A Study of the Influence Affecting Hart Crane

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A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCES AFFECTING HART CRANE

by

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INTRODUCTION

During the decade following World War I, Poetry Magazine was outstanding as the organ of new modern verse. The new poets were writing out of the devastation and barrenness of a complicated and disrupted world; their interest was no longer with the high excitement and novelties of the past years; and the tone and content of literature were registering these changes.

Morton D. Zabel, then associate editor of Poetry Magazine, makes the following observation on modern writing. He says, 1 that where Lindsay, Sandburg, and Masters, Robinson, Frost, and Amy Lowell, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and the Imagists represented the generation of 1912, now a succession of younger talents appeared on the scene to express the conflicts that followed the war. The lyric tradition continued to be represented in the work of Edna Millay, Elinor Wylie, Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, and Hildegarde Flanner, and innovators like Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Marianne Moore, Joyce, and Williams were working toward their maturity, but new poetic schools began to appear in America and England. Hart Crane was combining the vision of Whitman with his own acute critical sensibility in anticipation of his greatest ambition—the writing of an epic of the American spirit which he finally submitted to the world as The Bridge. Robinson Jeffers was voicing his sombre prophecies of despair. The southern regionalists—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert

Penn Warren--were reviving the classical model in their studies of tradition and morality. Descendants of the Imagists like Glenway Wescott and Yvor Winters were pushing to further lengths their experiments in sound and rhythm. The Middle Western school was finding new representatives in Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Maurice Lasemann, Jessica North, and George Dillon, who, with other younger talents, centered their activities in the Poetry Club at the University of Chicago, to whose formation Harriet Monroe lent her encouragement and support. George Dillon, in particular, a graduate from the University in 1927, was president of the chief poetry club during his years in school and received most of the outstanding rewards in his field. He was awarded the Young Poet's Prize by Poetry Magazine along with the John Billings Fiske Prize in 1925. This same year he became associate editor of the Poetry staff.

At length a renewed spirit of social criticism was to instruct a new generation of American poets, of whom Horace Gregory, Kenneth Fearing, Norman Macleod, and Edwin Rolfe were to become as representative of the revolutionary viewpoint in America as English poets like Auden, Spender, and MacLeish were to become after 1930. Poetry Magazine received all their manuscripts and its representativeness continued to reflect the changing attitudes and collisions around it.

The new poets found vigorous and stimulating material in a world of reality. From this every day life also was drawn the language of everyday speech in preference to the stilted traditional vocabulary. As the speech became less elaborate, so too did the patterns embodying it. Forms grew
simpler, and the intricate versification was discarded.

Although America is still young it is accumulating legends, ballads, and a few epics. The young poets turn to old heroes impartially, and to the relation of men and machines for their poetry. They do not believe in uncertainties, but rather in the certainty of some type of goal, through which they achieve order from the jumbled and chaotic mess, resulting finally in poetry.

It is with Hart Crane, probably one of the most sensitive of all poets of all times that this thesis will be concerned. Most critics agree that he is another example of a poet destroyed by the neglect of his age. Philip Horton proves this to be false in his biography. The forces which ruined Crane were within himself and his family. It is the purpose here to enumerate the various influences which affected him and also to show what a powerful figure he would have been had he been strong enough to endure his self inflicted hardships.

Among his acquaintances were included many celebrated writers, a fact which proves that he attempted to connect himself with prominent literary minds. He did not try to cut himself off completely from the world around him, but his extreme sensitivity naturally forced him further and further into oblivion.

Philip Horton is the greatest authority on Hart Crane, explaining in detail the poet's psychology and carefully analyzing his poems. Sculley

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Bradley gives a splendid review of Horton's book in *American Literature*. Bradley points out how conclusively Horton disproves the idea which is accepted by most critics; that is, that Crane was another example of the artist crushed by the materialism and neglect of his age. Bradley, in accordance with Horton, believes that the forces which destroyed Hart Crane lay within himself and within the peculiar family environment with which he had to cope. Neither materialism nor neglect would have crushed his spirit, had he not been a psychotic personality to begin with. Horton, as Bradley points out, has wisely avoided supporting any particular thesis in this study, but he has meticulously presented for the first time the complete picture—"the strange emotional world in which the boy grew up and his own natural morbidity and sensitiveness, as well as those more obvious economic factors which have been hitherto overstressed."  

Bradley shows that although Crane's story is a personal one and not 'an American tragedy,' it is none the less harrowing to read; and it is rendered the more terrifying by the skill with which Horton calls to life the author, demonstrates the power and beauty of his best work, and portrays the slow, excruciating torture of his decline and death. The following story is an excellent example of some of Horton's selections.

In 1929, when Crane was in Mexico and already approaching emotional chaos, his friend, the painter David Siqueiros, attempted his portrait,

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4 Ibid., p. 480.
which he finally painted with the eyelids lowered because he could not, or dared not, paint his eyes. That Crane understood the implications is shown by his later destruction of the portrait in a drunken rage. His emotional disintegration, rooted in the conflict between his mother and father during his boyhood, and carried into manhood as an Oedipus complex, found its final phase in a homosexuality pursued with pitiful bravado and came at last to debauchery and destruction.

Crane's acquaintance with the literary circle was enormous, including Margaret Anderson, Malcolm Cowley and Peggy Baird, Matthew Josephson, Gorham Munson, Padraic Colum, Sherwood Anderson, Kenneth Burke, Harry Crosby and a host of others, as well as Eugene O'Neill and the theater group of the Village. All this, while treated as incidental background, is convincingly authoritative.

Bradley also shows how Horton attempts an evaluation of Crane's contribution as a poet, which he believes in the main to be a second one.

He is justified, I believe, in calling Crane the most perfect of the modern metaphysical poets, if one stop short of MacLeish, whose best work was done later. Such poems as Repose of Rivers and Legend and perhaps a few others are perfect in their way. Mr. Horton explains Crane's shortcomings and uneven execution by reference to his dissipation and fits of bewildered self-doubt. He points out, however, that in his best verse Crane added to the modern command of a flexible blank verse, demonstrated anew the rapture of perfect diction, increased our perception of a poem as an experience, and enlarged still further the capacity of poetry to deal with the machine and the modern industrial world.5

5Ibid., p. 482.
If Horton seems a bit overenthusiastic, his claims are partially justified. We shall probably remember a few of Crane's poem always as the evidence of what he might have been.

In all the different reviews of Horton's work there is not to be found one single word against it. Conrad Aiken praises this admirable and moving biography because he realizes that the author has such a tragic and wretched and in many ways a sordid story to tell.\(^6\) When Crane ended his life, Aiken says, he ended the bankrupt dream of a whole generation as well. "It was an era of spurious violences, spurious mysticisms, spurious esotericisms; an era of easy and lazy short cuts; above all, an era of a kind of specious spaciousness, a spaciousness which was as little founded in thought as it was in education."\(^7\)

Charles Poore also lauds Horton's biography as a sound and thorough study of the poet who is already an American legend.\(^8\) Crane was a tempermental poet out of tune with the world, as Horton shows. Poore says that Horton has skillfully recorded the minute details of Crane's neurotic crises. He feels that there is nothing to be added. However, as this paper means to point out, there is much to be added.

F. O. Matthiessen, in his comments, remarks that in giving his book

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\(^7\)Ibid.

the subtitle, The Life of an American Poet, Horton has found in Crane's career a symbol of our recent culture, as Edgar Lee Masters found one when writing about Vachel Lindsay. He especially compliments the author on his avoidance of loose generalization.

Miss Walton thinks that it is good that one of Crane's personal friends did not attempt his biography, since it is a tragic study of frustration. Horton worked from documents and letters and presents his material objectively and impersonally. "He treats the poet with reverence but with no sentimentality, and he has no ax to grind. This biography is consequently a dignified analysis of a complex and tortured mind." Miss Walton praises Horton's book as authoritative and says, "It does Hart Crane justice, and that is saying a great deal."

Malcolm Cowley holds nothing but admiration for this book. He too, sees the difficult problem which Horton had to face—writing about an admirable poet who lived an unadmirable life. He had to be honest and not exaggerate or say anything that would offend Crane's family. Cowley calls the chapter dealing with the poet's adventures in Mexico, a masterpiece of

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11Ibid.

12Ibid., p. 734.

tact and wisdom, "describing sensational events without sensationalism, telling the truth without overemphasis."¹⁴

Gorham Munson mentions the two qualities, balance and understanding, which are most demanded of a biographer of Crane, and claims that Horton exhibits them throughout his book.¹⁵ As Munson was one of Crane's best friends, he knew that other of the poet's acquaintances guessed at an Oedipus complex, thus explaining Hart's diabolization of his father, his idealization of his mother, and his emotional obliquity, but he believes this to be crude and amateur psychoanalysis. Munson says that Horton was much better informed and more subtle and profound.

The whole key to Crane's character, as Horton says, is in his lack of security, even in childhood. His family was forever upset, and there was always trouble about money. Crane was exposed too early to the treacheries of human relations, and he was haunted all his life by the fear of betrayal the while he yearned for unqualified affection. The last years were dissolute in the extreme and verged on madness. "Crane believed in the Word that Uttered would Change Life. In this belief in a faith without works, or rather in a faith that automatically would perform works, Crane was an incorrigible romanticist, both in poetry and in living. Apart from discipline in verse craft, he fled precipitantly from all disciplines, rational or mystical; few lives have ever been more wildly undisciplined."¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid.
¹⁶Ibid.
Munson says that his friends could tolerate his genius but the record shows that hardly any of them could long endure the pathological violence of his behavior during the last five years. Their regard for Crane remained what it had been, "but flesh and nerves could not stand the pace of entertaining him under one's roof. 'Ce n'est pas un homme; c'est un ouragan' it used to be remarked of him by his friends in 'transition valley' in Putman County, New York."\textsuperscript{17}

The above quotation from Munson's article is not to be misinterpreted. He really found the poet to be a very lovable person, and admired chiefly the fact that he did not cultivate an "arty" temperament or the femininities of sexual abnormality. He found him exceptionally honest, affectionate, supercharged with vitality, and absolutely smitten by the love of poetry. "He was absolutely smitten, and that made him modest, made him in his conversation a communicant of the supreme excitement of art, made him in the end despair of life when he realized his creative gift had been dissipated. He was smitten absolutely, and that initiated him into moments of greatness in his own poetic labors."\textsuperscript{18}

Allen Tate reviewed Horton's book also,\textsuperscript{19} but an even more interesting one was made by Herbert Muller in the \textit{Southern Review}.\textsuperscript{20} The latter

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.


graciously congratulates Horton on his superb work and then goes on to make his own personal comments on Crane. He is sure that the poet is a victim of his age, responding hypersensitively to every fever symptom, catching every germ in the air. Not only physically but mentally, Crane suffered so intensely that even slight criticism threw him into unusual states of misery. Muller feels that he did not so much assimilate as swallow his age whole, and what he swallowed was chaos.

Other reviews appeared in the year 1937, and although they too continue to commend Horton for his work, they are hardly worth quoting. The titles appear below.21 Nothing can be gained by repetition, but it is essential to note that other critics were concerned, and that their articles about Crane and his biographer were being published.

After all this favorable comment, it is evident that Philip Horton is the authority on Crane's life. Because of this, all biographical material will be taken from this source.

John Holmes, Boston Transcript, July 3, p. 4.
Forum, 93:iv, August.
Time, 29:97, May 17.
CHAPTER I
EARLY LIFE AND WORKS

Harold Hart Crane was born in Garretsville, Ohio, July 21, 1899.1 His parents, Clarence A. and Grace Edna Hart Crane were both from well-to-do families of New England stock. Both were of unstable temperament, and from earliest childhood the boy was subjected to family quarrels. The emotional insecurity of his home made him shy. He felt himself set apart from other children, and as a result his school days in Warren and later in Cleveland were lonely.

Crane began to write at fourteen. His first printed poem appeared in 1916 in Bruno's Bohemia, a Greenwich Village publication. This success convinced him that poetry was to be his life work, so he was happy to leave high school before his courses were finished. His father and mother separated that same year and Hart made his home with his mother for awhile. He found work in a print shop to lighten the strain on his mother's income.

Later with his father's aid he was sent to New York to prepare for admission to Columbia. He attended art showings and concerts, displaying in his indifference toward world war issues his real inability to analyze the effect of society upon himself.

Shortly he was engrossed in his own study of the poetry of his


Crane was already beginning his own first sustained work when Eliot's Waste Land appeared in 1922. He immediately acknowledged Eliot as one of the greatest of modern poets, but he reacted to Eliot's study of disillusionment and decay. Crane saw immediately that once a fine poet had dramatized our modern emotional and mental chaos, that work was finished. It was, therefore, the duty of any other poet to try to see beyond chaos to some new synthesis of values. It was probably in reaction to Eliot, therefore, that Crane turned to Whitman for a mystical statement of belief in America.

