where he consorted with many of the American expatriates. Leading the life of a lonely Bohemian artist, Pascin never foreswore representationalism in painting and was known for his delicate craftsmanship. His sensitive but bitterly

ironic studies of women, often prostitutes, betray a tender capacity for humanitarian sympathy. He committed suicide in 1930. For American reminiscences of Pascin, see Robert McAlmon, Being Geniuses Together, 1920-1930, revised and with supplementary chapters by Kay Boyle (Garden City, New York, 1968), pp. 123, 300-301, 342, and Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York, 1964), pp. 101-104.

¹¹MC to Harold Loeb, July 27, 1922; Harold Loeb to MC, July 31, 1922, Loeb Papers.

¹²"Pascin's America," Broom IV (January 1923), 136-137. "Pascin's America" was, in effect, a transitional essay: on the one hand it reflected Cowley's altered position on the issue of nationality since writing "Two American Poets;" on the other hand it displayed a tentative awareness of a native tradition in American writing which Cowley would express with greater confidence and depth in his letter to Wheelwright of January 30, 1923.

¹³See, for example, Cowley's "Humanizing Society," in The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium, edited by C. Hartley Grattan (New York, 1930), pp. 63-84.

¹⁴ER, p. 135; MC to KB, February 8, 1923. Cf. David E. Shi, "Malcolm Cowley and Literary New York," Virginia Quarterly Review LVIII (1982), 575-593.

¹⁵MC to KB, December 17, 1922; MC to Harold Loeb, December 19, 1922, Loeb Papers; "Locus Solus," Broom IV (March 1923), 281-283. For Josephson's account of the manifestation, see Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 132-134.

¹⁶The Dadaist interest in America is exemplified in Philippe Soupault's "The 'U.S.A.' Cinema," Broom V (September 1923), 65-69; ER, p. 106; MC to KB, January 28, 1923.

¹⁷MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, January 14, 1923, Wheelwright Papers. Cowley's phrase "a critical patriot" is quoted from a personal letter to the author in Marjorie Rose Smelstor, "Broom and American Cultural Nationalism in the 1920's," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975, p. 118; MC to KB, January 6, 1923; January 28, 1923; May 4, 1923; "Portrait by Leyendecker," Broom IV (March 1923), 240-247. For Joseph Leyendecker, see Stephen Fox, The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators (New York, 1984), p. 44. "Voices from Home: 1923" appears in BJCP, p. 68.

¹⁸MC to KB, January 10, 1923; "They Carry Him Off in a One-Horse Hack . . .," Secession V (July 1923), 19; "Love and Death I," Secession V (July 1923), 18.

¹⁹Tristan Tzara to MC, February 5, 1923; MC to KB, February 8, 1923.

²⁰ER, pp. 151, 154; Notebook I, entry 31, p. 23; MC to KB, February 8, 1923.

²¹MC to KB, February 8, 1923; "A Life in the 1920's," unpublished manuscript, p. 2; ER, p. 149.

²²Notebook I n.s., June 10, 1933.

²³ER, p. 158; MC to KB, January 28, 1923; February 8, 1923; March 18, 1923.

²⁴Gorham B. Munson, "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," Sewanee Review XL (January 1932), 46.

²⁵Robert Coates, a recent visitor to Giverny, whom Cowley had first met in Paris the previous summer, elicited a similarly ambiguous response. Six feet tall, square-shouldered, with bright blue eyes, red hair and freckles, Coates was a contributor to Broom and Secession and then engaged in composing The Eater of Darkness, a novel which applied Dada principles to fiction and for a while enjoyed a reputation as the first Dadaist novel in America. Cowley found Coates personally likable, but distrusted his extravagant experimentalism: "He writes stories without punctuation, but he is beginning not to need this camouflage of modernism; he begins to have ideas." MC to KB, January 6, 1923.

²⁶Notebook V, n.p.. Cowley later used this passage as part of his contribution to a group manifestation in transition XIII (Summer 1928), 96-97; cf. Notebook I, entry 42, pp. 28-29.

²⁷MC to KB, January 6, 1923; January 11, 1923; January 28, 1923; February 8, 1923; April 6, 1923.

²⁸Harold Loeb, The Way It Was (New York, 1959), pp. 145-147; MC to KB, January 6, 1923; Harold Loeb to MC, March 14, 1923, Loeb Papers; Gorham Munson to MC, February 20, 1923.

²⁹MC to KB, January 10, 1923; Gorham Munson to MC, May 5, 1923; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 234-238; ER, pp. 180-181. See also Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "John Wheelwright, Gorham Munson, and the 'Wars of Secession,'" Michigan Quarterly Review XIV (Winter 1975), 26; Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years," pp. 39-40; David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian, pp. 70-71. Since Wheelwright did not leave for Europe until February 1923, he could not have been present at this editorial conference, as Shi suggests. Cf. MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, January 30, 1923, Wheelwright Papers.

³⁰MC to KB, March 1, 1923.

³¹MC to KB, January 11, 1923.

³²Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 237; "Exile's Return: Coffee and Pistols for Two," New Republic LXVIII (October 21, 1931), 259-260.

³³Gorham B. Munson, "The Mechanics for a Literary 'Secession,'" S4N IV, no. 22 (November 1922), n.p..

³⁴Louis Untermeyer, "The New Patricians," New Republic XXXIII (December 6, 1922), 41-42.

³⁵Editorial, "Secession," Freeman VI (January 10, 1923), 414. Through

1923 Brooks recurrently attacked the aestheticism of contemporary letters in his "Reviewer's Notebook." Cf. Susan J. Turner, A History of 'The Freeman' (New York and London, 1963), pp. 94-97.

³⁶John Brooks Wheelwright, "Concerning Secession," Freeman VI (February 7, 1923), p. 522.

³⁷MC to KB, January 11, 1923; March 18, 1923; MC to Norman Fitts, n.d. [1923].

³⁸MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, January 14, 1923, Wheelwright Papers.

³⁹MC to KB, February 8, 1923; Gorham Munson to MC, February 20, 1923.

⁴⁰MC to KB, March 8, 1923; March 18, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, March 6, 1923, Loeb Papers; Harold Loeb to MC, March 14, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁴¹Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 142-157; Harold Loeb to MC, November 30, 1922; December 19, 1922; February 9, 1923, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, March 11, 1923.

⁴²MC to Harold Loeb, February 9, 1923, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, March 11, 1923.

⁴³Gorham Munson, "A Comedy of Exiles," p. 66.

⁴⁴S. Foster Damon to MC, September 2, 1922; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, May 3, 1922; MC to S. Foster Damon, March 23, 1922. Cowley's selection included "Château de Soupir: 1917," "Two Swans," "Translucent Fingers," "Fifteen Minutes," "Mountain Farm," "For a Georgian Anthology," "Runaway," "Coal Town," "About Seven O'Clock," "Mountain Valley," and "Day Coach," poems which between 1918 and 1923 had appeared in The Harvard Advocate, The Dial, Poetry, The Little Review, Broom, Gargoyle, Secession and the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post. Rejected were "To a Dilettante Killed at Vimy," "Eighteenth Century Sonnet," "On Visiting the Revere," "Sentimental," "Nantasket," "For a Methodist Hymnal," "Deathbed," "Nocturne," "Sudden Encounter," and "Poem for Two Voices." John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, May 3, 1922. Among the poets considered but (partly on Cowley's advice) rejected, were Joseph Auslander, Donald B. Clarke, Malcolm Vaughn and Charles McVeagh. MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 3, 1921; Dorian Abbott, "Preface," in Eight More Harvard Poets (New York, 1923), pp. xii, xiv.

⁴⁵James Light to MC, n.d.; Stewart Mitchell to MC, January 14, 1923; John Dos Passos to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d., Wheelwright Papers; Conrad Aiken to John Brooks Wheelwright, March 7, 1923, Wheelwright Papers; Conrad Aiken to MC, March 27, 1923, Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken, edited by Joseph Killorin (New Haven and London, 1978), p. 75; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, February 8, 1923.

⁴⁶Milton Raison, "Poets and Pheasants," New York Tribune (January 28, 1923), p. 22; Mark Van Doren, "Genevieve Taggard and Other Poets," Nation CXIV (February 28, 1923), 246; "Poetry," Times Literary Supplement, April 12, 1923, p. 250; William Rose Benét, "Some Recent Poetry," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post III (March 10, 1923), 516; "Briefer

Mention," Dial LXXIV (March 1923), 314; Newton Arvin, "Shorter Notices," Freeman VII (May 2, 1923), 190; Gorham B. Munson, "Harvard Poets," New Republic XXXVI (October 3, 1923), 160. See also: "Recent Books in Brief Review," Bookman LVII (April 1923), 221, and "Shopgirls, Farms and Ghosts," New York Times Book Review (January 28, 1923), p. 2.

⁴⁷The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932, edited by Brom Weber (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), pp. 42, 75, 84, 97, 113; The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane, edited with an introduction and notes by Brom Weber (Garden City, New York, 1966), pp. 214-215. Crane's review first appeared in S4N IV (March-April 1923), n.p..

⁴⁸MC to Hart Crane, May 20, 1923, in Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane, 1923-1932 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1968), p. 10.

⁴⁹The poems appeared in Poetry XXI (February 1923), 233-239. Amy Lowell to MC, July 25, 1922, and MC to Amy Lowell, August 25, 1922, Lowell Papers.

⁵⁰"Prophetic," Poetry XXI (February 1923), 237.

⁵¹With the sale of two poems to The Bookman and The Double Dealer Amy Lowell's services as Cowley's informal literary agent came to an end; she had sold ten out of the original batch of twenty-five poems Cowley had sent her. In January 1923 Cowley expressed his formal thanks to Miss Lowell for having done "big things" for him (MC to Amy Lowell, January 11, 1923, Lowell Papers). By this time, too, Miss Lowell had begun to lose interest in the poetic efforts of her one-time protégés. Though she granted that, among the Eight More Harvard Poets, Cowley and Wheelwright had "some good things," she could not see "enough in their work to warrant them much of a future." She distrusted the cerebral experimentalism of the Secession group and disapproved of their propensity for critical theory. Among the younger poets she preferred the group of "Lyrist" led by Elinor Wylie and Edna Millay. Late in 1923 she denounced the "Secessionists" in The New Republic in terms which echoed Untermeyer's critique: "Their object is science rather than art; or perhaps it is fairer to say that to them art is akin to mathematics. They are much intrigued by structure, in a sense quite other than that in which it is usually employed in poetry. They have a host of theories, and are most interesting when stating them, but the doubt arises whether a movement which concerns itself more with statements about poetry than with the making of poetry itself is ever going to produce works of art of a quality to justify the space taken up by pronouncements." Amy Lowell, "Two Generations in American Poetry," New Republic, XXXVII, PT. II (December 5, 1923), 3; S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, pp. 637, 642; Norman Fitts to MC, September 14, 1922; MC to KB, n.d..

⁵²MC to KB, n.d.; Edmund Wilson to MC, March 27, 1923, in Edmund Wilson, Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972, edited by Elena Wilson (New York, 1977), p. 104.

⁵³MC to Burton Rascoe, March 23, 1923, and May 11, 1923, Rascoe Papers; MC to KB, May 16, 1923, and June 9, 1923.

⁵⁴MC to KB, March 1, 1923, and March 11, 1923; MC to Scofield Thayer, May 18, 1923, Dial Papers; Scofield Thayer to MC, May 25, 1923.

⁵⁵MC to KB, February 4, 1923; March 17, 1923; April 28, 1923; June 16, 1923; for a listing of Cowley's briefers, see Nicholas Joost and Alvin Sullivan, The Dial: Two Author Indexes (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1971), pp. 14-15; the poem quoted in the text appeared in Dial LXXIV (May 1923), 494; MC to KB, March 8, 1923.

⁵⁶The other essay was Francis Birrell's "Marcel Proust: The Prophet of Despair," Dial LXXIV (May 1923), 463-474.

⁵⁷MC to S. Foster Damon, April 26, 1922, Damon Papers; MC to KB, April 28, 1923.

⁵⁸MC to KB, November 27, 1922.

⁵⁹Cowley's early analysis of Proust's style and vision was astute enough. The "secret" of Marcel Proust, he argued, lay in the application of a superb "directing intelligence" to a method of "creative analysis," which Cowley defined as a "decomposition of life into an infinity of situations." Each situation was minutely analyzed by Proust and in turn decomposed into its "constituent elements." For Proust, however, all situations appeared to exist simultaneously; it was only through the "superimposition" of one situation on another that he could create "the illusion of motion" in time. Though Proust's real subject was "the stream of personal consciousness," Cowley observed, his situations had at most "a causal, but no temporal connexion." For Proust, Cowley implied, time was truly lost: "Past and present, anterior and posterior, exist for him simultaneously as in the omniscient mind of the Deity imagined by St. Thomas Aquinas." "A Monument to Proust," Dial LXXIV (March 1923), 237-239.

⁶⁰"A Monument to Proust," pp. 234-240. Cf. ER, p. 125.

⁶¹MC to KB, February 4, 1923; April 28, 1923.

⁶²MC to KB, March 17, 1923.

⁶³ER, p. 120; "The Hemingway Legend," Brentano's Book Chat VII (September-October 1928), 25-29; MC to Harold Loeb, October 18, 1969; Nicholas Joost, Ernest Hemingway and the Little Magazines: The Paris Years (Barre, Massachusetts, 1968), pp. 135-136.

⁶⁴The reference occurs in an early draft of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro:" "And there in the café as he passed was Malcolm Cowley with a pile of saucers in front of him and a stupid look on his potato face talking about the Dada movement with a Roumanian who said his name was Tristan Tzara, who always wore a monocle and had a headache." Cf. Philip Young, "For Malcolm Cowley: Critic, Poet, 1898-," Southern Review n.s., IX (Autumn 1973), 778-779. As Young reminds us, Alfred Kazin remembered Cowley's as "the face which so startlingly duplicated Hemingway's handsomeness" (Starting Out in the Thirties [Boston, 1965], p. 15).

⁶⁵MC to John Dos Passos, December 7, 1934, Dos Passos Papers; Nicholas Joost, Ernest Hemingway and the Little Magazines, pp. 129-154.

⁶⁶BJCP, p. 59; ER, pp. 119-124.

⁶⁷Notebook I, entry 45, pp. 30-31; "The Owl and the Nightingale," Dial LXXIV (June 1923), 624-626; MC to KB, March 11, 1923, and April 5, 1923.

⁶⁸ER, pp. 110-112; Notebook I, entry 35, p. 25.

⁶⁹ER, pp. 112-115.

⁷⁰MC to KB, March 18, 1923; cf. Notebook I, entry 47, pp. 32-33.

⁷¹MC to KB, March 18, 1923, and May 4, 1923; cf. MC to KB, June 2, 1922.

⁷²MC to KB, May 20, 1923.

⁷³"Phantassus," Dial LXXV (August 1923), 196-199.

⁷⁴Noel Riley Fitch, Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties (1983; New York and Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 172; Man Ray, Self Portrait (1963; rpt. New York, 1979), p. 190; MC to KB, March 1, 1923; March 11, 1923; March 17, 1923; April 5, 1923; May 16, 1923; May 20, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, May 27, 1923, Loeb Papers; Elinor Nef to MC, March 21, 1934; "Toward a Universal Man," New Republic XLIX (December 8, 1926), 69-70.

⁷⁵For some years Van Doesburg had been experimenting with geometrical abstractions in the style of Piet Mondriaan, and by 1923 he was making concerted efforts to launch a Dada movement in the Netherlands. He had made the acquaintance of Dadaists of various European nationalities, including Tzara, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Kurt Schwitters, and had staged Dada manifestations in The Hague, Haarlem and Amsterdam; MC to Hannah Hedrick, December 4, 1970; Hannah Hedrick to MC, February 2, 1971; WT, pp. 59-60; "Madrigals," Mécano, numbers 4 and 5 (1923), n.p.; Kurt Schwitters, "Theo Van Doesburg and Dada," De Stijl Dernier Numéro [no. 90] (January 1932), 24-30, reprinted in Robert Motherwell, ed., The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology (New York, 1951), pp. 275-276; MC to KB, March 1, 1923, and March 17, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, March 18, 1923, and May 27, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁷⁶John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, December 30, 1922; Gorham B. Munson to John Brooks Wheelwright, December 14, 1922; February 5, 1923; October 18, 1923, all three Wheelwright Papers.

⁷⁷Wheelwright's description of Dada is quoted in Alvin Rosenfeld, "John Wheelwright, Gorham Munson, and the 'Wars of Secession,'" Michigan Quarterly Review XIV (Winter 1975), 25; MC to KB, April 5, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 9, 1923, Wheelwright Papers; Wheelwright's remark on the treatment of Ashton's verse is quoted in Rosenfeld, p. 27; "Comment," Secession V (July 1923), 20-23.

⁷⁸MC to KB, April 5, 1923; for Cowley's axioms on art see Notebook I, entries 41 and 44; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 9, 1923, Wheelwright Papers; ER, p. 160.

⁷⁹John Brooks Wheelwright to Gorham B. Munson, October 22, 1923; Gorham B. Munson to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 19, 1923, and November 17, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d., Wheelwright Papers; John Brooks Wheelwright to Peggy Cowley, n.d..

⁸⁰MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 9, 1923; Munson, "A Comedy of Exiles," p. 60.

⁸¹For a detailed discussion of the Munson-Crane-Wheelwright "inbroglio" see Rosenfeld, pp. 30-36. Munson's resentment flared up and throughout the fall he conducted a pained and angry correspondence with Wheelwright, trying to regain control of his magazine and forcing Wheelwright to suspend printing. His rancor was slow to subside and in later reminiscences was aimed rather indiscriminately at Josephson, Wheelwright and Cowley. He spoke of acts of "sabotage" and of "the virtual hijacking of Secession by Wheelwright and Cowley" and denounced Cowley and Josephson as "machivellians" with an "unscrupulous attitude" towards Secession. To Alfred Stieglitz he observed that both had become "active and venomous enemies." See Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years," pp. 40-43, and "A Comedy of Exiles," pp. 60-62.

⁸²John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, November 17, 1923; Gorham Munson, "A Comedy of Exiles," p. 62.

⁸³MC to Harold Loeb, March 6, 1923, Loeb Papers; Harold Loeb to MC, March 14, 1923, and March 24, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, April 11, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁸⁴Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 162-163; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 246-248; MC to KB, April 28, 1923, and May 20, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, May 27, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁸⁵MC to KB, May 4, 1923; June 4, 1923.

⁸⁶"Exile's Return," New Republic LXVIII (September 23, 1931), 152-153.

⁸⁷Notebook I, entry 52, pp. 34-35. Cowley's observation proved prescient: not long after, many one-time Dadaists and Surrealists converted to political radicalism.

⁸⁸Notebook I, entry 57, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁹Notebook I, entry 56, p. 37; MC to KB, June 29, 1923. An ironic and indignant, but unsent, letter to the Postmaster General on literary censorship appears in Notebook I, part 2, entry 44, pp. 90-91. The letter is quoted in full in the present writer's "The Fabulous Ostrich of Art; Malcolm Cowley's Notebooks of the Twenties," Visionary Company II,2 & III,1 (Summer 1987), p. 147.

⁹⁰MC to M. A. Abernethy, July 29, 1932, Contempo Papers; ER, pp. 158-159; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 167-170; John Dos Passos, The Best Times: An Informal Memoir (New York, 1966), pp. 150-151; Charles Norman, E. E. Cummings: A Biography (1958; rpt. New York, 1967), pp. 138-140. Aragon's memory of the event, as related to Samuel Putnam, is given in

the latter's Paris Was Our Mistress: Memoirs of a Lost and Found Generation (1947; rpt. Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1970) and deviates in details: "There was one night when we were all at a house somewhere down in the country. Cowley and Josephson and Cummings, I remember, were there. Our host had an elaborately bound set of the works of Racine, and by way of showing our contempt for this kind of 'literature,' we took the volumes and tossed them into the fireplace. Then, as they went up in smoke, we all stood around and urinated upon the embers" (p. 184).

⁹¹This composite account of events is based on the following sources, which are neither entirely consonant in matters of detail nor entirely devoid of subjective coloration; they are, however, the best and only documents of a wild night at the disposal of the historian: ER, pp. 164-170; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 176-179; Robert McAlmon, Being Geniuses Together (London, 1938), pp. 113-115; André Salmon to MC, two undated letters [1923]; for Munson's retrospectively dim view of the "significance" of Cowley's gesture, see "A Comedy of Exiles," pp. 69-70.

⁹²ER, pp. 169-170.

⁹³"Prize American Literary 'Eggs' Boil Over in Paris Latin Quarter," New York Tribune, July 19, 1923; Gorham B. Munson, "The Fledgling Years," pp. 46-47.

⁹⁴Harold Stearns, The Confessions of a Harvard Man: 'The Street I Know' Revisited, edited and introduced by Hugh Ford, with a preface by Kay Boyle (Sutton West & Santa Barbara, 1984), pp. 298-300.

⁹⁵Sanford J. Smoller, Adrift Among Geniuses: Robert McAlmon, Writer and Publisher of the Twenties (University Park and London, 1975), pp. 26, 46; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 74, 77; "Those Paris Years," New York Times Book Review, June 9, 1968, p. 1 (FL, pp. 244-245); MC to Ken McCormick, December 9, 1967; Robert McAlmon, Being Geniuses Together, 1920-1930, revised and with supplementary chapters by Kay Boyle (New York, 1968), p. 42. McAlmon claimed he had played a leading role as a witness in achieving Cowley's release and, commenting on Cowley's subsequent return to the United States to assume an editorial post on The New Republic, scathingly described him as one "duly ponderous, the young intellectual fairly slow on the uptake."

⁹⁶MC to KB, June 16, 1923; June 29, 1923; July 5, 1923; Notebook II (1922).

⁹⁷Racine (Paris, 1923), pp. 7-9, 15. Cowley's essay on Racine was reprinted in The World of Tragedy, edited by John Kimmey and Ashley Brown (New York, 1981).

