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CYCLES OF ILLUSION AND DISILLUSION IN THE POETRY OF HART CRANE

Rice University PH.D. 1981

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CYCLES OF ILLUSION AND DISILLUSION IN THE POETRY OF HART CRANE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MAY 1981
ABSTRACT

This study is a reading of Hart Crane's two published volumes, White Buildings and The Bridge. The first chapter presents a general review of the major criticism of Crane's poetry and discusses the negative and positive aspects of that criticism. The relationship of this study to current critical opinion is also discussed, and the main thesis of this work is presented. The contention is that Hart Crane's poetry is motivated by a central synthesizing idea, the search for union between the illusions presented by poetic vision and the disillusioning antivisionary stance presented by twentieth-century reality. Crane, unlike many other poets, was not attempting to impose order upon, or change in any way, the world in his search for synthesis. He was, instead, seeking a stable order within himself that would accommodate both his vision and his reality. Since he was unable to alter perceived reality, he was forced to alter his poetic illusions one by one, constantly testing each against the disillusioning patterns of mundane existence until it failed, in continuous cycles of alternating illusion and disillusion. Crane sought not refuge from the harsh realities of life but a synthesis of real and unreal worlds that would provide a form of ultimate reality to which both the poet and the man, the visionary and the ordinary, could be reconciled. These cycles are illustrated in Chapter I by readings of two sections of The Bridge, and the problem of genre and division in Crane's poetry is discussed.
The second chapter is a reading of the poems in *White Buildings*. The thesis is that the volume is divided into five distinct cycles, each of which includes several poems in the volume. The first cycle presents an almost sinusoidal pattern of despair that moves toward ecstasy and eventually returns to despair once again. The succeeding cycles, although not nearly as linearly precise as the first, also follow similar patterns. "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" encompasses an entire cycle of illusion and disillusion by itself, while "At Melville's Tomb" and the "Voyages" series compose the concluding cycle of the volume. Throughout the book Hart Crane moves ever nearer his goal of union between the ideal and the real, and actually achieves the union, albeit briefly, in the last two cycles.

The third chapter is devoted to a reading of *The Bridge*. The contention here is that *The Bridge* is an evolved and expanded continuation of the process begun and partially developed in *White Buildings*. While the two works are separate entities able to stand by themselves, it is also possible to read them as, in one sense, one long work bound by similarities of theme, imagery, motif, and structure. *The Bridge* too is composed of cycles that oscillate between illusion and disillusion as the poet attempts to solve the twin problems of time and space, two aspects of reality that frustrate his drive toward synthesis. By using the lessons learned from *White Buildings*, Crane is able first to conquer time through a mystical dream-like journey into the prehistory of America in which he joins
erotically and spiritually with Pocahontas, the essence and spirit of the continent, and then conquers space through an actual journey into the hellish depths of lower Manhattan and a subway journey beneath the East River. The synthetic element he finds is the symbolic "Bridge," the synoptic arc that joins reality and illusion with a stable platform that supports the poet between the two variant states of existence. The poet himself becomes both the process and the artifact, the creator of the bridge and the bridge himself, symbolized by identification with the architectural construct of Brooklyn Bridge.
This work is dedicated to my wife, without whose loving care, hard work, and dedication this project could never have been brought to completion.
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Chapter I: The Bitter Rose: Cycles of Illusion and Disillusion in the Poetry of Hart Crane

"Sonnet: To a Portrait of Hart Crane"

Unweathered stone beneath a rigid mane
Flashes insurgent dusk to ancient eyes
Dreaming above a lonely mouth, that lies
Unbeaten into laughter out of pain:
What is the margin of the lovely stain
Where joy shrinks into stilled miseries?
From what remembrance of satyrs' tipped cries
Have you informed that dark ecstatic brain?

I have not grasped the living hand of you,
Nor waited for a music of your speech:
From a dead time I wander--and pursue
The quickened year when you will come to teach
My eyes to hold the blinding vision where
A bitter rose falls on a marble stair.

It may seem strange to some to preface a discussion of one poet's works with a poem by another poet, even when the poets were good friends like Hart Crane and Allen Tate. Yet, Tate's sonnet, written nearly ten years before Crane's despairing end, is in a sense both a tribute to the genius that burned within Crane and a harbinger of the ever-narrowing circumstances that would eventually destroy him. Crane's "blinding vision" was just that--a vision that was alternately focused on the ideal and the real but never able to find any permanent middle ground from which to build a stable mode of seeing his life and the world in a clear, unified vision. Ironically, this was one of the attributes that made him a great poet while ultimately eroding his ability to survive as one. It is also interesting to note that Tate
expresses a wish in this sonnet for his own version of the "blinding vision" to be taught by Crane, and fortunate, perhaps, for all admirers of his works and life that he was never able to see "where / A bitter rose falls on a marble stair," as Crane did.

In this study I will examine this search by Hart Crane for the clear, unified vision, what I have termed the synthesis or the fusion between the ideal and the real, between vision and reality, or ultimately, between illusion and disillusion. Crane's visionary impulses constantly led him in his poetry to illuminate the grand illusions of the world--love, poetic or artistic efficacy, the very possibility of happiness itself--through magnificent visionary flights of what the world, both private and public, could be. At the same time his basic insecurity led him to doubt his own vision, to test his carefully structured poetic illusions against the disillusioned and disillusioning reality of the early twentieth century milieu. Thus his poetry constantly cycles between ecstatic illusion and despairing disillusion in a search for some unity or synthesis that will allow the reconciliation of vision and reality. In succeeding chapters I will follow the course of these cycles through White Buildings and The Bridge in the form of a close reading of the two volumes that illustrates not only the persistence and structure of the cycles in Crane's poetry, but also how the cycles serve as a force for unity between the two volumes, leading in a linear progression to the achievement of the synthetic state at the end of The Bridge. In this chapter, however, I will explicate only the basic structure of the cycles and attempt to
demonstrate the foundations for them in Crane's critical thinking. Yet, before we can begin to unravel the complicated patterns of Crane's cyclic poetry, we must first examine the often stormy relationship between Hart Crane and his critics, many of whom were his close friends, and understand the basic misunderstanding of Crane that many of them represent.

Ever since his tragic death in 1932, critics have been writing about Hart Crane. Many have lamented the obscurity of his poetry, as, for example, when R. P. Blackmur says that in Crane's poems, "experience assaults rather than informs the sensibility." Others, including his most trusted friends, have labelled him a failed myth maker, as when Tate speaks of The Bridge as "fragmentary and often unintelligible," and Ivor Winters crucifies the same poem by saying,

The work as a whole is a failure. It builds up to two climaxes, one in The Dance and one in Atlantis, both of which are incomprehensible.

Additionally, critics have delighted in paying Crane left-handed compliments by labelling him an almost-visionary whose "failure has tragic (noble) implications," according to L. S. Dembo, and a poet of the first rank whose genius far exceeded his talent and who, according to Blackmur, lacks "the ultimate, if mythical, quality of easeity, that quality of completeness, of independence, so great that it seems underived and an effect of pure creation." Blackmur also says of Crane that "there is about him . . . the distraught but exciting splendour of a great failure."
Not all the criticism has been uniformly uncomplimentary or
denigrating, especially the later criticism, yet much of it has an
ambivalent quality about it, as if the critics were simultaneously
fascinated and repulsed by Crane and his poetry. This seems to be
especially true of those critics, such as Winters and Tate, who knew
Hart Crane personally. As John Unterecker, Crane's most recent
biographer, has remarked, "People who were close to Crane had a hard
time keeping up with where the poem was at, let alone where it was
going. Private knowledge got in the way of detached judgement." A
prime example of this ambivalent, perhaps too subjective view of Hart
Crane by his critics is Allen Tate. In his Collected Essays, Tate
says that Crane's "defect lay in his inability to face out the moral
criticism implied in the failure to impose his will upon experience," and
that Crane "would have gained an advantage could he have found a
subject to stick to." Later in the same essay, however, Tate
relents a bit when he asks, "Does American culture afford such a
subject? It probably does not." Tate can oscillate between
praising Crane as "one of the great masters of the romantic movement," whose "disorder is original and fundamental . . . the special quality
of his mind that belongs to our own time," and a condemnation of the
poet's most ambitious work as "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."

Hart Crane himself said in his "General Aims and Theories" that
"New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articula-
tion,"¹⁴ and emphasized that the poet's vision of the world and his times "will simply be a by-product of his curiosity and the relation of his experience to a postulated 'eternity'."¹⁵ Thus the poet's symbols become increasingly colored by his environment, his reaction to that environment, and the "moral predicament" a particular environment places him in. The arbitrary, transitory nature of this method of symbol making, which we are all subject to, is what seemingly bothers Tate. Of course, Crane realized that the poet "must . . . have a sufficiently universal basis of experience to make his imagination selective and valuable,"¹⁶ but the determination of what is "sufficiently universal" must be a personal decision within each poet: "... what is interesting and significant will emerge only under conditions of our submission to, and examination and assimilation of the organic effects on us of . . . fundamental factors of our experience."¹⁷

In another essay, Tate says of Crane that "His pantheism is necessarily a philosophy of sensation without point of view."¹⁸ In this instance, Tate is perhaps partially correct. Crane was constantly searching for a "point of view," a permanent credo from within which he could view the world with objectivity and equanimity, and which would support him against the apparent chaos he saw around him. What Tate detects as a lack of "point of view" seems to me to be a lack of an assimilated, unified viewpoint, as each stance Crane adopts is merely temporary, propped unsteadily and awaiting his critical,
destructive testing against reality. As Tate admits, later in the essay,

He is betrayed, not by a defect in his own nature, but by the external world; he asks of nature perfection—requiring only of himself intensity. The persistent, and persistently defeated, pursuit of a natural absolute places Crane at the center of his age.

Again, Tate is only partially correct. Crane's "absolute," if one can in all conscience call it that, did not have to be "natural," but merely enduring and sustaining, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters. (The reader is referred to "General Aims and Theories" for Hart Crane's ideas about himself as an "absolutist").

In yet another, still later essay, Allen Tate becomes more consistently complimentary, while still retaining the skewed vision of his "private knowledge," when he says,

... out of the desperate conditions of his life—which included almost unimaginable horrors of depravity and perversity ... he produced in the end a shining exemplum of uncompromising human dignity: his poetry ... By the time he was twenty-five, before The Bridge had scarcely been conceived, he had written a body of lyric poetry which for originality, distinction, and power, remains the great poetic achievement of his generation. If he is not our twentieth-century poet as 20 hero, I do not know where else to look for him.

Although the evident ambivalence toward Hart Crane by Allen Tate is remarkable, it is even more remarkable in later critics who knew Crane less intimately or not at all. Without going into great detail at this point, it is certainly true that Yvor Winters moved from hyperbolic praise of Crane's major work The Bridge to complete disdain
for Crane and all his works in a few short years. The problem seems
to have been, as Thomas Parkinson points out, that

Winters scorns ambiguities, and he needs no
.basis for an ethical position--without faith
and revelation, and modern man cannot accept
either, the best choice is simply the least
comforting of the various ethical possibili-
ties. The source of evil is in emotion, and
the reduction of emotion to a minimum is the
only way to a controlled and harmonious life. 21

Such a viewpoint was, of course, in direct opposition to Crane's
frenetic, emotional, and disharmonious life, and may have been at the
heart of Winter's later rejection of Crane's work and all he stood
for. (For Crane's reaction to this aspect of Winters' personality,
see Crane's letter of May 29, 1927 to Yvor Winters, pp. 241-247 in
Weber's CP and pp. 86-92 in Parkinson.)

Another critic who reacts ambivalently toward Hart Crane is Brom
Weber. Certainly no one has done more to promote what Tate calls the
"Crane legend" that "... should be fostered because it will help to
make his poetry generally known." 22 A critical biography, numerous
articles, and the standard edition of Crane's poetical works all point
to the fact that Weber sees Crane as important. Yet, Weber, too, sees
Crane as ultimately a failure, whose anti-intellectualism and lack of
apparent unity are seen as part of "... the compulsion Crane felt to
make a mystical synthesis of materials he was incapable of under-
standing because of his needless anti-intellectualism ... a mistake
which eventually was to prove ruinous to him in his major work." 23

Certainly it often seems that critics take too much account of
the poet and too little of the poetry in their analyses. However, I
find myself agreeing with Parkinson when he says it is "useless to act as if the poetry could be considered aside from the life of Crane."\textsuperscript{24} Crane's poetry was intensely personal and as such cannot be read with any depth or insight without a thorough grounding in the facts of his life. The primary requirement of the reader and critic, however, is to remain cognizant of the life of the poet and his poetry as inseparable yet distinct entities and to reserve moral judgements whenever possible, lest they interfere with a fair and impartial judgement of art as art, rather than art as life.