Between 1918 and 1925, Crane attained maturity of style. But these years also brought him economic and emotional harassment. His friends seemed to lose faith in him, his family troubles increased, and Crane suffered alternately from want of work and from stultification of his creative power because of the need of earning a living. He turned his hand to such varied employments as riveter in a Lake Erie shipyard, packer in his father's confectionery warehouse, reporter on the Cleveland Plain Dealer, salesman and manager in his father's tea-rooms, and later, writer of advertising copy in Cleveland and New York.
In order to blast poetry out of his weary head in the evenings he formed the enduring habit of writing under the double stimulation of wine and of music played on the portable victrola he carried everywhere. The misery of the intervals between periods of creative work was intensified by the longings of a morbidly insecure personality for a permanent home. Crane's drinking bouts and debaucheries became increasingly violent as he became more disillusioned with the love affairs his nature continually demanded. Yet it is significant that he never wished to join his expatriate literary friends in post-war Paris.

While living at Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, and daily crossing the Brooklyn Bridge, the theme of his poem, *The Bridge* grew in him. The entire work was to recreate the major forces in the development of American civilization.

During the winter of 1925 and 1926, Crane was enabled to live in the artists' colony of Patterson, New York, through the financial aid of the art patron, Otto Kahn. Here the actual composition of *The Bridge* was begun.

In June, 1926, Crane sailed to his grandparents' plantation on the Isle of Pines, near Cuba. There three-fourths of the poem was written; sections of it were published abroad in both *The Broom* and *The Criterion*. *White Buildings* was published in the fall of the same year.

A savage hurricane demolished his grandparents' home, and Crane returned to New York in October. The creative period which had produced his greatest work had ended. Although he now found himself considered the leading poet of his generation by the critics he most respected, in the two
years to come his life was more erratic and dissipated and more driven by money needs than ever before. He began to suffer regularly from insomnia. It was during this time that he seems to have lost faith in his own vision of humanity and in his ability to meet again the high standard of work of the unfinished Bridge.

The spring of 1928 found Crane living with his mother in California, but a bitter quarrel concluded his visit. He then traveled in London and Paris, but it was not until his return to New York in December of 1929 that he could bring himself to complete The Bridge, grinding out for the most part certain poor sections to meet a printer's deadline.

After a period of desperation worse than any preceding, Crane came to friendly terms with his father and worked about his father's inn at Chagrin Falls near Cleveland, where he led a happy life, active and simple. During this visit he very easily abstained from all liquor.

In March, 1931, Crane was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and within a week he determined to go to Mexico, where he planned to compose a poetic drama of the Conquest. But inspiration did not come, and as ever he was wretched in new surroundings. In June financial security seemed assured with the death of his father, but this salvation had come too late. Although he did write one poem, The Broken Tower, in his high magnificent style, the friends of whom he had asked criticism, not knowing his desperate need of assurance, delayed their replies too long. His drunken violences reached new heights of self-torment and abuse of those who loved him.

After learning from his step-mother that the entire estate of his
father might be swallowed by a lawsuit, he went to New York in April, 1932. On April 26, shortly before noon, clad only in topcoat and pyjamas, he walked to the stern of the ship and vaulted over the railing into the wake. His body was not recovered.
CHAPTER II

STATE OF MIND

It is unfortunate that Crane did not have the opportunity to realize happiness as Pierre did in Tolstoy's great book, War and Peace. As is said of Pierre:

While imprisoned in the shed Pierre had learned not with his intellect but with his whole being, by life itself, that man is created for happiness, that happiness is within him, in the satisfaction of simple human needs, and that all unhappiness arises not from privation, but from superfluity. And now during these last three weeks of the march he had learned still another new, consolatory truth - that nothing in this world is terrible. He had learned that as there is no condition in which man can be happy and entirely free, so there is no condition in which he need be unhappy and lack freedom. He learned that suffering and freedom have their limits and that those limits are very near together; that the person in a bed of roses with one crumpled petal suffered as keenly as he now, sleeping on the bare damp earth with one side growing chilled while the other was warming; and that when he had put on tight dancing shoes he had suffered just as he did now when he walked with bare feet that were covered with sores - his footgear having long since fallen to pieces. He discovered that when he married his wife - of his own free will as it had seemed to him - he had been no more free than now when they locked him up at night in a stable.1

Hart Crane's was a highly sensitive nature. He refused in his early works the abnegation of life. Although he was familiar with the scenery of Eliot's Waste Land, he disliked the negative view of life it contained. Crane saw beauty in modern life, beauty in machinery. He saw new reason for faith in man's creative genius exemplified by the beauty of the modern

city. His first desire was to take up swords against the pessimists to argue that the scientists had not routed the poets.

I. A. Richards published an essay\(^2\) saying that poetry was no longer to thrive, since it relied upon pseudo-truth and not scientific truth for its emotional appeal. Crane contradicted this argument by insisting that truth was in the heart and mind of man and that the modern poet had the task of absorbing the truths of science and reinterpreting them as a part of esthetic experience.

Obviously, great physical energy and great sensitivity are necessary to the poet who would absorb the sensations of urban life. The poet who surrenders only to the sensations of the rose or the daffodil is not likely to be so easily exhausted as is the one who rides on subways, stays up half the night at Harlem dance halls, sleeps briefly, and gets up to a depressing job. Crane was physically strong, but he was a highly neurotic person, and in attempting to live in cities in order to create pictures of city life and its significance, he had a difficult task. Being responsive to the esthetic beauty of an industrial world, Crane had first to create a new language which would express this beauty.

Hart Crane's reckless undisciplined swirl of words is essentially romantic. Elizabeth Drew, in her volume,\(^3\) calls him a more natural and


vigorous poetic genius than E. E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens or John Crowe Ransom. But, she sees that he was incapable of a sustained irony, which might have provided an inclusive attitude harmonizing his vision of actuality, his romantic transcendentalism and his personal neuroses. Miss Drew notes that his natural power of poetic expression was prodigious, but that its effectiveness was defeated by his essential patchiness, his exasperating combination of the meritorious and the meretricious. She feels that in spite of the obscurity of such poems as Voyages, Repose of Rivers, and For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen, the language and rhythm produce an immediacy of emotional effect.

By careful observation it can be seen that Crane viewed experience through a vocabulary, not through the eye or the mind. It was really the unused and unexplored in words which attracted him, being irresistibly fascinated by new accessions in words. "The new thresholds opened always onto some vague transcendental experience which had no basis in clear thinking or controlled feeling. He employed words merely as an excitant, blurring all coherent vision in confused declamatory resonance."4

Crane's deficiency in ultimate verbal clarity was the natural result of his deficiency in clarity of conception. His temperament, that of the romantic egotist, set him off from his age. Unlike Wallace Stevens and John Crowe Ransom who resorted to irony as an escape from the unsympathetic atmosphere in which they found themselves during this period, Crane floods

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4Tbid., p. 70.
his verse with emotional imagery.

Readers were accustomed to the boat as a symbol of the adventuring human soul, not to the dirigible as such a symbol. Crane so used industrial language as to arouse in the reader a sense of beauty of the modern industrial world, the very world which Eliot had repudiated as sordid and commercial. Crane, moreover, saw the present as a continuation of the greatness of the past. Eliot looked backward; Crane looked forward.

Eda Lou Walton in a review of *Collected Poems*, explains Crane's attitude toward Eliot.\(^5\) He was completely opposed to the philosophical Eliot, and would have nothing to do with the *Waste Land*. Crane saw a continuity beyond seeming discontinuity. He was born in one of those pauses when the struggle between forces has reached a complete balance. "Beneath every sign of disintegration he saw structure. In massproduction he saw religious beauty of anonymous creation. He spun his own faith. It was mystic romantic, and utterly modern. He accepted his America."\(^6\)

Horton points out that any poet of major ambitions had to first figure out an answer to the problems of the times. And so it was that both Crane and Eliot attempted to state their positions at the same time. "In November, 1922, when Crane was nearing the completion of *Faustus and Helen*, Eliot published in the first issue of *The Criterion*, and simultaneously in


\(^6\)Ibid.
Crane's reaction to Eliot is really very complex. Horton explains that the difference in temper between the two men was clearly indicated by the nature of their leading symbols: for Eliot, the wasteland with its rubble of disintegrated values and desiccated spirits; for Crane, the bridge with its hope of spiritual harmony and order above and beyond the acceptance of contemporary chaos. Horton continues to say that despite his philosophical optimism, Crane was not insensitive or blind to the causes of despair around him, for certainly he had been exposed to them rather more than is the usual lot of the poet, and had suffered proportionately.

If one were to attempt a definition of the difference between them by the analogy of religious convictions—which would not be entirely irrelevant—Eliot's attitude might be taken as being high Calvinist and Crane's as Revivalist. Throughout his life Crane rebelled against the psychology of despair, so contagiously expressed in The Wasteland and predominant in the thought of his time, without ever completely convincing himself that the age was not foreordained to reprobation.

The whole psychological approach to literature which renounced the Waste Land psychology of defeat was documented by sociologists, historians, and scientists who were busy deciding what the real state of affairs in the world was and what should be done about economic injustices.

Crane does not interpret the beauty of the city as related to the lives

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8Ibid., p. 122.

9Ibid.
of very ordinary men. His medium—the language, imagery, rhythms of his poetry—he perfected extensively. He was artist enough to use whatever influences in French and English poetry which were congenial to him, and completely to assimilate and individualize these influences until they were authentically his own. He was probably, as Miss Walton says, the only American poet to have 'acclimatized' the language of the industrial and mechanistic world. Directly, intuitively, subjectively, and therefore more economically through the use of symbols made to stand for the whole, Crane arrived at synthesis, and not through an accumulated mass of impressions. Miss Walton points out that from Melville and Whitman, as well as from his own personal experience, he took the sea as symbol of the eternally searching and creative spirit of mankind.

Miss Walton, as do most of the critics, believes that Crane could have been successful had he had more time and courage. She feels that The Collected Poems makes very clear his importance among American poets. Here, he is more original and more vital than Eliot, though not so great a technician.

He is the only American poet with a rich lyrical feeling who has attempted more than a personal synthesis; the only mystic who would prophesy concerning universal human values in the modern scene. He rejected no aspect of life, shut out from his consciousness no fact in the industrial world. All that he asked for his genius was 'the power of acting creatively under laws of its own organization.' He felt that the modern poet could not assume the role of philosopher

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or theologian, but he believed it his own function to fuse the 'intractable' into a universal vision. For this great task he did not allow himself time enough before death. But his poetry contains all the evidences that he might have succeeded.\footnote{11}{Ibid.}

Although Crane is generally considered an obscure and difficult writer, he does have his special admirers who think he was truly gifted. Archibald MacLeish, in an undated letter to Harriet Monroe, thanking her for accepting his latest contribution says in closing:

> What a shame Crane didn't get the Pulitzer. Not that the praise would elevate him much. But the cash is still cash. I suppose old Frost ought to have a reward and he is certainly a very deserving and estimable writer. But a prize for a man's collected works is like an LLD at seventy-five. Just a pat on the back. Whereas a prize to a single poem is a prize to a poem. Ah well...\footnote{12}{From letters collected in the Harriet Monroe Modern Poetry Library, University of Chicago.}

Another letter, dated November 29, 1930, congratulates Miss Monroe on the award of the Poetry Prize. He says, "That may just succeed in indicating to the Pulitzer Committee their equal duty to Crane."\footnote{13}{Ibid.}

Allen Tate feels that it is the reader's fault if he cannot comprehend modern poetry. This poetry requires the fullest cooperation of all of his intellectual resources, all his knowledge of the world, and all the persistence and alertness that he now thinks only of attaching to science. Tate
says that this kind of poetry must have the direct and active participation of a reader who today, because he has been pampered by bad education, expects to lie down and be passive when he is reading poetry. "He the reader admits, for some obscure reason, that poetry is a part of his education; but he has been taught to believe that education is conditioning; something is being done to him, he is not doing anything himself. And that is why he cannot read poetry."14

Yvor Winters, in a review of White Buildings, exhibits extravagant admiration for Hart Crane.15 He thinks that the poet is a contemporary master and that Allen Tate has given him an excellent tribute in his introduction to this particular volume.

The first thirteen poems presented are simple, and Winters believes probably written relatively early. He agrees with Tate that they are more or less imagistic. He believes however that Tate goes too far in intimating that the imagistic method is of necessity limited in its possibilities. He says, "the possibilities of any method depend not on itself but on the poet who happens to find himself adopted to it, and a great poet is almost invariably hard on pre-existing dogma, not to mention co-existing dogma."16

16Ibid., p. 47.
Winters finds Crane's faults the least interesting phases of his work, but as the editor points out, Winters is a poet also, and one very much in sympathy with his art. His article is not excluded from the magazine, however, probably because it does contain many intelligent and valuable statements.