⁹⁸Racine, pp. 10, 12-13, 16.

⁹⁹Racine, pp. 13-14, 20.

¹⁰⁰Racine, pp. 18-20.

¹⁰¹Racine, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰²MC to KB, June 16, 1923; Racine, p. 22.

¹⁰³MC to author, August 31, 1985; MC to KB, June 16, 1923; Notebook I, p. 88. The letter to Gertrude Stein is quoted in full in "The Fabulous Ostrich of Art," pp. 139-140.

¹⁰⁴WT, p. 61; MC to Harold Loeb; August 31, 1923; September 14, 1923; October 12, 1923; November 22, 1923; November 29, 1923, all five Loeb Papers; Harold Loeb to MC, September 30, 1923; November 5, 1923; November 19, 1923; MC to Van Wyck Brooks, September 14, 1923, Brooks Papers.

¹⁰⁵WT, p. 61.

¹⁰⁶Charles Townsend Copeland to MC, n.d.; Glenway Wescott to MC, October 10 [1923]; Scofield Thayer to MC, January 3, 1924; S. Foster Damon to MC, January 9, 1924; William Slater Brown to MC, n.d.; Gorham B. Munson to MC, January 24, 1924.

¹⁰⁷See, for example, "The Caged Osprey," New Republic LV (July 4, 1928), 179; "Angry Author's Complaint," New Republic LXXX (January 22, 1934), 51-52; "The Good Earthling," New Republic LXXXI (January 23, 1935), 309-310; "Voodoo Dance," New Republic LXXXII (April 10, 1935), 254-255; "Second Thoughts on 'Joseph,'" New Republic XCIV (March 23, 1938), 198-199. Cf. LS, p. 141; "Five Acts of The Scarlet Letter," in Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, edited by Charles Shapiro (Detroit, 1958), p. 36.

¹⁰⁸MC to Harold Loeb, February 9, 1923, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, n.d..

¹⁰⁹MC to Harold Loeb, February 26, 1923, Loeb Papers; Cowley translated "The Extra" by Louis Aragon (Broom V [November 1923], 211-216), "Poison" by Roger Vitrac (Broom V [November 1923], 226-228), and "My Dear Jean" by Philippe Soupault (Broom VI [January 1924], 6-9); MC to KB, n.d.; March 1, 1923. Cowley remained eager for definite arrangements about a farm to be made from Giverny. In late April he told Burke: "The farm seems good to me. Go right ahead." Though, three weeks later, he reported he was "still serious about the affair," the transaction was never consummated, and Cowley had to wait another couple of years before his dream was realized (MC to KB, April 28, 1923, and May 16, 1923).

¹¹⁰MC to KB, March 8, 1923; May 4, 1923; May 16, 1923; May 20, 1923; June 4, 1923; June 9, 1923.

¹¹¹MC to KB, July 5, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, July 10, 1923, Wheelwright Papers.

¹¹²MC to KB, June 4, 1923; June 9, 1923; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 18, 1923, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, January 28, 1923; February 4, 1923.

¹¹³See, for example, Notebook IV, entries 51, 78 and 79, pp. 9, 61-70.

¹¹⁴Notebook IV, entry 71, p. 39; Notebook IV, entry 78, p. 62.

¹¹⁵MC to KB, June 4, 1923; Notebook IV, entry 76, pp. 58-59. Cf. ER, p. 161.

¹¹⁶Notebook IV, entry 75, p. 57; ER, p. 160.

¹¹⁷MWH, p. 252; WT, p. x.

¹¹⁸Josephson's description of America is quoted in David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian, p. 77; ER, p. 170.

¹¹⁹ER, p. 83; David Shi, Matthew Josephson, p. 76; BJCP, pp. 66-67.

¹²⁰R. P. Blackmur, "The American Literary Expatriate," in David F. Bowers, ed., Foreign Influences in American Life (Princeton, New Jersey, 1944), p. 140.

¹ER, pp. 174-175; "Exile's Return," New Republic LXVIII (September 23, 1931), 151.

²ER, pp. 171-172; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), p. 254.

³BJ, p. 73.

⁴MC to Harold Loeb, August 31, 1923, and October 12, 1923, Loeb Papers; ER, p. 175.

⁵ER, p. 175.

⁶ER, p. 176; MC to Harold Loeb, August 31, 1923, Loeb Papers; SF, p. 197; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d. [August 1923], Wheelwright Papers; MC to Harold Loeb, October 12, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁷SF, p. 197; Notebook I, entry 60, pp. 41-42.

⁸ER, p. 174.

⁹ER, pp. 175-178; Notebook I, entry 59, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰MC to Witter Bynner, May 20, 1923, Lowell Papers; Notebook IV, part two, entry 77, pp. 59-60.

¹¹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 243-254; ER, p. 172; VE, pp. 58-60.

¹²Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, September 3, 1923, quoted in Harold Loeb, The Way It Was (New York, 1959), p. 186; Harold Loeb, "Comment: Broom: 1921-1923," Broom V (August 1923), 55-58.

¹³Harold Loeb to MC, November 19, 1923, Loeb Papers; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 187.

¹⁴"Snapshot of a Young Lady," Broom V (August 1923), 3-10; MC to KB, May 4, 1923.

¹⁵William Slater Brown, "A Note on Sculptural Kinetics," Broom V (September 1923), 124; Matthew Josephson, "Brain at the Wheel," Broom V (September 1923), 120; MC to Harold Loeb, August 31, 1923, Loeb Papers.

¹⁶ER, pp. 178-179; Matthew Josephson, "Henry Ford," Broom V (October 1923), 137-142.

¹⁷Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 187; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 256; John Gould Fletcher to Broom, October 23, 1923; Edmund Wilson to John Peale Bishop, January 15, 1924, in Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972, edited by Elena Wilson (New York, 1977), p. 119; Edmund Wilson, "An Imaginary Conversation: Mr. Paul

Rosenfeld and Mr. Matthew Josephson," New Republic XXXVIII (April 9, 1924), 179-182. Wilson's article was reprinted in his The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties (New York, 1952), pp. 125-140.

¹⁸"Comment," Dial LXXV (September 1923), 311-312.

¹⁹See, for example, Cowley's translations of two of Paul Valéry's essays, "Pure Poetry" and "The Future of Literature: Will It Be a Sport?," which appeared in the New York Herald Tribune in March and April 1928.

²⁰MC to Harold Loeb, August 31, 1923; September 14, 1923; Harold Loeb to MC, September 30, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, October 12, 1923, all Loeb Papers.

²¹Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, September 3, 1923, quoted in David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 85; MC to Harold Loeb, September 14, 1923, and October 12, 1923, Loeb Papers.

²²MC to KB, October 11, 1923; Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, October 20, 1923, quoted in Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 194; ER, pp. 179-180; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 260-261.

²³MC to Harold Loeb, October 12, 1923, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, October 11, 1923.

²⁴Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, October 20, 1923, quoted in Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 194-195.

²⁵ER, p. 180; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 195-196; Crane's grumblings to Munson and Cowley are cited in John Unterecker, Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane (1969; London, 1970), p. 314.

²⁶Gorham B. Munson to MC, October 15, 1923; Gorham Munson, "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," Sewanee Review XL (January 1932), 49-50; Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 196.

²⁷Philip Horton, Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet (1937; rpt. New York, 1976), p. 154.

²⁸ER, pp. 181-182; Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, October 23, 1923, quoted in Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, pp. 195-197.

²⁹MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 25, 1923; ER, pp. 182-183.

³⁰MC to Harold Loeb, October 30, 1923, Loeb Papers; cf. MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, October 25, 1923, and John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, November 23, 1923. Wheelwright had long since decided to stand by Cowley, Burke and Josephson. On November 23 he had written to Cowley: "I don't understand the lack of cooperation. In union is strength, etc. I should think this precious study of ad. slogans would teach you that. For God's sake! Is no one 'who writes' impersonal enough to put through a little enlightened selfishness? This futility gets my grab."

³¹ER, p. 184; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 267. For the varying and conflicting accounts of the muddy scrap at Fisher's Field, see Josephson's Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 265-267; Munson's "The Fledgling Years," pp. 50-52; Loeb's The Way It Was, pp. 200-201; and ER, pp. 183-185.

³²ER, p. 185.

³³MC to William Slater Brown, November 14, 1923; MC to KB, November 18, 1923; MC to Gorham B. Munson, November 14, 1923; Gorham B. Munson to MC, n.d. [November 1923]; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 18, 1923, Wheelwright Papers.

³⁴Philip Horton, Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet, pp. 156-157.

³⁵MC to KB, November 8, 1923; for Cowley's account of the weekend, see MWH, pp. 191-200.

³⁶MC to Harold Loeb, October 30, 1923, Loeb Papers; ER, p. 186; E. M. Morgan to "Publishers of 'Broom,'" December 8, 1923; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 270; William Slater Brown to "Matty Malcolm Josephson Cowley," n.d. [December 1923].

³⁷MC to Harold Loeb, November 22, 1923, Loeb Papers.

³⁸William Slater Brown to MC, n.d. [November 1923]; Matthew Josephson to Harold Loeb, October 23, 1923, quoted in Harold Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 197; ER, p. 189; William Slater Brown to Matthew Josephson, n.d.; MC to Harold Loeb, November 29, 1923, Loeb Papers.

³⁹Prior to the issue's publication Cowley had written to Brooks, assuring him that the forthcoming Open Letter was in no way to be construed as an oblique attack on Brooks himself, whom Cowley referred to as "a critic of integrity" deserving of "a more definite award." Brooks took the Open Letter, as well as Cowley's explanation, in a spirit of good sportsmanship. MC to Van Wyck Brooks, December 18, 1923, Van Wyck Brooks Papers; Van Wyck Brooks to MC, December 28, 1923. Among the Cowley Papers are several undated letters from William Slater Brown pertaining to the satirical attack on the Dial Award.

⁴⁰"Comment," Broom VI (January 1924), 30-31.

⁴¹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 272-273; ER, pp. 189-190, 195.

⁴²Hart Crane to "Broom," n.d.; William Carlos Williams to MC, n.d.; Norman Fitts to MC, n.d.; Eugene O'Neill to Postmaster General Harry S. New, n.d. (In a private, undated, letter to Cowley O'Neill added: "I'm rather a weak asset on this brand of protest because I'm so 'suspect' myself, that they'll think it's my own axe I'm grinding." O'Neill's play The Hairy Ape had recently been censored in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Detroit, and all his works "blacklisted" by the Catholic Church); Burton Rascoe, "A Bookman's Day Book," New York Herald Tribune, 27 January 1924, p. 26.

⁴³ER, p. 196; MC to Harold Loeb, March 14, 1924, Loeb Papers.

⁴⁴ER, p. 190.

⁴⁵ER, pp. 190-191; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 268; Gorham Munson, "A Comedy of Exiles," Literary Review XII (1968), 73, reprinted in Munson's The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), pp. 157-188; Gorham B. Munson, "The American Murkury," Secession VII (Winter 1924), 32.

⁴⁶Ernest Boyd, "Aesthete: Model 1924," American Mercury I (January 1924), 51-56, reprinted in Boyd's Portraits: Real and Imaginary (1924; rpt. New York, 1970), pp. 11-25.

⁴⁷Cowley's account appears in ER, pp. 190-195; Ernest Boyd's version of events is given in his Portraits: Real and Imaginary, pp. 153-155; see also Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 268-269.

⁴⁸ER, p. 195; Burton Rascoe, "A Bookman's Day Book," New York Herald Tribune, 6 January 1924, p. 23, reprinted in Boyd's Portraits, pp. 155-161.

⁴⁹ER, pp. 194-195.

⁵⁰ER, pp. 192, 194; MC to Burton Rascoe, October 30, 1931, Rascoe Papers.

⁵¹ER, p. 196; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 261, 274; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Crisis of the Old Order: 1919-1933 (Boston, 1957), p. 71.

⁵²Cf. Frederick J. Hoffman, et al., The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography (Princeton, New Jersey, 1946), pp. 101-107, and Marjorie Rose Smelstor, "'Broom' and American Cultural Nationalism in the 1920s," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975.

¹ER, pp. 201-202; Notebook IV, entry 54, p. 12.

²ER, pp. 201-202.

³MC to Hart Crane, November 28, 1923, published in Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane, 1923-1932 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1968), p. 19; MC to Harold Loeb, November 22, 1923, Loeb Papers; ER, p. 201.

⁴MC to KB, November 8, 1923; Notebook IV, entry 54, p. 12; Notebook I, entry 63, p. 43; MC to KB, February 19, 1924; MC to KB, November 18, 1923; Notebook IV, entry 56, pp. 18-19; MC to KB, February 1, 1924.

⁵Notebook I, entry 59, pp. 38-39; Notebook IV, entry 71, p. 39; MC to KB, February 1, 1924 (cf. ER, p. 202); Notebook IV, entry 56, pp. 18-20; MC to KB, February 19, 1924.

⁶DGM, p. 37; WT, pp. 99-100.

⁷Notebook IV, entry 75, p. 45.

⁸MC to KB, November 8, 1923; November 18, 1923; February 19, 1924; MC to Harold Loeb, November 22, 1923, Loeb Papers.

⁹Tristan Tzara to MC, February 20, 1924; Jim Butler to MC, several undated letters; Robert Coates to MC, August 6, 1925, and November 29, 1925; ER, pp. 204-205.

¹⁰A notebook entry a propos of Cowley's trip to Woodstock indicates that one of the topics of discussion with Brown had been the pertinence of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to the practice of criticism: "Let us divide criticism into Exposition and Judgment. Exposition is possible of a contemporary, but not judgment. Literature exists for us (as Eliot pointed out) as a series of relations, and each new work modifies not only the present and the future, but the series of relationships which make up the past. When Ulysses appeared, it was time to write a criticism of Sterne or Fielding or Flaubert. In the case of Ulysses we could tell what it was but not how good it was, for our standard of good and evil [sic] is really nothing more than our judgment of the effect of a book on the history of literature." Whether it was Brown who brought Eliot's essay to Cowley's attention remains uncertain; the notebook entry from 1924 is the earliest evidence available that Cowley had read "Tradition and the Individual Talent." For Cowley's visit to Brown, cf. ER, pp. 197-199; MC to Harold Loeb, March 14, 1924, Loeb Papers.

¹¹William Slater Brown to MC, n.d. [January-February 1924]; ER, p. 198; MC to Harold Loeb, March 14, 1924, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, February 19, 1924; Munson's statement is among the Cowley Papers. Gorham B. Munson to MC, March 9, 1924. For Munson's generational division see especially Chapter One, "The Pattern of Our Milieu," Destinations: A Canvass of

American Literature Since 1900 (New York, 1928), pp. 1-10.

¹²ER, p. 200; MC to Harold Loeb, March 14, 1924, Loeb Papers.

¹³MC to KB, November 18, 1923; Notebook I, entry 61, p. 42, and separate unpaginated entry. Cowley's formulations of Beauty were in linear opposition to a maxim of aesthetics ("Art is the superfluous") advanced by Slater Brown at Woodstock. See ER, p. 198, and Notebook I, entry 67, p. 50.

¹⁴Notebook I, entry 62, p. 42. The correlation between art and character, literary and personal ethics, continued to preoccupy Cowley. He embedded his final thoughts on the subject in the last chapter of -- And I Worked at the Writer's Trade (1978), which he ended with a statement from his notebook: "No complete son-of-a-bitch ever wrote a good sentence." WT, pp. 256-266. See also "Artists, Conscience and Censors," Saturday Review XLV (July 7, 1962), 8-10, 47; and "Ethics in the Arts," in Ethical Problems for the Sixties, by Malcolm Cowley, Robert Lewis Shayon, John Smith, and Charles Frankel (New Britain, Connecticut, 1962), pp. 1-15.

¹⁵Notebook I, entry 64, pp. 44-47; MC to KB, February 1, 1924.

¹⁶For Valéry's use of the term "construction," see his Variety (New York, 1927), pp. 260-263; Notebook IV, entry 80, pp. 70-71. The entry was probably written in the spring or summer of 1926.

¹⁷Notebook IV, entry 78 and 79, pp. 61-70; these entries, too, were probably written in the first half of 1926.

¹⁸Notebook I, entries 64 and 65, pp. 44, 47-48.

¹⁹Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), p. 277; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 10, 1924, Wheelwright Papers; Cowley's letters in praise of S4N appeared in volume IV, no. 26-29 (May-August 1923), [87], [100], [109]; MC to Harold Loeb, May 9, 1924, and June 24, 1924, Loeb Papers; MC to KB, June 24, 1924.

²⁰MC to Alyse Gregory, January 3, 1924; January 19, 1924; February 17, 1924; and April 5, 1924, all Dial Papers. For a full listing of Cowley's briefers, see The Dial. Two Author Indexes. Compiled by N. Joost and A. Sullivan (1971).

²¹MC to Alyse Gregory, January 3, 1924, Dial Papers; Norman Fitts to MC, n.d.; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, May 10, 1924, and May 11, 1924, Wheelwright Papers; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, April 29 [1924], May 3 [1924]; Norman Fitts to John Brooks Wheelwright, n.d. [1924], Wheelwright Papers; Hart Crane to his mother, May 11, 1924, in The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932, edited by Brom Weber (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), p. 184; Allen Tate to Donald Davidson, June 15, 1924, in The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, edited by John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young (Athens, Georgia, 1974), p. 20.

²²MC to Harold Loeb, May 9, 1924; June 24, 1924; September 15, 1924; September 17, 1924; November 23, 1924, all Loeb Papers; "Exact Fancy," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 22, 1925, p. 8; for Cowley's

supervising of Loeb's second novel see Loeb's "Afterword" to The Professors Like Vodka (1927; rpt. Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1974), pp. 253-266.

²³"Paris Letter," Dial LXXV (November 1923), 473-479; Pierre MacOrlan to MC, February 4 [1923]; Harold Loeb to MC, February 19, 1923; MC to Harold Loeb, February 26, 1923, Loeb Papers; Albert and Charles Boni to MC, April 19, 1924; Pierre MacOrlan to MC, April 28, 1924; MC to Harold Loeb, May 9, 1924, Loeb Papers; S. Foster Damon to MC, December 4, 1924; "Briefer Mention," Dial LXXVIII (March 1925), 246.

²⁴S. Foster Damon to MC, June 24, 1924; "Properties," Dial LXXV (September 1923), 296-298; "Family Adventures," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (September 22, 1923), 61.

²⁵"The Best of Medicine," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (October 27, 1923), 184; "A Lamb Among Wolves," Saturday Review of Literature I (November 15, 1924), 279-280.

²⁶"Black and White," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (February 16, 1924), 520. Cowley's review was of The Color of a Great City, a collection of early newspaper sketches, but branched out into a consideration of the general influence of Dreiser.

²⁷"The Village Smell," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (June 21, 1924), 844.

²⁸"St. Apollinaire," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (June 21, 1924), 835; for Apollinaire's role as "the impressario of the avant-garde," see Roger Shattuck's excellent The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I (1958; rev. ed. 1968), pp. 253-322.

²⁹MC to Alyse Gregory, September 15, 1924, Dial Papers; MC to KB, October 22, 1924.

³⁰John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds., The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, p. 132; "Gulliver," Dial LXXVII (December 1924), 520-522.

³¹MC to KB, August 19, 1924.

³²MC to KB, July 12, 1917; a four-page outline of the novel is among the Cowley Papers.

³³Peggy Cowley to S. Foster Damon, n.d. [summer 1925], Damon Papers; "A Novel," three-page manuscript, dated September 17 [1929?]

³⁴Notebook I, n.s., entry for May 12, 1934; Notebook I, n.s., entries for January 2, 1937, and November 10, 1937; Notebook VI, n.s., entry for February 21, 1952, all Sherman, Connecticut; MWH, p. 246; ER, p. 244; MC to KB, August 6, 1931; Page Stegner and Robert Canzoneri, "An Interview with Malcolm Cowley," Per/Se II (Winter 1967-1968), 34-39, reprinted in CMC, pp. 92-104.

³⁵Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932 (1952; rpt.

Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), p. 135; MC to KB, October 11, 1923; Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, pp. 155, 166.

³⁶Gorham B. Munson, "The American Murkury," Secession VII (Winter 1924), 32; for Crane's shifting allegiance to Munson, see John Unterecker, Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane (1969; London 1970), pp. 358-360; SF, p. 192; Cowley's judgment of Crane as a copywriter is quoted in Unterecker, Voyager, p. 358; Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, pp. 182, 184.

³⁷Allen Tate to MC, June 8, 1958; SF, pp. 192, 194.

³⁸John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds., The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, pp. 8, 16, 17, 18, 20, 27, 100; MC to Allen Tate, n.d. [1924], Tate Papers.

³⁹John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds., The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, pp. 119-120.

⁴⁰Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, p. 183; SF, p. 194.

⁴¹Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, p. 183; MC to Alyse Gregory, February 12, 1925, and March 7 [1925], Dial Papers.

⁴²MC to KB, August 12, 1924; August 19 [1924].

⁴³WT, p. 62.

⁴⁴For a virtually complete listing of Cowley's articles for Charm, see Diane U. Eisenberg's Malcolm Cowley: A Checklist of his Writings, 1916-1973 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1975), pp. 30-37, 101-106.

⁴⁵"Parnassus-on-the-Seine," Charm I (July 1924), 19, 80, 83. For an elaborate listing of articles on expatriation appearing in American (and European) periodicals through the 1920s, the reader is referred to the elaborate bibliography to Warren I. Susman's "Pilgrimage to Paris: The Backgrounds of American Expatriation, 1920-1934," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1957, pp. 362-403.

⁴⁶"Do Artists Make Good Husbands?" Charm II (August 1924), 28-29, 83, 91; LS, pp. 132-228.

⁴⁷See, for example, Cowley's 1973 stand against a new lakeside development in the vicinity of Sherman in the New York Times, November 4, 1973, section 8, pp. 1, 12, 16.