Although it may seem that I have given some rather important, even brilliant, critics short shrift, thus endangering my own claim to objectivity, it has not been my intention to do so. The fact that I disagree with some of their attitudes and conclusions in no way implies any denigration on my part of their important work. While it may be true, as Tate himself admits, that "Crane criticism proliferates like a tropical jungle: much of it is useless . . . ,"\textsuperscript{25} still, this paper could never have been written without the wisdom and pioneering efforts of men like Tate, Winters, and Weber. My differences with them and others lie in their conclusion that Crane failed in his most ambitious works and their seemingly patronizing view of him as one about whom "scholars will decide it was a pity that so great a talent lacked early advantages."\textsuperscript{26}

Magnificent failure or not, depending upon one's point of view, Cranes' poetry, while certainly difficult, is by no means impenetrable, especially if one accepts Crane's idea that modern poetry
presents "the most complete synthesis of human values" in all their connotations and permutations. The problem is to find the synthesizing idea or mode in Crane's poetry, just as Crane's problem was to find it in life. The fact that Crane ultimately failed to find such a central unifying mode in life is itself essential to understanding his poetry and perhaps illuminates the central dilemma of modern man. Once unified by this synthesizing idea, Crane's poetry becomes coherent and more readable, the flashes of lyric genius become linked by a unifying concept, and the poet's "blinding vision" of the world becomes less opaque.

It is my contention that this prime mover or synthesizer in Crane's poetry is a continuous series of cycles of illusion and disillusion, in which the poet is constantly building elaborate and systematic mental "voyages" or illusions, palaces of refuge for the tortured soul of Hart Crane, or any man for that matter. In the words of M. D. Uroff, Crane, unlike poets such as Stevens or Eliot, "... does not impose order on the world; instead, he evokes in his poem[s] an autonomous world of powerful movement ... [in which] ... the solidity of the world and the fixity of the perceiving mind are dissolved." After the illusion has been established, however, Crane just as constantly sets about knocking the props from under his illusions as he comes to recognize their ultimate futility when tested against reality. Perhaps it was an unconscious response to this continual cycling of illusion and reality (or disillusion) that prompted Yvor Winters to comment that
... we shall remember him chiefly for his having shown us a new mode of damnation, yet it is for this that we remember Orestes, and Crane has in addition the glory of being, if not his own Aeschylus, perhaps, in some fragmentary manner, his own Euripides. 29

Crane's "mode of damnation" was not entirely new; like Tantalus, Hart Crane was forever reaching for his imaged relief and never quite attaining it. As R. W. Butterfield has noted, Crane was trapped between the necessity for vision and the necessity for reality:

On the one hand there was material reality; on the other, the abstracted vision. Both obsessed him. Yet between them there was always the hiatus; for all the perpetual, futile attempts to transform the reality into the vision, always the hiatus... So Crane's consciousness of a sick society continued, he drank deeper and deeper draughts of stronger and stronger alcohol to hide from himself the reality of a secular world. Thus intoxicated, the imagination did for a time "span beyond despair." But in the dawn the world was still in disorder, and the disillusionment and despair returned.

Hung over, sick from hay fever and psychosomatic illnesses, and desperately poor, Hart Crane often must have faced the "real" world with something akin to Butterfield's eloquent vision of despair. Thus, many critics think, his need for poetry was allied to his need for escape from the troubles besetting him in the mundane light of day. In the words of John Irwin, "For him the ultimate act of the poetic imagination is a kind of naming which creates an ordered world in opposition to the chaotic world of physical nature."31 This view of Crane implies a conscious desire to leave the world behind and escape to some rapturous, or at least comforting, unreality that would obviate the necessity of the physical and moral world of the early
twentieth century. In such a created world the self or ego of the poet could endure and even prosper.

However, Crane's "cultural psychoanalytic,"\textsuperscript{32} to use Eric Sundquist's term, would not allow him to find such an easy refuge. The "hiatus" of Butterfield's remarks was what really obsessed him, forcing him to seek not refuge, but, instead, a synthesis of real and unreal worlds that would be a form of ultimate reality to which both the poet and the man could be reconciled. According to James McMichael, "Hart Crane's poetry is the record of a struggle to believe that the disparate orders of mind and matter are indeed one."\textsuperscript{33} Crane was not attempting "to transform the reality into the vision," as Butterfield claims, but, as L. S. Dembo so accurately describes it, attempting to "... acquire a stable 'nuclear' self, not one that would bear and \textit{transfigure} the world's impinging chaos' as Frank has explained the aim of the mystic, but one that would simply 'bear' it."\textsuperscript{34}

Thus the "vision" or illusion in Crane's poetry could never be accepted for long at face value. It had to be tested against reality for its ability to achieve what Sona Raziss calls the "organic association between the objective world and the ego."\textsuperscript{35} As Hart Crane himself said in a letter to Gorham Munson in 1926, "The tragic quandary of the modern world derives from the paradoxes that an inadequate system of rationality forces on the living consciousness."\textsuperscript{36} The inadequacy of our system of rationality stems from our inability to synthesize the "real" and "unreal" in any endurable manner; the
vision brought on by what Dembo calls "a self-induced Dionysian inspiration"\textsuperscript{37} is doomed, eventually, to destruction as its illusions crumble under the impact of our perception of reality. Thus, "conflict is the final reality in his verse. The prophetic and rhapsodic are persistently challenged by ironic predicament,"\textsuperscript{38} producing a pattern of constantly changing illusions challenged by disillusionary testing against reality in which the poet's visionary self is annihilated.

Yet, this annihilation of self is not the end of a process but merely the end of a phase in a continuing cycle of illusion and disillusion. As each "blinding vision" begins to fade, ceasing to obscure the reality beneath it, the poet replaces it with another, and yet another, in an attempt to reach what Crane calls, in a letter to Yvor Winters, "the interrelations between sources, facts, and appearances . . . one can go only so far with logic, then wilfully dream and play--and pray for the fusion."\textsuperscript{39} But the fusion never came, at least not in any permanent fashion, and Crane became something between a pantheist and a nihilist, a position Dembo suggests, but does not develop, when he says:

Is the poet a pantheist who feels himself able to reach a mystical state by surrendering to a reality in which ugliness and pain are mere appearances; or is he actually a nihilist who self-consciously induces in himself a narcotic state in which no ugliness and pain are perceivable, a state which he knows, ultimately, is only an illusion? While Crane wanted to believe that he was practicing the former, he was sophisticated enough to fear that he was practicing the latter.
Crane thus illustrates for us the pitfalls of an illusionary existence that has no basis in the external world by cycling constantly between the two in a sometimes pathetic, always terribly painful, delineation of each illusion's fatal flaw. Unfortunately for Crane, indeed for anyone attempting such a "fusion," the visionary mind often finds such a task too great for its capabilities. In the words of Butterfield, "... when the visionary fuel ran out, there was left the fate of Icarus, and the fate of Hart Crane a few miles off the Florida coast."41

It appears that some of Crane's way of seeing the relationship between the real world and the world of poetic illusion is similar to that espoused in P. D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*, which Unterecker says Crane had read by early 1922. Unterecker avows that Crane, originally enthusiastic about Ouspensky, later abandoned belief in the Ouspenskian vision, rejecting his cant about a higher race of "supermen" who will judge the older races. Yet certainly the book had an impact upon a young and profoundly impressionable poet, and much of what Ouspensky, who today would probably be labelled a "pop philosopher," had to say about vision, distortion, and illusion was evidently assimilated and transformed by Crane as he worked out his poetic theories. For example, the following passages in Ouspensky seem pertinent to Crane's dilemma:

*We can never see, even in the minute, any part of the outer world as it is, as we know it. We can never see the desk or the wardrobe all at once, from all sides and inside; Our eye distorts the outside world in a certain way, in order that, looking about, we may be able to define the position of*
objects relatively to ourselves. But to look at the world from any other standpoint than our own is impossible for us, nor can we ever see it correctly, without distortion by our sight. . . .

The "motions" of objects, to a person in motion, are very complex indeed. Observe how strangely the field of wheat behaves just beyond the window of the car in which you are riding. It runs to the very window, stops, turns slowly around itself, and runs away. The trees of the forest run apparently at different speeds, overtaking one another. The entire landscape is one of illusory motion. Behold also the sun, which even up to the present time "rises" and "sets" in all languages--this "motion" having been in the past so passionately defended!

This is all seeming, and though we know that these motions are illusory, we see them nevertheless, and sometimes we are deluded. To how many more illusions should we be subject had we not the power of mentally analyzing their determining causes, but were obliged to believe that everything exists as it appears!

I see it; therefore it exists.
This affirmation is the principal source of all illusions. To be true, it is necessary to say: I see it; therefore this does not exist--or at least, I see it; therefore this is not so (Ouspensky's emphasis).

Brom Weber, in Chapter 7 of his Critical Biography, has admirably illustrated the major Ouspenskian influences upon Crane (as well as those of Rimbaud and Frank). My purpose in introducing Ouspensky at this point is to illuminate briefly the influence of Ouspensky as it relates to the Cranian cycle of illusion and disillusion. Referring to the passage quoted above, one can note a corresponding echo of Ouspensky's mode of seeing in Crane's "Modern Poetry": "That 'truth' which science pursues is radically different from the metaphorical, extra-logical 'truth' of the poet," and "... poetic prophecy ... is a peculiar type of perception, capable of apprehending some
absolute and timeless concept of the imagination with astounding clarity and conviction."44 Thus the poet, in Ouspenskian terms, "sees" differently from ordinary mortals, apprehends the world, or a minute part of it, with a clarity of vision beyond that of mere rationalists whose sight is distorted by their necessity to be able to define the positions of objects relative to themselves. Yet Crane was never able to move totally beyond the rationalists' desire for "location" in the real world, and continually returned to the dilemma of the events of the physical world that determine so many of the activities of the imagination, as he noted in a letter to Yvor Winters in 1927: "One can respond only to certain circumstances; just what the barriers are, and where the boundaries cross can never be completely known. And the surest way to frustrate the possibility of any free realization is, it seems to me, to wilfully direct it."45 This reliance upon and surrender to circumstances and the inability to identify the "boundaries" and "barriers" between the illusionary and disillusionary worlds distinctly echoes the Ouspenskian reasoning leading up to the dictum "I see it; therefore this is not so," and calls into question the validity of all perceptions and inspirations generated by physical apprehensions of the world filtered through the mental apprehensions of the poet.

Therein also lies one of the bases of the Cranian "logic of metaphor," in which all poetic expressions are subject to individual interpretations of sometimes correspondent and sometimes non-correspondent experience, and in which the poet and the reader both
must span beyond "our so-called pure logic" to reach a point of
mysterious union through "a terminology something like short-hand as
compared to usual description and dialectics, which the artist ought
to be right in trusting as a reasonable connective agent toward fresh
concepts, more inclusive evaluations."\(^46\)

Another Ouspenskian lesson apparently assimilated by Crane deals
with the function of art. Although, as Weber has noted, the place of
the artist, especially the poet, is a high one in the Ouspenskian
hierarchy, the work of art itself occupies a rather lowly place in
that same hierarchy. The function of the artist is to "search out new
beauty," and the work of art itself has value only in so far as it
reflects and inspires that search:

\[
\text{Just as soon as art begins to take delight in that beauty which is already found, instead of the search for new beauty, an arrestment occurs and art becomes a superfluous estheticism, encompassing man's vision like a wall. The aim of art is the search for beauty... it does not say, find; but merely, seek!} \quad 47
\]

And Hart Crane was ever the seeker who, once he had "found" beauty or
any other illusion through which we place value upon and meaning into
our lives, must destroy the illusion before continuing the search. It
was this Ouspenskian process that involved Crane as much as that which
he sought so avidly. No mater what "delicately imaginative plateaus"
he migh reach, to use Crane's own example from a review of Maxwell
Bodenheim in 1919, poetry must also contain "a painful focus of
realities"\(^48\) to which the poet must always acknowledge some allegiance
in order to continue the process of writing poetry.
It was this "focus of realities" that informed the sensibility of Crane and forced him into the painful dilemma of seeking to fuse reality and imagination. As he said in "General Aims and Theories," the poem's evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an "innocence" (Blake) or absolute beauty. In this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or precognitions.

The illumination of the spirit, then, is grounded in experience or reality, with the poet himself serving as a bridge connecting the two. Thus the poet serves in all "innocence" as both the path through which the process occurs and, in a sense, as the process itself, being at the same time the physical embodiment of the fact of experience and the manifestation of spirit or imagination.