Winters feels that one could take almost any lines from the best poems, set them alone, and be equally surprised by them. In their context the casual reader is likely to overlook them. "They are in themselves so dense and are fitted so closely together, they present so shining and uniform a surface, that there is no foothold, no minor charm, no condescension or assistance. It is extremely easy to slide off the surface without having had the slightest idea of what one has been on." 17 This critic has been watching Crane's progress for about eight years, with mingled feelings of admiration, bewilderment, and jealousy. "My reaction to his poems," he states, "has always been slow and labored; but now that I have arrived at some degree of familiarity with the book as a whole, I am more than ever convinced that he deserves the careful attention which a comprehension of his work requires." 18

17 Ibid., p. 51.
18 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

SOME MINOR WORKS

Modern poetry describes the familiar and the unfamiliar in an unfamiliar way. If this was the only requirement necessary to be a good poet, Crane was certainly successful. It is especially in a work such as *Lachrymae Christi*, that this is apparent. The title alone, Christ's Tears, suggests sadness and mystery. From beginning to end it is complicated and baffling. R. P. Blackmur, in his book *The Double Agent*, makes many enlightening comments on this piece.¹

In lines 26-31, 'Let sphinxes... speak,' the poet prays to be resurrected, to speak as a sphinx might, or as one come back from death. He wishes to be freed of the gravestones. Blackmur says that in this passage, it is the syntax rather than the grammar that is obscure. He says:

I take it that 'let' is here a somewhat homemade adjective and that Crane is making a direct statement, so that the problem is to construe the right meanings of the right words in the right references; which will be an admirable exercise in exegesis, but an exercise only. The applicable senses of 'let' are these: neglected or weary, permitted or prevented, hired, and let in the sense that blood is let. Spinxes are inscrutable, have secrets, propound riddles to travellers and strangle those who cannot answer. 'Borage' has at least three senses: something rough in sound suggestive of barrage and barrier, a blue-flowered, hairy-leaved plant, and a cordial made from the plant.²

²Ibid., p. 136.
Although Blackmur's remarks here are in a highly technical vein, they are important and helpful in the understanding of this particular poem. He continues:

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary quotes this jingle from Hooker: 'I Borage always bring courage'. One guess is that Crane meant something to the effect that if you meditate enough on death it has the same bracing and warming effect as drinking a cordial, so that riddles of life or death are answered. But something very near the contrary may have been intended; or both. In any case a guess is ultimately worthless because, with the defective syntax, the words do not verify it. Crane had a profound feeling for the hearts of words, and how they beat and cohabited, but here they overtopped him; the meanings in the words themselves are superior to the use to which he put them. The operation of selective crosspollination not only failed but was not even rightly attempted. The language remains in the condition of that which it was intended to express; in the flux of intoxicated sense; whereas the language of the other lines of this poem...the language, not the sense is disintoxicated and candid. The point is that the quality of Crane's success is also the quality of his failure, and the distinction is perhaps by the hair of accident.3

As this intricate explanation of Blackmur's indicates, this passage is one of the more difficult in Crane's works. Here, and also in other examples, the poet uses words for their sound value rather than for precise meaning.

The scene in Lachrymae Christi is set in a mill town in the spring. Crane uses industrial images like 'benzine rinsings' for moonlight to indicate the cleaning effect of the moon shining upon the mills, its lights reflected

3Ibid.
on the windows. Inside the machinery is quiet, save for a sill of sluice, in which water is running. 'Sill' means threshold, and Crane here means the line over which the water flows. The only motion in the factory is the sluice which catches and reflects the moonlight.

The poet, seeing the mill working is reminded of the perfidy of man. In the stanza beginning with, 'Immaculate venom,' Crane deliberately uses imagery contradictory to the usual sentimental images of spring. The moonlight has stopped the machinery, 'the fox's teeth,' and 'swart thorns,' suggestive of the thorns worn by the crucified Christ, rather than flowers, indicate that spring is here. Along the hills these thorns do not sing, but twang, and their song is not the truth of spring, but perfidies or lies.

Lines fourteen to twenty picture a mystical assertion of the beauty of the night and of the poet's vision of beauty, despite the ugliness of the town. Line fifteen, 'Chant pyramids...,' is another way of saying that the night sings of mystery, and anoints with innocence despite the fact that perjuries [lies against beauty, or the realities of this industrial scene] have galvanized the eyes and prevented them from seeing true beauty.

Line thirty-four, 'Spell...pain,' is a reference to the suffering prior to the Resurrection and to Palm Sunday. In the following words of the poem, the general effect of the images is to bring into one's mind the Crucifixion and the old druidical sacrifices. The images of Christ and Dionysus, both images of resurrection, are used interchangeable, to indicate how although life is constantly sacrificed, it rises again.

Lachrymae Christi however, is probably one of the least important of
all of Crane's works. From April, 1922 to February, 1923 was one of the
most important periods in his life. He was absorbed during this time in
the composition of his first long poem, For the Marriage of Faustus and
Helen. This was his earliest attempt to deal with the major problems of
poetry. The symbolism he chose provided a concrete, even a dramatic frame-
work.

In the poem, the image of Faust is used as a symbol of the modern
scientific or skeptical mind. The image of Helen represents modern
civilization as typified by a large city, probably New York. Helen, the
metropolitan city, is wooed by Faustus, skeptical modern man. The poem
opens with a statement of the confusion in our daily life. With the words,
'There is a world dimensional,' and so forth, Crane expresses his faith that
even for the modern man or the poet there can be a synthesis of values. His
awareness of the city's beauty is then recorded in a group of images, and
the first section closes with a declaration of the poet's love for the
metropolis.

The second section opens with what is apparently a Harlem or primitive
dance scene. Here the poet accepts the modern nuances and nervosities of
city life. Then follows a ride through the city at dawn in which a sense
of death is felt. With the line, 'We did not ask for that, but have sur-
vived,' Crane cherishes the intricacy of beauty in our age, a beauty which
comes out of man's researches in the past and will be extended by his
researches into the future. 'The imagination spans beyond despair' is the
beginning of the poet's statement of his belief in man's creative power or
his power to love, despite commercialism.

As an introduction to the poem, a play by Ben Jonson, The Alchemist, is quoted, which is part of a chant calling upon the secret, or esoteric, spirits in the art of alchemy. A general explanation of the meaning of For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen has been given above, but more detailed comments seem necessary.

The first two stanzas describe the average mind of modern man taken up by baseball stories, and ordinary events, interrupted by brief imaginary moments, and sometimes arriving at peace in the evening. Then the poet imagines himself on an elevated train, noticing the beauty of the city, as if it were a woman and he the lover who would meet her at least in his dream. Although his life blood has been sold to purchase bread in a commercial society, none knows better than he the beauty of love.

The stanza beginning, 'Reflective conversion,' continues to picture chiefly in images of light the beauty of the city, always as if it were a feminine body. The poet makes a statement of almost religious devotion to the beauty of the city, a beauty which cannot be held endlessly or made captive, but can be realized only in moments of peculiar penetration.

Impressions of a Harlem dance scene are presented in the next section. The poet exults in the various rhythms. The rhythm of the dance in music is pictured as rebounding from roof to roof. The poet has presented a Harlem night scene as a picture of the Jazz Age of the twenties. Now in section three, he addresses his companion, Gorham Munson, the conservative critic with whom Crane was staying at the time. 'Capped Arbiter,' line
ninety, is a direct reference to the academic cap, typical of such scholars. The critic is pictured as shooting down other writers as he himself will in time be, figuratively speaking, killed. He is the religious gunman who arrives home at dawn with the poet. He is called religious because he, as a humanist, slays for what he considers an ideal. Then follows a picture of the youth of the twenties who lived by sensation and who knew the war and its destruction. He took no shelter against experience, hid underground from no single hour's excitement.

Line one hundred and fourteen and the rest of the stanza, means that all memories of the past will be added to by modern creative writers who will persist in giving new interpretations of Helen, such as Crane does in this poem.

Some of Crane's references toward the conclusion have special significance. One is the use of 'Anchises,' the father of Aeneas, who was carried from burning Troy out into the sea on his son's shoulders. Crane uses the reference as an indication of the glory of Greek civilization carried into Rome. Another example in the next line is the use of 'Erasmus,' a Dutch humanist and scholar. Crane uses him as a figure to symbolize the beginning of the Renaissance, since he was one of the scholars who crossed the sea and brought culture to England. In other words, both Anchises and Erasmus symbolize the spread of art into new fields, and Crane proceeds to indicate that the high spirited youth of the twenties will further art. He praises the years of the past, which even though they record suffering, record also
how the imagination spans beyond despair.

In one essay on Crane, Gorham Munson compares The Waste Land to Faustus and Helen. Both poems aim at a poetic summary of the times, "but whereas Eliot twists the great curves of the beauty of former ages into the mean ugliness of our day and closes with a cry of resignation, Crane attempts the reconciliation of mellow beauty with nascent beauty and affirms a delving upward for the new wine".4

Allen Tate says that readers familiar with For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen admire it by passages, but that the form of the poem, in its framework of symbol, is an abstraction empty of any knowable experience.5 He continues:

It is a conventional revival of the kind of diction that a young poet picks up in his first reading. Crane, I believe, felt that this was so; and he became so dissatisfied not only with the style of the poem, which is heavily influenced by Eliot and LaForgue, but with the 'literary' character of the symbolism, that he set about the greater task of writing The Bridge. He had looked upon his Faustus and Helen as an answer to the cultural pessimism of the school of Eliot, and The Bridge was to be an even more complete answer.6

Philip Horton says, "Crane imagined the poem as a kind of prothalamion celebrating his pursuit and capture of the Platonic idea of beauty, and at the same time defining his relation not only to his art, but also to the world in which he was living and to the world of tradition in which beauty

6Ibid.
had sometimes lived as a vital principle." 7

The ambitious scope of the poem demonstrates the metaphysical qualities of the mind. The problems that dominated the art and criticism of the twenties are also indirectly reflected. Crane drank a great deal during this period, Horton tells us, and in a letter to Gorham Munson, he openly confesses that he wished he had more money, so that he could afford to drink more wine. Crane goes on to tell his friend of a new supernatural power he has discovered in himself. The previous winter, while under the influence of ether, his mind reached to a kind of seventh heaven of consciousness where an objective voice informed him that he had the higher consciousness. From then on he begins to have more confidence in himself.

Horton calls Crane a mystic. "For the desire to expand the consciousness into higher levels of awareness and to achieve the ultimate reconciliation of universal conflicts is one of the chief characteristics and motivating forces of mysticism. In Crane's case this desire for an explanation of consciousness...has often been mistaken for a search for sensations." 8 Crane tried to identify himself with all of life. "He seemed to feel that in such identification there were tremendous reservoirs of spiritual power that once released would supply the elect with the pure, enduring stream of clairvoyant vision which would be the distinguishing feature of a new order of consciousness." 9

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7 Philip Horton, Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1937, p. 120.

8 Ibid., p. 129.

9 Ibid.
The poem, *Chaplinesque*, although not very well known, is interesting. If the reader will keep in mind Chaplin's characteristic gestures in the moving pictures, he will see that in this poem, Chaplin is used as the symbol of the modern man's disillusionments and way of getting through life without any assurance of its value here or hereafter.

The picture presented in line four, 'slithered, ragged,' is of Chaplin's typical costume with its large pockets always empty. A little further on, the words, 'coverts, shelters,' again refer to the tenderness with which Chaplin protects weaker things than himself, even though he is always down and out.

The next stanza, which opens, 'We will sidestep,' and so on, is a picture of Chaplin's dodging the thumb of a policeman pointed in his direction, and the thumb for the modern man is, of course, death. In other words, we smirk and pretend innocence, although we know we face death.

Two of Chaplin's favorite attitudes, his sudden collapses when overcome by a situation, and his way of pirouetting his cane when he escapes from any danger are portrayed in the next section. These two attitudes are characteristic of modern man, whose prayers are a task of no importance and who lives by accepting whatever comes, evading most things but unable to stop feeling.

'The game enforces smirks,' and the following words tell how life enforces smirks, but nevertheless modern man sees beauty, though somewhat humorously, in an empty ashcan which may recall to him the image of the Holy Grail sought by King Arthur's knights. As he may hear, instead of a
voice in the wilderness, a Biblical reference to the voice of God, a kitten in the wilderness, or the small voice of pity.

The Hurricane, another of the minor works, written after Crane had experienced a hurricane on the Isle of Pines, is an attempt to get down in words the motion of the storm. The rhythm is an imitation of that most commonly employed by Gerard Manley Hopkins, who has developed a system of accented rhythm and alliteration related to that used in early Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Compared to the rest of Crane's poems, this one is relatively simple, although there are a few unusual references. For example, line five, 'scripture flee' th stone,' refers to the fact that the stone on which the Ten Commandments were carved was broken; here used as an image of the world broken by the hurricane. Crane attempts to indicate that nothing may escape from the noise of the whirlwind's thunder.

These less important works appeared singly in various periodicals and are interesting and helpful in that they reveal some of Crane's most intricate methods and sources. When considering The Bridge, which will be discussed in the next chapter, it is well to keep the poet's early attempts in mind because it enables the reader to better understand the longer and still more difficult work.
CHAPTER IV
THE BRIDGE

The text of The Bridge used in the following discussion is taken from The Collected Poems of Hart Crane. The editor's note explains that the poems in part three of this volume are those which were found in manuscript among the poet's papers, and had been written in the last three or four years of his life. Some have no title—many are incomplete. This group belongs to the volume Crane prepared for publication at the time of his death called, Key West: An Island Sheaf.