⁴⁸The phrase is Radcliffe Squires' in his Allen Tate: A Literary Biography (New York, 1971), p. 55.

⁴⁹WT, p. 62; MC to James M. Kempf, November 23, 1974.

⁵⁰MC to Jane Heap, October 24, 1925, Little Review Papers; MC to KB, August 23, 1924; August 29 [1924].

⁵¹MC to KB, August 23, 1924; June 24, 1924; August 29 [1924].

⁵²MC to KB, September 1, 1924.

⁵³MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, September 17, 1924, Wheelwright Papers; MC to Harold Loeb, September 15, 1924, Loeb Papers. The letter is reprinted in Loeb's The Way It Was, pp. 222-223.

⁵⁴Gorham B. Munson, The Awakening Twenties (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), p. 291; Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks, p. 38.

⁵⁵MC to KB, October 22, 1924; October 30 [1924].

⁵⁶MC to KB, October 22, 1924; a clipping of Cowley's open letter "To the Editors of Books," dated October 20, 1924, is among the Cowley Papers; cf. Henry Seidel Canby to MC, November 5, 1924, and November 18, 1924.

⁵⁷Cf. Dickran Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1975), pp. 135-137.

⁵⁸Waldo Frank, "Seriousness and Dada," 1924, no. 3 (September 1924), 70-73.

⁵⁹"Communications on Seriousness and Dada," 1924, no. 4 (November 1924), 140-141; MC to Waldo Frank, n.d. [late October 1924].

⁶⁰Waldo Frank to MC, November 3, 1924. The altercation with Cowley in 1924 was reprinted in Frank's In the American Jungle (New York, 1937), pp. 128-135.

⁶¹William Carlos Williams to MC, December 24, 1924; Waldo Frank to MC, November 9, 1924, and November 21 [1924]; MC to KB, November 22 [1924].

⁶²MC to Harold Loeb, September 15, 1924, Loeb Papers; Gorham Munson, The Awakening Twenties, p. 292; Edwin Seaver to MC, n.d. [1924]; MC to KB, June 24, 1924; MC to KB, October 22, 1924; MC to Edwin Seaver, November 15, 1924.

⁶³Edwin Seaver to MC, n.d. [November 1924]; Cowley wanted to have inserted as a footnote: "Bertrand Russell says, 'Traditional mysticism has been contemplative, convinced of the unreality of time, and essentially a lazy man's philosophy.' It has always seemed to me that the mysticism of Mr. Frank's novels was of this traditional type." The footnote was included in the reprinted version of the exchange in Frank's In the American Jungle, p. 132. As Cowley's subsequent correspondence with Frank made clear, addition of the footnote to Cowley's open letter in 1924 would have done little to lessen Frank's fury. When Seaver refused to print the note, Cowley offered signing and dating it (November 8), to make clear that it had "no connection with [Seaver's] editorial policy, unless that policy is simply to praise Frank." MC to Edwin Seaver, November 15, 1924.

⁶⁴MC to Edwin Seaver, November 15, 1924; MC to KB, November 16, 1924.

⁶⁵MC to KB, November 16, 1924; November 22 [1924]; MC to Harold Loeb, September 15, 1924, Loeb Papers; for Munson's interest in the outlandish

cult of philosophical mysticism initiated by the Russian G. I. Gurdjieff at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau-Avon in France and propagated in America by A. R. Orage, see The Awakening Twenties, pp. 253-283; MC to KB, October 30 [1924].

⁶⁶MC to KB, October 22, 1924; November 22 [1924].

⁶⁷David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 99; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 22, 1924, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, November 16, 1924; November 22 [1924].

⁶⁸MC to Harold Loeb, November 23, 1924, Loeb Papers.

⁶⁹KB to MC, February 21, 1924, and November 25, 1924, Burke Papers.

⁷⁰MC to Harold Loeb, December 8 [1924], Loeb Papers; MC to KB, n.d. [December 1924]. The "Agenda" of a group session held in late November lists Crane's "Fantasia in the National Arts Club" as one of the features in the issue. MC to KB, November 29 [1924], Burke Papers. "I have a hunch," Cowley told Burke, "that Hart is going to talk things over with Munson and let himself be convinced that these plans, which he helped to draw up, are unwise. If he drops out, I want him to take the first step." Misunderstandings about the extent of Crane's alliance with the makers of Aesthete 1925 further strained his friendship with Munson. When Crane was thought to have contributed to the issue a poem ridiculing Munson's recent interest in mysticism and mocking his pompous critical rhetoric--a poem actually written by Slater Brown--disagreement between both men rose to such a peak that Crane declared himself ready to suffer excommunication from Munson's literary circle. Finding himself caught in the crossfire between two opposed literary groups, Crane suffered from "an unnecessarily aggravated state of nerves and feelings" and, justifiably complaining that the issues were "not at all clear," confessed himself disgusted: "I am growing more and more sick of factions, gossip, jealousies, recriminations, excoriations and the whole literary shee-bang right now." Hart Crane to Gorham B. Munson, December 5, 1924, and December 8, 1924, in Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, pp. 195-197. Cf. Brom Weber to MC, September 2, 1948. See also Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks, pp. 42-43.

⁷¹MC to KB, January 15, 1924 [1925]; MC to KB, February "something," 1925.

⁷²Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 291; William Carlos Williams, "[Letter to Walter S. Hankel]," Aesthete 1925 I (February 1925), 9-10. The "advertisement" for Mencken appeared on the inside back cover.

⁷³Allen Tate, "[Letter to Walter S. Hankel]," Aesthete 1925, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁴"To Whom It May Concern," Aesthete 1925, p. 28; Matthew Josephson, "Dr. Boyd Looks at Literature," Aesthete 1925, pp. 29-31.

⁷⁵William Slater Brown, "An Interplanetary Episode," Aesthete 1925, pp. 12-20; John Brooks Wheelwright, "Little Moments with Great Critics," Aesthete 1925, pp. 1-8; MC to KB, n.d. [December 1924]; KB to MC,

December 19, 1924, Wheelwright Papers; the footnote, by Walter S. Hankel, appeared on page two of the issue. As Dickran Tashjian reminds us, such analyzing as Burke's "looked forward to the academic orientation of the New Criticism and its opposition to impressionistic surveys of literature." Skyscraper Primitives, p. 141.

⁷⁶Kenneth Burke, "Dada, Dead or Alive," Aesthete 1925, pp. 23-26.

⁷⁷[Kenneth Burke], "French Letter," Aesthete 1925, p. 28; Hankel's "Meditations" appeared on pp. 8, 11; AT to MC, February 11 [1925]. Tate reminded Cowley of certain observations he had made one evening speaking on behalf of Mr. Hankel: "I am interested in ethics. I am concerned with the broader fields of human activity and with the vitality of immediate experience. There is nothing more inspiring than a figure like Napoleon. I am a Pragmatist; for Pragmatism is ethics. I care little for the anemia of metaphysical discussion, of mysticism. The limen differentiae between the so-called mystical ecstasy and the ordinary flux of experience is indeterminate; indeed, only in sex is such a difference perceptible." It was not difficult, indeed, to hear the voice of Cowley in such pronouncements supposedly by Hankel.

⁷⁸William Carlos Williams to MC, n.d. [February 1925].

⁷⁹John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, February 16, 1925; MC to KB, February "something," 1925.

⁸⁰ER, p. 243; Dickran Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives, p. 142.

⁸¹MC to KB, December 6 [1924]; n.d. [December 1924]; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, February 18 [1925], Wheelwright Papers.

⁸²ER, pp. 222-223; Radcliffe Squires, Allen Tate: A Literary Biography, pp. 57-58; Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks, pp. 26-27; Harold Loeb, "Mid-Atlantic Letter," This Quarter I (1928), pp. 211-212; Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, p. 198; SF, pp. 195-196; "The Flower and the Leaf," BJCP, pp. 139-141.

⁸³SF, p. 75; ER, p. 223.

⁸⁴Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 289-291; MC to KB, November 29 [1924], Burke Papers.

⁸⁵MC to KB, December 6 [1924]; February "something," 1925; March 22 [1925].

⁸⁶MC to KB, January 15, 1924 [1925]; February "something," 1925.

⁸⁷MC to KB, March 7 [1925].

⁸⁸MC to KB, March 7 [1925]; WT, p. 91; ER, pp. 207-209.

⁸⁹"A Life in the 1920s," unpublished manuscript, pp. 2-3. See also John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, n.d. [1925]. Wheelwright expressed similar sentiments: "In a country which tacitly disapproves of writing or else thinks it 'nice' (a country which prefers hygiene to culture and engineering to architecture not for themselves, not for their results)

writers are in the position of chemists in the Middle Ages, or Christians in the catacombs." As a result, Wheelwright believed, American writers in New York were condemned to conversing with each other "in Babel tongues from the bottoms of various wells." Because there was "no common meeting ground, nor audience," Wheelwright thought, the serious writer was forced to take refuge in the development of a private subjective language, "sufficient to itself"--"a new idiom may be evolved from each one exploring the world which lies within." Such extreme individualism, however, he granted, was "not fully human. Man is a social animal. . . . Such poetry as Hart Crane's is not social, it is a one-man language. And the same is true of all 'our' works." The problem, as Wheelwright saw it, was fundamentally a problem of language: words once fresh and inspiring "no longer vibrate in the mind with their true meaning," he wrote to Cowley. "There are lots of words in the Unabridged Dictionary. All the definitions will have to be rewritten, and by 'us.'" Wheelwright's comments interestingly anticipate Cowley's repudiatory analysis of the "religion of art" of the 1920s in Exile's Return and tie in with similar observations Cowley expressed in his letters, notebooks and articles of the time. Kenneth Burke's thought, as exemplified in his essays for The Dial, was moving along similar lines. See his Counter-Statement (1931).

⁹⁰Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (1942; rpt. 1972), p. ix; "A life in the 1920s," pp. 2-3; ER, p. 210.

⁹¹MC to KB, March 7 [1925]; March 22 [1925].

¹Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane, 1923-1932 (Middletown, Connecticut, 1969), pp. 27-30; Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932 (New York, 1952), p. 212; ER, pp. 227-235; SF, pp. 198-200, 207-211.

²When Crane learned of Cowley's incident from Tate, he exclaimed to the Browns: "When I think of poor Malcolm . . . I realize that ALL is folly, and one might as well have as good and unrighteous a time as not! What a persistent capacity for physical accidents that good friend, critic and poet seems to have!" Hart Crane to William and Susan Brown, Mid-August 1925, in Robber Rocks, pp. 31-32; MC to Matthew Josephson, August 12, 1925, Josephson Papers; Peggy Cowley to S. Foster Damon, n.d. [August 1925], Damon Papers.

³"Beavers, Builders and Lakes," Charm IV (August 1925), 14-17, 83, 90; "A Miscellany of Winter Books," Charm IV (January 1926), 50; "A Few Novels Worth Keeping," Charm IV (November 1925), 34, 64; "The Reviewer Cleans House," Charm IV (February 1927), 81.

⁴S. Foster Damon to MC, September 8, 1925; MC to S. Foster Damon, November 1, 1925, Damon Papers; WT, p. 66; ER, p. 224.

⁵"Mr. Moore's Golden Treasury," New York Herald Tribune Books, August 2, 1925, p. 5; Kenneth Burke, "Psychology and Form," Dial LXXIX (July 1925), 35, 42-43. Burke used the same quotation from Baudelaire to demonstrate the psychological workings of "form." Cowley's analysis, however, remained his own.

⁶Gorham B. Munson, The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), p. 95; WT, p. 63.

⁷William Rose Benét to MC, April 16, 1947, Benét Papers. In 1944 Cowley translated Gide's Imaginary Interviews; a year later appeared Aragon: Poet of the French Resistance, edited by Hannah Josephson and Cowley, who translated a substantial number of Aragon's poems; Cowley also translated most of the essays in Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé, the eighth volume in the collected works of Valéry published under the auspices of the Bollingen Foundation in 1972.

⁸"Two Novels from the French," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 4, 1926, p. 11; "Poets March in the Van," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 16, 1927, p. 4; "French Poetry and the New Spirit," Saturday Review of Literature III (May 7, 1927), 810; Marshall Best to MC, October 10, 1929.

⁹"Grosse Margot's Lover," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 15, 1928, p. 3; "That Excellent Blackguard," New York Herald Tribune Books, September 9, 1928, p. 3; "Haloes for the Damned," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 9, 1926, p. 10; "Stendhal Complete," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 23, 1926, p. 12; "The Art of Visible Things," Dial LXXXII (March 1927), 247-249; "A Messiah of the Skeptics," New York Herald

Tribune Books, October 21, 1928, p. 7; "Untranslatable Genius," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 31, 1926, p. 19; "From 'Flowers of Evil' to the Super Realists," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post VII (January 29, 1927), 1, 14; "The Apron-Strings of Vice," New Republic LIII (February 8, 1928), 328; "The Voyager of Dreams," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 10, 1929, p. 3; "The Victim of a Mask," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 13, 1930, p. 8; "Cocteau's First Novel," Saturday Review of Literature II (November 28, 1925), 335; "Lightning in a Mist," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 10, 1927, p. 2; "The Road of Excess," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 7, 1926, p. 17; "A Few Translations and Reprints," Charm VII (March 1927), 39, 84, 87; "A Fourth Brontë," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 23, 1927, pp. 5-6; "The Caged Osprey," New Republic LV (July 4, 1928), 179; "The Geographer of Love," New York Herald Tribune Books, December 4, 1927, pp. 6-7; "As If Written by Starlight," New York Herald Tribune Books, December 2, 1928, p. 4; "A Talented Subaltern," New York Herald Tribune Books, August 26, 1928, p. 4; "The Curse of Beauty," New York Herald Tribune Books, June 16, 1929, p. 4; "The Men of the Road," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 7, 1929, p. 4; "A Man of Letters," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 17, 1926, pp. 4-5; "The Coin of Greatness," New York Herald Tribune Books, September 25, 1927, pp. 1-2; "Albumblatt," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 20, 1929, pp. 5-6; "The Problems of André Gide," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 22, 1934, p. 4; "French Verse in English," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 25, 1926, p. 12.

¹⁰Carl Sandburg to MC, May 18, 1926; MC to Carl Sandburg, n.d. [1926], Sandburg Papers; "What is a Show Boat, Anyway?," Charm VI (November 1926), 31; "Four Biographies and a Novel," Charm VI (January 1927), 49.

¹¹"Marcel Proust's Unfinished Symphony," New Republic LXXXI (December 12, 1934), 139-140; "Cocteau's First Novel," Saturday Review of Literature II (November 28, 1925), 335; "Stendhal Complete," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 23, 1926, p. 12; "A Fourth Brontë," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 23, 1927, pp. 5-6; "St. Apollinaire," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post IV (June 21, 1924), 835; "The Men of the Road," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 7, 1929, p. 4; "From 'Flowers of Evil' to the Super Realists," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post VII (January 29, 1927), 1, 14; "French Poetry and the New Spirit," Saturday Review of Literature III (May 7, 1927), 810; "Grosse Margot's Lover," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 15, 1928, p. 3.

¹²"A Life in the 1920's," unpublished manuscript, p. 2; "An Excellent Manual," Saturday Review of Literature II (August 8, 1925), 22; "The Road of Excess," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 7, 1926, p. 17; "Lightning in a Mist," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 10, 1927, p. 2.

¹³"A Man of Letters," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 17, 1926, pp. 4-5; "The Coin of Greatness," New York Herald Tribune Books, September 25, 1927, pp. 1-2; "Albumblatt," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 20, 1929, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴"From 'Flowers of Evil' to the Super Realists," p. 1; "A Man of Letters," pp. 4-5; "The Problems of André Gide," New York Herald Tribune

Books, July 22, 1934, p. 4.

¹⁵Compare Cowley's early formulation with his definition of the story as given in "A Defense of Storytelling," WT, p. 204: "A person (or group of persons) is involved in a situation and performs an act (or series of acts, or merely undergoes an experience) as a result of which something is changed."

¹⁶"The Dark City," Saturday Review of Literature I (June 27, 1925), 851; "The Orange Moth," Dial LXXIX (December 1925) 507-509; "Some Interesting Biographies," Charm IV (September 1925), 86.

¹⁷Hart Crane to MC, January 3, 1926, in Robber Rocks, p. 47; "Frankenstein; or, the Poetical Faculty," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 1, 1925, p. 10; "Two Anthologies," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 21, 1926, p. 6; "As Told in a Bazaar," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 8, 1928, p. 13.

¹⁸"Frankenstein; or, the Poetical Faculty," p. 10; "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," New Republic LIII (December 28, 1927), 173-174.

¹⁹MC to S. Foster Damon, November 1, 1925, Damon Papers; ER, pp. 216-217; Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), pp. 300-303; Matthew Josephson to MC, August 2, 1925, and September 30, 1925; "Two Winters with Hart Crane," Sewanee Review LXVII (Autumn 1959), 547-556; SF, pp. 200-204.

²⁰"Two Winters with Hart Crane," p. 550; ER, pp. 226-227; MC to S. Foster Damon, April 6, 1925, and November 1, 1925, Damon Papers.

²¹Allen Tate to MC, October 20, 1925; "Churches Which Remember the Revolution," Charm IV (December 1925), 12-17, 78; MC to KB, November 9, 1925; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, November 7 [1925]; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 17, 1925, and August 19, 1925, Wheelwright Papers.

²²MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 28, 1925, Wheelwright Papers; MC to James M. Kempf, April 20, 1975.

²³MC to S. Foster Damon, November 18, 1925, and November 28, 1925, Damon Papers; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 28, 1925, Wheelwright Papers.

²⁴Allen Tate to MC, n.d. [1925]; SF, pp. 201-202; BJ, p. 82; Hart Crane to MC, January 3, 1926, in Robber Rocks, p. 47.

²⁵Lowell Brentano to MC, December 28, 1925; for The Chap-Book see Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (New York, 1966), pp. 134-138; MC to author, March 2, 1980.

²⁶Bellamy Partridge to MC, February 9, 1926, and April 2, 1926; MC to Joel Townsend Rogers, September 13, 1961; MC to Allen Tate, March 27, 1926, Tate Papers; Allen Tate to MC, May 16, 1928, and May 23, 1928.

²⁷"Lost! A Lady. Found! An Artist," Brentano's Book Chat V (March-April 1926), 19-23; "Garçong! Garçong!," Brentano's Book Chat V (May-June 1926), 24-29; "Eugene O'Neill, Writer of Synthetic Drama," Brentano's

Book Chat V (July-August 1926), 17-21; "The Real Jungle King," Brentano's Book Chat V (September-October 1926), 17-21; "How to Interview Ring Lardner," Brentano's Book Chat V (November-December 1926), 25-30; "Wowzers on the Run," Brentano's Book Chat VI (January-February 1927), 30-33; "Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Person and the Poet," Brentano's Book Chat VI (March-April 1927), 24-28; "Decadent Spring," Brentano's Book Chat VI (May-June 1927), 37-41; "Nick Carter," Brentano's Book Chat VI (July-August 1927), 34-37; "Conrad Aiken: A Man of Letters," Brentano's Book Chat VI (September-October 1927), 29-32; "Smash Your Guitar!", Brentano's Book Chat VI (November-December 1927), 33-36; "On Giving Books," Brentano's Book Chat VII (January-February 1928), 38-40; "The Hemingway Legend," Brentano's Book Chat VII (September-October 1928), 25-29; Bellamy Partridge to MC, January 27, 1925 [1926?].

²⁸MC to Charles Scribner's Sons, March 8, 1926, Scribner's Archives; MC to author, March 2, 1980; MC to KB, August 19 [1924].

²⁹SF, p. 248; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 303-304; MC to Charles Scribner's Sons, March 8, 1926. See also Maxwell Perkins to MC, May 11, 1926; MC to Maxwell Perkins, May 14, 1926; Maxwell Perkins to MC, May 17, 1926; May 19, 1926; MC to Maxwell Perkins, May 22, 1926, all Scribner's Archives. Further details have been taken from Cowley's articles on the respective authors.

³⁰"Lost! A Lady. Found! An Artist," pp. 19-23.

³¹"Garçong! Garçong!," pp. 24-29.

³²"The Real Jungle King," pp. 17-21.

³³For Wilson on Lardner, see The Shores of Light (1952), pp. 94-98; "How to Interview Ring Lardner," pp. 25-30.

³⁴"Wowzers on the Run," pp. 30-33.

³⁵"Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Person and the Poet," pp. 24-28.

³⁶"Conrad Aiken: A Man of Letters," pp. 29-32.

³⁷"The Hemingway Legend," pp. 25-29.

³⁸Willa Cather to MC, January 17 [1926]; William Beebe to MC, August 2, 1926; E. A. Robinson to MC, January 3, 1927, and March 7, 1927; Conrad Aiken to MC, August 26, 1927, and September 12, 1927; MC to Bellamy Partridge, October 6, 1927.

³⁹MC to Marianne Moore, February 16, 1926, Dial Papers; "Introduction" to Joseph Delteil, Joan of Arc (New York, 1926), p. xiii-xiv.

⁴⁰"Introduction," pp. xiii-xix.

⁴¹Matthew Josephson, "A Modern's Joan of Arc," Saturday Review of Literature II (June 19, 1926), 869; Harrison Smith, "A Poet's Joan," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 16, 1926, p. 7. See also Charles K. Trueblood, "Poetic Biography," Dial LXXXI (October 1926), 337-339; A. W.

Vernon, "A Lyrical Biography," New Republic XLVII (July 7, 1926), 206; Pierre Loving, "New French Life of Joan of Arc Makes Her of the Earth, Earthy," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post VI (April 24, 1926), 6; reviews also appeared in the New York Times Book Review, New York World, Boston Transcript and the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

⁴²Ernest Boyd to MC, March 11, 1926; Hart Crane to MC, March 28, 1926, in Robber Rocks, p. 52; MC to Ernest Boyd, March 13, 1926; Ernest Boyd to MC, March 20, 1926. The subject of French satanism had been thoroughly researched by one of Cowley's professors at Montpellier, who had intended to present Baudelaire "in the new role of a reformer," but whose findings had remained unpublished at his death.