Crane's difficulty in forcing the fusion of the real and the illusory was partially dictated by the Ouspenskian regard for process rather than product, but also by the intractibility of modern experience. As he grew older, the world showed him that old illusions were incompatible with new experience. L. S. Dembo says that "Crane suggests that if the poet can regard an urban or industrial object with correct vision, its intractibility, both moral and aesthetic, will vanish and a new aesthetic experience will be available." Yet the chaos induced by the technologic and moral revolutions in twentieth-century America did prove intractible more often than not, and ultimately were reflected in Crane's poetry, as Dembo acknowledges.
when he says of the ending of The Bridge: "... there is nothing but
the literary principle of anticlimax to prevent another cycle of
despair and ecstasy from being added to the poem and extended indefi-
nitely," which may be necessary "in any attempt to achieve 'continuity
with chaos,' when that chaos is represented by modern industrial
life."51 Whereas Dembo appears to find this a defect in the poem, it
is just the opposite when seen in the context of cycles of illusion
and disillusion, for it ultimately brings the poem full circle,
enabling the poet to leave the poem where it began, grounded in the
"antiphonal" whispers where "Now pity steepeth the grass and rainbows
ring," while the poet continues his search for the "curve ship" that
"lends a myth to God."

In a later chapter I shall deal with this concept of the The
Bridge as a complete poem unified by its cyclic nature, but for now I
would like to illustrate briefly how the cycles operate in a few
sections of The Bridge to make clear my later explications of Crane's
poetry. In section III, "Cutty Sark," for example, Crane examines the
illusion of freedom, especially that provided by the seas in the
adventurous life of a seaman far from responsibility and commonplace
events. The sailor's "GREEN eyes" and the recurrent jukebox song
"Stamboul Nights" symbolize the sailor's total commitment to the sea
and the romance of those far-off ports of call as imagined by the
poet/persona. The sailor sings of life as "a geyser--beautiful--" and
even seems to have become a type of sea creature himself with his
green eyes and "my lungs-- / No--I can't live on land--!" Yet the
attraction of this way of life is an illusion, rather than a reality, as is reflected by the background theme played on the jukebox: "O Stamboul Rose--dreams weave the rose!" The meeting between the dream and reality occurs in the fuzzy region where "rum was Plato in our heads . . . ." The sober reality is that of a New York waterfront dive, and the sailor is an old man who is "not much good at time anymore" and who keeps "weakeyed watches sometimes snooze." The green of his eyes is not a reflection of the sea but merely a reflection of green sunglasses or bar lights, and the mundane existence of the sailor is harsh: "I ran a donkey engine down there on the Canal / in Panama--got tired of that-- / the Yucatan selling kitchenware--beads--." The drabness of donkey engines, kitchenware, beads, which are the realities of the sailor's life, is relieved only occasionally by some ecstatic vision that enables the sailor's mind to hold the romantic illusion of the adventurous life at sea through sheer beauty and awesome isolation: "have you seen Popocateptl--birdless mouth / with ashes sifting down--?"

The persona's disillusion with the sailor's dreams manifests itself midway through the section with the mocking realization that the old sailor is trapped by time in an illusory past that really never existed or, if it did, has become so distorted in his mind that he no longer knows the difference between reality and illusion:

I saw the frontiers gleaming of his mind; or are there frontiers--running sands sometimes running sands--somewhere--sands running . . .
The old sailor's time is running out, but perhaps the beauty of his illusion will preserve him, "may start some white machine that sings," thus enabling the sailor to escape the trap of time and "laugh and dance the axeltree-- / steel--silver--kick the traces--and know--."

Yet this, too, is merely an illusory hope, as illustrated by the theme song's breaking in once more:

\begin{verbatim}
ATLANTIS ROSE drums wreath the rose
the star floats burning in a gulf of tears
and sleep another thousand--
\end{verbatim}

Literally, Atlantis rose up, its vision of immaculate, rose-like beauty accompanied by drums whose sound "wreathed" it. But fabled Atlantis is merely a myth, a "star" that floats in a sea of tears brought on by disillusion, and it sinks quietly back into the sea from which it rose to "sleep" for another thousand years, perhaps awaiting some other dreamer with the power and faith to evoke it.

After an "interminably long" time, the poet/persona realizes the song from the jukebox has ended; time, in the form of "somebody's nickel" has run out for the dreams that "weave the rose" of Atlantis, as well as for the sailor's illusions. Our last sight of him is one of complete disillusion, as he drunkenly avoids being run down by a truck and reels along "Bowery way while the dawn / was putting the Statue of Liberty out--that / torch of hers you know--." What one sees here is literally the torch of liberty, in the triple sense of a liberty ashore for the sailor, liberties and confidences taken and revealed at night in a sleazy waterfront bar, and the illusion of liberty or freedom through romantic vision. Just as the dawn brings
an end to the sailor's shore leave ("now remember kid / to put me out at three she sails on time") and brings an end to intimate nighttime revelations, so the cold light of dawn also snuffs out the illusion of liberty through adventure and romance on the high seas. The vision of freedom on the sea, adventure in far-off ports, has been dispelled by the one factor that captures all men and their illusions--time. The old, romantic sailing ships that brought "Sweet opium and tea," as well as the sailors' chants of "Yo-ho!," as they hauled on the halyards while shipping "the breeze around Japan!", are all victims of time. Their names remain bright illusions promising beauty in

Bright skysails ticketing the Line, wink round the Horn to Frisco, Melbourne . . .
Pennants, parabolas--
baronial white on lucky blue!,

while in reality those masterly old ships, Cutty Sark, Thermopylae, Black Prince, Flying Cloud, Rainbow, Leander, Nimbus, Taeping, and Ariel, are all victims of time, "a long tack keeping--," and will never be seen in mortal ports again. No one knows what has happened to the beautiful vision that was once theirs, and Crane ends the section on a query, as the poet continues to seek the essence of the illusion he himself has destroyed:

--where can you be
Nimbus? and you rivals two--
a long tack keeping--
Taeping?
Ariel?
The persona/poet only knows that the seas are now empty of sails, that the vision has been destroyed and he must seek elsewhere for the fulfillment of his quest for the fusion of reality and vision.

Time as the element of disillusion and destruction of vision is a recurrent theme in much of Crane's poetry, especially in The Bridge. Section V, "Three Songs," provides another example of Crane's use of time as a disolutionary device in the illusion/disillusion cycle. The first song, "Southern Cross," illustrates the combined illusion of love and religious experience, blending the two into one vision of love as religion: "It is / God--your namelessness." The persona examines his longing for this love, as yet only dreamed, to become realized in the physical world: "I wanted you, nameless Woman of the South, / No wraith, but utterly." The fantasy woman is symbolized by the constellation Southern Cross as seen from a ship's deck, and the poet is uncertain of her characteristics. Is she Eve, the first and archetypal woman who led man to his downfall, or Magdalene, the redeemed whore who embodies Christ's forgiveness of even the humblest sinners, or Mary, who gave birth to the Son of God through an immaculate conception? All of these names are inadequate for this symbol of the ultimate, but nameless, womanly ideal: "Whatever call--falls faintly on the wave." From this glowing allusion to the purity of an archetypal womanhood, the poet drops us into contradictory images of modern womanhood. The image becomes a "simian Venus" or an ape-like creature embodying merely carnal, animalistic desires, a "homeless Eve" who is "unwedded, stumbling gardenless to
grieve." Eden has been lost forever, and the lament of Eve is echoed only in "Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever."

While the essence of the illusion is unnamed, it is, paradoxically, infinitely named in its personified state: "Finally to answer all within one grave." The illusion thus presents all the states of womanhood from the most pure to the most degraded, embodying through its contrasts the poet's hoped-for fusion between the perfect and the imperfect, the unreal and the real. This fused state allows the poet to retain his visionary grasp upon the illusion while giving him some imaginative grasp of its ability to fulfill his own human needs. Yet even in the midst of seeking the fusion so apparently within his grip, Crane knows its realization is impossible, and places all action in the song in the past--"I wanted you," rather than "I want you."

The poet/persona, viewing his vision at some later date, after it has already faded, notes that the long phosphorescent wake of the ship, the reality of his location both spatially and temporally, causes the vision in his mind to be "churned to spittle, whispering hell." The names will not hold and the vision of "The embers of the Cross" becomes finally "God--your namelessness" which "It is blood to remember." Eve, the archetype, remains glowingly, simmeringly unattainable, a "wraith to my unloved seed," as the illusion is broken up by the harsh light of morning:

The Cross, a phantom, buckled--dropped below the dawn.
Light drowned the lithic trillions of your spawn.
Love as God, the ultimate fusion to which the poet could have reconciled himself, has been drowned by the obliterating light of reality, along with all the "lithic trillions" of emotions spawned by the beauty of the illusion.

What is left of love after the disolution of its ideal manifestation by the disillusioning dawn is brought down to the reality of lust in "National Winter Garden," the second song in Section V:

Outspoken buttocks in pink beads
Invite the necessary cloudy clinch
Of bandy eyes . . . No extra mufflings here:
The world's one flagrant, sweating clinch.

The woman here is the opposite of the idealized woman image in "Southern Cross." She is Magdalene the prostitute, whom the persona is alternately attracted to and repulsed by. In the general atmosphere of pure lust where "legs waken salads in the brain," the persona makes his choice in a spirit of game resignation while hoping and waiting for the visionary beauty of the ideal woman:

You pick your blonde out neatly through the smoke.
Always you wait for someone else though, always--.

Finally, in a moment of revulsion, the persona panics and rushes through the smoky room for the exit, but he cannot escape desire, the

. . . tom-tom scrimmage with a somewhere violin,
Some cheapest echo of them all-- . . .

Yet, though this "Magdalene" is a "burlesque of our lust--and faith," the persona recognizes the potential for fusion in her. Though she is not "whiter than the snow" and "her eyes exist in swivelings of her teats," still she embodies at least the echo of the synthesis between pure lust, "Sprayed first with ruby," and pure
ideal, "then with emerald sheen." The "emerald sheen" recalls the "GREEN eyes" associated with the sailor's vision in "Cutty Sark," while her identification as "Magdalene" recalls one of the attributes of the ideal woman in "Southern Cross." This "writhing pool" of a woman is neither the embodiment of ruby lust or emerald idealism, but a muddy "sandstone grey between." Her apparent fusion is a mockery and the poet finds himself unable to overlook the basic fraud of her trivial existence:

    Pearls ship her hips, a drench of whirling strands.
    Her silly snake rings begin to mount, surmount
    Each other--turquoise fakes on tinsilled hands.

Her only genuine reality is her lust, "All but her belly buried in the floor" and the poet/persona once more attempts to "flee her spasm through a fleshless door." Yet, even with sex reduced to a mere reflexive "spasm" without meaning or purpose, still the persona finds there is some renewal in her "empty trapeze of flesh." She, in her harsh barrenness, is a force for rebirth through her ability to awaken, in the midst of the deepest revulsion and despair at the reality of the world and its "lewd trounce," those seemingly dead thoughts of sexuality and sensuality that are the harbingers of a renewal of life. In a continuation of the cycle of despair and reaffirmed vision, the persona finds himself unwillingly drawn to the ugly reality that means the death of vision, "each comes back to die alone," and then finds himself carried forward from death to rebirth and into the inescapable, recurrent illusion of love presented in the last of the three songs, "Virginia."
In "Virginia" the woman is a "blue-eyed Mary," a virgin whose chastity in the real world has not been violated by a spiritual impregnation nor corrupted by the lustful atmosphere that surrounds her: "Keep smiling the boss away." She exists in the "real" world of time, "O rain at seven, / Pay-check at eleven," where the persona waits impatiently for her: "Gone seven--gone eleven, / And I'm still waiting for you."

Like the women in the previous songs in this section, Mary too has a dual nature reflecting the attempt to fuse reality and vision. She is the working girl with a "claret scarf" who is free only on weekends, "Saturday Mary, mine!" She is also the embodiment of the visionary fairy-tale princess: "O Mary, leaning from the high wheat tower, / Let down your golden hair!" As such, she transcends the reality of lust and sensuality represented by

Pigeons by the million--
And Spring in Prince Street
Where green figs gleam
By oyster shells!

to become an idealized virginal image in a gleaming metal tower:

Out of the way-up nickel-dime tower shine,
Cathedral Mary,
shine!--

She shines down upon the persona, a vision of reality transformed into ideality, urging him onward like a knight seeking the grail.

An unabashed love lyric, "Virginia" provides a return path to the beginning of the cycle, in which "Cathedral Mary" is transformed into the "Southern Cross." Love and religion, resurrection and destruction, illusion and disillusion, play out an infinite cyclic
game, and for Hart Crane this recurrent cycle would continue unbroken until destroyed by death itself, the ultimate reality and permanent disillusioning force. Crane, as the facts of his life indicate, was never able to reject love entirely, although he knew well the patterns and processes it would follow. He continually returned to it, tested it against the reality of his own lifestyle, found it disillusioning and lacking in staying power, rejected it, and then, brought full circle, found himself falling in love once more. Thus "Three Songs" represents this persistent faith in the efficacy of the illusion even in the depths of disillusionment, or perhaps Crane's determination to keep searching for the formula, the catalyst, that would provide the fusion between imaged world and real world.