There exist a number of variora of certain passages of The Bridge, apart from the variations in the Paris edition which appeared a few months before the first New York issue; but the Editor has not judged that the publication of variora would be advisable in this first collected edition. The text of The Bridge adhered to, is the final one chosen by the poet.

Waldo Frank's introduction to this volume contains many remarks about The Bridge and its production which are worthy of note. In 1924, the same year in which White Buildings was completed, Crane was living at 110 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, in range of the Harbor, the Bridge, and the sea sounds.


2Ibid., Editor's note.

3Ibid., pp. ix-xxix.
It was here that the vast theme of his poem took hold of him, and in the fall of 1925 he had organized the entire pattern for his work. Since his father would not assist him financially, Crane appealed successfully to Otto H. Kahn, and with ample spending money went to the Isle of Pines, to Paris, and to Marseilles, writing and living riotously in the meantime. By December, 1929, his poem was finished.

Frank tells an interesting story of a discovery made by Crane during this writing period. Crane had learned that the house where the vision of The Bridge first came to him and where he finished it, was once the property of Washington Roebling, and that the very room in which Crane lived had been employed by the paralysed engineer of Brooklyn Bridge as an observation tower to watch its construction.4

The Bridge was published in April, 1930, after a limited first edition, inscribed to Otto H. Kahn was released in Paris by the Black Sun Press. It was in 1931, when Crane received the fellowship from Guggenheim Foundation, that he went to Mexico; his plan being to write a poem on the history of Montezuma, a variation of the American theme which The Bridge started.

To make himself the master of his sense of immediate continuity with such a jumbled chaotic world was the principle which Crane followed in producing The Bridge. But this principle did not sustain him in actual life. As Frank says:

He had a literary method to apply the principle to his vision; he had no psychological method to apply it to his person. The symbol of the Sea--theme of retreat into the unity of immersion and

4Ibid., p. xviii.
of dissolution—still bespoke him, as it had finally 
bespoken the love experience in White Buildings. The 
Bridge, with its challenging synthesis of life, wherein 
all the modern multiverse is accepted and transfigured 
without loss into One, could not hold the poet. The 
poems later than The Bridge, despite their technical 
perfection, mark a retreat from the high position of 
that Poem back to the mood of White Buildings—a return 
from grappling with the elements of the industrial 
world back to the primal mother world whose symbol is 
the tropic Sea.5

Frank's explanation of Crane's tender friendships with boys who followed 
the Sea is very interesting. He points out that, "...drink was the Sea's 
coadjutor; for it gave Crane release not as with most men, from the burden 
of separateness from life, but from the more intolerable burden of continuity 
with life's chaos. The Sea had ebbed while he stood high above it on his 
mythic Bridge; now again it was rising."6 When Crane speaks of the sea as 
the 'wink of eternity,' he condenses into one image the suggestion of the 
momentary and the timeless; the actual physical gleam of the sea's surface, 
and the good humor of its mood.

Frank's introduction then goes on to illustrate that Crane's choice to 
travel to Mexico was not made without thought. Here for a thousand years a 
worship of Death has been practiced by a folk of genius. And among these 
surroundings Crane worked less, drank more, and finally on his return to 
New York could not resist the temptation of the Sea in preference to 
resuming again his place in the modern chaos.

Looking again at The Bridge, Zabel's words in one of his articles, are 
most suitable. He reasons as follows:

5Ibid., p. xix.
6Ibid.
The result, in The Bridge, was the kind of poem which inevitably results from an ecstatic and desperate formulation of faith. The confusion in modern standards of good and evil, of humiliation (Quaker Hill) and exaltation (Atlantis), of the horrors of modern civilization (the subway in The Tunnel) and its triumph the aeroplane in Cape Hatteras, was simplified, and in its place was established the antithesis of experience and idealism necessary to a heroic conception. 7

Waldo Frank has many more important comments to make on this particular work. He feels that the beauty of Crane's lyrics and many of his passages seem inviolable. Seeing that the traditional base of its poetic texture is complex, he goes on to compare him to the Elizabethans. Frank calls The Bridge a deliberate example of myth-making. But in explanation for the will of the poet, he says that his will is born of a desperate, personal need. The poet must create order from the chaos with which his associative genius overwhelms him. The Poem retains the personal origin of its own will. "The revelation of The Bridge as myth and principle, comes to a person in the course of his day's business; and that person is the poet. In this sense, The Bridge is allied to the Commedies of Dante who also, in response to desperate need, takes a journey in the course of which his need finds consummation." 8

Frank illustrates that the difference between Dante and Crane is that the latter has no sense of time and his person-sense is vacillant and

8Frank, op. cit., p. xxii.
evanescent. Crane's journey is that of an individual unsure of his own form and lost to Time. "This difference at once clarifies the disadvantageous aesthetic of The Bridge, as compared with that of broadly analogous Poems of cosmic search, like the Commedia or Don Quixote. It exemplifies the role played by the cultural epoch in the creation of even the most personal work of genius."9

Since Frank's line of thought is so stimulating, it seems proper to follow through his final ideas about The Bridge. He finds the structural pattern superb, and describes it in the following manner:

... a man moves of a morning from Brooklyn to Manhattan, returns at midnight, each stage of his course adumbrating, by the mystic law of continuity, into American figures with cosmic overtones; and all caught up in a mythic bridge whose functional span is a parabola and an immediate act of vision. The flaw lies in the weakness of the personal crystallisation upon which the vision rests, as the Bridge is spanned upon its piers. This flaw gets into the idiom and texture. Sometimes the image blurs, the sequence breaks, the plethora of words is blinding. There is even, in the development of certain figures, a tendency toward inflation which one is tempted to connect with the febrile false ebullience of the American epoch [1924-29] in which the Poem was written. Yet the concept is sound; the poet's genius has on the whole equalled his ambition. Even the failings in execution, since they are due to weakness of the personal focus, help to express the epoch; for it is in the understanding and creating of persons that our rapidly collectivising age is poorest.10

9Ibid., p. xxiii.

10Ibid., p. xxvii.
Frank tries to make it explicitly clear that Crane's myth is not to be confused with that found in Homer or in the Bible or the Nibelungen. The Bridge is more of a useable symbol rather than something to be popularly sung. Although the Poem makes the Bridge into a machine, it has beauty. The life of America has flowed into the Bridge through the men who built it--our past and future life. "A cosmic content has given beauty to the Bridge; now it must give it a poetic function. From being a machine of body, it becomes an instrument of spirit. The Bridge is matter made into human action."

In his last remarks, Frank expresses great expectations for Crane and his Bridge. He believes confidently that the message of The Bridge will be more comprehensible in the future, not in the immediate future, but in the time when the functionally limited materialism of our collectivist era has, through success, grown inadequate to the deepened needs of a mankind released from economic insecurity and prepared, by leisure, for regeneration. For even as necessity, today and tomorrow, drives most men to think collectively in order that they may survive; necessity, day after tomorrow, will drive men to think personally [poetically, cosmically], in order that their survival may have meaning. When the collectivist era has done its work--the abolition of economic classes and of animal want--men will turn, as only the privileged of the past could ever turn, toward the discovery of man.

But when that time comes, the message of The Bridge will be taken for granted; it will be too obvious, even as today it is too obscure, for general interest. The revelation in Crane's poems, however, of a man who through the immediate conduit

Ibid., p. xxviii.
of his senses experienced the organic unity between
his self, the objective world, and the cosmos,
will be accepted as a great human value. And the
poems, whose very texture reveals and sings this
man, will be remembered.12

By closer observation of the actual language used by Crane in The
Bridge, many of the complicated passages become clearer. In line one,
section one, for example, 'How many dawns... Liberty,' the image of the
sea gull in flight represents true freedom and is presented against the
image of the Statue of Liberty, or false freedom. The gull is contrasted
with our mechanical flight in elevators further on, in line eight, 'Till
elevators... day.'

The next stanza, beginning, 'I think... screen,' describes the
poet's reflection concerning the monotony of most lives in the modern city.
To city dwellers the moving-picture "screen" is a prophecy of a dream
place never attained and an image of sentimental emotion.

So many images are present in the whole of The Bridge, that it would
be impossible to discuss each one extensively. However, further explanation
of several passages is necessary for a definite understanding of the poet's
meaning, even in this short selection.

Line thirteen, 'And thee... thee!', displays an image of the quietness
and dignity of the Bridge, of its motion in stillness. The following words
present the silly gesture of a suicide jumping from the Bridge and the
resulting reaction of the crowd that sees it. 'Down wall... still,' line

12Ibid.
twenty-one, pictures the swift passage of the city day on Wall Street. The enduring strength of the Bridge is contrasted with the flight of time.

Then Crane changes his use of language from the almost purely descriptive to that of religious exaltation. The meaning of line twenty-five, 'And obscure. . .thy guerdon,' is that the reward is as obscure in its intellectual beauty as the heaven of the Jews. The poet states his faith that art such as is created by man working anonymously together to erect modern beauty, the Bridge, is reason enough for believing in man's holiness. Crane was unwilling to restrict the idea of art to the fine arts. He saw in our modern industrial age new expressions of the creative imagination as man worked scientifically and esthetically to build towers, bridges, and airplanes.

Line twenty-six, 'Accolade. . .raise,' means that accolade, the act of knighting, is bestowed on anonymous creative work which time will not destroy.

With the words, 'vibrant reprieve,' Crane unites the idea of the vibrancy of the Bridge with the religious thrill of pardon, implying that since man is capable of creating beauty in this scientific age, he may be pardoned his materialism.

In the next few lines, the Bridge is both physically described and presented as a religious symbol. The poet asks how toil could create such beauty. He addresses the Bridge as a prophet's pledge and the prayer of an outcast and a lover's cry, all symbols of things which endure. An exact picture of the lighted Bridge is given and at the same time a further state-
ment of the eternal endurance of beauty.

The last two stanzas of this portion of _The Bridge_ finds the poet near the pier, in order that he may see its full shadow. Around him the city lights up, as if it were a Christmas tree. Imaginatively, the poet seems to see the Bridge extending itself further and further over sea and over prairie, continuing forever. He asks that it, with its beautiful curves, be considered a modern myth symbolic of man's spiritual integrity.

Waldo Frank offers a very compact summary of the whole poem in his introduction, previously mentioned. He points out that in the preface, the poet exhorts the object of his choice—the Bridge. "It shall synthesise the world of chaos. It joins city, river, and sea; man made it with his new Hand, the machine. And parabolawise, it shall now vault the fulfillment of man's need of order." 13

Frank sees that part one, "Ave Maria," is the vision of Columbus, the mystic navigator, who mapped his voyage in Isaiah, and sought to blend the world's riven halves into one. "But this Columbus is scarcely a person; he is suffused in his history and his ocean; his will is more substantial than his eye. Nor does he live in Time." 14

Part two, "Powhatan's Daughter," in which the Indian Princess is the flesh of America, the America, the American earth, and mother of our dream, the poet begins his journey which traces in extension the myth's path.

13Ibid., p. xxiii.
14Ibid.
He finds himself above the Harbor, awakening beside his lover. With the harbor and the sea sounds accompanying him, he walks through the lowly Brooklyn streets with his Cultural past: Pizarro, Cortes, Priscilla, "and now Rip Van Winkle whose eyes, fresh from sleep, will abide the poets' as they approach the transfigured world of today." The "Van Winkle" portion is unusual in that the figure of old Rip is used as a muse of memory, the connection between past and present, between childhood and harsher adult reality. A hand organ begins playing arpeggios, and the poet begins to remember school days. Humorously Crane infers, in line fifteen, that if Van Winkle were here today he would be poor and living on Avenue A, which is located in a slum district on the lower East side of New York. The poem continues with images of childhood and only in the last three stanzas does it swing back to images of adulthood and of going to work in the morning.

The poet then enters the subway, which is at first a river of steel rails stretching from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate, waking on its way the trudge of pioneers and all their worlds of factory and song. The body of Pocahontas is traced by the march of American settlers. The daughter of Pocahontas, who is the flesh of America, dances and the flesh becomes spirit. She dances finally into the life of an Indiana mother, who is saying farewell to her sea loving son. This is the first weak point in the structure of the poem, Frank believes. He says that there are no persons in the

15Ibid., p. xxiv.
universe of Hart Crane, and this crystallisation of the prairie mother only upsets the former pattern.