⁴³MC to Marianne Moore, April 3, 1926, and Marianne Moore to MC, April 7, 1926, both Dial Papers.

⁴⁴"The Voyager of Dreams," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 10, 1929, p. 3; see also "The Apron-Strings of Vice," New Republic LIII (February 8, 1928), 328, and "The Victim of a Mask," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 13, 1930, p. 8.

⁴⁵Matthew Josephson to MC, January 14, 1925 [1926?]; MC to Marianne Moore, March 4, 1926, Dial Papers; MC to Anna B. Davis [Personal Service Fund], n.d. [1925]; Edmund Wilson to MC, August 21, 1925; MC to Allen Tate, March 27, 1926, Tate Papers.

⁴⁶MC to Allen Tate, March 27, 1926, Tate Papers; Allen Tate to MC, March 30, 1926.

⁴⁷MC to KB, November 9, 1925; MC to Allen Tate, March 27, 1926, Tate Papers; Hart Crane to MC, March 28, 1926, in Robber Rocks, pp. 52-53; MC to Harriet Monroe, June 3, 1926, Poetry Papers. For Cowley's description of the life of "summer people," see ER, 211-212.

⁴⁸Jane Heap, "Lost: A Renaissance," Little Review XII (May 1929), 5-6; Jane Heap, "Dada," Little Review VIII (Spring 1922), 46; Jane Heap, "Exposé," Little Review VIII (Spring 1922), 46-47; Jane Heap "Comments: Aesthetes 1925," Little Review XI (Spring 1925), 19; Jane Heap to MC, n.d. [late 1925], Little Review Papers; Matthew Josephson to MC, n.d. [early 1926?]; MC to Jane Heap, October 24, 1925; November 1, 1925; December 27, 1925, all Little Review Papers.

⁴⁹Jane Heap to Matthew Josephson, April 8, 1926, quoted in Life Among the Surrealists, p. 291; Matthew Josephson to MC, n.d. [early 1926?]; MC to Jane Heap, April 26, 1926, Little Review Papers; MC to KB, April 16, 1926; MC to Jackson R. Bryer, February 5, 1964; ER, p. 225.

⁵⁰For John Riordan, see Paul Mariani, William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked (New York, 1981), pp. 248-251; MC to Allen Tate, March 27, 1926, Tate Papers; Allen Tate to MC, April 28, 1926; "Notes on Contributors," Little Review XII (Spring-Summer 1926), 1-2.

⁵¹Matthew Josephson, "A Letter to My Friends," Little Review VI (Spring-Summer 1926), 17-19.

⁵²Josephson, "A Letter to My Friends," p. 18.

⁵³"Anthology," Little Review XII (Spring-Summer 1926), 33-36.

⁵⁴Eugene Jolas to MC, March 27, 1926; Maria Jolas to MC, September 9, 1926; MC to Hart Crane, October 8, 1926, in Robber Rocks, pp. 65-67; Eugene Jolas to MC, November 7, 1926; January 8, 1927. Among those who drew up a biographical sketch was Allen Tate, who sent Cowley the following: "Allen Tate, born 1899, of mixed English, Irish, French, Indian, Scotch and German stock has lived since birth the nomadic life typical of the broken-down American gentility of the last two generations. Has contributed to various journals in America and England, both verse and criticism." In a footnote Tate commented: "Scholars in 1980 may analyze this sentence to prove the pervasive influence of Miss Moore on American prose." Allen Tate to MC, n.d. [1926?]

⁵⁵Eugene Jolas to MC, January 8, 1927; Elliot Paul to MC, January 8, 1927; Dougald McMillan, 'transition': The History of a Literary Era, 1927-1938 (Amsterdam and London, 1975), p. 37; Eugene Jolas to MC, May 12, 1927; "The Hill above the Mine," transition X (January 1928), 90-91; "Race Between a Subway Local and a Subway Express," transition X (January 1928), 51-54.

⁵⁶Harrison Smith to MC, April 29, 1926; MC to Lewis Galantière, May 7, 1926, Galantière Papers; MC to Paul Valéry, May 7, 1926.

⁵⁷Lewis Galantière to MC, May 17, 1926, and June 16, 1926; J. H. Lewis's translations appeared in Dial LXXX (June 1926), 447-457, and Dial LXXXI (July 1926), 47-58.

⁵⁸MC to Hart Crane, October 8, 1926, in Robber Rocks, p. 65; MC to KB, September 1, 1926; Matthew Josephson to MC, August 6, 1926. For T. E. Hulme's influence, see Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., Modernism, 1890-1930 (1976), passim, especially pp. 228-241. For Tate and Hulme, see Radcliffe Squires, Allen Tate: A Literary Biography (New York, 1971), pp. 265-266.

⁵⁹MC to Lewis Galantière, September 12, 1926, Galantière Papers; Julien P. Monod to MC, November 1, 1927. Cf. James R. Lawler, "Introduction" to Paul Valéry: An Anthology. Bollingen Series XV-A (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), p. viii.

⁶⁰MC to Marianne Moore, April 16, Dial Papers; Allen Tate to MC, n.d.; Mark Van Doren to MC, October 20, 1926; Edmund Wilson to MC, November 17, 1926. See also Edmund Wilson to MC, November 27, 1926, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 139.

⁶¹"Toward a Universal Man," New Republic XLIX (December 8, 1926), 69-71. Reprinted as "Introduction" to Variety (New York, 1927), pp. v-xv.

⁶²MC to KB, July 26, 1926; Notebook IV, entry 85, pp. 76-77.

⁶³MC to KB, March 10, 1969; "Toward a Universal Man," pp. 70-71; Paul Valéry, Variety, pp. 181-182.

⁶⁴Paul Morand, "Paris Letter," Dial LXXVIII (March 1925), 222-223; "A Letter from Madame Emilie Teste," Dial LXXVIII (June 1925), 465-474;

Edmund Wilson, "Paul Valéry," Dial LXXVIII (June 1925), 492-497; Edmund Wilson, "Paul Valéry in the Academy," New Republic XLV (December 23, 1925), 134-135; J. H. Lewis's translations appeared in Dial LXXX (January 1926), 43-46, Dial LXXX (June 1926), 447-457, and Dial LXXXI (July 1926), 47-58; Edmund Wilson to MC, November 17, 1926; November 27, 1926, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 139.

⁶⁵Harrison Smith to MC, March 4, 1927.

⁶⁶Eugene Jolas to MC, May 12, 1927; Matthew Josephson, "Intellectual Comedy," Saturday Review of Literature III (April 16, 1927), 725-726; Lewis Galantière, "Consciousness and X," New York Herald Tribune Books, March 20, 1927, pp. 5-6; C. P. Fadiman, "Essays by Paris's New Deity of Letters," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post VII (March 12, 1927), 3, 11; Thornton Wilder, "Pride of Intellect," Yale Review XVII (October 1927), 178-180. See also [anon.], "Paul Valéry's Essays in an English Translation," New York Times Book Review, March 20, 1927, p. 5, and S. H., "Paul Valéry and Variety," Boston Transcript, April 27, 1927, p. 4. Other reviews appeared in Outlook, CXLVI (May 4, 1927), 28; Living Age, CCCXXXII (May 15, 1927), 747; Independent CXVIII (April 9, 1927), 400; American Review of Reviews LXXVI (July 1927), 107.

⁶⁷Alyse Gregory, "A New Academician," Dial LXXXVIII (November 1927), 429-433; Matthew Josephson to MC, February 12, 1927; MC to Harrison Smith, December 2, 1926; MC to Marianne Moore, November 14, 1927, Dial Papers.

⁶⁸Cowley's Variety (1927) retained a solid reputation through the decades. In 1949 James Laughlin requested permission to include parts of it in a volume of Valéry's Selected Writings to be brought out by New Directions. In 1956 Harcourt, Brace and Company seriously considered reissuing the book in combination with Variety II, translated by William Aspenwall Bradley, and asked Cowley to expand his original introduction to encompass both volumes; the gist of his essay, Cowley felt at the time, still had contemporary relevance after thirty years. As late as 1968 Kraus Reprints considered doing an offset of Variety (1927). Both plans for reissuing the book were obviated by the Bollingen series in progress. James Laughlin to MC, November 25, 1949; MC to Margaret Marshall, June 21, 1956; MC to Jackson Matthews, June 25, 1956; MC to KB, November 9, 1968; October 4, 1964; Lewis Galantière to Editor of "Books," April 1, 1928; Clifton Fadiman to MC, May 9, 1928; Edmund Wilson to MC, September 17, 1928, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 151; for Cowley's later strictures against Valéry, see ER, pp. 126-132; MC to John Crowe Ransom, June 22, 1956, Kenyon Review Papers; MC to George Lanning, October 1, 1964; October 13, 1964; October 31, 1964; Cowley's translations of Valéry appeared in Kenyon Review XIX (Summer 1957), 425-447 ("The Existence of Symbolism"), Kenyon Review XXVII (Winter 1965), 94-112 ("I Sometimes Said to Stéphane Mallarmé . . ."), and New Republic CXXXVIII (March 3, 1958), 17-19 ("Leonardo da Vinci"); the extensive correspondence about the Bollingen translation between Jackson Matthews and MC is among the Cowley Papers; "Paul Valéry," Atlantic Brief Lives, edited by Louis Kronenberger (Boston, 1971) pp. 819-822. For Cowley's continuing fascination with Valéry, see also "What Are the Qualities That Make an Author Modern?," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, July 27, 1952, pp. 1, 10, and "Gide as Friend and Colleague," Washington Post Book Week, May 1, 1966, p. 2.

⁶⁹MC to Melvin B. Yoken, April 17, 1970; "Toward a Universal Man," p. 70; MC to KB, June 23, 1929; April 5, 1966. For all his aversion to abstraction, in the course of time Cowley discovered himself moving closer and closer to Valéry's notion of literature as "a form of mental exercise." Thus, in 1949, he observed in his journal: "Year by year I make more notes, outlines, rough drafts before finishing a piece. Partly that represents a weakening of the creative impulse. Partly it represents a shift of attention. Year by year the problem of writing an essay, book, poem, becomes more interesting to me, and the answer to the problem--that is to say the finished essay, book, poem--seems less important in itself." Notebook V, n.s., entry for January 22 [1949].

⁷⁰MC to KB, April 5, 1966; MC to KB, July 26, 1926; Hart Crane to MC and Peggy Cowley, July 29, 1926, in Robber Rocks, pp. 64-65.

⁷¹Notebook IV, pp. 98-104; Harrison Smith to MC, May 7, 1926; Robber Rocks, p. 61; Edmund Wilson to MC, November 1, 1926; November 17, 1926.

⁷²"Icy Fire," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 11, 1925, p. 5.

⁷³MC to Marianne Moore, November 13, 1926, Dial Papers; "The Art of Visible Things," Dial LXXXII (March 1927), 247-249.

⁷⁴"Death of a Nobody," New York Herald Tribune Books, December 18, 1927, p. 5.

⁷⁵KB to MC, June 1927, Dial Papers.

⁷⁶MC to KB, July 31, 1927, Dial Papers; "The Golden House," Dial LXXXIII (October 1927), 339-342.

⁷⁷In April 1927 Cowley submitted an early version, based on a consideration of Joseph T. Shipley's Modern French Poetry: An Anthology, to Robert Morss Lovett at The New Republic. Lovett rejected the article because Cowley, in unknowing conflict with the magazine's policy, had already done a (substantially different) review of the book for Irita Van Doren, but granted that his present treatment was "quite superior" to his Tribune review and promised to "consider" an independent essay by Cowley on the subject. Cowley reworked the review into a full-length essay and resubmitted it to The New Republic in the fall, but this time met with Edmund Wilson's hesitation: "I like it, but . . . it's hard to get in a long literary essay which is not hung on some recent book, or, like the Valéry, on some particular brilliant writer." Lovett finally rejected the piece on the grounds that it was "a hard subject to handle for our particular constituency." Bristling with indignation at the unfair and contradictory treatment his essay had received at the hands of Lovett and Wilson, Cowley submitted the piece to Marianne Moore of The Dial, expressing his willingness to transform it into a book review of three recent anthologies of modern French verse, but again it was rejected. Finally he had to turn to his old mentor Canby to get the essay published. See Robert Morss Lovett to MC, April 28, 1926, May 10, 1926, and December 9, 1926; Edmund Wilson to MC, November 27, 1926, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 139; MC to Marianne Moore, October 4, 1926, and December 17, 1926, Dial Papers; Marianne Moore to MC, December 27, 1926, Dial Papers.

⁷⁸"French Poetry and the New Spirit," Saturday Review of Literature III (May 7, 1927), 810; WT, pp. 233-235. Cowley continued to use Baudelaire as a "touchstone" of modernism. In 1952, returning to the question "What Are the Qualities That Make an Author 'Modern'?", he observed: "[Baudelaire] was modern, we say--nearly a century after his death--by the nervous intensity of his emotions and by their unconventional nature. He was modern by the cool, ironical, almost scientific fashion in which he observed the emotions, and by the defiant honesty with which he revealed them. He was also modern in his conviction that new feelings required a new poetic vocabulary, which he tried to invent, so that his work helped to transform the language of poets everywhere. Today most poets in all the Western countries are a little infected with Baudelaireanism." New York Herald Tribune Book Review, July 27, 1952, p. 1.

⁷⁹Allen Tate to MC, November 19, 1926. Tate had also touched upon the distinction between subject and vision in his foreword to Hart Crane's White Buildings (1926).

⁸⁰For Cowley's later strictures against Eliot, see ER, pp. 110-115, 163; MC to Allen Tate, November 24, 1926, Tate Papers.

⁸¹William Carlos Williams to MC, December 31 [1925]; February 3 [1926]; February 12 [1926]; MC to William Carlos Williams, January 3, 1925 [1926], Williams Papers; BJ, p. 75.

⁸²A copy of the circular and questionnaire are among the Cowley Papers; MC to Editors of "Books," n.d..

⁸³Edmund Wilson to Allen Tate, December 11, 1925, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 128; Allen Tate to MC, December 23 [1925]; Allen Tate to Donald Davidson, January 3, 1926, in The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, p. 156; Edmund Wilson to Allen Tate, February 24, 1926, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 129; Allen Tate to MC, May 24, 1927. For Tate's efforts to locate a New York publisher for the Fugitives anthology, see The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, pp. 183-204. Riding's The Close Chaplet appeared in 1926, as did Crane's White Buildings. Putnam's Trinc appeared in 1927, Tate's Mr. Pope and Other Poems in 1928.

⁸⁴MC to Harriet Monroe, April 27, 1926; May 22, 1926; June 3, 1926; October 3, 1926, all Poetry Papers.

⁸⁵"Blue Juniata," Poetry XXIX (November 1926), 61-71; Ronald Levinson to MC, November 2, 1926.

⁸⁶For the mood of despair underlying modernism, see Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., Modernism (1976), p. 26; T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," Dial LXXV (November 1923), 480-483; MC to KB, n.d. [late 1924].

⁸⁷Allen Tate to MC, April 28, 1926; William Slater Brown to MC, n.d. [1926]; John Brooks Wheelwright to MC, n.d. [late 1929]. René Taupin detected the influence of Rimbaud's "Le Bateau Ivre" in the poem (as well as that of Laforgue, Tailhade and Soupault in other poems) and quoted

extensively from "Leander" in his L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poésie Américaine de 1910 à 1920 (Paris, 1929), pp. 290-291. "Bon poète et critique de goût," Taupin observed, "[Cowley] possède les meilleurs qualités françaises et en particulier l'élégance d'esprit." "Leander" appeared in Dial LXXXIII (September 1927), 199-200.

⁸⁸MC to Hart Crane, October 8, 1926, in Robber Rocks, pp. 65-66; MC to Marianne Moore, n.d. [January 1927], and February 18, 1927, Dial Papers; MC to KB, February 22, 1927; KB to MC, February 24, 1927.

⁸⁹KB to MC, July 21, 1928, and August 1, 1928, Burke Papers; MC to KB, July 24, 1928.

⁹⁰MC to Allen Tate, May 7, 1927, Tate Papers; "Two Winters with Hart Crane," p. 550.

⁹¹"Fisherman's Luck on Barnegat Bay," Charm VIII (September 1927), 13-15; MC to Lucie Taussig, August 21, 1927; Lucie Taussig to MC, October 6, 1927. The three articles actually written were "The Oldest Quaker Colony," Charm VIII (December 1927), 11-13, 83-84; "Our Last Royal Governor," Charm IX (February 1928), 18-20, 77-78; and "Last Veterans of the Revolution," Charm IX (May 1928), 24-25, 76, 78.

⁹²MC to KB, July 31, 1927, Dial Papers; MC to Matthew Josephson, September 26, 1927, Josephson Papers; Barbusse's Jesus, translated by Solon Librescot and supervised by Cowley, appeared in late 1927. For the dust raised by Barbusse's controversial novel in America, see Shirley Jackson Case, "To the Tormented Spirits of Our Age," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 8, 1928, p. 3; Hershell Brickell, "The Literary Landscape," North American Review CCXXIV (December 1927), n.p.; John Haynes Holmes, "Recent Books on Jesus," Bookman LXVI (December 1927), 458-459; Paul Sunday, "Two Religious Novels in Paris," New York Times Book Review, March 27, 1927, p. 7.

⁹³The American Caravan, edited by Van Wyck Brooks, Paul Rosenfeld, Alfred Kreymborg and Lewis Mumford (New York, 1927), pp. ix-x; "Aspects of the American Scene," Charm VIII (November 1927), 30, 80.

⁹⁴MC to KB, April 26, 1926; "Biography," The American Caravan, pp. 52-58.

⁹⁵Allen Tate to MC, card postmarked August 30, 1927; MC to Allen Tate, August 30, 1927.

⁹⁶Allen Tate to MC, September 2, 1927.

⁹⁷Notebook III, financial record for October 1927, n.p.; Harriet Monroe, A Poet's Life (1938; rpt. New York, 1969), p. 334; MC to Harriet Monroe, June 28, 1928, Poetry Papers; S. J. Brown, Robber Rocks, p. 102; WT, p. 64; ER, p. 207.

⁹⁸Notebook IV, entry 77, pp. 46-50.

⁹⁹Notebook V, entry 1, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰⁰Notebook VI, entry 77, p. 48; ER, p. 243; MC to Matthew Josephson,

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September 26, 1927, Josephson Papers; Matthew Josephson to MC, June 24, 1927; November 15, 1927; n.d. [late 1927].

¹T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," in To Criticize the Critic (London, 1965), p. 27; Eric W. Carlson ed., The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829 (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1966), p. ix.

²"The French and Our New Poetry," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post II (May 6, 1922), 641; Notebook I, entry 16, p. 13; Notebook IV, entry 80, p. 70; SF, p. 194. Later, in The Bridge, Crane would incorporate a passage on Poe which questioned whether the contemporary artist, in the midst of a hostile consumerist environment, would be able to preserve his integrity in the face of death and disintegration. See "The Tunnel" section of The Bridge in Collected Poems (New York, 1933), pp. 51-52.

³Allen Tate to MC, n.d. [1926]; Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," Collected Essays (Denver, Colorado, 1959), p. 458.

⁴Edmund Wilson, "Poe at Home and Abroad," New Republic XLIX (December 8, 1926), 77-80; Edmund Wilson to MC, November 27, 1926, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 129; Allen Tate to MC, n.d. [November 1926]; November 19, 1926.

⁵Edmund Wilson to MC, January 6, 1927; Joseph Wood Krutch, "An End and a Beginning," Saturday Review of Literature III (January 8, 1927), 493-494.

⁶MC to Marianne Moore, October 4, 1926; November 13, 1926; December 17, 1926; January 13, 1927; February 18, 1927, all Dial Papers.

⁷"The Reviewer Cleans House," Charm VII (February 1927), 33; "Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Person and the Poet," Brentano's Book Chat VI (March-April 1927), 25.

⁸Allen Tate to MC, September 2, 1927.

⁹"Israfel," Dial LXXXIII (August 1927), 168-171.

¹⁰"The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," Outlook CXLIX (July 25, 1928), 497.

¹¹Untitled and unpublished manuscript, n.d.; Krutch had falsely opposed I. A. Richards to Paul Valéry, Cowley had observed; not only was Richards, like Poe, "primarily interested in the psychology of the audience," but Valéry, too, could easily be shown to have a similar interest in literature. Wasn't it Valéry, after all, who, in his masterly "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo Da Vinci" had written: "What critics call a realization, or a successful rendering, is really a problem of efficiency . . . in which the only factors are the nature of [an author's] materials and the mentality of the public. Edgar Allan Poe . . . has clearly established his appeal to the reader on the basis of psychology and probable effects." The quotation from Valéry is from

Variety, p. 281.

¹²"The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," pp. 498-499, 511; WT, pp. 256-266.

¹³SF, p. 63; "The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," pp. 499, 511.

¹⁴MWH, p. 251. The essay on Poe was seriously considered by Henry Dan Piper for inclusion in A Many-Windowed House, but was finally omitted for reasons of space. Henry Dan Piper to MC, March 4, 1969; "The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," pp. 499, 511.

¹⁵T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," in To Criticize the Critic, pp. 27-42; Allen Tate's two essays on Poe were included in his Collected Essays, pp. 432-454, 455-471. Even in 1928 Tate had felt that Cowley and he were engaged in a collective endeavor to stem the tide of a nefarious mode of criticism. In May of that year Tate had submitted an early version of his essay on Emily Dickinson to The Outlook and commented to Cowley: "What little previous criticism of her there has been, has in effect argued that she would have been better off if she had indulged occasionally in sexual intercourse. In effect, I combat that view. If I remember the drift of your Poe essay, it does the same thing. Two essays in that direction may count a little in checking the tide of opinion to the contrary." Allen Tate to MC, May 23, 1928.