The cyclic nature of Crane's poetry therefore mirrors, to an extent, his life, and the alternating cycles of despair and hope in Crane's existence have been well documented. As Weber says about Crane's life during 1926: "This alternation of depression and elation became more feverish and pronounced than it had been during earlier years. Each state became shorter in duration, and more extreme in tendency." Weber also indicates Crane's Ouspenskian lack of confidence in modern American goals and his conflicting faith in the ideals espoused by Whitman and Frank, thus producing a dualistic, alternating cycle of conflict that was

... far more than an abstract conflict between ideal and reality, between matter and spirit, good and evil, lust and love. It was a dualism that extended through every fiber of his being, sending him in agony from one extremity to another, always in turmoil and never at rest.
This duality was ultimately indicative of overpowering despair because of the indestructible nature of the dilemma and its quality of bouncing Crane between its limitations like some crazed rubber ball. Thus Crane was constantly caroming off one half of a dilemma or the other, caught in a deadly trap between the insubstantial, but attractive and comforting, illusion and the hard, stable, reliable, but repellent reality that ultimately undermines all illusion. Unfortunately, he was unable to accept either illusion (vision) or disillusion (reality) alone, and his agony was further compounded by his ability to achieve only a temporary synthesis or unity before the whole structure cracked into duality once again. Such is the process in "Three Songs" and in much of Crane's mature poetry; indeed, it is the process that unifies The Bridge and the poems of White Buildings, embodying as it does, what Vogler sees as ". . . a personal quest, the search of the poet for a vision that will satisfy his own needs,"54 rather than those of art, family, or society.

The preceding examples of cyclic method in Crane's poetry serve to illustrate how illusion and disillusion, and the impulse toward fusion they provoked in Crane, function as forces for unity and synthesis in his poetry. These sections will be discussed again in the chapter on The Bridge, but for now they should allow the reader to comprehend what M. D. Uroff calls "the process of destruction and recreation" in Crane's poetry, in which "the world must be destroyed so that it can be created anew by the poet."55 One must, however, be careful not to view the acts of creation and destruction so visible in the cycles as
ends in themselves, just as one cannot dismiss Crane as merely "an
idealist longing for escape from reality." 56 Despair or disillusion
in Crane is not merely a reflection of twentieth-century angst or even
a rite of passage through which the promised vision may be reached.
As Douglas Messerli has pointed out,

... the vision must be generated in the despair;
the vision must exist in the present. ... The
reader must with the poet search ... for images
which will stimulate his memory and permit him a
moral vision. The vision must exist within the
nightmare or the myth cannot be promised. ..."

Thus the necessity for the dual natures of the women in the "Three
Songs" section of The Bridge: they represent the "real" vision, the
fusion of the reality and the dream, but always in a state of
mutability, always in process and never able to become static or
stable. This "vicious yet ritual irony" which the poet is "condemned
to repeat ... incessantly in time" 58 is a large factor in Crane's
confusion and agony. Philip Horton's statement about the poet's
unstable sexual and social life seems apropos here in relation to
Crane's instability in other areas, especially in light of his lonely,
tragic end:

It was not until much later, after years of painful
experience had cleared his mind of such confusions,
that he was able to see the appalling discrepancy
between his desire and its gratification and to
understand the impossibility of ever fulfilling his
59 desires at their own level and in their own kind.

R. W. B. Lewis, in The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study, has
recognized what he calls "the felt rhythm of life" 60 in Crane's poetry
and even affirmed Crane's necessary obsession with process and fusion:
What Crane did aim at in The Bridge is what he always aimed at: to see "the two worlds. And at once." ... Crane sought to body forth a vision in which countless aspects of this world, themselves united by the poet's esemplastic eye, were seen in union with the "Everpresence," the irradiating power of the simultaneously perceived world of ideal beauty and love and harmony ... the absolute inextricably wedded to the actual, seen and known by means of the actual even as it serves to transform the actual: this was Crane's regular purpose and his brand of totality.

Yet Lewis sees the pattern of "vision briefly enjoyed, vision lost, vision recovered" as leading to a rebirth of the world "out of the enormous creative struggle of the imagination." My disagreement with Lewis here lies primarily in his conception of Crane's process, and the poet's concomitant need for it, as ultimately transforming reality through contact with "vision," thus enabling the poet to build a new world of actuality modified by some form of "pulsating" ideality. It is my contention that Crane was seeking not the old world transformed and ordered by imagination, but the old world in harmony and communion with the poet's vision. He did not know, in any sense of the term, what Frank calls "by immediate experience, the organic continuity between himself and the cosmos," but rather doubted its existence and sought throughout his life for proof of that continuity between himself and infinity that would allow him to meet Frank's definition of a mystic. But beyond mere continuity, Hart Crane desired union between himself--the actual--and infinity--the pure absolute. While he was aware that the imagination could "transform" reality into something apparently "better" than the common lot of men, ultimately he came to see such transformations as the unstable
illusions they are and sought instead some formula by which the real world and the ideal world could coexist as a compatible whole. In the words of M. D. Uroff, "Art that aims at purity is art that is always destined to fall short of its highest ideal. The imperfect world of time and memory, the imperfect vehicle of words . . . cannot be annihilated by the poet."65 Crane's awareness of the imperfection of the world and its ultimate triumph over the "perfection" of poetic vision lies at the heart of his search for fusion and ultimately leads, by a tortuous path, to his own destruction, for the idea of fusion came finally to be the largest illusion of them all.

Before moving on to an explication of Crane's poetry and its relation to the cycles of illusion and disillusion, there remains to be clarified the problem of genre and division in Crane's entire canon. Is Crane primarily a lyric poet who attempted the transition to epic poet and failed, or is he instead an epic poet whose early (before The Bridge) work was merely preliminary to his real achievement? Which is the more significant work, White Buildings or The Bridge, or can such distinctions even be made?

Most critics have examined The Bridge in isolation from the rest of Crane's poetry, seeing therein a natural separation between two units of widely different conception and realization in the life of one man. The Bridge has apparently been the more fascinating work to critics because of its structural and interpretational difficulties, and this attitude has led to some neglect of the lyrics, or at least a general attitude that they are of lesser significance than The Bridge,
throughout the years. R. W. B. Lewis, for example, seems to believe that much of Crane's early work was preparation for The Bridge and that the longer work is more significant and of more value to Crane's readers because it was the culminating effort of the poet's life: "This was Crane's mensis mirabilis, what the whole period of visionary lyric had prepared him for. Nothing quite like it could even be expected to happen to him again."  

Early critics of Crane, particularly Tate and Winters, have seen The Bridge as a fascinating mistake undertaken by one who was primarily a lyric poet and who exceeded his depth in attempting something as ambitious as an American "epic." In fact, both saw Crane's long poem as a collection of lyrics without a unifying principle or structure to make it one poem and have thus judged the work to be a failure. This stance has caused much debate and sparked numerous analyses of The Bridge purporting to show exactly how it is a complete, whole, organic poem, separate unto itself, which has further widened the gap between critical considerations of the basic unity of White Buildings and The Bridge.  

To close this gap, some later critics, for example, Sherman Paul and M. D. Uroff, have chosen to see Crane's entire body of work as connected by threads of thematic emphasis that serve to relate the two books. Paul, while concentrating his efforts primarily upon The Bridge, nevertheless sees at the end of his excellent discussion of Crane's lyrics a connective element comprising the honesty and value
of the human spirit along with the Cranian "logic of metaphor" that provided the poet with "the creative assurance he needed to complete his task." 68

Still, Paul sees The Bridge as the more important work, giving greater emphasis in his critical effort to the longer poem rather than engaging in a more balanced critical approach. It remained for Uroff to attempt a more complete synthesis of Crane's works. She thinks it

... impossible to separate Crane's poetry into strict periods and to regard The Bridge as his mature work for which his lyrics were the preparation ... Crane has been regarded as a poet of broken efforts, of varied creative aims, but a study of his poetry reveals that his is rather a work of unusual continuity of patterns recurring with obsessive frequency. 69

Uroff's contention is that the main patterns in Crane's poetry (as she sees them), the poet as violator and possessor, the world in flight and in stasis, and the desire for mastery over the world, are inextricably woven throughout The Bridge and White Buildings, as well as the later poetry, thus making a collateral study of these works necessary to a deep understanding of or insight into Crane's work. Uroff says, "His life was short, his productive life very short; he matured as a poet early, and aside from his very early poetry his work is of one piece." 70

To a large extent I must agree with Uroff's conclusion that any study of either White Buildings or The Bridge must necessarily be incomplete if attempted without a parallel study of the other, and also that the two volumes are related in numerous ways by repeated symbols, images, themes, and concepts. Still, The Bridge occupied
more than half of Crane's creative life and any effort that tremendous
must of necessity provide a different focus that serves to distance
the work to a certain extent from its predecessor. *White Buildings* is
a collection of lyrics, separate entities that can be read by them-
selves as complete poetic statements (with the possible exception of
the "Voyages" series), even though an examination of the entire volume
will provide the reader with another, more generalized statement, as I
shall demonstrate in the next chapter. *The Bridge*, on the other hand,
was conceived by Crane as, and in fact is, a single entity, one long
poem unified by its own unique set of assumptions and the circum-
stances surrounding its composition. Thus the critic is torn between
studying the two separately, which is certainly more convenient, and
running the risk of perpetuating a dichotomy that has hindered past
criticism, or, as Uroff has done, examining the two "as one piece" and
running the risk of obscuring the major differences that give each
volume its autonomy as a work of art.

I have decided to take a more conservative, middle-of-the-road
approach and attempt to combine the best of both methods, thus
lessening the possibility of either slighting one work in favor of the
other or confusing the differences between two. I shall examine *White
Buildings* and *The Bridge* in separate chapters to preserve their
autonomy as separate works that can be made to stand or fall by their
own merits, while attempting always to illustrate the correspondences
between them to preserve the idea of Crane's work as unified by a
central thematic and modal concept—continual cycles of illusion and
disillusion motivated and kept moving by Crane's desire for fusion between the illusory ideal and the disillusionary real.
ENDNOTES

1 Allen Tate, The Double Dealer (March-April 1923), p. 123.


6 Blackmur, p. 122.

7 Ibid., p. 140.


10 Ibid., p. 231.
11 Ibid.


13 Ibid., p. 237.


15 Ibid., p. 128.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 219.

18 Tate, Collected Essays, p. 233.

19 Ibid., p. 234.

20 Ibid., p. 532.


22 Tate, Collected Essays, p. 226.

24 Parkinson, p. xxii.


26 Tate, *Collected Essays*, p. 226


34 Dembo, p. 147.


37 Dembo, p. 145.

38 Raiziss, p. 234.

39 Parkinson, pp. 18-21.

40 Dembo, p. 143

41 Butterfield, p. 67.


44 Ibid., p. 263.

45 Ibid., p. 245.

46 Ibid., p. 238.

47 Ouspensky, p. 230.
48 Weber, CP, p. 204.

49 Ibid., p. 221.

50 Dembo, p. 133.

51 Ibid., p. 147.


53 Ibid., p. 233.


55 Uroff, p. 140.

56 Ibid., p. 110.

57 Douglas Messerli, "Out of the Square, the Circle: Vision in Nightmare in Crane's 'Tunnel,'" Four Decades of Poetry, 1:2 (July, 1976), pp. 203-204.


59 Horton, p. 83.


61 Ibid., p. 374.
62 Ibid., p. 380.

63 Ibid., p. 382.


65 Uroff, p. 33.


67 Lewis, p. 215.


69 Uroff, pp. 5-6.

70 Ibid., p. 5.
Chapter II: Of Sine and Sign--The Cyclic

Nature of White Buildings

Some poets collect their poems haphazardly, with individual poems in a volume having little or no relation to other poems in the same volume beyond owing their existence to the same author. Such, most critics agree, was not the case with Hart Crane. As John Unterecker stated in his biography,

... almost as soon as he started to gather his poems, Hart began to think of them as a book, and not a collection of poems, for he recognized ... that the interrelationships between the separate poems were of great importance. "You know one makes up one's mind that certain things go well together--make a book, in fact--and you don't feel satisfied until you have brought all the pieces to a uniform standard of excellence."

It was just such a striving for excellence that led Crane to arrange and rearrange feverishly the order of the poems to be included in White Buildings until he had "a book, in fact" that comprised patterns as complex as any to be found in the poems taken out of context.