"Cutty Sark," part three of the poem, finds the poet in South Street, Manhattan. It is near mid-night and he is carousing with a sailor. Soon he is out again, this time sea-ward. Elizabeth Drew's remarks on this section are effective. She says:

The chance encounter on the New York water front described in the opening lines overflows into a romantic reminiscence of clipper ships against the music of a mechanical piano. It is a frankly romantic piece, but Crane's technique of presentation has lessened the sentimental weakness which mars so much of the poem. His method is one of auditory imagery developed through the piano in the background... An atmosphere of fading and fusing sounds gradually emerges... Then the clipper ships appear as a romantic memory floating in a mist of echoed sounds.16

Miss Drew continues: "Here the audacity of complete freedom is triumphant; but such a triumph is rare. A great poetic craftsman finds his source of energy more often in the dramatic possibilities of the conflict between the variations of emotional tones in his poems, of the images he employs to create these, and the technical demands of a metrical scheme."17

Frank's version of part four, "Cape Hatteras," is worthy of being quoted in full. He finds this to be the turning point of the Poem and says as follows:

17Ibid., p. 237.
Thus far, we have seen the individual forms of the poet's crowded day melt into widening, deepening cycles of association, Columbus into the destiny and will of the Atlantic: two lovers into the harbor, the harbor into the Sea; a subway into a transcontinental railroad, into a continent, into a River; the River into the Gulf; the Indian princess into the Earth Mother and her dance into the tumult and traffic of the Nation; ribald South Street into a vision—while the Bridge brings the clippers that bring China—of Atlantis.18

Not much is said about part five, which is merely music upon the variable theme of woman. Then in the following section, "Quaker Hill," an attempt is made again to focus the cosmic journey once more on the person of the poet.

"The Tunnel," which is the title of part seven, runs swiftly toward the climax. The poet is in mid air at mid-night. He leaves the Bridge, 'comes down to earth,' and returns home as he had left, by subway. This unreal collapse of the bridge into subway has meaning, Frank says. "The subway is the tunnel; is the whole life of the city entextured of all the images created by the Poem, all the previous apparitions of earth and sun. The tunnel is America, and is a kind of hell. But it has dynamic direction, it is moving!"19 Poe appears in the subway darkness as the most prophetic and most advanced thinker. He has guessed the effect that the machine would have upon man. Man is seen in his industrial hell, credited to the machine; now let the machine raise his spirit. The vision is given by Whitman; Poe

\[18\text{Frank, op. cit., p. xxv.}\]
\[19\text{Ibid., p. xxvi.}\]
offers the method.

In "Atlantis," the final part, a return is made to the beginning. In time, the Bridge has connected Atlantis with Cathay. "Now it becomes an absolute experience. Like any human event, fully known, it links man instantaneously, 'beyond time,' with the Truth." 20

That Crane is obscure to the average reader, cannot be denied. He was fundamentally a lyric poet working with complex images. Although critical opinion is not in complete agreement, many of the more important critics acknowledge that despite his obscurity he is one of our most important poets. Some of the most intelligent remarks about The Bridge, and about Crane's poetry in general, are made in Ben Belitt's unpublished essay. Despite the fact that Crane thought of The Bridge as an epic about America, it actually breaks into a number of long lyrics. Belitt says:

Amid the possible explanations for the failure of Hart Crane's The Bridge is the surmise that Crane, as a miniaturist, was never at home in the 'epical' form. In general, his tools are the tools of the miniaturist, narrow and delicate edges for cutting in intaglio, mineral surfaces to take light strangely and deflect it glancingly. . . . The stroke is at once a line and a form; no sooner does the blade depress the surface, than it converts its bias into a plane, and its plane into a facet. Its complexity is at least two-fold, for it not only is a complexity of lines, but of surfaces as well. It is from the interplay of line with surface, that the design as a whole communicates its 'meanings.'

Obviously, such a technique is at odds with the formal exigencies of the 'epic' which moves in perspectives rather than planes, and masses rather

20Ibid., p. xxvii.
than facets, and in which the individual stroke is not final, but fluid. Yet when one returns from the analogy to the subject with which it is concerned, one discovers that Crane was capable of something more than the devices of the miniaturist. It is impossible to read such sections of The Bridge as "Ave Maria" and "The Tunnel," for example, without the feeling that the poet's vision was almost the reverse of the miniaturists, that, indeed, its long rebounding cadences and breathing rhythms were the product of a 'massive' rather than a linear energy.21

Belitt goes on to point out that Crane's confusions are often confusions of focus in which mass obscures detail, and detail, mass. "Crane's poetry," he states, "is poetry in which ideas are caught up and wrenched out of their lodging, subjected to change in speeds and changing stature."22

That Crane was caught by his own images and by their double or triple significances and associations is evident in all his work. As Belitt says: "His world is a dream world whose dimensional integers are in continual flux."23 In such a world time is felt to expand and contract according to the poet's emotional state of mind. Despite Crane's sense of flux and change, he wished to state in his poetry an affirmative attitude toward life and to believe in a synthesis of values. As a symbol of the unity in all men's lives, he chose man's anonymous power to create. And in seeking an image of this power he selected the bridge, created by all men working

21From an unpublished essay on Hart Crane, by Ben Belitt.
22Ibid.
23Ibid.
together. He saw this bridge even as Whitman saw the railroad as a symbol of time and space, of unity between past and present, and between various phases of American life. Crane’s was the logic of the dreamer which has no validity outside the dream. Actually his world was one of chaos to which he reacted violently.

Babette Deutsch, in her book, This Modern Poetry,²⁴ contributes a worth while commentary on Crane and his Bridge. She recognizes the influences of Whitman, Dickinson, Poe, and Rimbaud in his verse. "Electicism" is the term applied as the most distinguishing element in the contemporary verse exhibited by Crane.

Miss Deutsch defines a genius as one who has complete control of the rich materials produced in his subconscious mind. She feels that Crane approximates this definition closely. "A mystic, like Yeats, deprived, like him, of a religious tradition in which he could be at ease, longing, like him, for a sacred myth acceptable to his compatriots and contemporaries, but far more keenly alive to the disruptive elements of our urban, industrial civilization, Hart Crane found in the Brooklyn Bridge a symbol adequate to his purpose."²⁵ The bridge becomes for him the key to the ultimate union of mankind, not alone to the spanning of a continent. It was the outward and visible sign of man’s dynamic nature, Miss Deutsch says, the mechanical extension of his being, which pointed to vaster ideal horizons. "Where


²⁵Ibid., p. 141.
Crane telescopes sensations and emotions, or with a cinematographic touch allows the close-up of a remembered moment to open into scenes rapidly shifting time and place, he presses upon the nerve of modern sensibility. Where the light of intellectual beauty sheds its radiance on the given experience, the poet transcends all his contemporaries.26

Miss Deutsch remarks in conclusion, that there are several passages in The Bridge which read like a fulfillment of the extravagant prophecies of Rimbaud, whom Crane, she doubtfully records, professed himself unable to read in the original. "The poem," she continues, "is an apotheosis of the stormy voyages and far explorations, the energy, the agony, the exaltation evoked by the author of The Drunken Boat and A Season In Hell."27

The following words of Nicomachus are quoted by Miss Deutsch in this section: "All things that have been arranged by nature according to a workmanlike plan appear both individually and as a whole, as singled out and set in order by Foreknowledge and Reason, which created all according to number, conceivable to mind only and therefore wholly immaterial; yet real, indeed, the really real, the eternal."28

Allen Tate believes too, that in considering the whole fifteen parts of The Bridge, as a whole poem, there is a definite lack of coherent structure, whether symbolistic or narrative. He finds coherence in the

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 143.
28 Ibid.
personal quality of the writing—in mood, feeling, and tone. In the best passages Tate sees that Crane has a perfect mastery over the qualities of his style; but it lacks an objective pattern of ideas elaborate enough to carry it through an epic or heroic work. "The single symbolistic image, in which the whole poem centers, is at one moment the actual Brooklyn Bridge; at another, it is any bridge or 'connection'; at still another, it is a philosophical pun, and becomes the basis of a series of analogies."29

The theme of The Bridge, in fact, is an emotional simplification of a subject-matter that Crane did not simplify at all. The poem really contains a single purpose and should therefore be comparatively simple. But it is emotionally confused because it is not structurally clarified. Tate feels that the historical plot of the poem, which is the groundwork on which the symbolic bridge stands, is arbitrary and broken, and further, if Crane had picked out a single historical episode, he probably would have been more successful.

"The impulse in The Bridge is religious, but the soundness of an impulse is no warrent that it will create a sound art form. The form depends on too many factors beyond the control of the poet."30 Crane has no poetic interest in his theme. "The structural defect of The Bridge is due to this functional contradiction of purpose."31 When the poet saw that


30Ibid., p. 35.

31Ibid., p. 36.
the bridge, as a symbol was not fulfilling his purpose there was nothing he could do about it. "He is the blameless victim of a world whose impurity violates the moment of intensity, which would otherwise be enduring and perfect."32 He is betrayed, Tate continues, "not by a defect of his own nature, but by the external world; he asks of nature, perfection—requiring only of himself, intensity. The persistent, and persistently deflated pursuit of a natural absolute places Crane at the center of the age."33

Crane does not understand his symbol of the bridge, so naturally the inner structure of the poem becomes confused. He tries to include all American life, and like one trying to see New York in a night, misses everything important. "The poem is the effort of a solipsistic sensibility to locate itself in the external world, to establish points of reference."34

Tate however, does feel that some of the very best poetry of our times is contained in The Bridge. He concedes that Crane is one of those chosen persons who is called upon to act as spokesman for the spiritual life of his age. And in regard to all such characters, Tate says: "The accidental features of their lives, their place in life, their very heredity, seems to fit them for the role: even their vices contribute to their preparation... The character formed by those influences represents an immense concentration, and becomes almost a symbol, of American life in this age."35

32Ibid., p. 38.
33Ibid.
34Ibid., p. 39.
Finally Tate remarks, "...the 'bridge' is empty and static, it has no inherent content, and the poet's attribution to it of the qualities of his own moral predicament is arbitrary. That explains the fragmentary and often unintelligible framework of the poem. There was neither complete action nor ordered symbolism in terms of which the distinct moments of perception could be clarified."

Miss Drew quotes Crane as having cried: "Oh, it is hard! One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper patterns at the right moment." Later on, she says, "Hart Crane in The Bridge is often drowned as well as drenched. A poet may be either master or slave to his medium, but his business is not to deny any of the resources at his disposal, but to select and control them; to make them beneficent instead of beguiling."

In commenting on Crane's imagery, Miss Drew remarks that it is based largely on patterns of private association, which he failed to develop into terms of permanent reference, and which lacks any germinal quality. "He was constantly extending his range of metaphor, but he never intensified and enriched it with any accretions of meaning. And when he choose ready-made symbols, like Brooklyn Bridge and Pocahontas, he failed to endow them with the personal imaginative quality which would give them independent life."
Miss Drew feels that they remain superficial and rather commonplace symbols of transition and romance.

It is interesting to observe here what Crane had to say personally about his work. In one letter to Otto H. Kahn, with whom he corresponded frequently during the process of writing this poem, Crane sets down the entire outline of his mammoth piece. The letter, dated March 18, 1926,\(^40\) will be quoted in part as a clarification of some confused versions offered by the critics.

Crane says:

Right now I'm suppose to be Don Cristobal Colon returning from 'Cathay,' first voyage. For mid-ocean is where the poem begins.

It concludes at midnight--at the center of Brooklyn Bridge. Strangely enough, that final section of the poem has been the first to be completed--yet there's a logic to it, after all; it is the mystic consummation toward which all the other sections of the poem converge. Their contents are implicit in its summary.

Naturally I am encountering many unexpected formal difficulties in satisfying my conception, especially one's original idea has a way of enlarging steadily under the spur of daily concentration on minute details of execution. I don't wish to express my confidence too blatantly--but I am certain that, granted I'm able to find the suitable form for all details as I presently conceive them, 'The Bridge' will be a dynamic and eloquent document.

As I said, I have thus far completed only the final section,--about one hundred lines. I am not

going straight through from the beginning. There has been much incidental reading to do, and more study is necessary as I go on. As I cannot think of my work in terms of time I cannot gauge when it will be completed, probably by next December, however.

There are so many interlocking elements and symbols at work throughout 'The Bridge' that it is next to impossible to describe it without resorting to the actual metaphors of the poem. Roughly, however, it is based on the conquest of space and knowledge. The theme of 'Cathay' [its richness, etc.] ultimately is transmitted into a symbol of consciousness, knowledge, spiritual unity. A rather religious motivation, albeit not Presbyterian. The following notation is a very rough abbreviation of the subject matter of the several sections:

I. Columbus--Conquest of space, chaos
II. Pocahantos--The natural body of American fertility, etc.
III. Whitman--The Spiritual body of America—a dialogue between Whitman and [a dying soldier in a Washington hospital; the infracion of physical death, disunity, on the concept of immortality]
IV. John Brown
   [Negro porter on Calgary Express making up berths and singing to himself [a jazz form for this] of his sweetheart and the death of John Brown, alternately]
V. Subway--The encroachment of machinery on humanity; a kind of purgatory in relation to the open sky of last section.
VI. The Bridge--A sweeping dithyramb in which the Bridge becomes the symbol of consciousness spanning time and space.