¹⁶"Introduction" to The Portable Hemingway (New York, 1944) and The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1946); "Aidgarpo," New Republic CXIII (November 5, 1945), 610 (FL, p. 199); "Poe's Influence on Europe" and "Notes on a Literary Balance of Trade," unpublished lectures, 1949; MC to KB, March 10, 1969; MC to Gay Wilson Allen, February 7, 1978, and March 18, 1978, personal files of G. W. Allen.

¹⁷"Aidgarpo," p. 608; Allen Tate, Memoirs and Opinions, 1926-1974 (Chicago, 1975), p. 119.

¹⁸MWH, pp. 250-251; "The Haunted Castle," New Republic LVI (October 31, 1928), 300-301.

¹⁹"Gross Margot's Lover," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 15, 1928, p. 3; MC to Irita van Doren, n.d. [late July 1928?].

²⁰MWH, pp. 248, 250; "Alastor," Dial LXXXIV (June 1928), 475-478. Cowley attacked Gorham Munson's criticism, likewise, for being "judicial, hierarchic and discipular." He warned Munson against the danger "of being pedantic, of lacking both humility and humor and of becoming intolerant toward other systems of judgment than his own." See "A Theologian of Letters," New York Herald Tribune Books, September 1, 1929, p. 5; MC to Marianne Moore, April 11, 1928, Dial Papers.

²¹MC to Marianne Moore, May 13, 1925, Dial Papers; MC to KB, July 26, 1926; William Carlos Williams to Ezra Pound, August 11, 1928, in John C. Thirlwall, ed., The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1957), p. 103. For the declining reputation of The Dial, see G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review: A Critical History, 1920-1950 (The Hague, 1968), pp. 79-89. As Janssens has noted, "with the new editorial policy [after 1925] controversy was so completely banned from its pages that, apart from the Dial Awards, the magazine seemed to move

in a vacuum, a world completely its own;" "Hard-Boiled and Romantic," New Republic LX (November 6, 1929), 326.

²²For Marianne Moore's editorship of The Dial, see Janssens, pp. 84-87, and William Wasserstrom, The Time of 'The Dial' (Syracuse, New York, 1963), pp. 115-122; Marianne Moore to MC, October 9, 1925; MC to Marianne Moore, October 12, 1927; October 27, 1927; March 23, 1928, all three Dial Papers; MC to KB, August 21, 1927. Cowley had found the Proust piece in a summer 1927 issue of La Nouvelle Revue Française, a review which he faithfully read, and had recommended it to Burke as an explanation of "the general philosophy" of Proust's work, "a defense of his own subjectivity," which illuminated "all of Proust" and "could be separately translated with considerable effect."

²³Marianne Moore to MC, October 21, 1925; MC to Marianne Moore, April 3, 1926, Dial Papers; MC to KB, August 16, 1927; December 8, 1928; for Burke's position on The Dial, see William Wasserstrom, The Time of 'The Dial', pp. 125-129; Marianne Moore to MC, April 19, 1928; MC to KB, August 25, 1929.

²⁴Marianne Moore to MC, October 9, 1926, Dial Papers. Cowley's relations with Marianne Moore remained somewhat problematical. As an editor of The New Republic he was eager to have her represented in the book department but found her not politically astute enough to review on a regular basis. In 1936 he described her to Burke as "the very last of the Puritans," whose very conventionality had become "unconventional." "A sweet soul," he granted. "But she turns everyone around her into a hypocrite." MC to KB, Memorial Day [1936?]. Professionally, Cowley remained on good terms with Miss Moore. In the early 1950s he closely cooperated with her on her translation of the fables of LaFontaine for Viking Press, painstakingly supervising and revising her work, so as to clarify the meaning of her idiosyncratic style and bring the renderings closer in spirit to the original French. In her "Foreword" to The Fables of LaFontaine (New York, 1954), Miss Moore acknowledged her indebtedness: "As linguistic Seeing-Eye dog of The Viking Press, Malcolm Cowley pronounced portions of the text 'rather far from the French;' he has contributed lines in addition to pedagogy, and but for the disservice of being credited with what he might repudiate, should be denominated Supervisor Extraordinary of the present version." The extensive correspondence between Cowley and Miss Moore pertaining to the LaFontaine translation and running from April 1952 to August 1954 is in the archives of the National Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

²⁵G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review, p. 34; MC to William Wasserstrom, November 29, 1958. In the minds of many Malcolm Cowley remained associated with The Dial. In 1931, two years after its demise, rumors circulated in New York that James Sibley Watson was "backing" Cowley, Burke and Josephson "on another Dial," so Lincoln Kirstein, editor of The Hound & Horn, intimated to Roger Sessions (G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review, p. 89). Fifteen years later, in 1946, Allan Dowling, a wealthy banker and amateur avant-garde poet, planned to apply a considerable part of his money to reviving the old Dial and turned to Cowley as his "first choice" for general editor. Cowley gave the proposal, which included a yearly salary of \$10,000, serious thought (there was, he told Mary Mellon, "no literary magazine of general circulation" to take the place of the old Dial), gauged the

willingness to cooperate on such a venture of friends like Burke, Tate and Robert Penn Warren, but in the end decided against accepting the editorship. Editing a revised Dial would mean a full-time job and Cowley was reluctant to surrender the opportunity to do his own writing which he had finally found under the generous provisions of the Mellon Foundation between 1944 and 1949. Dowling regretted Cowley's decision, which meant the end of his efforts to resuscitate The Dial, and, in 1947, transferred his money to Partisan Review, allowing the magazine to more actively commission articles and raise its rates to contributors. It seems an ironic twist of literary history that Cowley's decision indirectly enabled the editors of Partisan Review to expand the influence of a magazine which had been bitterly hostile to Cowley's brand of radicalism in the late 1930s and was hardly friendly to him in later years. See Allan Dowling to MC, August 22, 1946; September 3, 1946; September 22, 1946; October 16, 1946; October 31, 1946; November 14, 1946. Also MC to Allen Tate, November 3, 1946, Tate Papers, and MC to Mary Mellon, October 5, 1946. Dowling's sponsorship of Partisan Review is announced in "Angel with a Red Beard," Time XLIX (June 30, 1947), 64. Cowley's 1937 controversy with Partisan Review is reprinted in Jack Salzman and Barry Wallenstein, eds., Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930s (New York, 1967), pp. 297-307.

²⁶DCM, pp. 8-9; David Seideman, 'The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism' (New York, 1986), p. 95; "A Reminiscence: Edmund Wilson on The New Republic," New Republic CLXVII (July 1, 1972), 25.

²⁷Edmund Wilson to MC, October 17, 1927; MC to Edmund Wilson, October 20, 1927, Wilson Papers.

²⁸David Seideman, 'The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism', p. 95; Edmund Wilson to MC, October 26, 1927; MC to Edmund Wilson, November 2, 1927; January 7, 1928, both Wilson Papers.

²⁹Edmund Wilson to MC, March 26, 1928; April 13, 1928; April 27, 1928, all three in Letters on Literature and Politics, pp. 143-144; TBOU, p. 385; Henry Dan Piper, "Introduction," TBOU, p. xiii; Edmund Wilson to MC, May 23, 1928.

³⁰"The Tall Men," New Republic LIII (February 15, 1928), 355; "Humbert Wolfe," New Republic LIII (February 1, 1928), 304; "The Apron-Strings of Vice," New Republic LIII (February 8, 1928), 328; "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," New Republic LIII (December 28, 1927), 173-174; "Babbilogues," New Republic LIV (April 25, 1928), 278; "The Wild Body," New Republic LIV (April 11, 1928), 253; "The Caged Osprey," New Republic LV (July 4, 1928), 179; "The Chaos of English Grammar," New Republic LV (July 18, 1928), 232; "Junketing for Science," New Republic LIV (May 16, 1928), 393-394; Edmund Wilson to MC, April 27, 1928, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 144. Writing for The New Republic Cowley adopted a more severely critical tone than he had done in his Book Chat portrait of William Beebe. Rather than discuss his subject's contributions to scientific thought, as Wilson hoped he would, Cowley expressed his sympathy with Beebe's attack on "the whole theory of monastic specialization" in biology, and, typically, concentrated his review on the question of Beebe's "style." Countering the current estimate of Beebe as a flawless stylist, he pointed out his literary faults and limitations in a manner which was emblematic of Cowley's

inclination to criticize through image rather than idea: "Clear, agreeable and limpid, [Beebe's style] is like a smooth brook flowing over gravel--a brook which mirrors, in its shallow waters, the poised forepaws of foxes, the flight of humming-birds, the courtship of two insects, the turning of a leaf. It has no obstructions or shadowy deep pools; it is not free from impurities; it casts no sudden rainbows over a gorge; but it is, in general, an admirable reflecting medium for anything a naturalist may happen to observe." Beebe, Cowley criticized, tended to "obtrude a screen of [moral] commonplaces between the observer and the thing observed," paraded, in effect, "a rather shop-worn philosophy" of life, displayed a "weakness for things theatrical and sentimental," and was "very often guilty of fine writing"--indeed, his popular success as a scientist-writer had engendered an unfortunate "tendency toward self-exploitation," so that Beebe had begun to sound much like a "peddler" hawking his wares.

³¹"Babbilogues," New Republic LIV (April 25, 1928), 302.

³²Edmund Wilson to MC, March 26, 1928, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 143; "Style and Fashion," New Republic LIV (April 18, 1928), 278.

³³"The Peasants of New York," New Republic LV (June 6, 1928), 74-75.

³⁴Edmund Wilson to MC, May 23, 1928; "Dynamic Liberalism," New Republic LV (July 11, 1928), 104.

³⁵Edmund Wilson to MC, March 26, 1928, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 144; "Portrait of a Publisher," New Masses IV (January 1929), 5-6.

³⁶Bruce Bliven to Edmund Wilson, June 29, 1928; Edmund Wilson to MC, July 9, 1928.

³⁷Herbert Croly to MC, October 18, 1928; David Seideman, 'The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism', p. 89; Bruce Bliven to MC, October 31, 1928.

³⁸Michael Gold to MC, n.d. [fall 1928].

³⁹MC to Author's Guild, March 20, 1928; Ivan von Auw [Author's Guild] to MC, March 28, 1928.

⁴⁰MC to Alfred Knopf, August 12, 1944; Alfred Knopf to MC, August 16, 1944; August 21, 1944; MC to Lewis Galantière, November 16, 1964, Galantière Papers.

⁴¹Jolas's proclamation is quoted in Dougald McMillan, transition: The History of a Literary Era, 1927-1938 (Amsterdam and London, 1975), p. 27.

⁴²David E. Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 115; "New York: 1928," transition XIII (Summer 1928), 83-104; Eugene Jolas, "Glossary," transition XIII (Summer 1928), 271.

⁴³"Glossary," p. 271; "Tar Babies," in "New York: 1928," pp. 96-97.

⁴⁴ER, p. 217; Robert Coates, "Letter-Carrier," in "New York: 1928," pp. 90-93; Josephson's attack on Ford appears on p. 95; Will Bray, "Knights of Press-Agency," pp. 88-89.

⁴⁵"Tablet" appears in "New York: 1928" on p. 85; it was reprinted as "Commemorative Bronze: 1928" in BJCP, p. 84.

⁴⁶"Seven Occasional Poems," in "New York: 1928," pp. 86-87; Josephson, "Open Letter to Mr. Ezra Pound and the Other 'Exiles,'" pp. 98-102. transition's program appeared in issue XVI & XVII (June 1929). It is quoted in ER, pp. 276-277.

⁴⁷Eugene Jolas, "Glossary," transition XIII (Summer 1928), 271; Jolas's response is quoted in Dougald McMillan, transition: The History of a Literary Era, pp. 43-44; "Why Do Americans Live in Europe?" transition XIV (Fall 1928), 97-119.

⁴⁸"Patriot and Expatriate," New York Herald Tribune Books, December 30, 1928, pp. 1, 4; MC to Bellamy Partridge, October 6, 1927. Dostoevsky had preferred to speak, not of the Russian "soul," but of the Russian "God," a concept he defined as "the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end." Cowley himself had earlier found substantiation for a similar belief in the anthropological writings of Emil Durkheim, from whom he had derived the notion that "God is identical with society" and that "our only immortality is to become part of the race mind." Before long he would explain the appeal of Communism as a religion in similar terms, but in 1928 he was content to note that it was only through "an act of religious faith performed while abroad" that Dostoevsky was able to solve the literary problem of expatriation and provincialism. Notebook I, entry 68, pp. 50-51; for Cowley's explanation of the appeal of Communism as a religion, see "Faith and the Future," in Whose Revolution?, edited by Irving Dewitt Talmadge (New York, 1941), 135-165. A shortened version is reprinted in FL, pp. 12-24. As Cowley confessed to Granville Hicks, his interpretation was partly indebted to Durkheim. MC to Granville Hicks, July 11, 1941, Hicks Papers; ER, pp. 93, 95-96.

⁴⁹MC to Albert Boni, n.d. [1928]; "Introduction" to Adventures of an African Slaver (New York, 1928), pp. xvii, xxi.

⁵⁰"Briefier Mention," Dial LXXXV (October 1928), 358; Harrison Smith, "Mr. Gunpowder," New York Herald Tribune Books, July 29, 1928, pp. 1-2; Harrison Smith to MC, July 27, 1928; for the contemporary interest in primitivism, see Frederick Hoffman, The Twenties, pp. 306-308; other reviews of Adventures of an African Slaver appeared in Outlook CXLIX (July 25, 1928), 513, and Time XII (September 10, 1928), 46. The book did so well that Cowley felt justified in asking Albert Boni for an additional \$200 on top of the original fee of \$200, which seemed painfully out of proportion with the time and energy expended on the work. MC to Albert Boni, n.d. [1928]. In 1962 appeared Black Cargoes, written in collaboration with Daniel P. Mannix. Partly as a result of Cowley's resurrection of "Mr. Gunpowder" in 1928, Mannix was able to point out that Canot's personal narrative had "been reprinted many times in many languages, besides providing material for scores of novels in which Canot is the villain or the hero." He described the book as "a headlong adventure story, marred here and there by boasting and self-

justification, but generally accurate." Black Cargoes, p. 235.

⁵¹Frances Lamont Robbins, "Aristocratic Authoress," Outlook CXLIX (June 20, 1928), 314; Lewis Galantière, "The True Little French Girl," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 20, 1928, p. 3; other interesting reviews were: Arthur Ruhl, "Dagger-Strokes," Saturday Review of Literature IV (May 26, 1928), 909; [anon.] "High Society in Pre-War Europe," New York Times Book Review, May 13, 1928, p. 9; Rose Lee, "Hands Across the Sea," Bookman LXVII (August 1928), 709-711; and Hershell Brickell "The Literary Landscape," North American Review CCXXVI (July 1928), n.p..

⁵²Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, p. 362; "My Countryside, Then and Now: A Study in American Evolution," Harper's Monthly Magazine CLVIII (January 1929), 239-245; T. Wells [Harper's] to MC, September 14, 1928; MC to KB, postcard, August 18, 1928; MC to George Swetnam, October 22, 1968.

⁵⁴"Hemingway's Wound--And Its Consequences for American Literature," Georgia Review XXXVIII (Summer 1984), 233-234; for the persistence of Cowley's regionalism in the radical 1930s, see "Continental Highway," New Republic LXVI (February 25, 1931), 34-37 (TBOU, pp. 14-15, reprints part of the article), "Homesteads, Inc.," New Republic LXXVII (November 15, 1933), 22-23 (TBOU, pp. 51-55), and "How Far Back to the Land," New Republic LXXV (August 9, 1933), 336-339. As Lewis P. Simpson has pertinently suggested, Cowley's radicalism was in part an attempt to recover a Jeffersonian pastoral vision of America. Simpson, "Cowley's Odyssey: Literature and Faith in the Thirties," Sewanee Review LXXXIX (Fall 1981), 527-528.

⁵⁵MC to Allen Tate, August 28, 1928, Tate Papers; Allen Tate to MC, August 29, 1928.

⁵⁶Allen Tate to MC, April 25, 1929; MC to Allen Tate, June 3, 1929, Tate Papers. Cowley thought the ideas expressed to Tate important enough to enter them into his notebook under the title "Letter to a Poet from Tennessee." Notebook IV, entry 90, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁷Allen Tate to MC, June 14, 1929; MC to Allen Tate, December 15, 1930, Tate Papers. Contrary to his promise, Cowley did not write the review, so that, much to Tate's chagrin, I'll Take My Stand did not receive the critical attention it deserved in The New Republic. MC to Allen Tate, August 28, 1931, Tate Papers; DGM, p. 199; for Cowley's views on Tate in 1936, see his review of Tate's Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas, "A Game of Chess," New Republic LXXXVI (April 29, 1936), 348-349; for Cowley's visit to the Agrarians in 1933, see DGM, pp. 192-206; interview with Robert Penn Warren, January 28, 1982; MC to Allen Tate, August 29, 1973.

⁵⁸WT, pp. 64-65; Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 351-352.

⁵⁹MC to KB, July 24, 1928; Hart Crane to MC, "Near August 20, 1928," in Robber Rocks, p. 98; MC to Allen Tate, August 28, 1928, Tate Papers; SF, p. 204. A year later Cowley again expressed his solicitude about Crane to Tate: "Yesterday Hart suddenly appeared, driven from his comfortable New York apartment by emotional troubles and the desire to

work on The Bridge in . . . peace. I can hardly use the word in connection with him. Like certain mountains, he has his own storms, his local weather. The phonograph is playing, the alcohol bottle uncorked; Hart is writing on the Cape Hatteras section, and writing well, which is news of interest to the world. The spell laid on him for the past two years by Malicious Animal Magnetism (in which he believes devoutly, as he believes in his own star) has been broken. All the perturbations of the last two years are justified in his eyes by the result. This is bad logic, I think, but how can it be disproved?" MC to Allen Tate, September 9, 1929, Tate Papers.

⁶⁰MC to KB, July 24, 1928; Notebook IV, part two, entry 85, pp. 76-78.

⁶¹"Meditations on My Not Writing," Notebook IV, entry 77, p. 47; SF, p. 201.

⁶²Notebook IV, entry 79, pp. 51-56; BJ, pp. 104-105.

⁶³Frederick Hoffman, The Twenties, pp. 400-408; Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left, pp. 185-190; ER, pp. 218-221. A full account of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, as well as of the literary record of the affair, is given in Louis Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti (1948; rpt. Chicago, 1964), which includes a discussion of Cowley's views on the case as exemplified in ER and his poem "For St. Bartholomew's Day;" Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists, pp. 346-348; David Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian, p. 112.

⁶⁴Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left, p. 189; Elinor Bulkin, "Malcolm Cowley: A Study of His Literary, Social, and Political Thought to 1940," unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973, p. 60; "Echoes of a Crime," New Republic LXXXIV (August 28, 1935), 79; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, August 28, 1929, Wheelwright Papers; Matthew Josephson, "American Letter," transition XIV (Fall 1928), 57.

⁶⁵Bliven's remark is quoted in David Seideman, 'The New Republic': A Voice of Modern Liberalism, p. 84; "Excessive and Colossal," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 14, 1928, p. 3. Reading Cowley's review Josephson granted that Cowley had treated him fairly and had rightly emphasized the Dreyfus affair: "I feared that you were going to cuthbert (read: 'Boyd') me in your review . . . [but] the admonitions . . . were almost dignified and reflected your nicest self. They were just. No relation to the cuthberts and the boyds. Thereby outweighing the disadvantages (of your knowing me too well and 'leaning over backward')." Matthew Josephson to MC, October 10, 1928.

⁶⁶"A Messiah of the Skeptics," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 21, 1928, p. 7.

⁶⁷"A Messiah of the Skeptics," p. 7; "Excessive and Colossal," p. 3; MC to KB, October 16, 1928; October 17, 1928.

⁶⁸Isidor Schneider to MC, n.d. [1928]; MC to Isidor Schneider, two undated letters [early 1929?], Schneider Papers; Cowley's financial arrangement with Loeb is registered in Notebook III, account for November 1928; MC to KB, December 9, 1928.

⁶⁹In December 1928, reviewing his income through writing (including reviews, articles, translations, publisher's reports and advances) over the past year, Cowley calculated that he had earned an average of \$267.50 a month. Notebook III; KB to MC, October 15, 1928, Burke Papers; MC to KB, October 17, 1928; December 9, 1928; December 30, 1928; April 10, 1929.

⁷⁰MC to KB, December 9, 1928; Notebook I, entry 68, p. 51; MC to KB, December 30, 1928.

⁷¹MC to Allen Tate, April 2, 1929, Tate Papers; MC to Edmund Wilson, February 13, 1929, Wilson Papers.

¹MC to Allen Tate, April 2, 1929, Tate Papers; MC to Edmund Wilson, March 30, 1929, Wilson Papers.

²Matthew Josephson to John Brooks Wheelwright, April 4, 1929, Wheelwright Papers; MC to S. Foster Damon, April 18, 1929, Damon Papers.

³ER, p. 224; MC to KB, July 26, 1926.

⁴Details of Cowley's first meeting with Blume are taken from his "Peter Blume: Painting the Phoenix," Virginia Quarterly Review LXI (Summer 1985), 529-536. Blume's memory of his first meeting with Cowley differs at various points; he remembered, for instance, that Cowley was not alone on the occasion but came to Lee Chumley's accompanied by Nathan Asch and William Slater Brown. Interview with Peter Blume, January 31, 1982. See also "Malcolm & Muriel, Peter & Ebie: An Interview with the Cowleys and the Blumes," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 30-31; MC to KB, n.d. [April 10, 1929?].

⁵Interview with Peter Blume, January 31, 1982.