I do not wish to imply that none of the poems in White Buildings can be read out of context of the entire volume, for that certainly is not the case nor was it the intention of Hart Crane. After all, most of the poems in the book were published separately in various magazines over a span of several years. They were intended to, and they do, stand alone as autonomous entities, complex works of art that can withstand repeated, isolated reading and explication. To read them as such involves no injustice to the poems or the poet. However,
to read them in the context of Crane's life, as I mentioned in the first chapter, is to add immeasurably to the richness of one's comprehension. Similarly, to read the poems of White Buildings as parts composing a whole is to immerse oneself into a rich tapestry of at once both sensory and intellectual complexity that also adds greatly to the reader's comprehension of Crane's genius.

The main pattern in the warp and weave of White Buildings is the Cranian cycle of illusion and disillusion, the constant shifting of the poet between the realm of "the imaged Word" and that of reality, and his sometimes desperate, often apparently chaotic, but actually quite methodic (if possibly unconscious), search for synthesis and harmony between the two modes.

In explicating the cyclic nature of the poems in the volume I will not attempt to examine every poem individually and in detail, for such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis and exceeds the limits of both time and space available. I will, however, explicate the first cycle in great detail to allow the reader to follow the full flow and rhythm of this continuing pattern of illusion and disillusion laid out with almost sinusoidal precision by the poet. I will also deal in detail with the patterns of illusion and disillusion in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and the "Voyages" series, since both are too important to neglect and deserve detailed analysis as the culminating efforts of White Buildings. Other cycles in the volume will be explained with enough detail to enable the reader to perform his own complete analyses, if he should so desire.
Before beginning an examination of the first cycle in White Buildings (consisting of "Black Tambourine," "Emblems of Conduct," "My Grandmother's Love Letters," "Sunday Morning Apples," and "Praise For an Urn"), it is necessary to look at the introductory poem, "Legend." As the first poem in the volume, "Legend" occupies a special place and needs careful attention before its significance in relation to the cyclic nature of Crane's poetry and White Buildings can be realized. As I stated in the previous chapter, Crane was constantly seeking a fusion between the two seemingly incompatible realms of the visionary or illusionary world and the real or disillusionary world. Thus "Legend" begins by addressing both realms in the first two lines:

As silent as a mirror is believed,
Realities plunge in silence by... 

"Realities" are ever in motion, plunging by us in a silence that leaves most persons unaware of the constantly shifting nature of the real world. As Butterfield has said, "One can no more grasp and hold on to ultimate realities than he can apprehend his own reflection in a mirror."² The world of the mirror, literally the world of the image and thus, by inference, the world of the imagination, is also apprehended by most persons as silent, reflecting mute but faithful reproductions of reality. One must, however, remember one salient fact about mirrors: they never truly reproduce reality but always present a distorted reflection of it. Even the finest lead-crystal mirror presents a distorted image of that which it reflects, if only because the reflection is always reversed. Imperfections in the glass or the reflective coating, whether accidental or deliberate, serve
only to add to this distortion, never to lessen it. Thus it is with the imagination and the poet's reflection of reality apprehended through the "mirror" of his perception. One can never fully apprehend reality because one's senses and imagination produce only distorted images of the real world, and should one become cognizant of this fact and attempt to refocus his faculties on the world, he finds to his utter frustration that the world of reality has moved on in the process, "plunge[d] in silence by."

Yet for all the frustration and distortion thus produced, still there is something to be gained from the poet's attempt to bring the two worlds into a synthetic state. The operative word in the first two lines of "Legend" is not "mirror," "reality," or "silence," but "believed," and upon this single word the entire world of the poem itself rests. The image in the mirror is not mute but merely believed by most persons to be so. It obviously speaks through the imagination, engendering, if not words and a physical voice, then at least feelings and perhaps a truer knowledge of ourselves and our environment than that which we nominally affirm to be "reality." Thus it is with the imagination itself, constantly providing information about the "real" world that, no matter how distorted, is useful in that it is the only information we have, or can ever have, while not actually engaging in any communication outside itself--thus appearing "silent as a mirror." Reality, as well, is "As silent as a mirror is believed," that is, not silent at all in that it constantly feeds
information to the imagination through the senses and acts as a sort of "silent partner" with the imagination.

Therefore I must disagree with Butterfield's interpretation of these two lines, though not with his assessment of their importance, when he says:

The lines announce the premise on which the rest of the poem is built: since our knowledge of true reality is so superficial, we must be all the more ready to spend ourselves in the dangerous, perhaps hopeless, pursuit of it.

The persona/poet of "Legend" is not merely pursuing reality hopelessly, but pursuing the merger between reality and the realm of illusion or imagination. Thus the "moth" of the imaginative intelligence is attracted to the "flame" of reality, which ultimately must injure, if not destroy, it in "This cleaving and this burning." The "flame" of reality, however, is just as metaphorically attracted to the free flight of the mind's illusory "moth":

... For the moth
Bends no more than the still
Imploring flame. ...

Their meeting will be one of heat and light, tentative, like the first kiss of new lovers in an otherwise cold world of "white falling flakes," a cautious meeting of mind and matter that holds danger for them both because of their inexperience:

It is to be learned--
This cleaving and this burning.

Apprehensively, the poet seeks to bring about this dangerous union, granting that in spite of the danger there is really nothing else worth pursuing:
And tremorous
In the white falling flakes
Kisses are,—
The only worth all granting.

The poet, not wise enough yet for repentance or regrets because of his own youth and inexperience, seeks to learn the technique by which the disillusioning world of reality can be joined to the illusionary world of the imagination by "the one who / Spends out himself again," that is, by sacrificing his illusions time and again to the painful, destructive burning of the flame of reality, admitting that this is the only path available.

Thus "Twice and twice / . . . and yet again" the poet forces his illusions or imaginative constructs into conflict with reality, again and again reducing them to "smoking souvenir[s]" and "Bleeding eidolon[s]." Since eidolon in the Whitmanian canon means "image or spiritual manifestation," the image, the manifestation of spirit in the poet, is battered—burned, smoking, and bleeding—"Until the bright logic is won" and the union between reality and vision is complete. Like the "mirror" of the first two lines, the merging of imagination and reality is mute yet eloquent in its silence, "Unwhispering as a mirror / Is believed," gathering itself "drop by caustic drop" into the "perfect cry" that "Shall string some constant harmony." It is this "constant harmony" that makes the perfect poem, that, for Crane, made him "step / The legend" of his "youth into the noon" in the form of White Buildings.

The volume is the record of Crane's attempts at this fusion, and the poems within it are the smoking souvenirs and bleeding eidolons of
his repeated search; they are, in fact, the "legend" or explanation of Hart Crane the poet, set down in black and white in a book, exposed to the noonday glare of readers and critics. The word "legend," then, takes on the meaning "explanation," as in, for example, a legend explaining a photograph or map. "Legend" the poem, then, becomes in fact a "legend" or explanatory introduction to White Buildings, informing the reader of Crane's method and experience in shaping both the separate poems and the volume comprising them. It serves, therefore, as both introduction to the book and integral part of it, embodying as it does the same agonizing attempts at fusion it explains, and takes its rightful place as the first and perhaps most important element in Crane's conception of White Buildings, something most critics have chosen to ignore.\(^5\) It is not, as Butterfield has characterized it, a slender effort, but instead is a profoundly rich masterpiece equal to most, if not all, the poems in the volume it serves to introduce.

The cyclic nature of White Buildings prefaced by "Legend" begins with a sinusoidal pattern encompassing the next five poems in the book. Crane leads us, using the arrangement of the poems in the volume, into a deep curve of darkness and disillusion in "Black Tambourine," through its lowest point in "Emblems of Conduct," and into an ascending curve in which hope is restored and the irony of failure softened in "My Grandmother's Love Letters." Just as many of the individual poems in the volume reflect a constant swing from illusion to disillusion and back again, so too does the overall
pattern of these first poems in the volume reflect a gradual shift from bitter disillusioning reality to a rebirth of hopeful aesthetic vision and an attempt to reach the synthetic state detailed in "Legend." If one were to diagram the poems that make up this pattern in a sinusoidal curve, he would find that the cycle begins negatively, with "Black Tambourine" and "Eblems of Conduct" composing most of the negative half of the curve. "My Grandmother's Love Letters" would fall on the ascending side of both the negative and positive halves of the cycle, and "Sunday Morning Apples" would form the positive peak of the ascending curve. The cycle would be completed by placing "Praise For An Urn" on the descending tail of our graphic representation of the classic sine wave. What better symbol could one choose for the electric current of Hart Crane's poetry, whose "curveship lend[s] a myth to God," than the standard symbol of the twentieth century--the sine wave of common alternating current that drives our age?

The beginning poem in the cycle, "Black Tambourine," has been seen variously as a sociologic commentary upon the plight of Negroes in America, a comparison between the Negro and the poet and their similar places in the modern social hierarchy, and a reflection upon the poet's attempts to achieve some permanent reconciliation with life through his poetry. All of these interpretations have their avid supporters and all are justifiable. Seen in the light of a pattern of illusion and disillusion, however, the poem takes on the character of a despairing cry against the dilemma of the poet caught between the
need for his "music" and the world's harsh rejection of it, and his conflicting need for the approval and stability that world can provide if only one is willing to conform to its requirements.

It should be obvious that the black man in the poem symbolizes in one respect the modern poet, if only because of the close juxtaposition of him and his contrast to Aesop, who was himself a black man, a slave, and a poet. The modern black man/poet is trapped in the very "cellar" of society's regard because his "interests" are not those of the world at large, and his pursuit of purely artistic concerns while facing "the world's closed door" is a belated, and somewhat wistful, "judgement" upon society's crass treatment of its outcasts.

Crane was, as several critics and his biographers have pointed out, desperate for some reassurance from the world as to his worth and rightful place in it. At the time of "Black Tambourine's" composition, this sense of worth was largely sought from his father, whose approval Crane never ceased trying to obtain. Yet Clarence Crane, Hart's father, was also trapped by circumstances. A literate man, one not insensitive to the needs of art and artists, according to Unterecker, still Clarence Crane felt deeply the necessity for making something of oneself in terms of the "real" world and according to that world's conditions and sanctions. Thus, while sympathetic to his son's desires, he also wished for Hart to be a business success, since that often seems to be the only measure by which a capitalistic society gauges one's importance and worth. Had Hart Crane been able
to reconcile the two worlds of art and business as, for example, Wallace Stevens did, there can be no doubt that Clarence Crane would have been able to provide much more emotional support than he did. Unfortunately for both men's concerns, Hart was a complete disaster in the business world, and saw his father's mounting frustration and increasingly severe attempts to bring his son back into the only real world he knew as deliberate personal attacks designed to humiliate him and relegate him to second-class citizenship in the "cellar" of parental, hence societal, regard, where

Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,
And a roach spans a crevice in the floor.

Aesop, the black slave/poet, was also torn between the world of his poetic imagination and the reality of his situation, according to the persona of "Black Tambourine," and "driven to pondering" his dilemma, "found / Heaven with the tortoise and the hare." Aesop, therefore, was able to reconcile the imaginative world and the concrete world by relating fables that, while dealing with purely imaginative characters like the tortoise and the hare still managed to deal efficiently and expeditiously with the mundane concerns of those who live in the "real" world. For this blending of common sense and imaginative brilliance, Crane sees him as receiving the best of both worlds as his reward, the natural commendations of nature, "Fox brush and sow ear top his grave," along with those of the illusionary world of the imagination, "And mingling incantations on the air."

The modern persona/poet disguised as the black man, however, "forlorn in the cellar," is trapped between the two worlds, unable to
bring about the resolution Aesop found. He "Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies" somewhere between the symbol of his poetic music, the "tambourine, stuck on the wall," and the real world of a "carcass quick with flies" that reflects both his origins and his present doom. In such a situation the poet is indeed forlorn, for he is unable to join fully either world. He cannot forsake the visionary world, for to do so would be to die as a poet. The only life remaining in the last line, a metaphor for brutal reality and, perhaps, also for society's parasitical nature, is that of the flies, feeding off the symbolic corpse of the poet. The "carcass" is not "quick" according to the syntax of the line; only the flies are, despite the assertions of at least one critic to the contrary.7

Conversely, the poet's mystical/poetic world is also stilled; his tambourine hangs on the wall and is literally "stuck" there, the poet unable to make music, his creative imagination brutalized into silence by his circumstances. There the poet sits in his despair, unable to "sing," unable to join the mass of men in accord with society and reality as society perceives it, and, unlike Aesop, seemingly unable to find any resolution that will permit him to maintain himself simultaneously in both worlds. Yet for all the despair and disillusion the poet expresses in this poem, there remains the central germ of Aesop's achievement to keep the poet from giving up and to provide a goal toward which the poet can strive. This, and only this, prevents "Black Tambourine" from presenting the poet's existence as unredeemably bleak and wasted.
It is the faintly glowing spark of hope amid the despair of "Black Tambourine" that allows Crane to place next to it "Emblems of Conduct," a poem presenting an apparent lift in tone from the literal "blackness" of the previous poem. Yet this more optimistic tone is only an illusion and, as one digs deeper into the poem's strata, it becomes obvious that the poet here portrays the visionary world as an empty illusion corrupted by time and dulled by the distorted perceptions of history and modern science.