The first and last sections are composed of blank verse with occasional rhyme for accentuation. The verbal dynamics used and the spacious periodicity of the rhythm result in an unusually symphonic form. What forms I shall use for the other sections will have to be determined when I come to grips with their respective themes.41

41Ibid.
Another letter to Otto Kahn appears in this same issue of *Hound and Horn*, dated September 12, 1927, in which Crane lays down a more specific outline of *The Bridge*.\(^{42}\) This same letter appears, almost in its entirety in Horton's book [pp. 335-340], so reference to it here will not be necessary.

\(^{42}\)Ibid., pp. 679-682.
CHAPTER V

LATER LIFE AND WRITING

The **Broken Tower** is the last important poem Crane wrote. It was finished not long before he committed suicide. The theme of the poem is that the poet feels himself to have been destroyed by the intensity of his imagination. The first four stanzas, in which many images of bells are used, refer to the imagination which destroys the tower, or the body. The body is shattered, as it were, by the poet's attempt to present his vision. In a letter to the editor Crane said that Leonie Adams' **Bell Tower** inspired him to write this. This was before he left New Mexico. Apparently the poem had been in his mind for some time, for there is some argument as to just when it was written. Eda Lou Walton says that the **Broken Tower**, the one masterpiece of the last year of his life, was thought of at least a year before it took final shape in his mind. "I have a letter from Crane dated January, 1931," she says, "in which he writes, 'Give my greetings to Léonie Adams and tell her that I think her poem **Bell Tower** makes one long to do something half so perfect as its delicate and yet majestic overtones achieve'."

In a letter to the **New English Weekly**, after Crane's death, to refute Gorham Munson's statement that the poem had been composed several years

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earlier, Lesley Simpson left a record of its immediate genesis. He wrote that he was with Hart Crane in Taxco, Mexico, the morning of January 27, 1932, when he first conceived the idea of The Broken Tower. The night before, being troubled by insomnia, he had risen before daybreak and walked down to the village square. It so happened that one of the innumerable Indian fiestos was to be celebrated that day, and Hart met the old Indian bellringer who was on his way down to the Church. He and Hart were old friends, and he brought Hart up into the tower with him to help ring the bells. As Hart was swinging the clapper of the great bell, Simpson reports, he was half drunk with its mighty music when the swift tropical dawn broke over the mountains.

The sublimity of the scene and the thunder of the bells woke in Hart one of those gusts of joy of which only he was capable. He came striding up the hills afterwards in a sort of frenzy, refused his breakfast, and paced up and down the porch impatiently waiting for me to finish my coffee. Then he seized my arm and bore me off to the plaza where we sat in the shadow of the Church, Hart the while pouring out a magnificent cascade of words. It was a Hart Crane I had never known and an experience I shall never forget.

This poem is interesting, especially after reading the story of its conception. The first line, 'The bellrope,' and so on through two stanzas, gives a physical description of Crane's response to hearing the bells ring in the tower. About line ten, begins his recount of his own identification with the experience of hearing the bells. The bells seem to him his own emotions which he can ring. He indicates that he, as poet, like

the sexton, entered the world to ring bells, that is write poems about love and faith, but that these poems or songs could not long indicate his spiritual vision. In time the poetic intensity of his imagination seemed indeed to destroy his physical health, and while he was still young, he felt both mind and body failing him.

The next stanza states that he sang, but that the song was dissipated on the air, while the religious word, had he been able to state it, would have been hope rather than despair. Emotions left him no answer. In line twenty-six, he asks, 'Could blood...power?' In other words, can emotions present truth? Do emotions still stir latent power? His emotions still recall the old song of hope, despite the fact that there are conflicting feelings in him concerning his vision. Desires or prayers have struggled against one another in the poet before he could proclaim truth. He builds his own spiritual tower. The formative qualities of the heart, or emotional feelings, command the poet to understand the whole scene of earth and heaven and to declare that love is the greatest power of the imagination.

The following remarks are taken from Crane's own essay, "Modern Poetry." Here can be found many of his most important ideas. He believes that modern poetry has long since passed the crest of its rebellion against many of the so-called classical strictures. The poet's concern, as it always has been, must be self-discipline toward a formal integration of

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experience. "For poetry is an architectural art, based not on Evolution or the idea of progress, but on the articulation of the contemporary human consciousness sub specie aeternitatis, and inclusive of all readjustments incident to science and other shifting factors related to that consciousness." Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare is cited as the process of free creative activity and each poet can find his responsibilities in this.

More than any of the other arts, Crane sees that poetry has a greater intimacy and a wider and more exact scope of implication. He parallels literature with painting as having the closest analogous tendencies toward abstract statement and metaphysical representation. Both media, it is certain, were responding to the shifting emphasis of the Western World away from religion toward science. The two basic concerns of science, analysis and discovery, became conscious objectives of both painter and poet. Modern painting, like a mathematical equation, is independent of any representational motive; while some modern verse is merely the result of acute psychological analysis, independent of any dramatic motivation.

The function of poetry in a machine age is identical to its function in any other age; and its capacities for presenting the most complete synthesis of human values remain essentially immune from any of the so-called inroads of science. The emotional stimulus of machinery is on an entirely different psychic plane from that of poetry. Its only menace lies in its capacities for facile entertainment, so easily accessible as to arrest the development of any but the most negligible esthetic responses. The ultimate influence of machinery in this respect remains to be seen, but its firm entrenchment in our

4Ibid., pp. 175-176.
lives has already produced a series of challenging new responsibilities for the poet.

For unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e., acclimatise it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function. This process does not infer any program of lyrical pandering to the taste of those obsessed by the importance of machinery; nor does it essentially involve even the specific mention of a single mechanical contrivance. It demands, however, along with the traditional qualifications of the poet, an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life. This presupposes, of course, that the poet possesses sufficient spontaneity and gusto to convert this experience into positive terms.

The above quotation has so often been misquoted, that it seems important to include it here in its original form.

Crane continues to say that use of and poetic allusion to machinery will in time cause it to lose its sensational glamour. It cannot act creatively in our lives until its connotations emanate from within.

The next point which Crane questions is the modern poet in the role of philosopher or theologian. He sees science in the place of the hierarchies of both academy and Church. "It is pertinent to cite the authors of the Commedia and Paradise Lost as poets whose verse survives the religious dogmas and philosophies of their respective periods, but it is fallacious to assume that either of these poets could have written important religious verse without the fully developed and articulated religious dogmas that each was heir to."6

5Ibid., p. 177.
6Ibid., p. 179.
Crane admits that in such limited space he can only touch on the complicated future of modern poetry, and concludes his essay with a statement about Whitman.

The most typical and valid expression of the American psychosis seems to me still to be found in Whitman. His faults as a technician and his clumsy and indiscriminate enthusiasm are somewhat beside the point. He, better than any other, was able to coordinate those forces in America which seem most intractable, fusing them into a universal vision which takes on additional significance as time goes on. He was a revolutionist beyond the strict meaning of Coleridge's definition of genius, but his bequest is still to be realized in all its implications.7

Crane's poetry is greatest for its powerful lyrical intensity and for the amazing variety and explosiveness of its imagery. He had been born into the wrong period to accomplish what he wished, namely, to carry into the twentieth century Whitman's faith in democratic brotherhood. The democracy which Whitman prophesied had become a capitalistic society, nor was there as yet any dream of socialism. Crane could see that scientific advancements had made it necessary for men to work together in order to create great cities, with their bridges and other means of communication. He wrote of man's scientific creations, but he had no vision of man's mass power to change his world, and he died before any revolutionary faith was prevalent among the artists. He stands, therefore, between the school of poets who sang of man's spiritual poverty, such as Eliot, and the school who sing of man's will to bring about socialism, such as Auden, Spender,

7Tbid.
and C. Day Lewis. Crane affirms man's greatness by emphasizing the greatness of his works, not the greatness of man himself.

Miss Drew makes an excellent contrast between the intuitive poets and the deliberate poets. The latter, such as Marianne Moore, Stephen Spender, and F. T. Prince display fastidious workmanship. The former, such as Dylan Thomas, Richard Eberhart, and Crane often disappoint as often as they satisfy.

Waldo Frank again, has made significant comments on the poetry of Hart Crane. He calls it a deliberate continuance of the great tradition in terms of our industrial world, and with this purpose of Crane's work in mind, finds it easier to understand his methods, his content, his obscurity. Frank points out that clear forms, such as those of a poet like Frost should not be sought in Crane. The latter continues the tradition of the Emersonian era, whose poets were all bards of possibility rather than of realisation. They relied on inherited forms, however; forms emotional, ethical, social, intellectual and religious, transplanted from Europe and not too deliquescent for their uses. "Whitman's apocalypse rested on the politics of Jefferson and on the economics of the physiocrats of France. Emerson was content with the ideology of Plato and Buddha, his own class world not too radically differing from theirs." These poets received an


9Frank, op. cit., p. ix.
accessible and communicable form from these conventional assumptions. However, in Crane none of these traditions are found surviving, so that his problem of finding new words with which to create his vision is more evident. "His vision was the timeless one of all the seers, and it binds him to the great tradition; but because of the time that fleshed him and that he needed, to substance his vision, he could not employ traditional concretions. He began, naked and brave, in a cultural chaos; and his attempt, with sound materials, to achieve poetic form, was ever close to chaos."10

Frank calls Crane a more complete child of modern man than either Emily Dickinson or Blake. He was overwhelmed by the forces of cities, machines, and his fellowmen. In order to master them the poet must find his own expression to show his relationship with life.

Crane's interests were complex and varied and he was in vital touch with the two chief literary tendencies. One was centered by Ezra Pound, Alfred Kreymborg, the imagists, Harriet Monroe's Poetry and The Little Review; the other was grouped about The Seven Arts. He was reading Marlowe, Donne, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and was also finding inspiration in Whitman, Sherwood Anderson and Melville.

At the time of the outbreak of the war, 1917-18, Crane was most undecided about future plans. He wanted time to write, to meditate, and to read, but he had no desire to lose contact with the industrial world.

10Ibid., p. x.
So as a compromise he became employed by his father in the candy business in Cleveland, where he remained for two years. At the end of this period, Hart was completely unnerved. He could not stand, not even for one more day his father's war against his poetic calling. So he decided in 1920, to leave both Cleveland and his father. But his burden was too heavy to carry and alcohol became his God. Aside from this curse however, there was a deeper cause which led to Crane's suicide.

Crane was a mystic, Frank says, in agreement with Gorham Munson, whose ideas will be discussed later. Frank continues to explain the mystic in the following manner:

The mystic is a man who knows, by immediate experience, the organic continuity between his self and the cosmos. This experience, which is the normal fruit of sensitivity, becomes intense in a man whose native energy is great; and lest it turn into an overwhelming, shattering burden, it must be ruthlessly disciplined and ordered. The easiest defense from this mystic burden is of course the common one of denying the mystic experience altogether. An anti-mystical age like ours is simply one so innerly resourceless that it solves, by negation and aggressive repression, the problem of organic continuity between the self and a seemingly chaotic world—thus perpetuating the inward and outward chaos.

Frank believes that the true solution is too much for most men to figure out. One must achieve within one's self a stable nucleus to bear and then transfigure the world's impinging chaos. This nucleus is impersonal

11Ibid., p. xiii.
12Ibid.
and cosmic, and is the key to order in the ordinary world. In this way, the mystic escapes destruction and becomes a leader. Frank feels that Crane missed being a mystic, not because of developing a nucleus, but because he could not control his nerves and his passions, which in turn led him to drink and sexual indulgence. Munson, although most of his criticism is kindly, refers to him as a "mystic on the loose."¹³

Criticism at times seems extremely cruel, when it is really meant to be an aid to the poet. Crane, himself, admitted once that if it was not for the helpful assistance of Munson, Allen Tate, and Frank, he probably would have given up long before he did.

Allen Tate's words from the introduction to White Buildings, 1926, are quoted by Frank. It is the latter's purpose here, to try to show that he is not the only one who sees the lack of a unitary principle or theme in Crane's poetry. Both critics agree that themes are present in fragmentary parts, but there is no underlying motive for the whole. That is why part of a poem is sometimes better than the whole; and that is why too, the reader finds it difficult to carry the thought from one section to the next.

In speaking of White Buildings, Frank continues to illustrate, with specific examples, the need of integration of ideas. He says that page after page only ephemerally framed in a mirroring mood at once melts itself into the turbulent procession. Objective reality exists in these poems, Frank says, only as an oblique moving-inward to the poet's mood.