⁶"He never sat for a portrait," Blume remembered, "but I had Malcolm definitely in mind, . . . not symbolically but actually." Cowley also was the model for the dummy in Blume's Light of the World (1932). After finishing Parade Blume moved to Sherman, first to a one-time wooden chapel, which he converted to a studio, then to a little house on Church Road. In 1931 he married Grace Douglas Craton, a Southern girl nicknamed "Ebie," Cowley serving as best man. A year later Blume returned the service, being best man at the occasion of Cowley's second marriage to Muriel Maurer, whom he had met through the Blumes. Later in the decade the Cowleys, at the Blumes' suggestion, bought an old barn across the street on Church Road, which they remodeled into the house they would live in for the rest of their lives. --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade (1978) is dedicated to Peter and Ebie Blume, "Neighbors and friends since always." For Cowley's reminiscences and evaluation of Blume, see his "Peter Blume: Painting the Phoenix," Virginia Quarterly Review LXVI (Summer 1985), 529-536. Quotations in the text are from this article and from "An Interview with Peter Blume" by Donald G. Parker and Warren Herendeen in Visionary Company I (Summer 1981), 56-76. See also the 1985 interview with the Cowleys and Blumes in the summer 1987 Cowley issue of The Visionary Company, pp. 29-53.

⁷Notebook V, entry 93, p. 13. Blume would go on to become a modern painter of international renown. His second big painting, South of Scranton, won first prize at the 1924 Carnegie International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture in Pittsburgh; it is on permanent display in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York. Many of his paintings, which include The Eternal City (1937), The Rock (1948), Tasso's Oak (1960), and From the Metamorphoses (1979), are owned by major American museums and private collections. Cowley continued to admire Blume for "his broad concepts, his patient workmanship, and his stubborn independence." In 1985 he wrote about Blume: "He was utterly

unaffected by the winds of fashion that sweep across the art world as over a field of wheat in Kansas. Peter has been more like a tree standing firm at the end of the field, changing shape with the passage of years, but only in accordance with its inner laws of growth." In an idiom inimitably his own Cowley was paying tribute to an American artist who, in his own special realm, belonged with the literary heroes of his generation. Donald G. Parker and Warren Herendeen, "An Interview with Peter Blume," p. 56; "Peter Blume: Painting the Phoenix," pp. 533-534.

⁸MC to KB, May 5, 1929; MC to KB, December 30, 1928; Fitzgerald is quoted in SF, p. 25; SF, p. 35; MC to KB, n.d. [April 10, 1929?]; May 5, 1929; May 8, 1929; May 15, 1929; June 23, 1929; June 28, 1929.

⁹MC to KB, August 25, 1929; May 23, 1929; July 9, 1929; ER, p. 243; MC to KB, September 30, 1929; DGM, p. 12.

¹⁰The Green Parrot received the following, mostly laudatory reviews: [Anon.], "Cosmopolitan People," New York Times Book Review, May 19, 1929, p. 8; "Notes on Novels," New Republic LXIX (August 14, 1929), 349; untitled review, Outlook CLII (May 29, 1929), 188-189; "Abnormal States," Saturday Review of Literature VI (July 27, 1929), 7; Margaret Cheney Dawson, "Improbability," New York Herald Tribune Books, May 26, 1929, p. 5. The Count's Ball was reviewed in Bookman LXX (January 1930), XV and by Walter R. Brooks, "Behind the Blurbs," Outlook CLIII (December 4, 1929), 548; George Stevens to MC, September 25, 1929; Cowley's correspondence with W. W. Norton about Exile's Return (1934) is in the Norton Archives at the Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹¹Notebook III, accounts for May 1928 through October 1928; MC to Edmund Wilson, January 7, 1928 [1929?], Wilson Papers; Cowley had contracted for the translation of The Sacred Hill through Josephson, then at Macaulay's, as early as October 1927. On September 26, 1927, he had enquired into the progress of Josephson's negotiations with Barrès's widow and Macaulay and had observed that La Colline Inspirée was "the one book I'd really like to translate." Josephson agreed with Cowley's high opinion of the novel: "La Colline Inspirée is one of the purest and solidest books written in the first quarter of this century." MC to Matthew Josephson, September 26, 1927, Josephson Papers; Matthew Josephson to MC, November 25, 1927; n.d. [late 1927?].

¹²"The New Books," Saturday Review of Literature VI (January 4, 1930), 624. More representative was the praise Cowley's rendering received in The Nation: "Any publication in English of Maurice Barrès's classic novel . . . would be a noteworthy event; in Malcolm Cowley's translation there is the rare opportunity of approaching, as closely as is possible through an interpreter, the style and thought of one of the most important French writers of the past half-century. Mr. Cowley not only translates idiomatically and accurately but he achieves the most difficult goal of all--the reproduction of the rhythm of the original, the quiet power of Barrès's clear but laden prose." Florence Codman, "Prose in the Grand Manner," Nation CXXX (January 8, 1930), 50.

¹³"Introduction," The Sacred Hill (New York, 1929), pp. vii-x. Cowley had repeatedly urged Burke to read The Sacred Hill. On July 24, 1928, he had described it as "an admirable novel, parts of which you [Burke] would have liked to write," and a year later, on June 23, 1929, had observed

that from Barrès one could learn "how a man who is not a novelist can write a novel that is like a big chunk of lyric granite." Burke let himself be tempted to read The Sacred Hill, but was disappointed for his own idiosyncratic reasons: "The book was a major disappointment to me," he wrote Cowley on October 3, 1929 (Burke Papers); "His comic relief is shameless, his concepts of rhetorical effectiveness are frequently hackneyed." In his review, too, Burke exemplified his particular concerns with Barrès's "rhetoric." See "The Eloquence of Barrès," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 10, 1929, p. 4. Other reviews worth considering, besides those in The Nation and The Saturday Review of Literature, are: [Anonymous], "Religious Fanaticism," New York Times Book Review (October 20, 1929), p. 7; A. C., "The Sacred Hill," Boston Transcript, November 9, 1929, p. 5.

¹⁴MC to S. Foster Damon, April 18, 1929, Damon Papers; Crane's letter to the Schneiders is quoted in John Unterecker, Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane (New York, 1969), p. 561; WT, pp. 65-66; Unterecker, Voyager, p. 561.

¹⁵Hart Crane to MC, October 24, 1928; November 20, 1928; December 1, 1928, in Robber Rocks, pp. 99-101; Gorham B. Munson to John Farrar, Memorandum, December 27, 1928.

¹⁶WT, p. 67; MC to S. Foster Damon, April 18, 1929, Damon Papers; Harrison Smith to MC, July 27, 1928; MC to Harriet Monroe, January 29, 1929, Poetry Papers.

¹⁷Harry Crosby, Shadows of the Sun, edited by Edward Germain (Santa Barbara, California, 1977), p. 234; Unterecker, Voyager, p. 580; Hart Crane to MC, February, 4, 1929, in Robber Rocks, pp. 112-113.

¹⁸MC to Harriet Monroe, January 29, 1929, Poetry Papers; WT, pp. 67-68; MC to Allen Tate, April 2, 1929, Tate Papers. Tate agreed to the wisdom of Cowley's changes and additions: "Up to now we have all, to an extent, been duped by an excessive zeal for perfect writing. . . . Every book, prose or verse, should represent a mind at its fullest within the limits of the subject; and if our craft is too weak for this, the weakness should be exposed." Allen Tate to MC, April 15, 1919. Cowley's emphasis on the book's unity, whatever its indebtedness to Crane, was in line with the comments he had expressed in earlier reviews. In one of his first reviews for The Dial, in May 1920, he had pleaded for a chronological arrangement of the poems of Siegfried Sassoon so as to reveal "the steady development of a mind" ("Against Nightingales," Dial LXVII [May 1920], 623). Five years later, advising S. Foster Damon about the structure of his book of poems, he had urged Damon to select his poems "from the point of view of one dominant mood, probably the mystical frenzy of your apocalyptic poems. Everything else could be arranged from its bearing on that one theme." (MC to S. Foster Damon, November 28, 1925, Damon Papers). In early 1928, writing for The New Republic, he had praised Humbert Wolfe's feeling for structure and unity in terms which anticipated his own efforts with Blue Juniata: Wolfe, he observed, "has that rare degree of facility which enables him to draw the plans for a volume, to erect the framework, and then to write the poems which will serve as shingles, sash, and clapboarding. Thus his books . . . are really books of verse, and not mere anthologies of poems by the same author" ("Humbert Wolfe," New Republic LIII [February 1, 1928], 304).

When, shortly after, he sat down with Crane to compose his own book of verse, he naturally, as naturally as Crane, thought in terms of "sequence" and "structure."

¹⁹Hart Crane to MC, July 3, 1929, in Robber Rocks, p. 114; WT, p. 68.

²⁰MC to Mr. Schlanger [Octagon Books], June 1, 1967; Allen Tate, "American Poetry Since 1920," Bookman LXVIII (January 1929), 507; Edmund Wilson to Allen Tate, March 21, 1929, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 162; Allen Tate, "A Regional Poet," New Republic LX (August 28, 1929), 51-52. Both Tate's Bookman article and his New Republic review are reprinted in The Poetry Reviews of Allen Tate, 1924-1944, edited with an introduction by Ashley Brown and Frances Neel Cheney (Baton Rouge and London, 1983), pp. 78-88, and 89-91.

²¹MC to Allen Tate, September 9, 1929; April 2, 1929, both Tate Papers; Allen Tate to MC, April 15, 1929; September 20, 1929. Josephson, too, considered reviewing his friend's book a "dangerous and delightful prospect." He intended to review Blue Juniata for transition, but no such review appeared in its pages. Matthew Josephson to MC, July 31, 1929.

²²MC to KB, August 25, 1929; Kenneth Burke, "An Urn of Native Soil," New York Herald Tribune Books, August 18, 1929, p. 2; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, August 28, 1929, Wheelwright Papers.

²³Harriet Monroe, "Man-Size Poems," Poetry XXXV (October 1929), 45-49; Harriet Monroe to MC, September 4, 1929; MC to Harriet Monroe, September 9, 1929; October 17, 1929, both Poetry Papers.

²⁴Louis Untermeyer to MC, July 14, 1929; July 22, 1929; Untermeyer, "Auspicious Debut," Saturday Review of Literature VI (September 28, 1929), 178. Untermeyer promptly asked Cowley for permission to include several of his poems in a revised edition of his Modern American Poetry--A Critical Anthology (New York, 1930); it would contain "The Farm Died," "Mine No. 6," "Blue Juniata," and "Winter: Two Sonnets." Louis Untermeyer to MC, August 10, 1929.

²⁵John Chamberlain, "Modernism in Malcolm Cowley's Poems," New York Times Book Review, September 18, 1929, pp. 2, 10.

²⁶Edwin Seaver, "Cowley's Experiments Suggest Poe, Also Irving Berlin," New York Evening Post, August 17, 1929, p. 7; Horace Gregory, "Vital Contemporary Poetry," New York Sun, August 17, 1929; a clipping of the latter is among the Cowley Papers.

²⁷Ralph Cheney, "Labels and Libels," Contemporary Verse XXV (September 1929), 15; R. Ellsworth Larsson, "Mementoes," Commonweal (December 4, 1929), 150-151.

²⁸Morton Dauwen Zabel, "The Poems of Malcolm Cowley," Nation CXXIX (August 21, 1929), 200; MC to KB, May 8, 1929.

²⁹S. Foster Damon to MC, December 4, 1924; Damon voiced his enthusiasm about Blue Juniata to Cowley personally. He felt that, collectively, the poems seemed "stronger and more authentic than ever," but wondered what "the N. Y. logrollers" would do with it. He called for

"another Amy Lowell" (she had died four years before, in 1925) who would "say what is good and what is bad, and punctuate inflations on both sides, and be a center for theorizing and attack! Since her death, American criticism has collapsed; nobody seems to have any principles except 'I like' and 'They say.'" S. Foster Damon to MC, July 6, 1929. In Blue Juniata Cowley, too, acknowledged his gratitude to Miss Lowell for her "assistance and very practical advice" during the last six years of her life. BJ, p. 111.

³⁰R. P. Blackmur to MC, June 26, 1929, and November 12, 1929. For an account of the projected merger between The Hound & Horn and The Symposium, see Leonard Greenbaum, The Hound & Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly (The Hague, 1966), pp. 44-46, and G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review, pp. 109, 148-150. "The death of The Dial did us considerable good," Blackmur wrote to Pound shortly before his dismissal from the magazine. "I mean we have Burke, Cowley, Williams, and possibly a few others." R. P. Blackmur to Ezra Pound, October 2, 1929, quoted in Greenbaum, p. 40. Blackmur, who regarded himself as "[b]eing in the literary generation which is so to speak immaturely your own," remained sympathetic to Cowley. In his double-review of Cowley's Exile's Return (1934) and T. S. Eliot's After Strange Gods (1934), he aligned himself, subtly and not uncritically, with Cowley rather than Eliot. See his chapter "The Dangers of Authorship" in The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation (1935; Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1962), pp. 172-183. Cowley lost much of his sympathy for The Hound & Horn when he adopted a near-Marxian viewpoint in the 1930s. In 1932 he suggested to Granville Hicks that "[s]omebody ought really to do a materialistic interpretation of the Hound and Horn," and proposed Hicks use Lincoln Kirstein's novel Flesh is Heir as the opportunity for a leftist attack. He was, thus, in a sense the initiator of the ensuing controversy between The New Republic and the editors of The Hound & Horn. MC to Granville Hicks, February 25, 1932, Hicks Papers, and G. A. M. Janssens, The American Literary Review, pp. 144-146. When the magazine expired in 1934, Cowley again ranged himself on the side of the radical critics. "I didn't have to choke back great sobs when I heard that The Hound and Horn was suspending publication, but none the less I was sorry to see it go," he observed in The New Republic. In line with his earlier distrust he preferred to see The Hound & Horn as continuing "the esthetic tradition" of The Harvard Monthly and The Dial, a literary mode which, by 1934, he had come to believe had shot its bolt: "in an age of political unrest there was nobody sufficiently interested in a purely esthetic magazine to make the sacrifices necessary to keep it alive." "Midsummer Medley," New Republic LXXX (August 15, 1934), 24-25.

³¹Leonard Greenbaum, The Hound & Horn, p. 162; Yvor Winters to MC, September 11, 1929; Yvor Winters, "The Poetry of Malcolm Cowley," Hound & Horn III (October-December 1929), 111-113; MC to KB, May 8, 1929; Yvor Winters to MC, August 13, 1929. Other reviews of Blue Juniata appeared in Outlook CLII (August 21, 1929), 671; Symposium I (January 1930), 135-138; Virginia Quarterly Review (1930), 151-160. The latter two were omnibus-reviews of recent poetry.

³²Yvor Winters to MC, August 13, 1929; Conrad Aiken to MC, May 23 [1929]; July 25, 1929. In 1952, recalling Aiken's harsh comments on Blue Juniata, Cowley observed: "I am conceited or humble enough to think that Conrad was wrong in this instance. The poems were me, or as much of me as

I was then capable of putting on paper. For all my talk about technique I wrote--always emotionally, often awkwardly--those poems only that forced me to write them, and that was a bad habit I should have learned to overcome." "Biography with Letters," Wake XI (Summer 1952), 29.

³³In 1927, a propos of Cowley's niggardly praise of Blue Voyage in Brentano's Book Chat, Aiken had explained his aesthetic credo to Cowley in terms which seemed to reach for a synthesis between "expressionist" and "constructionist" art: "I wish you felt otherwise than you do about B. V.," Aiken wrote, "about which I feel that you're entirely wrong. I can't feel any aesthetic or moral error in the casting of an autobiographical theme into the third person; in fact I believe it is possible to be more detachedly honest in this form (if you insist on honesty as a prime criterion) than in straight confession. At all events, I am much interested in this form--the autobiographical turned novel, given shape and distance. And it seemed to me a useful thing to do, at this point in my life: I mean, to give myself away, for the benefit of any stray psychologist of literature who might be interested in diagnosing the case of the author of Forslin, et al. And incidentally, to twist the thing into a design of its own, to make it stand on its own legs as an organism." Conrad Aiken to MC, August 26, 1927.

³⁴MC to KB, May 23, 1929; Notebook IV, part two, entry 86, pp. 79-80.

³⁵"The Dry Season," BJCP, p. 90; The fifth section, "The Dry Season," of Blue Juniata: Collected Poems (1968) is prefaced by a prose note which reads in part: "By 1930 or thereabouts we were men on the threshold of middle age, each with a household to support. We had ceased to be a generation of friends inscribing poems to one another, and of sometimes bitter rivals united by their distrust of older persons; instead we were busy with our separate jobs. . . . It was exciting to have a share in the business of the world, perhaps in shaping its future, but some of us came to feel that we were not dealing with persons any longer; there was no time for that. More and more we dealt with categories and convenient abstractions. . . . From those years I remember looking for simple emotions that would, at any cost, reassure me that I lived. There was not much time for writing poems, less even than for truly personal relations, but I tried to say in all simplicity that black is black, that love is good, and that home is something you can never go back to. What I feared most and sometimes detected was a dryness of the heart." BJCP, p. 88.

³⁶MC to Allen Tate, September 9, 1929, Tate Papers; MC to Wallace Stegner, November 13, 1968; MC to Walter Snow, August 27, 1971.

³⁷MC to Edmund Wilson, February 13, 1929, Wilson Papers; BJ, pp. 33-34; 49-50.

³⁸MC to KB, May 16, 1929; June 11, 1929; June 23, 1929; July 9, 1929; July 11, 1929; MC to Edmund Wilson, July 17, 1929, Wilson Papers.

³⁹MC to KB, August 25, 1929; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, August 28, 1929, Wheelwright Papers; Notebook V, entry 94, pp. 13-15.

⁴⁰MC to KB, June 23, 1929.

⁴¹Allen Tate, "American Poetry Since 1920," Bookman LXVIII (January

1929), 503-508; Kenneth Burke, "A Decade of American Fiction," Bookman LXIX (August 1929), 561-567; Gorham B. Munson, "The Young Critics of the Nineteen-Twenties," Bookman LXX (December 1929), 369-373. The widespread feeling that an era in literary history was ending did not only induce a mood of literary stocktaking but also led several of the dominant literary magazines of the 1920s to suspend publication, most notably The Dial and The Little Review. See, in this light, Jane Heap, "Lost, A Renaissance," Little Review XII (May 1929), 5-6.

⁴²When Henry Dan Piper collected Cowley's articles and reviews of the 1930s in Think Back On Us . . . (1967), he naturally divided the book into two parts, "The Literary Record" and "The Social Record;" "Four Books About Ourselves," Charm V (June 1926), 33.

⁴³Cf. ER, pp. 4-7, 18-23; "Our Own Generation," New York Herald Tribune Books, June 23, 1929, pp. 1, 6.

⁴⁴Notebook IV, part two, entry 88, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁵Notebook VII, entry 85a, pp. 12-14.

⁴⁶Cowley named the following works as marked by the "new primitive" element in contemporary writing: Cummings's The Enormous Room, Him, and VI Poems; Orient Express by Dos Passos; The Sun Also Rises and in our time by Hemingway; The Office by Nathan Asch; Nothing Is Sacred by Josephine Herbst; and Engagement by John Herrmann.

⁴⁷"If one reads very many of the 'Freudian' novels which have been published during the last ten years," Cowley observed in his 1929 essay, "one is forced to conclude that the subconscious is gray and formless; that one man's subconscious too often resembles another's." His observations anticipate his later distrust of such devices of the Art Novel as the "interior monologue." In his speech before the 1935 American Writer's Congress he observed that "the inner world which [the device of the interior monologue] was supposed to illuminate was really not very interesting, not very fresh. The inner world of one middle-class novelist was very much like the inner world of another middle-class novelist. And the liberating effect of the revolutionary movement has been to carry the interest of novelists outside of themselves, into the violent contrasts and struggles of the outer world." TBOU, p. 90.

⁴⁸"The New Primitives," New York Herald Tribune Books, June 30, 1929, pp. 1, 6.

⁴⁹SF, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁰SF, p. 16. The distrust, Cowley wrote in A Second Flowering (p. 17), "also helped to shape the prose style of a generation which, as a rule, preferred the colloquial tone even in critical essays." Cowley named the example of Edmund Wilson, but the observation seems equally pertinent, if not more so, to his own critical practice. Interestingly enough, Kenneth Burke's stylistic propensity was diametrically opposite to Cowley's (or Hemingway's): from the very first he seemed bent on developing a language and a critical idiom so uniquely and subjectively his own, that certain of his critics have come to feel that Burke was, in effect, increasingly enveloping himself in a solipsistic linguistic

universe (See Grant Webster, The Republic of Letters: A History of Postwar American Literary Opinion [Baltimore and London, 1979], pp. 174-175). On October 3, 1929, having read Cowley's essay-review of A Farewell to Arms and recognizing its pertinency to his friend's own stylistics, Burke commented in a letter: "I do not have so strongly as you the test of naturalness in writing--for it leads too inexorably to Hemingway, whom I hate as though sent upon the earth to hate him. . . . There is no particular virtue attached to naturalness, except where it is a hit, where the naturalness is exceptional in its enlightenment." KB to MC, October 3, 1929, Burke Papers.

⁵¹"Not Yet Demobilized," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 6, 1929, pp. 1, 6. Robert O. Stephens, ed., Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception (New York, 1977) reprints extracts dealing specifically with A Farewell to Arms, but omits the crucial middle section which became "Ambulance Service" (ER, pp. 36-47).

⁵²ER, p. 144; Notebook V, pp. 21-22; Notebook V, "Judgment by Effect," p. 20; "Winter: Two Sonnets" and "The Streets of Air," BJ, pp. 102-103, 108; Notebook VII, entry 82, p. 3; Notebook VI, entry 4, p. 9; Notebook VI, entry 9, p. 14.