It is interesting to note at this point that Crane did not wish to include "Emblems of Conduct" in White Buildings, but did so only at the urging of Allen Tate and Malcolm Cowley. Crane apparently felt uncomfortable with the fact that most of the poem had been taken directly from several poems by Samuel Greenberg, an impoverished young poet who died of tuberculosis in 1917. Although he has been accused of plagiarism by some critics, most think the charge unjustified because of what Crane did with the lines from Greenberg, turning them into a work of art completely different from their original source in tone, form, and meaning. The technique is completely acceptable and has a long history, according to Laughlin, going back to the middle ages. If one wishes more modern confirmation of this fact, he has only to look at the unattributed lines from other poet's works in Eliot's The Waste Land or Pound's Cantos, for example.

Still, Crane did feel uncomfortable about publishing "Emblems of Conduct" and did so only reluctantly. Nevertheless, its place in White Buildings was carefully chosen to add to the volume's continuity
of theme and illustrates the continuing pattern of illusion and
disillusion in the sinusoidal cycle laid out by the poet.

It is helpful to study "Emblems of Conduct" alongside its major
source, Greenberg's "Conduct," as reproduced below:

By a peninsula, the painter sat and
sketched the uneven valley groves
The apostle gave alms to the
meek, the volcano burst
In fusive sulfur and hurled
Rocks and ore into the air,
Heaven's sudden change at
The drawing tempestuous
Darkening shade of dense clouded hues
The wanderer soon chose
His spot of rest, they bore the
Chosen hero upon their shoulders
Whom they strangely admired—as
The Beach tide summer of people desired.11

Contrast Greenberg's poem to Crane's:

By a peninsula the wanderer sat and sketched
The uneven valley graves. While the apostle gave
Alms to the meek the volcano burst
With sulfur and aureate rocks...
For joy rides in stupendous coverings
Luring the living into spiritual gates.

Orators follow the universe
And radio the complete laws to the people.
The apostle conveys thought through discipline.
Bowls and cups fill historians with adorations,--
Dull lips commemorating spiritual gates.

The wanderer later chose this spot of rest
Where marble clouds support the sea
And where was finally borne a chosen hero.
By that time summer and smoke were past.
Dolphins still played, arching the horizons,
But only to build memories of spiritual gates.

Greenberg's poem ends with a romantic vision of the artist
elevated to the status of hero by an admiring "tide" of mankind, a
dream whose realization Crane may have often longed for, as I noted in
relation to "Black Tambourine," but which he was far too wise in the ways of the world to draw comfort from. Greenberg's vision is an illusion that will not stand the test of contact with reality, a fragile bubble whose basic emptiness is part of the true subject of Crane's poem.

In "Emblems of Conduct" the poet contrasts the lifeless institutionalization of man's vision of the world to the full power and glory of nature's volcanic eruptions, a recurrent symbol of the stupendous beauty of the real world in Crane's poetry. The artist is a wanderer attempting to capture the essence of the landscape in which the "groves" of Greenberg has become "graves" to reflect its deathliness. By sheer chance he is witness to the contrast between nature's powerful outbursts of deadly beauty, and religion's perversion of the powerful concept of a God who could create such magnificence into a public charity for those too "meek" to take for themselves the "joy rides in stupendous coverings" that lead to the "spiritual gates" of a true vision of God present in the fusion of artistic imagination and natural events. This symbolic peering into the heart of a volcano for a true "vision" of the power behind reality is similar to the "heaven" found by Aesop in "Black Tambourine" in the company of the tortoise and the hare, and becomes the artist's "emblem" or sign by which he shall conduct himself and resist the dead and deadening emblems of the modern world.

In contemporary society the vision of the volcano's "aureate rocks" is subverted by scientific investigation, in which natural laws
are "radioed" by our modern "orators," scientists, to an admiring populace. There are no flights of visionary experience in the modern version of reality, but merely "thought through discipline" and flights of scientific investigation to "follow the universe." The relics of the past are adored only by historians, whose "dull lips" give lifeless commemoration to the idea of spiritual gates. Since one commemorates that which has passed away, modern society thus pronounces the death of vision and pays it hollow, meaningless lip service through the dull offices of scholarly investigation and discipline.

In the last stanza Crane unleashes a furious, yet poignant, irony when he portrays the artist as finally receiving the homage of mankind, become a "chosen hero" borne to his final resting place at the site of his original vision, another echo of Aesop's grave in some natural glade. Yet the artist's grave in "Emblems of Conduct" is not the natural, harmonious resting place of Aesop in "Black Tambourine." It is, instead, a place where the "marble clouds" of temples have replaced the "sulfur and aureate rocks" of the original volcanic eruption that precipitated the artist's vision. The "summer and smoke were past" and the beautiful accolades envisioned by Greenberg have become merely the dying "memories of spiritual gates," as empty of true meaning as the arching of playful dolphins that briefly echo memories of a vision perverted and lost.

The artist stubbornly remains true to his "emblem" of conduct, his desire to fuse the beauty of nature with the visionary impulse toward
a true spiritual experience, yet to no apparent avail, for society misinterprets and corrupts the vision, and finally (after he is safely dead) enshrines the visionary poet in the distorted, dull grip of imperfect memory. The poet, then, is a mock hero, one whose original vision has lost its meaning with the passage of time, the one reality that seems destined to twist and destroy even the most perfect blend of vision and experience. The illusion of any enduring meaning attaching to the artist's attempts to preserve his artistic integrity in the face of a perverted and perverting world is shattered by the disillusioning reality and endurance of that world in contrast to the transient nature of the artist's vision. The faint glimmer of hope held out in "Black Tambourine" is extinguished in "Emblems of Conduct" as Crane first builds, then destroys, the illusion of poetic efficacy, the idea of the poet as a "hero" whose works matter in the real world.

From the blighted irony of the last stanza of "Emblems of Conduct," Crane leads us into a gentler irony, that posed by "My Grandmother's Love Letters." If, as in the previous poem, the world corrupts and destroys the visions of youth, and if time distorts past events in such a way that they lose all meaning and value, then can the poet not revive the "stars . . . of memory," renew the vision and evoke the young girl who once existed in a world of passion quite different from her existence now as "my mother's mother, / Elizabeth"?

Unfortunately, the answer must be in the negative, since the Elizabeth to whom the letters are addressed no longer exists except as memories in the form of old love letters.
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Yet the persona of the poem enters the attempt to recall the past, the elusive young girl Elizabeth, with hope and gentleness, seeing in the soft rainy night conditions in which the imagination has room to expand upon memories, although "Over the greatness of such space / Steps must be gentle." The fragility of the illusion shimmering in his mind, "hung by an invisible white hair" and trembling "as birch limbs webbing the air," causes the persona to question his ability to transcend the intervening years:

Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes?

Can the persona/poet tread lightly enough
To carry the music back to its source
And back to you again
As though to her... . .

without destroying the vision he seeks to evoke?

The problem with evoking the past lies not in the attempt but in the motive, and is less concerned with abilities than with conceptions and perceptions of reality. The youthful persona/poet, in attempting to recall the equally youthful vision of his grandmother's girlhood, is doing so in order

To lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand.

Thus the poet is motivated by classic hubris, though without the usual drastic consequences, in a desire to lead his elders through experiences he arrogantly assumes they would fail to understand, and, para-
doxically, by a concurrent desire to lead the young girl Elizabeth unchanged from the dim Victorian past into the bewildering present of twentieth-century life. Either way, the poet must fail, for he can neither instruct his elders in that which the wisdom of age has given them nor find a suitable companion to share his life in an illusion from the past:

    And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
    With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

    It is the motive behind his attempt, left unstated until the last stanza, that causes the poet to stumble where he should have stepped gently, thus destroying the fragile illusion before it had ever coalesced. The rain, which began the poem as symbolic of real conditions that allow the poet's imagination to work undistracted by other natural phenomena ("There are no stars tonight / But those of memory"), ends the poem as symbolic of the futility of such an attempt motivated by impure or unrealistic desires. The vision brought to life, that is, the illusion fused with reality, cannot be achieved by the inexperienced or evoked by pride and loneliness, but by something else, to be learned from these early attempts at synthesis. What this something else consists of, according to Crane, is illustrated in the next poem in the cycle, "Sunday Morning Apples."

    Hart Crane's poem to William Sommer, an artist who was not only a very great friend but a tremendous influence upon the developing poet, has been put through the critical mill with different results by nearly everyone. The assessments of its worth run the gamut of critical opinions, from dismissal as a minor effort that only shows
its worth as "the first clear instance of what Crane would later call the logic of metaphor,"\textsuperscript{12} according to Lewis, to damnation as a poem that, while it retains a certain charm, "if we consider rational content alone, is really indecipherable,"\textsuperscript{13} according to Yvor Winters, to excessive praise as "one of his consummate poems"\textsuperscript{14} that treats the modernist issue of the relation of art to nature and to imagination, according to Sherman Paul. All of which only illustrates that critics, far from illuminating the works of Hart Crane, usually serve to muddy the waters to such an extent that the reader is forced to make his own independent assessment; which, perhaps, is as it should be.

In "Sunday Morning Apples" Crane lifts the reader from the ironic, but gentle, ending of "My Grandmother's Love Letters" to a height of explosive euphoria over the possibilities afforded the artistic vision by the examples of nature and the ultimate creative act—the fusion of vision and reality in the form of art and nature—through the actions of the artist who can move freely in both realms and thus "straddle" their "spontaneities."

This ultimate creation is not to be found in the dead past, as "My Grandmother's Love Letters" confirms, but the passage of time is necessary for its development. Time must pass and the seasons change before the "fleece of nature" can become charged

\[\text{... with those purposes} \]

That are your rich and faithful strength of line.

The eternal process that is nature will continue, in its own cyclic fashion, to renew creative purpose and provide the "fleece" that is
the artist's raw material and from which, a logical extension of the metaphor implies, the artist weaves the cloth of his art.

Thus from nature (ultimately a metaphor for reality) is received the inspiration of art, the "rich and faithful strength" that lies at the heart of all creativity. Yet in Sommer's studio Crane sees a painting of a nude that clashes with nature, that is not a fusion of vision and reality but a "Bursting on the winter of the world," and which "cries defiance to the snow." It "challenges" nature instead of acting in accord with it, reflecting its origin in divisiveness and conflict between art and reality—"a realm of swords"—instead of harmony and synthesis.

Contrasted to this arrogant

... ripe nude with head reared
Into a realm of swords ...

is a natural vignette like many Crane must have witnessed from Bill Sommer's studio window, perhaps even on the same day he saw the "ripe nude" and composed "Sunday Morning Apples."

The scene illustrates the harmony between man and nature in the form of a boy running joyously with his dog in the summer sunlight, partaking of both the world in its natural sense and of the intoxicating euphoria inspired by that world (hence the aptness of the valley's name—"Brandywine").

This scene, which would be a challenging yet ideal subject for a painting its juxtaposition with the "ripe nude" implies, is not in conflict with nature but in harmony with it. The boy and his environment are separate, of "independent orbits," and both have
"Their own perennials of light," but the boy also "straddles" the "spontaneities" that form those separate worlds, thus bringing about a synthetic state in which, perhaps only for a moment, the worlds of ecstatic illusion, or vision, and natural disillusion, or reality, are coexistent in one entity. It is the power of the moment in the form of the boy and his environment that allows him to bridge or "straddle" the gap that usually separates these two realms. The resultant state is like two planets in conjunction, the stellar imagery implies, giving forth a brightness that far surpasses their individual "perennials of light." Unfortunately, while such a conjunction is not rare, it is transitory. While it is hoped the artist himself will be able to enter such a state, it is also up to the artist to capture such moments on paper or, as in the case of Sommer, on canvas.