But the mood is never, as in imagist or romantic verse, given for and as itself. It is given only as a moving-outward toward the objective world. Each lyric is a diapason between two integers of a continuous one. But the integers subjective and objective are almost never clear; the sole clarity is the balance of antithetical movements. This makes of the poem an abstract, wavering, aesthetic body.14

But in the final six lyrics, "Voyages," Frank notes the beginning of a synthesis by the symbolic use of the sea. "The turbulent experiences of Crane's childhood and youth are merged into a Litany of the Sea."15 As D. H. Lawrence used the symbol of perfect sexual union, Crane uses the symbol of the Sea as a principle of unity and release from the contradictions of personal existence. But he could not be satisfied with his symbol, as Lawrence was, because his intellect was more powerful, his art more austere. White Buildings ends on the note of surrender. "But," Frank says, "the poet in ready to begin his quest again for a theme that shall integrate, not destroy, the multiple human world he loves."16

In his review of Horton's Life of Crane, Conrad Aiken agrees with the author that Crane is a "great" poet, but he sees what is apparent, especially as the poet grew older, and that is, the failure of the sub

14Frank, op. cit., p. xv.
15Ibid., p. xvi.
16Ibid., p. xvii.
structure to hold together. "He had, it is true, an explicit aesthetic in defense of this: he claimed the privileges of a pre-logical and associational and purely affective kind of poetic statement, carried to an extreme of subjectivism; but it may well be questioned whether this was not an ex post facto rationalization of what had become an essentially destructive bad habit."17

Crane was a neurotic with talent, but with no courage or will to discipline his extraordinary talent. As Aiken points out, he indulged its weaknesses to excess, whipped up his failing associational powers with alcohol, and came inevitably to the point at which they were exhausted. "Arrived there, he found, of course, that he had no intellectual centre, and no core of conviction, left. Intellectually and spiritually, he died with his failure to synthesize the architecture of The Bridge, his finest poem; and this he knew."18

At the time when Crane first found his theme, Lewis Mumford was writing prophetically. Frank includes one of his quotations from Sticks and Stones in his introduction, which is worth repeating here. Mumford wrote:

... beyond any other aspect of New York, I think, the Brooklyn Bridge has been a source of joy and inspiration to the artist. ... All that the age had just cause for pride in—its advances in science, its skill in handling iron, its personal heroism in the face of dangerous industrial processes, its will—


18Ibid.
Inversion to attempt the untried and the impossible—came to a head in the Brooklyn Bridge.19

Destinations contains an essay written by Gorham Munson in 1925.20 It is probably the first important study made of the poet. He sees a totally different and higher order of poetry coming from Crane. "Here we are captivated by sureness and deftness, with verbal music, and lifted to rapture by the gorgeous and evocative images. The plane on which Crane writes is imaginative, not fanciful, and the rhetoric turns lyrical eloquence."21

Munson calls Crane's poetry divine. "What is divine about the poetry of Crane is the energy which fills it, that intense, dionysian, dancing, exalted energy that by sheer pressure lifts him to heights unattainable by less titanic poets."22

Then this writer goes on to give three characteristics of Crane's poetry in general. First, he says, there is metrical range. The use of conventional rhyme and beat patterns while he was learning his craft, then experiments in vers libre, eventually the mastery of blank verse. Next, Munson explains the effect of the weighty vocabulary, — "words like 'plangent,' 'hypogeum,' 'vertex,' 'transmemberment,' solid born Latin words

19 Frank, op. cit., p. xviii.
20 Munson, op. cit.
21 Ibid., p. 161.
22 Ibid., p. 162.
stamping out a robust dance in packed array."23 The images, used not for illustration, but as symbols, therefore take on strange and echoing overtones.

Second, ". . . extraordinary tension of verse structure, of mood, and of thought. In short, his poems are ecstatic illuminations, the tensile expansions of his psychology."24 And the third obvious property cited is Crane's obscurity in meaning.

For the most part, Munson's criticism is highly favorable. "At sixteen he was writing on a level that Amy Lowell never rose from and at twenty-eight he is writing on a level that scarcely any other living American poet ever reaches. He may rightly be termed a real prodigy."25 But in spite of all his genius, Crane was not recognized by any but the small impecunious and adventurous type of review: The Pagan, the Modern School, the Modernist, the Measure, the Double Dealer, Broom, the Fugitive, S4N, Secession, 1924, and the Little Review. Munson believes Crane to be a poet of great creative force and potentiality, but he fears that he does not know enough. " . . . he was breathed on uncritical atmosphere: he has dined on meager ideas: he has been stranded in an arid region so far as currents of fresh, intelligent and alive thought go."26

Allen Tate makes the following statement about the poet's education:

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23Ibid., p. 165.

24Ibid., p. 170.

25Ibid., p. 164.

26Ibid., p. 173.
In an ordinary sense Crane was not an educated man; in many respects he was an ignorant man. There is already a Crane legend, like the Poe legend—it should be fostered because it will help to make his poetry generally known—and the scholars will decide that it was a pity that so great a talent lacked early advantages. It is probable that he was incapable of the discipline of a formal classical education, and probable too that the eclectic education of his time would have scattered and killed his talent.27

Crane's answer to Munson appears in Horton's book. He writes:

I'm perfectly aware of my wholesale lack of knowledge. But as Allen said, what do you mean by knowledge. When you ask exact factual data, ethical morality, or moral classifications, etc. from poetry you not only limit its goal, you ask its subordination to science, philosophy. Is it not equally logical to expect Stravinsky to bring his strings into dissent with Sir Issac Newton?28

Crane tells Munson that as a critic he is working in a confusion of categories. Despite the numerous compliments handed him in the beginning, Crane is displeased with the whole essay because of its conclusion.

Zabel, in an article in Poetry Magazine, delivers a firm belief in the future popularity of Crane's poetry.29 He thinks that once it has gained notice and the interest of historians, it will doubtless be explained with more than usual facility. "Its greatness will be seen in terms of the

poet's heroic resistance to his confused and inchoate environment; its weakness because that confusion, at the pitch of a world crisis, proved too much for him. From such a formulation the meaning and character of his talent will both escape." Zabel says that Crane's personal problem will be simplified by subjecting it to authorized codifications of conduct and motive, but he is doubtful if the increasing scientific subtlety of these codes will permit an explanation not already apparent in his verse. "His poetic vision was caught by an antinomy unresolved both in his experience and in his style. But that irresolution was hardly caused by the two excited decades in which he came to maturity and wrote his verse."31

Cummings, Dos Passos, and Hemingway have laid the stigma of their romantic satire and personal disgust on the post-war world. Crane's verse easily surpasses these. His was not the task of a public idealist. References in his poems to Blake, Poe, Melville, Rimbaud, and Whitman are important to note. Zabel suggests that the intensity of his perception of spiritual corruption inevitably calls for Melville, in whom, rather than in Whitman, Crane might have found his master.

Horton makes an interesting notation in this regard however. He says that the crowds in the street were for Crane very much the same as they had been for Whitman—a source of continual inspiration and vigor; and though he suffered the inevitable reactions against the strain of metropolitan

30 Ibid., p. 33.
31 Ibid.
life and from time to time fled to the country for rest, he always returned
to the massed motions of life. "If they often represented the chaos and
the materialistic madness of the world in which he lived, they also, and
more importantly, represented the incalculable energy and spirit which fed
the anatomy of his faith."32

Zabel continues his discussion by comparing Crane to Blake. "Where
Rimbaud sought to disintegrate the tyranny of inherited concepts, Blake -
and Crane - were bold enough to attempt a synthesis of idealism and
disruption, the task which baffles, according to our traditional cautions
in such matters, any courage but the poets'."33

Into the obscure documentation of Eliot, or the abstract values of
Yeats, he did not venture. The comparison with Blake is enough to suggest
how restricted and deliberate was Crane's choice of symbols, and how his
symbolism is suspect, or specious, the moment it exceeds the solid
boundaries of his sensibility and intuition.

Crane wanted a complete reversal of Eliot's direction. As F. O.
Matthiessen points out, he would profit from Eliot's technical discoveries,
but he would use them toward a more ecstatic goal.34 His closest kinship
was with Whitman. "In his intense desire to embody an idealistic vision,
to assert the present as a splendid bridge to the future, and then, as
he tried to centre on his creation, in his growing confusion as to the

32Horton, op. cit., p. 130.
33Zabel, op. cit., p. 35.
contours of his vision, in his uncertainty as to the foundations of his bridge, he illustrated both the buoyant aspirations and the sudden bewildered despair that fought in the American temperament in the post-war decade."35

Allen Tate says in one essay, "His poetry not only has defects of the surface, it has a defect of vision; but its great and peculiar value cannot by separated from its limitations. Its qualities are bound up with a special focus of the intellect and sensibility, and it would be foolish to wish that his mind had been better trained or differently organized."36

In the summer of 1930, Tate received a letter from Crane which stated that he felt his soundest work was in the shorter pieces of White Buildings, and that his most ambitious work, The Bridge, was not quite perfectly realized. But now that he had started this larger undertaking, he could never return to the lyrical and more limited form. "He had extraordinary insight into the foundations of his work..."37 Tate was a friend of Crane's for a good ten years, and feels that his judgment is sound.

Tate compares Crane's obscurity to a game of chess. "It is a game of chess; neither side can move without consulting the other. Crane's difficulty is that of modern poets generally; they play the game with half

36Tate, op. cit., p. 28.
37Ibid., p. 29.
of the men, the men of sensibility, and because sensibility can make any move, the significance of all moves is obscure. 38

By testing out his capacity to construct a great objective piece of work, The Bridge, in which Crane should present a perfectly articulated definition of himself, Tate feels that the poet has brought his career to an end. He thinks that Hart Crane knew that the structure of the poem was finally incoherent, and for this reason he could no longer believe even in his lyrical powers. He could never return to his early works. "Far from 'refuting' Eliot, his whole career is a vindication of Eliot's major premise - that the integrity of the individual consciousness has broken down. Crane had, in his work, no individual consciousness." 39

Allen Tate realizes that general criticism may easily isolate the principle upon which Crane's poetry is organized. He states that it is the immediate quality of an art, not its whole significance, that sets up schools and traditions. He feels that Crane not only ends the romantic era in his own person, but that he ends it logically and morally. "Beyond Crane no future poet can go," Tate says. 40 "This does not mean that the romantic impulse may not rise and flourish again. The finest passages in his work are single moments in the stream of sensation; beyond the moment he goes at

38Ibid., p. 33.
39Ibid., p. 39.
40Ibid., p. 41.
peril; for outside it there lies the discrepancy between the sensuous fact, the perception, and its organizing symbol—a discrepancy that plunges him into chaos and sentimentality."41

Matthiessen, in regard to Tate's criticism, which announces Crane's failure, says the following:

But even if Crane did not succeed in building a philosophical structure that would give form to the course of America's development and satisfy his desire for a symbol of 'the continuous and living evidence of the past in the immost vital substance of the present,' he did envisage and create separate sections of the poem, as for instance 'The River' or 'The Harbor Dawn,' with magnificent wholeness. When he spoke, during the weeks of his most heightened concentration on his work, of sensing 'an absolute music in the air,' he was not engaging in hyperbole.42

Matthiessen believed that he was more greatly endowed than any other poet born in America since Eliot with the essential talent of being able to conceive of his poems not as 'ideas,' nor as expressive lines and passages, but as complete rhythmical entities.

The obscurity for which he has been much attacked was never deliberate; it resulted from his fumbling need to find words that could articulate a musical ecstasy that he knew to be as real as that of Rimbaud. He may have been betrayed at times by a dangerous analogy between poetry and painting into trying to use words plastically, to manipulate their colors and shapes, but he never lost sight of his fundamental conception of a work of art as 'simply a communication between man and man, a bond of under-

41Ibid.

42Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 175.
Crane was an extraordinarily sensitive person who found no security from his family nor from the period into which he was born. He was strange in daily life, and like Whitman placed all his faith in an ecstatic and mystic love. Eda Lou Walton believes that he might have become the first poet of revolutionary belief, had he lived to know himself the voice of a great movement.  

Miss Walton speaks highly of Philip Horton's book, and at the same time makes some interesting comments on the poet. She says that the last chapters are devoted to a very level headed analysis of Crane's poetry. The earlier versions of the poems, she believes, prove how wrong academic criticism of crane may be—how wrong, in fact, even so acute a critic as R. P. Blackmur has been. Crane worked with words as an artist does with color and design, moving pieces of poems from one composition to another, shifting phrases for better effect and association. For him poetry was plastic, Miss Walton assumes. She continues:

Horton is right about Crane's method of realizing his own meaning through sound and association of image rather than through idea. Music and words aroused him to ecstasy. He played the phonograph constantly while he composed. Words and phrases came very uncleary at first; then as they were written down, their significance cleared and mistakes could be corrected. But revision for Crane meant the reexperiencing of the original emotion; he had constantly to throw himself back into the strange mood of a poem's inception. At times

43Ibid.
44Walton, op. cit.
he wrote with speed and great intensity. Two comparatively brief intervals saw most of his great poems composed. The weaker sections of The Bridge were written when Crane was mentally ill.\(^\text{45}\)

Although Max Eastman is no first rate critic and would rarely, if ever, be included among a group of authorities, parts of his satirical exposition on Crane will be quoted here as a sort of interlude. Even Shakespeare, in his deepest tragedy, realized the necessity for a touch of humor. It is hoped that this report has not, or will not, come close to the Elizabethan tragedies, but the subject matter is sad and depressing; an unhappy tone is in the air. The following words therefore, should alleviate the gloom for awhile anyhow.