⁵³"The Literary Business," New Republic LIX (July 3, 1929), 172-174. As early as August 15, 1930, Cowley observed to Tate: "I take the New Republic view of anti-industrialism, and believe that we can no more defeat present tendencies than we can make water run uphill--we can merely deflect them." MC to Allen Tate, August 15, 1930, Tate Papers.

⁵⁴"Machine-Made America," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 3, 1929, pp. 1, 6.

⁵⁵"The Escape from America," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 10, 1929, pp. 1, 6.

⁵⁶WT, pp. 92, 97; Lewis P. Simpson, "Malcolm Cowley and the American Writer," Sewanee Review LXXXIV (April-June 1976), 225; "The Battle over Ezra Pound," New Republic CXXI (October 3, 1949), p. 20 (FL, p. 106).

⁵⁷"The Business of Being A Poet," New York Herald Tribune Books, November 17, 1929, pp. 1, 6. In Our Singing Strength Kreymborg singled out Cowley as the most "significant" among the poets brought forth by Harvard, and commented that it was "nothing less than exasperating" that Cowley wrote "only on rare occasions." Our Singing Strength: An Outline of American Poetry, 1620-1930 (New York, 1929), p. 583.

⁵⁸Notebook VI, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁹Frederick Hoffman, The Twenties, pp. 165-172; J. David Hoeveler, Jr., The New Humanism. A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1977), pp. 81-106.

⁶⁰In alphabetic order the signers to the Open Letter were: R. P. Blackmur, Louise Bogan, Slater Brown, Kenneth Burke, John Chamberlain, Malcolm Cowley, Hart Crane, Edward Dahlberg, Babette Deutsch, Herbert S. Gorman, C. Hartley Grattan, Henry Hazlitt, Geoffrey T. Hellman, Granville Hicks, Raymond Holden, Matthew Josephson, Joseph Wood Krutch, T. S.

Matthews, F. O. Matthiessen, Katherine Anne Porter, Phelps Putnam, John Crowe Ransom, Burton Rascoe, John Riddell, Paul Rosenfeld, Isidor Schneider, Gilbert Seldes, Genevieve Taggard, Allen Tate, Mark Van Doren, John Wheelwright, Edmund Wilson, Stark Young. "Wanted: A Humanist Masterpiece," New Republic LXII (March 26, 1930), 153; "Correspondence," New Republic LXII (April 16, 1930), 247-248; "Humanizing Society," in C. Hartley Grattan, ed., The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium (New York, 1930), pp. 79-81.

⁶¹C. Hartley Grattan to MC, January 27 [1930]; n.d. [early february 1930?]. The symposium appeared in the late summer of 1930. It featured contributions by Grattan, Wilson, Henry Hazlitt, Rascoe, Tate, Burke, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Blackmur, Chamberlain, Bernard Bandler II, Winters and Lewis Mumford. Cowley's contribution was entitled "Humanizing Society." It appeared in a shorter version in The New Republic of April 9, 1930, as "Angry Professors." The version reprinted in TBOU, pp. 3-13, omits the crucial sixth section of the symposium essay, which it replaces by section V, which did not appear in the New Republic version.

⁶²The Bookman was soon to be transformed into The American Review, which would come under fire as a notoriously reactionary, fascist and racist periodical; Notebook VI, "Humanism," pp. 18-19.

⁶³Cf. J. David Hoeveler, Jr., The New Humanism, p. 131.

⁶⁴ER, p. 34.

⁶⁵Notebook VI, "Humanism," p. 26.

⁶⁶Notebook VI, "Humanism," p. 24.

⁶⁷"Angry Professors," New Republic LXII (April 9, 1930), 207-211; "Humanizing Society," in The Critique of Humanism, pp. 63-84. For an earlier notebook version of the extended quoted passage, drafted in late 1929 or early 1930, see the present author's "The Fabulous Ostrich of Art: Malcolm Cowley's Notebooks of the Twenties," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 158-159.

⁶⁸DGM, p. 12; MC to John Brooks Wheelwright, November 17, 1925, Wheelwright Papers; MC to KB, August 8, 1920; ER, p. 160; Notebook IV, part two, entry 88, p. 83.

¹FCF, p. 172.

²R. P. Blackmur, "The Dangers of Authorship," in The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation (1935; rpt. Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1962), p. 172. Blackmur's essay originally appeared in Hound & Horn VII (July-September 1934), 719-726.

³Lewis P. Simpson, "The Decorum of the Writer," Sewanee Review LXXXVI (Fall 1978), 569.

⁴Cf. John W. Aldridge, "Malcolm Cowley at Eighty," Michigan Quarterly Review XVIII (Summer 1980), 486.

⁵For Wilson's reviews, see The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties (New York, 1952).

⁶"A Reminiscence: Edmund Wilson on The New Republic," New Republic CLXVII (July 1, 1972), 25-28. Parts of the article were incorporated in the final chapter of SF, pp. 236, 241-242.

⁷Henry Dan Piper to MC, March 4, 1969; DGM, p. 12. For Cowley and Wilson, also cf. Leonard Kriegel, "Art and the Book Reviewer," Nation CCIV (June 5, 1967), 732.

⁸Of the major works of the lost generation published in the 1920s Cowley reviewed at length only The White Oxen and A Farewell to Arms, though he wrote extensively about the writers of his age-group in other ways. His first serious consideration of Crane came in 1930 ("A Preface to Hart Crane," New Republic LXII [April 23, 1930], 276-277); of Cummings and Dos Passos in 1932 ("The Last of Lyric Poets," New Republic LXIX [January 27, 1932], 299-300, and "The Poet and the World," New Republic LXX [April 27, 1932], 303-305); of Fitzgerald in 1934 ("Breakdown," New Republic LXXIX [June 6, 1934], 105-106); of Wolfe and Faulkner in 1935 ("The Forty Days of Thomas Wolfe," New Republic LXXXII [March 20, 1935], 163-164, and "Voodoo Dance," New Republic LXXXII [April 10, 1935], 254-255).

⁹"A Reminiscence: Edmund Wilson on The New Republic," p. 25; SF, p. 242. The phrase "Ishmael of his generation" is Robert E. Spiller's in Milestones in American Literary History (Westport, Connecticut, 1977), p. 41. Just as in 1928 Cowley defended Poe against the critical "jackals," so fifty years later he spoke up on behalf of Hemingway in "Mr. Papa and the Parricides," WT, pp. 21-34.

¹⁰Cowley's correspondence with W. W. Norton is at the Butler Library, Columbia University, New York. MC to Warren I. Susman, March 8, 1965; CMC p. 171.

¹¹For fuller bibliographical information concerning these and subsequent prepublications of parts of Exile's Return, see Diane U. Eisenberg, Malcolm Cowley: A Checklist of His Writings, 1916-1973

(Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1975), pp. 109-114. The third article in the series, Cowley's account of the Munson-Josephson fisticuffs in Woodstock, N. Y., in the fall of 1923, caused a brief but intense flare-up of all the old animosities between Cowley and Munson. Cowley's "Exile's Return III: Coffee and Pistols for Two," New Republic LXVIII (October 21, 1931), 259-262, contained a spiteful caricature of Munson's literary character and his role in the founding of Secession in which Cowley let himself be carried away by the self-satirical, trivializing mood of his retrospective evaluations. It was much toned down in Exile's Return (1934), possibly as a result of the polemical debate Cowley and Munson conducted over the Secessionist past in the pages of Sewanee Review and Contempo during the winter of 1931-1932. Munson attacked Cowley's "extravagant fiction" in "Questions for Cowley," Contempo I (December 15, 1931), 1, 4. Cowley defended his account of the "ludicrous and dead" quarrels of the past in "Munsoniana," Contempo I (January 1, 1932), 1, 4. Munson, in turn, answered Cowley's attempt to "hoodwink" his readers in a later issue of Contempo, and in "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," Sewanee Review XL (January 1932), 24-54, presented his own version of events, in which he retaliated with an even more extravagantly spiteful portrait of Cowley which did not have the excuse of deliberate caricature. In a later version of the article, "A Comedy of Exiles," Literary Review XII (1968), 41-75 (reprinted in The Awakening Twenties [1985], pp. 157-188), Munson, too, toned down his original attack. In the summer of 1932 Samuel Putnam challenged Cowley's contention that he and his friends had brought Dada to America and presented the anecdote of the urinating incident in Cowley's studio at Giverny (as told to him by Louis Aragon) as "the Secessionists' culminating achievement." Samuel Putnam, "If Dada Comes to America," Contempo II (July 15, 1932), 1, 3, 5. Cowley answered with a letter to the editor in which he presented his memory of the notorious evening ("not to be printed"), and concluded: "As for the question WHO BROUGHT DADA TO NEW YORK? the answer is WHO THE HELL CARES?" MC to M. A. Abernethy, July 29, 1932, Contempo Papers.

¹²The final stages of the writing of Exile's Return can be reconstructed from the new series of more elaborate notebooks Cowley started during his stay at Cloverlands. Notebook I, n.s., entries May 17, 1933 through May 12, 1934, Sherman, Connecticut. See also DGM, pp. 192-206, 219-224.

¹³DGM, pp. 51-55, 63-67, 77-82.

¹⁴"Twenty-Four Youngsters," New Republic LXXVII (July 8, 1931), 205-206; "Kentucky Coal Town," New Republic LXX (March 2, 1932), 67-70; "The Flight of the Bonus Army," New Republic LXXII (August 17, 1932), 13-15; "Red Day in Washington," New Republic LXXIII (December 21, 1932), 153-155. The story of Cowley's radicalization is told at length in DGM, passim. Cowley's pledge of allegiance to the Communist Party Presidential candidates was reported in "Writers in Support of Communists," Daily Worker, September 14, 1932, p. 1, and, more elaborately, in "2,000 Professionals, Writers, Artists, Pledge Support to Communists in Elections," Daily Worker, October 14, 1932, p. 1. The latter quoted from a speech Cowley made at an election dinner held under the auspices of the Independent Committee for Foster and Ford on October 13: "It wasn't the depression that got me. It was the boom. I saw all my friends writing the tripe demanded by the present order, stultified and corrupted and unable to make real use of their talents. After that, I had to discover the

reason for this state of affairs, which comes from the nature of a ruling class which lives by exploiting everyone else. Then I went through the South, and saw how cleverly the rulers try to divide white and black workers by giving the whites a trifle more than the black sharecroppers. That taught me the necessity of unity of white and black workers and professional workers under the leadership of the Communist Party."

¹⁵Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left (1961; Avon Books, 1965), p. 348; DGM, pp. 117-118.

¹⁶Hamilton Basso to MC, July 17, 1939. On February 16, 1931, Cowley had written to Burke that "a whole scheme of life" had "collapsed" and that he was convinced he would have to "find a new one and find it for myself. . . . I don't think my troubles are peculiar to myself. A lot of people I know have been moving in what now seems to be the wrong direction; they too will have to change or go bust."

¹⁷"Never so much as during the writing of this book have I been troubled by doubts concerning myself," he noted on June 2, 1933. "All my fine, simple prescriptions to younger writers . . . all these obvious truths are forgotten and I wonder whether I really have or have ever had anything to say. . . . I don't know whether it is worthwhile setting down this history of people most of whom will be forgotten along with the decade in which they flourished--flouruerunt circa 1920-1930." Two weeks later he had become convinced that "the book should end with a personal confession of belief." Notebook I, n.s., June 16, 1933.

¹⁸Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years (New York, 1973), p. 153. Pells's study contains an illuminating discussion of the place of Exile's Return in the context of its times; see pp. 154, 156-159. Notebook I, n.s., entry for May 12, 1934; ER (1934), pp. 12, 286, and passim.

¹⁹Yesterday's Burdens is the title of the novel by Robert Coates published in 1933 and reissued in 1975 by Southern Illinois University Press. ER (1934), pp. 287-288, 294, 223, 302. The epilogue to the original edition is reprinted in TBOU, pp. 56-62.

²⁰ER (1934), p. 240.

²¹MC to Warren I. Susman, March 8, 1965; DGM, pp. 227-232.

²²Representative reviews were the following: Arthur Mizener, "Home Was the Stranger," New York Times Book Review, June 10, 1951, p. 9; Lloyd Morris, "Most Vivacious Account of Literary Life in the Twenties," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, July 8, 1951, pp. 1, 10; Maxwell Geismar, "Cowley and the Lost Generation," New York Evening Post, June 9, 1951, p. 3; F. W. Dupee, "Still a Good Book," American Scholar XX (Autumn 1951), 480, 482. Robert E. Spiller's review for American Quarterly III (Fall 1951), 273-275, is reprinted in Milestones in American Literary History, pp. 39-41. See also Mizener's "The Long Debauch," New Statesman LXII (September 29, 1961), 433-434, which considers the belated appearance of the revised edition in England. The principal additions and deletions were the following: the section "Political Interlude" and the epilogue were dropped from the original edition; a new foreword and epilogue were added; the section on Harry Crosby was revised at the

request of Caresse Crosby; and new sections were added on Hart Crane and the Sacco and Vanzetti case. In addition, there were revisions of style and perspective throughout. Thus, the section "Historical Parallel" was rewritten and expanded to incorporate the changed perspective on Russia in 1951.

²³Cowley had not only continued to review with critical loyalty the works of the lost generation published between 1934 and 1951, he had also spoken up in its defense (see, for example, "In Defense of the 1920's," New Republic CX [April 24, 1944], 564-565, reprinted in FL, pp. 179-184) and helped to bring its critical reputation up to par with its achievement by editing The Portable Hemingway (1944) and The Portable Faulkner (1946), compiling The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1951), and editing what he thought was the "final version" of Tender Is the Night (1951). He had also assembled much original biographical information on Hemingway, part of which went into "A Portrait of Mister Papa," Life XXVI (January 10, 1949), 86-90, 93-94, 96-98, 100-101.

²⁴ER (1951), pp. 296-300.

²⁵ER (1951), p. 291. Peter Blume remembered that Robert Coates, whose Yesterday's Burdens Cowley had taken as a representative account in his section "Connecticut Valley," registered objections (interview with Peter Blume, January 31, 1982). Katherine Anne Porter as late as 1965 protested at being classified as an "exile" (Katherine Anne Porter to MC, March 3, 1965) and Kenneth Burke ironically complained in 1985 that in the original Exile's Return Cowley was "obviously phasing me out" ("KB to MC: An Interview with Kenneth Burke," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 [Summer 1987], p. 89). Cowley's symbolic use of Harry Crosby's life story--a vicarious use, since he had really meant to write about Hart Crane--has particularly come under fire. The case against Cowley's generational paradigm of exile and homecoming and his use of Crosby's life was stated forcefully, but hardly conclusively, by Geoffrey Wolff in his Black Sun. The Brief Transit and Violent Eclipse of Harry Crosby (New York, 1976), 114-117, 306-308, and *passim*. Wolff's initial inspiration for writing the life of Crosby had been Cowley's account in Exile's Return, which he credits with gracefully keeping alive the memory of Crosby. For Cowley's devastating refutation of Wolff, see his "Foreword" to Karen Lane Rood, ed., American Writers in Paris, 1920-1939 (Dictionary of American Literary Biography 4; Detroit, 1980), pp. xi-xiii. Leon Edel, too, has wondered whether Cowley's choice of Crosby has been "genuinely relevant," but finds that Wolff's supposedly corrective biography provides "only a larger picture of what Cowley in essence discerned" ("Introduction" to Exile's Return, Limited Editions Club, 1981, p. xviii). Edward Germain, who edited Crosby's diaries for the Black Sparrow Press, saw no reason to challenge Cowley's interpretation of Crosby ("Introduction" to Shadows of the Sun. The Diaries of Harry Crosby [Santa Barbara, California, 1977], pp. 7-17).

²⁶MC to KB, August 6, 1931. The qualification of Exile's Return as "epic-making" was made by Burke in an interview with the editors of The Visionary Company for the special Cowley issue (Summer 1987), p. 93.

²⁷Burke made his comment in a speech on the occasion of the presentation to Cowley of the Gold Medal for Belles Lettres and Criticism, May 20, 1981. The speech is reprinted in the Cowley issue of

The Visionary Company, pp. 9-10. Brooks's comment appeared as a blurb on the jacket of Exile's Return (1951).

²⁸Lewis P. Simpson, "Malcolm Cowley and the American Writer," Sewanee Review LXXXIV (April-June 1976), 237.

²⁹Warner Berthoff, "Modern Literature and the Condition of Exile," in Fiction and Events: Essays in Criticism and Literary History (New York, 1971), p. 78. Berthoff's essay contains a valuable discussion of Cowley's "saga" of exile and return in the context of the international experience of literary expatriation.

³⁰Leon Edel, "Introduction," Exile's Return (Limited Editions Club, 1981), p. xi; Robert E. Spiller, Milestones in American Literary History, p. 39. Wolff's critique is given in his biography of Harry Crosby (see note 25 above). Lynn's excoriation of Exile's Return appears in The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing About America (Chicago and London, 1983), pp. 94-96. His embittered and biased denunciation departs from the distorted premise that "no other interpretation of American literature has more engaged the national mind, or more thoroughly stultified it, than the legend of the lost generation that Cowley wove from the warp of the Communist line and the woof of his own romanticism;" the last quotation but one is from John Aldridge, "Malcolm Cowley at Eighty," p. 481. Spiller's comment appears in Milestones, p. 39.

³¹Alfred Kazin, Starting Out in the Thirties (Boston, 1965), p. 16. For Wilson's sharp upbraidings, see Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972 (New York, 1977), pp. 286-288, 309-310. Tate's and Basso's letters to Cowley have not been published; Daniel Aaron quotes from several of them in his chapter on Cowley in Writers on the Left, pp. 347-355.

³²Felix Morrow, "Malcolm Cowley: Portrait of a Stalinist Intellectual," New Militant II (April 18, 1936), 2-3. Eugene Lyons excoriated Cowley in "Malcolm Cowley: 1938," Modern Monthly V (June 1938), 6-8. James T. Farrell criticized Exile's Return in A Note on Literary Criticism (New York 1936), pp. 157-174, and attacked Cowley's review of Dos Passos's Adventures of a Young Man (New Republic XCIX [June 14, 1939], 163) in "Dos Passos and His Critics," American Mercury XVII (August 1939), 489-494, besides being generally hostile to Cowley in the late 1930s. Joseph Epstein, ("The Literary Life Today," New Criterion I [September 1983], 13) thought that "nearly every one of the printed literary opinions of Malcolm Cowley . . . needs to be fumigated for possible political motive." Kenneth Lynn's excoriations can be found in The Air-Line to Seattle, pp. 108-131, 163-171. For Cowley's answer, see "Hemingway's Wound--And Its Consequences for American Literature," Georgia Review XXXVIII (Summer 1984), 223-239. The debate was continued in "Reader's Forum," Georgia Review XXXVIII (Fall 1984), 668-672, with responses from Lynn, Philip Young and Cowley. For Kazin on Cowley, see Starting Out in the Thirties, pp. 15-20. Aaron's views are given in Writers on the Left, pp. 347-355, and passim. Robert Alter, "The Travels of Malcolm Cowley," Commentary LXX (August 1980), 33-40; George Core, "Malcolm Cowley and the Literary Imperium," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 16-28; Lewis P. Simpson, "Cowley's Odyssey: Literature and Faith in the Thirties," Sewanee Review LXXXIX (Fall 1981),

520-539; WT, p. 139.

³³SF, p. 241; Kazin, Starting Out in the Thirties, p. 15.

³⁴See, for example, "To a Revolutionary Critic," New Republic LXXVI (November 8, 1933), 368-369; "Art Tomorrow," New Republic LXXIX (May 23, 1934), 34-36 (part of the original epilogue to ER [1934]); "Literature and Politics," New Republic LXXXI (January 2, 1935), 224; "A Note on Marxian Criticism," New Republic LXXXI (January 30, 1935), 337; "What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for a Writer," New Masses XV (May 7, 1935), 20-22; "Marx and Plekhanov," New Republic LXXXIX (December 30, 1936), 277-278. Reprinted in TBOU, pp. 47-51, 56-62, 78-80, 81-83, 87-94, 130-135.

³⁶"The Art of Insurrection," New Republic LXXIV (April 12, 1933), 248 (TBOU, p. 28); "Fellow Traveler," New Republic LXXXII (May 1, 1935), 346; Edmund Wilson to MC, October 20, 1938, in Letters on Literature and Politics, p. 310; "Poet in Politics," New Republic XCVI (September 21, 1938), 191-192 (TBOU, pp. 324-328); "Baudelaire as Revolutionist," New Republic LXXXVI (April 15, 1936), 287-288 (TBOU, pp. 283-287); "Footnotes to a Life of Marx," New Republic LXXXVI (February 26, 1936), 79 (TBOU, p. 105).

³⁷"Socialists and Symbolists," New Republic XCVI (September 28, 1938), 218-219 (TBOU, pp. 328-332); "What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for the Writer," New Masses XV (May 7, 1935), 20-22 (TBOU, pp. 87-94).

³⁸Lewis Simpson, "The Decorum of the Writer," pp. 569-570.

³⁹"The Michael Golden Legend," Decision II (July 1941), 44-45 (TBOU, pp. 194-195).

⁴⁰"Faith and the Future," in Whose Revolution?, edited by Irving Dewitt Talmadge (New York, 1941), pp. 135-165. A shorter version is reprinted as "Communism and Christianity" in FL, pp. 12-24.

⁴¹Cowley's experiences in Washington, D. C., in 1942 are described in WT, p. 158; by Donald Faulkner in his "Introduction" to FL, pp. xiv-xvi; and by George Core in "Malcolm Cowley and the Literary Imperium," pp. 24-25. The quotation in the text appears on p. 21. For Cowley's experiences in Seattle, see FL, pp. 107-111.

⁴²A valuable first consideration of Cowley's "middle years" is James M. Kempf's "Cowley's 'Middle Career:' In Defense of the 1920's at the American Mid-Century," Visionary Company II, 2 & III, 1 (Summer 1987), 121-130.