Thus Crane exhorts Sommer to return to natural objects for his inspiration, having seen evidence in the past of "the apples that toss you secrets" and unlock the "seasonable madness" with their "aerial wine." Unlike the "spontaneous," unplanned ecstasy of the summer morning's conjunction with the boy and his dog, the artist may actively seek the "seasonable madness" of synthesis between art and nature, vision and reality. The natural world brought into conjunction with the world of imagination, symbolized in the last section of the poem by the apples poised next to "a pitcher with a knife" (indicative, one may conclude, of the vessel of the artist's creative energy and the sharp, dissecting qualities of his mind), produce their own "spontaneities"--a kind of spontaneous "explosion"
into the synthetic state that is, for Hart Crane, the essence of art. The artist's concentration, therefore, must be outward, toward the natural world, as Crane exhorts his friend—"The apples, Bill, the apples!"—and not inward upon the "ripe nude," who is in conflict with and antithetical to nature.

In "Sunday Morning Apples" Crane achieves far more than a minor effort or an "idecipherable hodgepodge." The poem is, as Sherman Paul says, "an elan of the imagination that convinces us that 'vision is the release into pure being,'" but it is also something beyond even that: it is the cumulative peak of a cycle that began in disillusion and despair and has returned to complete faith once again in the power of vision and artistic purpose; faith in the artist's ability to create a synthesis from illusionary and disillusioning worlds; and a negation of the darkness and lack of assurance that so often seemed to accompany the life of Hart Crane. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this peak in the first cycle in White Buildings is short lived, abruptly declining in the next poem in the volume, "Praise For An Urn."

Written as an ode for the funeral of Ernest Nelson, another artist and good friend of Crane's, "Praise for an urn" provides a disillusioning contrast to its companion in the volume, "Sunday Morning Apples." The biographical aspects of the piece have been adequately detailed by many critics and need not be recounted here, except to say that they are of some importance in understanding the poem's milieu. Perhaps the best introduction to the poem comes from
Crane himself, who gave a short biographical sketch of Nelson in response to an inquiry about the poem, concluding with the statement that "He was one of many broken against the stupidity of American life in such places as here." With this bitter outburst about the "broken" artist in mind, and recalling L. S. Dembo's assessment that "Crane saw in Ernest Nelson, his subject, the dead brother poet or image of himself," one can begin an exploration of the poem in the proper frame of mind.

From the brilliant, explosive optimism of "Sunday Morning Apples," Crane drops the reader of White Buildings into a world of despair, in which the artist is defeated by circumstances, time, and death. Nelson, a Norwegian expatriate (hence "Northern face" and "exile guise" of the first two lines), had mingled within his personality

The everlasting eyes of Pierrot
And, of Gargantua, the laughter.

As Lewis has pointed out,

Pierrot was associated traditionally and in Crane's mind with the moon and with the creative imagination... But the moonstruck Pierrot was also a somewhat sad and foolish fellow, and his presence in "Praise for an Urn" lends in advance something sad and foolish to those hopeful guesses and presentiments about death recounted in the third stanza. Nelson thus becomes symbolic of the imagination, the "everlasting eyes" that continually seek vision, yet are somehow sad and foolish, "moonstruck," and of the gargantuan zest and appetite the artist must have to enable him to cope with his existence in a hard, wearying world. This combination of imagination in the guise of Pierrotic innocence or
naivete along with the ceaseless curiosity about and zest for life of Gargantua is Crane's conception of the true attributes of the artist in the modern world.

The artist's legacy is composed of his thoughts, delivered to Crane from his deathbed, "From the white coverlet and pillow," and seen as such only in retrospect. They are "Delicate riders of the storm," fragile bubbles of imaginative creation battered and carried by the "storm" of reality, perhaps destined to flounder, perhaps to survive, but set free nonetheless by their communication to the poet and his "inheritance" and assimilation of them into his own psyche. Recalling their past conversations, Crane speaks of how he and Nelson were once moved by "The slant moon on the slanting hill" to meditate upon death and "what the dead keep, living still," that is, upon the thoughts and ideas of the dead, thoughts that still, perhaps, live, but which are trapped eternally within their originators' dead minds. Whatever these entombed secrets are, hovering just beneath the threshold of perception, "presentiments" of them are evoked by the "slant" moon and the "slanting" hill, both reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." The truth is "slanted" in such a way that one only receives presentiments of it, for such secrets revealed would, as Dickinson's poem concludes, blind us with their awesomeness.

The awesome truth, the secret that lives within us all after death, is brutally hammered home by the ticking clock "perched in the crematory lobby." Time is the great secret, time in the guise of an
ironic but persistent commentator upon our naive "praise / Of glories proper to the time." Though our praise and our glory both have their proper time, still that "time" passes and nothing endures but ravaging, indifferent Time itself. The symbolic clock, the slant moon smoothly transformed into the round dial of ever insistent time (the moon is still used to gauge time in colloquial expression, especially in relation to cycles of life) perches vulture-like over the funeral of Ernest Nelson, casting the dark shadow of its wings over all our "assessements of the soul," and our "praise of glories," commenting all the while with supreme indifference about the meaninglessness and transitory nature of all our lives and efforts.

Nelson, the artist "broken" by America and time, is gone, leaving only a few "riders of the storm" as his legacy. Crane, recalling "gold hair," symbolic in all his poetry of the loved one,

... cannot see that broken brow
And miss the dry sound of bees
Stretching across a lucid space.

The way in which these lines are read is extremely important to the meaning of the poem. In rough paraphrase, then, are we to take them as meaning, "Recalling his gold hair, I cannot see his broken brow without hearing (that is, I cannot miss) the sound of bees, etc.," or as, "Recalling his gold hair, I refuse to see his broken brow and I miss (that is, long for) the sound of bees, etc." Almost all the critics have read these lines according to the latter interpretation, with Lewis even going so far as to indicate that "miss" is to be taken as a deliberate action, a rejection of the meaningless drone of bees
"to which his friend's once eloquent voice had been reduced." Most other critics have interpreted the sound of the bees as symbolic of Nelson's inspiring intelligence and Crane's lament upon its loss.

To read these lines as most critics insist they should be read, however, one must insert a comma after "brow," as the end-of-line pause is not emphatic enough to sustain the conjunction of the two independent thoughts by itself. That is, syntactically the common interpretation requires an independent clause, not the dependent clause indicated by the lack of punctuation after "brow." Thus grammatically as well as logically the poem demands the primary reading indicated above, in which the poet, recalling how his friend once was and comparing that memory to what he has become, is forced by the comparison to hear "the dry sound of bees / Stretching across a lucid space." The insistent commentary of the clock in the previous stanza has become the sound of bees, the individual ticks of the clock sped up until they resemble the buzz of insects--time passing in unendurable and unstoppable frenzy across the now "lucid space" of the poet's conception of his life and its infinitesimal relation to the world. This seems to me to be a more satisfactory reading of the next to last stanza, not only because the poem's punctuation seems to require it, but also because it logically concludes the train of thought begun in the third stanza. The "presentiments" are now unveiled, the truth is no longer "silent" but "lucid," and the revelation is indeed awesomely bleak and devastating.
The poet concludes by asking that the "well meant idioms" of the poem be scattered, like Nelson's ashes,

Into the smoky spring that fills
The suburbs, where they will be lost.

The act of creation is, in this instance, also an act of sacrificial consumption—the poem's idioms are consumed by their scattering or recitation over the suburban and uncaring America that "broke" Nelson, and they will be no "delicate riders of the storm" but, instead, utterly and unredeemably lost. The futility of artistic action in the face of harsh reality and the transitory nature of mind and ideas, is indicated most forcibly in the final despairing line that echoes, in a different context filled with bitterness and irony, what was so optimistically presented in "Sunday Morning Apples." The image of synthesis and purpose presented by the boy running "before the sun" has turned to ashes; the idioms of poetry, and all art, "are no trophies of the sun."

Thus Crane brings to a close the first cycle of White Buildings. Having led us from despair, through hope, to the highest optimistic pinnacle, he returns us full circle to the beginning of the volume where the black man sits in his cellar contemplating no "trophies of the sun" but a "mid-kingdom dark" and a symbolic "carcass quick with flies." Once again I wish to emphasize that such continuity of pattern and theme almost certainly was not in the poet's mind at the time of these poems' composition. It was only later, when he came to "step the legend of" his "youth into the noon" through the structural composition of White Buildings, that Crane's genius for pattern making
guided his hand in the arrangement of these poems. Crane has left us no written statement of intention in this regard beyond the fact that certain things seem to go together, and it is probable that the cyclic nature of his poetry and its grouping into larger cycles was only unconsciously perceived. Crane's life is filled with instances in which he included lines or words in poems because they "seemed" right, because their "texture" pleased him and their "aesthetic sense" outweighed any "meaning" he or his critics could consciously perceive. All great artists operate in this fashion to some extent, and the phenomenon of the poet who writes more than he knows or whose unconscious moves him in directions totally beyond his conscious realization is an accepted fact in literary criticism. In such unconscious motives and creative actions one finds much of poetry's attraction and a great deal of its value. The tactile nature and richness of most poetry would be absent without it, and we would be reduced to a few repetitive platitudes about life without the unique qualities that make a good poem about, for example, death, really about so much more than the mere fact of mortality and physical corruption.

In bringing full circle the first cycle of *White Buildings*, Crane has dealt with art and the artist's role in the world without mentioning that other great motivator of youthful poets, love. It remains for the second cycle to deal with the overwhelming theme of physical and emotional love and the poet's attempts to find there the sense of fusion with something outside himself he so desperately needed. This
second cycle consists of the next seven poems in *White Buildings*: "Garden Abstract," "Stark Major," Chaplinesque," "Pastorale," "In Shadow," "The Fernery," and "North Labrador." They recount the ups and downs of Crane's youthful love life, his sexual longings and searches for fulfillment. They also reflect his concern with aspects of love beyond the erotic, his need for reassurance, his loneliness, his relations with relatives, and his early attempts to bring about, somehow, a resolution between his adolescent desires and needs and the harsh realities of growing up in prudish early twentieth-century America, which would not accept his homosexuality nor even allow him to accept it himself without a lifelong struggle.

If the next cycle is a reflection and recounting in symbolic form of all these things, it is also something else. It is the record of Crane's major source for poetry, the "cleaving and the burning" along with the tremorous kisses in the snow--"the only worth all granting." When Hart Crane wrote brilliantly, when he leaped ahead in poetic prowess and knowledge, it was almost invariably because love gave him the energy and inspiration. As he said in a letter to Gorham Munson, "The strongest incentive to the imagination, or, at least, the strongest in my particular case is love." And when love was absent he would lament, as he did in the same letter, "There is not love enough in me at present to do a thing." But when the love was in him he was capable of monumental achievements, and the full flowering of mature love inspired him to perhaps his greatest height of lyric accomplishment, the "Voyages" cycle. Thus Crane, in this second cycle
of his first book, shows us the process behind the "relentless caper" that leads ultimately to the "perfect cry" of "constant harmony" brought nearly to completion in later, more mature cycles.

This second cycle in White Buildings, while not nearly as sharply defined nor as sinusoidally distinct as the first, still retains the basic Cranian pattern of moving from a state of questing, illusionary hope to a state of barren, devastated disillusion. The cycle's boundaries are defined by two poems of strikingly different subjects, tone, theme, and meaning: "Garden Abstract" and "North Labrador." The poems between these two end-pieces illustrate Crane's journey from the hot "mimic of the sun" in the first poem to the "land of leaning ice" in the last. The end of "North Labrador" presents a denial of all the concerns of the intervening poems, denying the illusions of spring and sexual renewal presented in "Garden Abstract," birth and the psychological death of lovers in "Stark Major," and the passage of time in "The Fernery." It also emphasizes the lack of warming and suffusing light, thus echoing the twilight atmosphere of "In Shadow," "Chaplinesque," and "Pastorale":

Cold-hushed, there is only the shifting of moments
That journey toward no Spring--
No birth, no death, no time nor sun
In answer.

Even the theme of death, a major motif in several of the poems in the cycle's interior, is denied. All these themes, the major motivators of mankind, whether efficacious or detrimental, are seen at the end of the cycle as illusions. The only tenable reality is the harsh one of loneliness, silence, and numbing cold, with the "land" of the poet's
"glittering breast" laid bare before us, moving "silently / Into eternity."

"Garden Abstract," in contrast, is a poem of pure, earthy sexuality, whose phallic symbolism even Crane was forced to acknowledge.24 Weber points out that the first version of the poem was blatantly homosexual in imagery and theme, and was subsequently rewritten by Crane, who was unwilling at the time to have his sexual preferences paraded before the world.25 Thus, in the guise of a woman, Gargantua's zest is reborn in sexual appetite and lusty zeal for life and love. The woman reaching for her "desire," becomes so enthralled she "comes to dream herself the tree," and blends herself in a passionate fusion that dissolves her physical presence and holds "... her to the sky and its quick blue, / Drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight." In the final orgasmic lines she is suspended at the peak of ecstatic release, and all normal concerns beyond the present climactic instant of union are forgotten:

She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope
Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet.