Eastman assumes that poetry and all writing is a communicative act. "In these days when critics loudly acclaim a poem like Hart Crane's, The Bridge, as one of the greatest of our generation, and quite incidentally remark that they do not know what the poet is talking about, it seems to me this question needs looking into."\(^\text{46}\)

Eastman tells the story of the time Crane handed him a poem which began with a Latin quotation. After pondering over it for awhile, he finally, in humiliation, asked the poet to explain the meaning, and was told in turn by Crane that he did not know a word of Latin. He did not know what it meant. After several hours of trying to figure out the meaning of the poem, this

\(^{\text{45}}\)Ibid.

critic said: "After struggling awhile with the English parts of it, I returned finally to the Latin as more communicative." 47

At Melville's Tomb is chosen from White Buildings as an example of this uncommunicative verse. Eastman finds the poem simple enough and very sincere and also in a way beautiful. "But," he asks, "does it not tantalize you with a certain reticence? To me it is one of the most exasperating of attractive things. It gazes out of the page significantly and in my direction, and with signs of intense emotion, but will not open its lips, will not make friends—will not, as we say, 'Cone out with it.'" 48

Eastman says there is no one he knows more freely and unaffectedly communicative than Hart Crane, personally. He feels that it is difficult to continue believing that poetry is essentially an act of communication after reading Crane. "It seems in his case to be the opposite—a thing that begins whenever he stops communicating." 49

Hart Crane is not only generous in communication, but also—at least as regards the English parts of his poetry—swift and convincing. He can very handily dispose of any sceptic who ventures to suggest that each syllable is not rich with values both of meaning and experience. He is in fact so brilliant in this process that he always proves beyond a glimmer of doubt not only that his poetry when explained by him can be understood by anyone, but also that when not explained by him it can be understood by nobody. 50

47 Ibid., p. 94.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 95.
50 Ibid.
Without his own interpretation, Crane's lines reveal little or nothing at all, Eastman goes on to say. "But this fact does not disturb Hart Crane in the least. It does not even occur to his mind. He is not defending his skill in communicating experience. He is defending his integrity in the art of talking to himself in public." 51

Eastman later speaks of several of Crane's critics. Mark Van Doren, in eulogizing Hart Crane's volume White Buildings, "begins by confessing quite frankly that he could not understand this volume when he first read it, and then still more frankly adding that he cannot understand it now either. But nevertheless he admires and enjoys it, and insists that it is 'intellectual' rather than emotional poetry." 52

After reading Allen Tate's criticism, Eastman decides that, "the idea is not to delve under what the poet is talking about, but read so fast that what he is talking about can't catch you." 53

Eastman sees that the formulas for reading poetry presented by Tate and by Eliot, are almost identical. "They both make us feel at least it is awfully easy to read poetry—all you have to do is suspend your intelligence and 'let her go'." 54

Ivor Winters, another of Crane's commentators and Herbert Read are

51 Ibid., p. 96.
52 Ibid., p. 113.
53 Ibid., p. 114.
54 Ibid.
discussed next. They say that to really read poetry you have to study it intensely and then talk it over with your friends. It is evident by now that Eastman has absolutely no use for any of these critics. One other example which is comical enough to include, is his reference to C. K. Ogden's suggestion on how to read Joyce's Tales Told of Sham and Shaun. That is, one must learn to talk Eskimo.

In speaking of all critics, of all times, Eastman says:

I do not see what to do with the whole tribe but bundle them into a well-rotted ship and shove them out to sea. We should no doubt long ago have adopted this mode of mitigating the plague of unintelligibility, were it not for the fact that a majority of these critics are poets too. That leaves us nothing to do, I am afraid, but smile patiently and turn to the books of science and wait for better days.55

If these were Eastman's sincere plans for the future, it would probably be all for the best, because although his comments are highly entertaining and amusing, they are actually very mediocre and definitely unfounded.

55Ibid., p. 122.
CONCLUSION

American opinion, without any fixed symbol of its culture, swung back and forth after the war between radical ideas and more conservative ones. Woodrow Wilson, before his death, realized that the idealism on which he acted in leading America into the war was inopportune. American radicals were aroused to new enthusiasm by the revolutionary developments in Russia, while the rest of the country entered a period of temporary boom. During the Waste-Land period most of the writers had complained desolately of the sad state of affairs, the origin of which they did not trace back to economic injustice. Now suddenly the writers of the younger generation ceased to complain and began to diagnose what was wrong with themselves as entirely explainable in terms of what was wrong with the world. They no longer mumbled to themselves about their private frustrations but attempted to instruct the world concerning the contradictions of society. By 1931, America had her millions of unemployed. The good old stolid American business man, however, went on his way, sure that this depression, like others, could be shaken off. As the years of unemployment went on, the lower middle-class teetered up and down between upper middle-class stability and the insecurity of the laboring class.

During the early years after the crash one cure after another for the serious economic difficulties in which America now found herself was suggested. The engineers argued that as technocrats they could best take over the means of production. Intellectuals in general suggested that
their superior intelligence should grant them leadership. One writer even went so far as to propose that a special group of leaders be picked in childhood, that these chosen individuals be isolated from the world in order that they be kept free from political corruption until they were fifty years old, and that at this mature age they become the especially appointed rulers of America, able to guide her in spiritual and economic dilemmas. This idea and many others similar to it, was actually taken seriously by most of the reviewers and became the subject of many earnest analyses in women's club meetings.

The artists were already emphasizing the influence of society upon man. Such writers as kept step at all with the times, with the rise of dictators and prophecies of world disaster, decided to vacate their esthetic retreat. They began jumping out the windows and landing somehow, anyhow, in the real world. Once on the ground, English and American writers both began wandering about in search of new material. This they found in a sociological interpretation of life and in studies of the working class.

After 1915, there were two strongly opposed tendencies for several years. Sandburg, Lindsay, Masters, and Frost popularized one by the use of colloquial speech; Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay remained loyal to the traditional poetic language. Carl Sandburg was one of the first writers concerned with the working people. He refused to flee from dirty Chicago and argued that machines were not to blame for the situation in which men found themselves. He felt that in the right hands, machine economy could be beneficial. Always, Sandburg sees the people,
stupid or not, as right and capable of winning in the long run. Today and for some seven or eight years past our philosophers, historians, journalists, scientists, and men of letters are all more or less inclined to accept the idea that to understand the world at all we must understand the economic structure of society.

The abrupt change in idiom came with T. S. Eliot, whose unusual skill in technique, derived from the Symbolist school, soon brought him many imitators in France, in England, and in America. Some, such as Hart Crane, would not follow his inner difficulties and despairs; but like Crane they made an effective study of his technique. Horace Gregory, for example, like Eliot did not wish to relinquish the past, but unlike Eliot, he refused to believe that art and passion had ever been the sole property of the intelligentsia. While Gregory bewailed the fact that we still live --and we do still live--in the Waste Land and have little certainty of what the future holds, he argued also against the injustices apparent everywhere.

Others such as Kenneth Fearing, Alfred Hayes, Muriel Rukeyser, and Sterling Brown, forsook entirely personal lyricism and turned to the new subject-matter of economic criticism. When the Waste-Land poets shifted from the use of nature imagery to the use of city imagery in order to express the new sense of man as victimized by too complex a society, an obscurity arose from the use of new images to present new emotions. Their language at first seemed unfamiliar. Later the newer poets were to meet the same problem. They wished to express new ideas not in general circulation and for this purpose they needed new imagery. Industrial imagery they could
use and often did. Nature imagery they seldom used, for they were talking chiefly of reactions to economic injustices best exemplified in modern cities. But since they could not make up an entirely new language, they had obviously to rely upon older emotional pictures and to present these so as to attempt to communicate rather startlingly new ideas. The result was that they often failed to communicate precisely what they intended.

Babette Deutsch makes the point that every poet has to be thinking about something, no matter how vague his stream of thought may be, and his emotion will be aroused by something outside himself.¹ The thoughts and feelings of the moderns centered on their irrational and unstable universe. Theirs was a war torn world; society was disorganized by the abuse of the machine. "The desperate - and the poets despaired - not finding refuge in fantasy, must shell the enemy with a play of blinding irony."² This is true of many of the poets, although as it has been shown, Crane did not resort to these means.

Miss Deutsch continues:

With the economic framework toppling, with religious sanctions fallen away and science not yet happy in supplanting them, the poet had not merely to respond to and interpret his world, he had practically to create it. The symbolists had telescoped images to convey the rapid passage of sensations and emotions. The metaphysicals had played in a like fashion with ideas. Both delighted in paradox. The cinema, and ultimately the radio, made such telescopy congenial to the modern poet, as the grotesqueness of his environment made paradox inevitable for him.³

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
Miss Deutsch attempts to show that the difference in pre-war thought and post-war thought is due chiefly to the abrupt changes which took place in the world during this short space.

Eliot believed that man should be portrayed by the poet as being concerned with the trivialities of daily life; there should be a sense of the past continually interrupting the present. This is obviously difficult to achieve in one single poem, which is evident even in The Wasteland. The continuity is lost as in Ezra Pound's, Cantos and in Hart Crane's, The Bridge.

Today the world is again in a period of transition. The same people who are sitting in the most expensive restaurants demanding super attention from waitresses are the very same people who five years ago were the servers of the delicious dainties they are now enjoying. It is not the fine wines and sirloin steaks these people like, because they are not even aware of the fact that they are dining on the very best to be had. They do not know what good food is because they never had it before. Food is incidental to them. It is, on the other hand, a petty feeling of power that satisfies them. They have been pushed around for so long, that now with defense wages so ridiculously high and the need of workers becoming such a drastic problem, the working people are striking back. But they are actually defeating their own purpose, because after the war, defense factories will be closed, money will disappear, jobs will be scarce, and these same people will be tossed back into the bread line. How will they live? How can they possibly stand the jar? It will not come about without the
usual family tragedies which follow such changes. Money today is definitely
in the wrong hands. If Hart Crane were alive he could no more bear under
the modifications of society than he could twenty years ago.

Naturally a war is bound to bring about drastic alterations. The
people at the present time, however, on the whole seem to be better
equipped to meet uncertain situations than they were during the last war. A
new type of machine nowadays is not one-half as surprising as a machine
appearing in the last generation. Then it was a sensation, and in many
cases it meant a complete renovation of the simple life being led.

Crane was not the only one who gave up. Newspapers carried several
suicide reports daily, and hundreds of others never received the notice
of the press. The world had been turned upside down destroying thousands
in its revolution—men who lacked physical, mental, and spiritual strength
to meet the crisis.

It might be said that Crane tried too hard to reach his goal, and that
in his desperate struggle to accomplish what was to be an American epic,
he ignored the "trivialities of daily life" which Eliot spoke of. He was
overwhelmed and consequently the regrettable and bitter outcome was inevi-
table. The world was not to blame for Crane's death, or for anyone's death.
Trouble and worry together are merely a test of human ability to either
rise and conquer situations or to fall sadly to destruction.

Crane, however, had high poetic ideals. As was quoted earlier from
his essay, he believed that poetry could absorb the machine; that is,
"acclimatize" it naturally as it did every other association. He was not
alone in this belief, although it is felt he was probably the most sincere. W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and C. Day Lewis, three of the young English poets, more than anyone here in America, believed in Crane's ideas. The Bridge, as critics have said, was almost a success, and still may attract more than curious attention in the future. However, the lack of a culminating effect and the inability of the poet to solidify his mood and material at the end of the poem are unfortunate.

It is proof, on the other hand, as this thesis set out to show, that it was not the neglect of his age which ruined Hart Crane as a poet and as a man, but rather the destructive elements within himself and his family. His life, chaotic as it was, his family in all its troubles, his inability to accept criticism, which was so often a helping hand, his excessive drinking, and his abnormal sexual relationships, have been shown in such a way that it is easy to see how this sensitive character was unable to cope with the complexities of modern life. He tried to solve problems he probably did not understand. But his contribution to modern poetry cannot be ignored, even though he can no longer defend his poetic theories. As it has been often said, Crane probably has received more attention from his suicide than from his poetry. But this is unfair, even as it is unfair to delve into his personal peculiarities in preference to his "artistic" contribution.

It is for this reason, therefore, in honest consideration, and in the name of justice, that Crane's most personal affairs have been omitted. This material, which is always so accessible to the sensational and "look at this line" readers, has not been included because it is available in sources
already mentioned.

The more sympathetic of Crane's critics, such as Horton, Tate, Frank, and Munson, have been cited in their efforts to illustrate the special influences on Crane. All of them, especially the prime authority, Philip Horton, agree that it was not due to lack of appreciation that Crane was so sadly destroyed, but due fundamentally to his own personal lack of stamina to live as a sensitive man and a poet in this upset world.
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for

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCES AFFECTING HART CRANE

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Ben Belitt, unpublished essay.
The thesis submitted by Miss Dorothy Jayne McNulty has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 28, 1945
Date

Signature of Adviser