⁴³Cowley's essay on Hawthorne, the introduction to The Portable Hawthorne (1948), appeared first as two articles: "Hawthorne in Solitude," New Republic CXIX (August 2, 1948), 19-23, and "Hawthorne in the Looking-Glass," Sewanee Review LVI (Autumn 1948), 545-563. Reprinted integrally in MWH, pp. 3-34.

⁴⁴Cowley's reconsideration of Whitman, the introduction to The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman (1948), appeared first as four articles: "Walt Whitman: The Miracle," New Republic CXIV (March 18,

1946), 185-188; "Walt Whitman: The Secret," New Republic CXIV (April 8, 1946), 481-484; "Walt Whitman: The Philosopher," New Republic CXVII (September 29, 1947), 29-31; "Whitman: The Poet," New Republic CXVII (October 20, 1947), 27-30. Reprinted integrally in MWH, pp. 35-75

⁴⁵"The Dispossessed," New Republic CVI (June 22, 1942), 865-866 (FL, pp. 36-40); "American Literature in Wartime," New Republic CIX (December 6, 1943), 800-803 (FL, pp. 3-11); MWH, p. 34; "Introduction," The Portable Hemingway (1944), p. vii; "Introduction," The Portable Faulkner (1946), p. x; FCF, pp. 153-157.

⁴⁶Cowley's articles on naturalism appeared mostly in 1947: "Naturalism's Terrible McTeague," New Republic CXVI (May 5, 1947), 31-33; "Sister Carrie's Brother," New Republic CXVI (May 26, 1947), 23-25; "The Slow Triumph of Sister Carrie," New Republic CXVI (June 23, 1947), 24-27; "'Not Men:' A Natural History of American Naturalism," Kenyon Review IX (Summer 1947), 414-435. Collected in MWH, pp. 116-152, 153-165. For the persistence of naturalism into American fiction at mid-century, see "Naturalism: No Teacup Tragedies," in LS, pp. 74-95. MWH, p. 74. The last phrase quoted is Alfred Kazin's in On Native Grounds (1942; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 314.

⁴⁷SF, p. 124.

⁴⁸SF, p. 249.

⁴⁹WF, pp. 256-266.

⁵⁰"Criticism: A Many-Windowed House," Saturday Review of Literature XLIV (August 12, 1961), 10-11, 46-47. Reprinted in MWH, pp. 244-252.

⁵¹John W. Aldridge, In Search of Heresy: American Literature in an Age of Conformity (1954; Port Washington, New York, 1967), pp. 166-176. Aldridge's earlier book After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars (New York, 1951) is much indebted, especially in its opening chapters, to Exile's Return. For Aldridge's finely balanced later appreciation of Cowley, see his "Malcolm Cowley at Eighty," Michigan Quarterly Review XVIII (Summer 1980), 481-490.

⁵²"In Defense of the 1920's," New Republic CX (April 24, 1944), 564-565 (FL, pp. 179-184); "Exploring a World of Nightmares," New York Times Book Review, March 27, 1960, pp. 1, 40 (FL, pp. 236-240). For Cowley on Fiedler, cf. MWH, p. 249; "Faulkner: The Etiology of His Art," WT, pp. 214-230.

⁵³For Alger and Hearn, see MWH, pp. 76-88, 100-115; for Damon, Coates and Caldwell, see WT, pp. 35-50, 82-94, 113-132; for Thurber and Algren, see FL, pp. 200-209, 349-353; for Pound and Frost, see MWH, pp. 178-190, 201-212.

⁵⁴For Brooks, see MWH, pp. 213-228; for the "middle-American prose style," see FL, pp. 185-193; the introductory essay to Leaves of Grass is reprinted in FL, pp. 140-168.

⁵⁵Lewis Simpson, "The Decorum of the Writer," pp. 567-568; Cowley's two-part portrait of Maxwell Perkins appeared first in The New Yorker XX

(April 1, 1944), 28, 32, 35-36, and (April 8, 1944), 30-34, 36, 39-40. It was reprinted in FL, pp. 55-66, and reissued, with a "Prefatory Note," as a little book, Unshaken Friend: A Profile of Maxwell Perkins, in 1985 by the publisher Robert Rinehart; "A Natural History of the American Writer" appears in LS on pp. 132-228. For Cowley's expertise in the field of publishing, see the chapters "Cheap Books for the Millions" and "Hardbacks or Paperbacks?" in LS, pp. 96-114, 115-131. It was again typical that for The Literary History of the United States, edited by Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Seidel Canby (New York, 1948), Cowley wrote the chapters "Creating an Audience" (with Canby; pp. 1119-1134), "How Writers Lived" (pp. 1263-1272), and "American Books Abroad" (pp. 1374-1391).

⁵⁶"The Battle over Ezra Pound," New Republic CXXI (October 3, 1949), 17-20 (FL, pp. 99-106).

⁵⁷"Some Dangers to American Writing," New Republic CXXXI (November 22, 1954), 114-117 (FL, pp. 112-118).

⁵⁸Cowley has taught at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1950; Stanford University in 1956, 1959, 1960-1961, and 1965; University of Michigan in 1957; University of California at Berkeley in 1962; Cornell University in 1964; University of Minnesota in 1971; and University of Warwick, England, in 1973.

⁵⁹See, for example, his "Invitation to Innovators," Saturday Review of Literature XXXVII (August 21, 1954), 7-8, 38-41, which was incorporated into the concluding chapter to LS, "The Next Fifty Years in American Literature," pp. 229-246.

⁶⁰For Cheever, see FL, pp. 360-374. Cowley's efforts on behalf of Kerouac are recreated in lively detail in Adam Gussow's "Bohemia Revisited: Malcolm Cowley, Jack Kerouac, and On the Road," Georgia Review XXXVIII (Summer 1984), pp. 291-311. For an account of Cowley and Kesey at Stanford, see FL, pp. 324-327. Cowley's services to writers have included critics and literary historians or biographers like Philip Young, Larzer Ziff, Michael Millgate, Gay Wilson Allen, A. Scott Berg and, indeed, countless others.

⁶¹For Wilder, Marquand, O'Hara, Cozzens and Cather, see FL, pp. 309-313, 291-294, 319-323, 285-290, 299-303. For Cowley's lack of appreciation for postmodernist "anti-fiction," see WT, pp. 194-213; WT, p. x.

⁶²Cf. John Aldridge, "Malcolm Cowley at Eighty," pp. 482-483. Aldridge speaks of Cowley's ability "to sense and report the psychic weather, the dominant moods and styles, the subtle forces that shape the collective state of mind of the historical moment very often while the moment is still in the process of being formed and he himself is being formed by it."

⁶³For Cowley's revaluation of the radical past, see, besides DGM, WT, pp. 95-112, 133-158. Since 1980, Cowley has continued to work on a sequel to DGM, dealing with the second half of the 1930s. See "No Homage to Catalonia: A Memory of the Spanish Civil War," Southern Review XVIII (January 1982), 131-140; "Echoes from Moscow: 1937-1938," Southern Review

XX (January 1984), 1-11; "Lament for the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," Sewanee Review XCII (Summer 1984), 331-347; and "A Time of Resignations," Yale Review LXXIV (Autumn 1984), 1-14. As of January 1987 Cowley has been forced to withdraw from active writing. Cowley's account of the "love generation" of the 1960s appears in WT, pp. 249-256.

⁶⁴FL, pp. 328, 338, 341.

⁶⁵For a sensitive appreciation of Cowley's activities in the various "dukedom and principalities" of the Republic of Letters, see George Core, "Malcolm Cowley and the Literary Imperium," Visionary Company (Summer 1987), pp. 16-28. Core, like Simpson and Aldridge, has felt that Cowley may well be the last of a vanishing type and has pointed to the serious loss for the literary commonwealth: "The man or woman of letters is not only a writer of many parts (poet or fictionist, essayist, correspondent) but is often a secretary and diplomat who serves the literary polity by acting as a mediator between writers and publishers (frequently as an unpaid agent), by working as an editor (again often unofficial and unpaid), by addressing the world at large on behalf of Literature (either in person or on paper), and by performing in many other salutary ways to promote writers and their work. Were this office abolished or were its holders to vanish, the Republic of Letters would be gravely threatened, and professional writers would be little more than a mob with many individuals and numerous cliques but no center, and the literary imperium, which I take to embrace all the chaotic possibilities of the realm of letters at its widest and most primitive, would be disorderly to the point of verging on pandemonium" (p. 20). Cf. Aldridge, "Malcolm Cowley at Eighty," pp. 487-490; Simpson, "The Decorum of the Writer," p. 570, and "Cowley's Odyssey: Literature and Faith in the Thirties," pp. 534-539.

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HET VROEGE LEVEN EN WERK VAN MALCOLM COWLEY, 1898-1930

Voor velen is Malcolm Cowley bij uitstek de literaire kroniekschrijver van de legendarische generatie Amerikaanse schrijvers die tot bloei kwam na de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Hij staat bekend als de auteur van Exile's Return (1934; herziene uitgave, 1951), een eerste, semi-autobiografische studie over de aesthetische en ethische idealen van zijn literaire tijdgenoten, die op gezaghebbende wijze heeft bijgedragen tot de beeldvorming van deze "verloren generatie" en een belangrijke aanzet heeft gegeven tot begrip en interpretatie van de invloed van het Europees modernisme op de ontwikkeling van de Amerikaanse letterkunde tussen 1915 en 1930. Hoewel niet geheel onomstreden, bezit het boek nog steeds de status van een klassiek document uit de Amerikaanse literaire geschiedschrijving. Bekend ook is Cowley's pleitbezorging, in de jaren veertig, van het toen nog ondergewaardeerde of misverstane werk van William Faulkner en Ernest Hemingway.

Als men Cowley vooral wil zien in de beperkte, zij het invloedrijke, rol van geschiedschrijver van zijn generatie, gaat men echter voorbij aan de opmerkelijke verscheidenheid en veelzijdigheid van zijn literaire bemoeienis en belangstelling, en onderschat men de reikwijdte van zijn invloed als "man of letters." Als dichter, criticus, redacteur, adviseur van literaire uitgeverijen, geschiedschrijver van de Amerikaanse letterkunde, zowel van het heden als van het verleden, alsmede in talloze andere, vooral praktisch gerichte functies, heeft Malcolm Cowley steeds een centrale plaats ingenomen in het literaire leven van zijn tijd. Cowley's literaire loopbaan is niet slechts een seismograaf van de ontwikkelingen in de literaire situatie in de Verenigde Staten na de Eerste Wereldoorlog; als criticus en geschiedschrijver heeft hij op belangwekkende wijze de plaats helpen bepalen van de moderne Amerikaanse letterkunde, in de context van zowel de nationale literaire traditie als het internationaal modernisme. Zijn persoonlijke literair-kritische

getuigenis en zijn retrospectieve evaluatie van de opkomst, bloei en reputatie van de moderne Amerikaanse letterkunde maken op treffende wijze de artistieke en sociale dilemma's van de schrijver in de Verenigde Staten zichtbaar.

Serieuze literair-wetenschappelijke aandacht is Cowley lange tijd onthouden. Sinds de aanvang van deze studie hebben een aantal critici, met name George Core, James Kempf en Lewis Simpson, een waardevolle, zij het bescheiden, impuls gegeven om te komen tot een appreciatie die recht wil doen aan Cowley's daadwerkelijke betekenis voor de Amerikaanse letterkunde. Een meer omvattende, systematische studie blijft echter geboden. Voortbouwend op het werk van bovengenoemde critici, wil deze dissertatie proberen een volwaardige aanzet te geven tot een dergelijke studie, teneinde Cowley's reputatie in evenwicht te brengen met zijn aanzienlijke, maar tot op heden onvoldoende belichte, verdiensten als "man of letters."

Deze studie geeft een gedetailleerd beeld van het vroege leven en werk van Malcolm Cowley, gezien tegen de achtergrond van zijn gehele literaire carrière. Zij verschaft de documentaire geschiedenis waartegen Cowley's eigen interpretatie in Exile's Return moet worden afgezet. De discrepantie tussen beide maakt duidelijk, dat Exile's Return slechts tot op beperkte hoogte als accurate en betrouwbare autobiografie mag worden gezien. In zijn streven zijn persoonlijke ervaringen te presenteren als zijnde representatief voor die van zijn generatiegenoten, minimaliseerde Cowley vaak het belang van andere aspecten van zijn literaire leven en denken, die niet met die opzet strookten.

Enerzijds wil deze studie dus een zo volledig en genuanceerd mogelijk beeld geven van de literaire wederwaardigheden van de jonge Malcolm Cowley, tegen de achtergrond van de nationale en internationale literaire situatie van de vroeg-twintigste eeuw: van Cowley als adolescent met literaire ambities in Pittsburgh en Belsano; als aankomend dichter op Harvard; als vrijwilliger aan het Westelijk Front in 1917 in Frankrijk; als ontluikend criticus en recensent in Greenwich Village; als voortrekker van een authentieke eigentijdse Amerikaanse literatuur, onafhankelijk van de Europese, maar desalniettemin gevoed door het internationale modernisme; als schrijver voor en redacteur van de avant-gardistische tijdschriften Broom en Secession in het woelige Europa van de vroeg-jaren twintig; als skeptisch volgeling van de Franse Dadaïsten

In Parijs; als bevlogen maar vaak ontmoedigd free-lance literair journalist en dichter in New York; als pleitbezorger en vertaler van moderne Franse auteurs; als aankomend literair redacteur van The New Republic.

Anderzijds wil deze studie meer zijn dan een biografie van Cowley's literaire beginjaren. Zij hoopt ook inzicht te verschaffen in de ontwikkeling en continuïteit van Cowley's literair-kritische opvattingen en wil de vooronderstellingen, die aan zijn werk als criticus en literair geschiedschrijver ten grondslag liggen, blootleggen en beoordelen. Tussen 1915 en 1930 was Cowley op zoek naar de literaire en morele waarden die de hoeksteen zouden blijven vormen voor zijn latere praktijk als schrijver. Het was een speurtocht vol ambivalentie en vaak onopgeloste tegenstrijdigheden, waarin een koppig en nafef idealisme niet altijd bestand bleek tegen teleurstelling en vertwijfeling. Blootgesteld aan het Frans Classicisme enerzijds en het Symbolisme en Dadaïsme anderzijds, slaagde Cowley er niettemin reeds vroeg in om een kritisch perspectief te ontwikkelen, vanwaaruit hij de Europese modernisten en hun invloed op de eigentijdse Amerikaanse literatuur kon bezien. Dat perspectief laat zich omschrijven als humanistisch, pluralistisch en eclectisch. Vanaf het begin richtte Cowley zijn aandacht zowel op de aesthetische en formalistische aspecten van literatuur, als op de ethische, praktische en sociaal-economische kanten van het schrijverschap. Enerzijds trad Cowley, op zijn eigen rebelse manier, in het voetspoor van T. S. Eliot en Ezra Pound, anderzijds deelde hij de zorg van Van Wyck Brooks voor het creëren van een organische Amerikaanse cultuur, een milieu dat de schrijver kon schragen en zijn vrijheid en integriteit kon waarborgen. Zag Cowley de schrijver primair als schepper van het autonome kunstwerk, hij zag werk en auteur ook in de maatschappelijke, historische en culturele context van het moment. In de loop van de jaren twintig raakte Cowley steeds dieper overtuigd van de onlosmakelijke verbondenheid van beide dimensies aan het schrijverschap. Een beter inzicht in de mate waarin Cowley zich rekenschap begon te geven van de samenhang tussen de kwaliteit van de Amerikaanse cultuur enerzijds, en de ontplooiings- en rijpingskansen van de Amerikaanse literatuur anderzijds, maakt duidelijk dat de kiem van Cowley's politiek radicalisme in de jaren dertig reeds geplant was lang voordat de economische depressie invloed op zijn denken kon uitoefenen. Tussen 1919 en 1929 maakten Cowley's literaire opvattingen een bijna

complete ommezwaai: zijn aanvankelijke omhelzing van de ethische en esthetische waarden van het Symbolisme maakte plaats voor een afwijzing van de sociale en menselijke implicaties ervan, voor een verwerping van de "religie van de kunst" als ideaal van het literaire leven, en voor de overtuiging dat de Amerikaanse schrijver niet langer kon leven als banneling op eigen bodem.

Rond 1930 hadden Cowley's opvattingen zich zodanig gekristalliseerd, dat men kan spreken van het eind van zijn literaire leertijd. De fundamenteën voor zijn latere visie en praktijk als criticus en geschiedschrijver waren gelegd en zijn reputatie als beoefenaar van een geavanceerde vorm van moderne literaire kritiek gevestigd. Hij had zich naam verworven als criticus en vertaler van moderne Franse auteurs en werd in brede kring erkend als een betrouwbaar literair historicus en kroniekschrijver. Met een goed ontvangen eerste poëziebundel, Blue Juniata, had hij zijn eigen, bescheiden maar niet te veronachtzamen bijdrage geleverd aan de literatuur van de "verloren generatie." Zijn moeizame pogingen om zich als free-lance schrijver staande te houden in het Amerika van de jaren twintig, alsmede zijn in Frankrijk gegroeide zicht op de mogelijkheden van een ondersteunend literair milieu, hadden hem geïnspireerd tot het formuleren van een breed en eclectisch idee van de "man of letters" als iemand die, idealiter, de hele literatuur tot zijn aandachtsveld zou kunnen rekenen; die voldoende integriteit en onafhankelijkheid van geest bezat om zich uit te spreken over politieke en maatschappelijke aangelegenheden "zonder verraad te plegen aan het intellect;" die, juist door zich met haast religieuze toewijding in te zetten voor de literatuur en de schrijver in Amerika, op zinnige wijze kon bemiddelen tussen de artistieke verplichtingen van de schrijver en zijn menselijke en sociale verantwoordelijkheden. Op de drempel van de jaren dertig was Cowley's visie op zijn rol en functie als "man of letters" een belofte die nog grotendeels moest worden ingelost; als ideaal en toetssteen zou hij haar met zich blijven meedragen.

Curriculum Vitae

Hans Bak was born in 's-Hertogenbosch on March 21, 1952. He received his high-school education (Gymnasium A, 1970) at St. Paulus Lyceum in Tilburg, R. K. Gymnasium Rolduc in Kerkrade, and St. Bernardinus College in Heerlen. In 1970 he began his studies of English language and literature at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, graduating cum laude in 1977. The academic year 1975-1976 he spent at New England College, Henniker, New Hampshire. Since 1977 he has been teaching American literature at Nijmegen. In 1979-1980 he was an American Council of Learned Societies research fellow at the Newberry Library in Chicago; in the winter of 1981-1982 he received a short-term Newberry fellowship. His essays and review-articles on American literature have appeared in Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters, English Studies, Georgia Review, The Visionary Company: A Magazine of the Twenties, and De Tijd. He is on the editorial board of the recently launched Horns of Plenty: Malcolm Cowley and His Generation. He is married to Ella Leendertse; they have a daughter, Saskia.

STELLINGEN

I

De poëzie van Malcolm Cowley is van meer dan historisch-documentair belang; zij verdient erkenning op intrinsiek-literaire gronden.

II

Kenneth Lynns vooronderstelling dat Malcolm Cowley's interpretatie van de "lost generation" in Exile's Return voortkomt uit zijn links-radicalen politieke opvattingen in de jaren dertig berust op een verwrongen lezing van de literair-historische feiten.

Contra: Kenneth S. Lynn, The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about America (Chicago and London, 1983), p. 95.

III

In Exile's Return erkent Malcolm Cowley in onvoldoende mate de invloed die het Frans Classicisme op zijn literair-kritische opvattingen heeft gehad.

IV

Dat Malcolm Cowley lange tijd serieuze literair-wetenschappelijke aandacht is onthouden, is slechts ten dele te verklaren uit het feit dat (a) Cowley nooit een specifieke literair-theoretische benadering heeft voorgestaan en (b) het merendeel van zijn geschriften pas sinds 1967 in boekvorm beschikbaar is, maar veeleer vanuit de literaire situatie in de Verenigde Staten tussen 1945 en 1980.

V

De romans van Robert M. Coates, met name Yesterday's Burdens (1933) en Wisteria Cottage (1948), zijn de serieuze aandacht van de literaire criticus meer dan waard.

VI

De nadruk die door zijn literaire tijdgenoten is gelegd op Gorham B. Munson's bemoeienissen als redacteur van het avant-garde tijdschrift Secession heeft tot gevolg gehad dat Munson's verdiensten als literair criticus in de jaren twintig tot op heden onvoldoende belicht zijn gebleven.

VII

Het "kwaad" in de toneelstukken van Lillian Hellman is veelal onvoldoende gemotiveerd, zowel vanuit de psychologie van de karakters als vanuit de historische situatie waarin deze zich bevinden.

VIII

De overheersende kritische belangstelling voor het vernieuwende of onconventionele in de toneelstukken van Sam Shepard gaat voorbij aan het feit dat Shepard, althans ten dele, op ironiserende wijze aansluiting zoekt bij traditionele motieven in het werk van Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller en Edward Albee.

IX

Marsha Normans 'night, Mother (1982) toont op overtuigende wijze aan dat de realistische toneeltraditie, zoals die in de Verenigde Staten haar hoogtepunt bereikte in Eugene O'Neills Long Day's Journey into Night (1941), nog steeds levend en veerkrachtig is.

X

Behalve als auteur van romans, korte verhalen en gedichten, verdient John Updike erkenning als essayist en literair criticus.

XI

Het schrijven van een doctoraalscriptie is de enig waardige afsluiting van een academische studie in de letterkunde.

XII

Door de als gevolg van de bezuinigingen toenemende werklast op het gebied van onderzoek en onderwijs verschuift de verantwoordelijkheid voor de kwaliteit van het academisch onderwijs steeds verder van de docent naar de student.

Stellingen behorende bij het proefschrift van J. T. J. Bak, Malcolm Cowley: The Formative Years, 1898-1930.

MALCOLM COWLEY: THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1898 - 1930