"Stark Major" brings this union to an end, to "the time of sundering," when the lover "dies" and is forced back into the "heat and sober / Vivisection" of the real world. Here Crane has shifted his persona's focus from the woman to her lover or husband about to embark upon his daily routine, one who lives only in memory of his nightly existence. The woman's desires, so graphically presented in "Garden Abstract," have been satisfied, and she is filled now with "her mound of undelivered life." Although things seem the same,
although she still calls and laughs, the persona perceives that the lover has truly "died" in that the terms of his existence with this woman have changed. The traditional image of the "lover" normally takes no account of consequences; here, however, the carefree nature of lovers' passions is destroyed by the subtle intrusion of another life. She is no longer a lover but an expectant mother, and he is no longer a lover but a husband and father, with responsibilities and cares that admit no permanent union. The husband finds himself, in a sense, superfluous. The woman moves beyond him, into regions he can never enter. He finds himself psychologically shut out by the new intimacy and experience the coming child provides his partner, and is left looking "At doors and stone with broken eyes." Her labor cries and ecstasies will provide larger, more potent memories than he can ever hope to provide, and certainly can never share:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Walk now, and note the lover's death.} \\
& \text{Henceforth her memory is more} \\
& \text{Than yours, in cries and ecstasies} \\
& \text{You cannot ever reach to share.}
\end{align*}
\]

While outwardly things appear the same, inwardly the illusion of the lover has crumbled and died. Yet, though the carefree, passionate lover in us "dies," its death serves the creation of new life; for Crane, however, such was never to be the case. The persona/poet is sterile, an uninitiated, nonparticipatory observer who feels all the more keenly the death of the lover because his own ruined love affairs left him naked, alone, and without the consolations of heterosexual lovers.
Thus the poet, like the lover, must make his own

... meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits,

Crane says in the opening lines of "Chaplinesque," the next poem in the cycle. If the lover in us dies, then "we can still love the world" and give solace to those creatures less fortunate than ourselves. We play the game, sad pierrotic figures like Charlie Chaplin, sidestepping "the final smirk" and putting off the doom that awaits us, clownishly "Facing the dull squint" of the world with feigned "innocence" and "surprise." If, as Butterfield has stated, "Chaplin is primarily a metaphor for a psychological... condition," then the clownish acts of the persona/poet "are not lies" but reflections of real conditions and states of mind, just as the comic "collapses" of Charlie Chaplin's films reflect deeper psychologic and sociologic concerns than their slapstick appearance at first reveals.

L. S. Dembo has commented that in the fourth stanza Crane is saying "Our funerals [obsequies] are no great undertaking because in America our deaths are meaningless." Taken in context with the other poems in the cycle, the lines also reflect upon the death of the lover in "Stark Major." The lover, the "heart," dies in one sense, and in another also lives on, in a "game" that "enforces smirks." The pun on Crane's name here is too obvious to overlook, and is a typically playful, but also serious, way for Crane to indicate his own personal involvement in the poem's milieu.
Finally, though we are bereft, all feeling is not dead, merely hidden behind the Chaplinesque mask, sometimes finding its way to the surface of consciousness in the "grail of laughter of an empty ash can," or in the cry of "a kitten in the wilderness" cutting through the masks of "gaity and quest" like moonlight in a lonely alley cuts through the darkness.

In "Pastorale" Crane laments the lost opportunities of the past as, in autumn, he contemplates dead violets, emblems of spring and symbols of poetic growth and inspiration he was to use again in the "Cape Hatteras" section of The Bridge. But a more common symbolic use of violets in Crane's poetry is as a reference to sexuality and the hot, fervid growth of desire, as seen, for example, in "Virginia" in the "Three Songs" section of The Bridge and in "Moment Fugue." In "Pastorale" the two meanings are combined, with beauty, love, and poetry inseparably intertwined. The poet laments, then, the passing of all three with the progression of time as the year becomes "Broken into smoky panels," and the visions and enthusiasms of spring are obliterated in the colorful but depressing ending of the year "in this latter muffled / Bronze and brass." The persona's query in the last two stanzas brings into question the validity of attempting to bear anything from the past into the present. Has the poet been dwelling too much upon the past, or has he dwelt too little upon it:

Have you remembered too long;
Or was there too little said
For ease or resolution?
Has life rushed forward too quickly for the poet to gain anything of lasting value from it (echoing the plunging realities of "Legend"), with the vast majority of the year's "violets" gone and only "A few picked, the rest dead?" There is no resolution to this nagging insecurity beyond the feeling that whichever proves to be the case the poet will still have failed to achieve anything of significance and is, in fact, a "fool."

"In Shadow" presents another portrait that stresses the lateness of the hour. Instead of late autumn, it is "the late amber afternoon," and the object of the poet's attention is "Confused among chrysanthemums," barely distinguishable, with only her parasol giving definition to her presence as it alternately flashes from sunlight to shadow. As the deepening twilight engulfs her, she senses his presence behind her. He addresses her, not only as a woman, perhaps the object of desire, but also as the essence of faded beauty that once had the power to "distill / The sunlight." In a passage reminiscent of the ending of "My Grandmother's Love Letters," he states he will at least attempt to rescue her from the fate of being alone in the darkness, since he cannot prevent the twilight from becoming night. But the darkness of her faded beauty is as much a part of her allure and mystery as her daytime "furtive lace and misty hair." Thus "her own words are night's and mine;" powerless to prevent the decline of beauty, Crane opts for another illusion to take the place of full-blown youthful beauty, the beauty inherent in the
very act of beauty's fading "alone in the light's decline," turning the romantic poetry of night, darkness, and decay into his own.

"The Fernery" presents a final picture of sensual, sexual, youthful beauty transformed by senility and decrepitude. The woman, no longer an object of desire, her face worn and seamed with "zigzags fast around dry lips," contents herself with her fernery. Ferns do not bloom and ordinarily take little care. They are, therefore, indicative of the decline of youthful hope and desire symbolized by the botanic progression within the cycle; from the apples and sunlight of "Garden Abstract," to the wilted, dying violets of "Pastorale" and the dim chrysanthemums of "In Shadow," to the dark "humid green" of "The Fernery," Crane leads us to the end of the illusion of youth and love, "To darkness through a wreath of sudden pain." As the title of the first version of this poem, "Auntie Climax," instructs us, life's end is anticlimactic, a negation of the climactic nature of the first poem in the cycle, "Garden Abstract." Life becomes a process of dimming into confusions and "merciless tidy hair," premonitions of which the poet has already felt within himself:

I have known within myself a nephew to confusions
That sometimes take up residence and reign
In crowns less grey-- . . . .

The anticlimactic nature of life, its sheer meaninglessness when measured by the few worthwhile "violets" of poetry or sexual bliss (themselves, like the poet, pitifully fragile and transitory) one is able to "pick" along the way to one's own personal "fernery," lead the readers of White Buildings into the damned, yet painless, "land of
leaning ice" presented in "North Labrador." The poet finds himself once again in a dark mid-kingdom as he did at the end of the first cycle, a place "Darkly Bright," containing no memories and, consequently, no disappointment:

"Has no one come here to win you,  
Or left you with the faintest blush  
Upon your glittering breasts?  
Have you no memories, O Darkly Bright?"

All the illusions of the previous poems are blasted away by this final disillusionment with life itself and the poet's descent into the "Cold-hushed" stasis of shifting moments "That journey toward no Spring."

The end of the second cycle in White Buildings also marks the end of what may loosely be called the "juvenile" half of the volume, a term that, in this context, has nothing to do with chronological order or physical maturity. It merely indicates that the first two sections of the book present patterns of groping desperation, the struggles of a young poet to come to grips with himself, his age, his sensuality, and his art. The fact that these two sections contain poems whose dates of composition in some instances are separated by relatively long periods in which poems placed in later cycles were composed ("Stark Major," for instance, was written after "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen") has little to do with the overall thematic cycles they illustrate in White Buildings.

The poems that follow "North Labrador" are generally more complex, hence more mature, expressions of Crane's aesthetic development. The failures and the lessons learned in the first two sections combine in
the latter half of the volume to produce greater thematic assurance and confidence as Crane seeks synthesis through the combination of sensual, erotic, and intoxicating stimuli with his ever growing mastery of the visionary and poetic torrents that raged within him.

Having found only disappointment in the first two cycles, the reader of the third cycle finds it illustrates an ascending curve of responses to the world that leads naturally to the two climactic efforts of the volume, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and the "Voyages" cycle. This third grouping of poems includes "Repose of Rivers," a peaceful interlude in which the poet renews his faith and energy after the bitter emptiness of "North Labrador"; and "Paraphrase," "Possessions," "Lachrymae Christi," "Passage," "The Wine Menagerie," and "Recitative," which recount renewed attempts to reconcile the world of reality with that of vision or illusion. Love and lust, religion and secularism, Dionysian exuberance and oblivion, all combine in the third cycle to lead the poet to the point where he can attempt a reconciliation between the "twin shadowed halves" of the visionary and the real and attain enough of the synthetic state that they may "walk through time with equal pride," the long "hours clapped dense into a single stride."

Samuel Hazo remarks of "Repose of Rivers" that it is "almost Wordsworthian in its tranquility" and "derives its basic force from a combination of reminiscence and contrast."29 It also presents the first real mention in the volume of what was to become for Crane a major motif, the sea and its peaceful, femininely comforting
properties of renewal. In the poem the poet remembers the events of
the past that have brought him to this point, the "flags" of euphoria
and the "weeds" of black despair. But it is in the memory of the
sound of the wind in willows that "all things nurse," that is, take
their renewal and build their strength as the young poet steadily
matures. It is a new sound, however, that brings back these memories:

I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Til age had brought me to the sea.

Crane, having passed beyond the "nursing" stage (another introduction
of a major Cranian motif, that of rebirth, infancy, and maturity, that
appears often in subsequent poems in the volume), is ready now for a
more mature relationship with the world and is lured away from
reliance upon memories of the protected "alcoves" and "ponds" of his
youth by the more exciting, dangerous, beautiful, and incomparably
larger symbol of the sea:

I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer,
And willows could not hold more steady sound.

In the midst of his urban life, the sea, "there, beyond the dykes,"
allows him his memories in peace and offers him new opportunities for
vision and exploration while affording a comforting sense of
continuity with the past. The sound of the sea, so much larger and
"more steady" than the willows, is also similar enough that he can
embrace it with confidence and renewed energy.

Yet this renewal of energy and confidence does not immediately
close the doors of self doubt nor entirely dispel the helpless feeling
that the poet is at the mercy of a cruel world that may end his
endeavors before they are properly begun. With the lessons of Ernest Nelson and Samuel Greenberg before him, Crane cannot help but contemplate his own death and unfinished work in "Paraphrase." As Robert Combs has remarked, "One may come with a start," the poem's first stanza says,

> to sense within oneself the emptiness and silence which constantly fall between heartbeats; they are the death we carry with us.

The "repose" in this poem is not the repose that brings a healing balm to a disturbed psyche as it is in "Repose of Rivers," but is instead the stillness of death that "Involves the hands in purposeless repose," healing and accomplishing nothing. Death "stuns" us with its "antarctic blast" and leaves the head "unrocking to a pulse" and "Hollowed by air." Crane demonstrates a painful awareness of the necessity for the real world and its cruelties, however, for if the world kills us eventually, it also lets us live, if only for a short time. Thus the heartbeats of life become "bruised roses," painful and beautiful, superimposed upon a wall of reality whose color is the blank whiteness of death, a chilling echo of "North Labrador's" resonant despair.

The image of eventual fatality lurking beneath the colorful "roses" that paper the walls of our lives does not tell the entire story of the experience of living, but it does sum it up succinctly and definitively, providing, in short, a paraphrase or simplified account of life and its eventual end in nothingness. The "paraphrase" of the title and the last stanza, then, indicates an abbreviated
account of life itself imposed upon the harsh reality of the void, and
reflects the fusion between the flowering illusion that is life and
the empty disillusionment of chaos and death that informs and controls
that life. This is the "record wedged in his soul" the poet reports
in his first stanza, a revelation so startling it causes him to rush
from his bed in amazement and, perhaps, momentary panic.

Sona Raiziss has said of Crane that "He captures the continuity of
life in unregenerate adult ardor and bitterness, instructed by the
painful sensibility of his time and its need for intelligible
patterns." In "Possessions" Crane leaves the fearful confrontation
with death for the more absorbing "continuity of life" presented by
his adult sexual problems and their relation to his life and art.
Crane finds himself burdened under the "fixed stone of lust," living a
life whose "record" is one "of rage and partial appetites," and
actively seeks to escape that burden into some higher "pure
possession." He does not deny his lusts and desires; on the contrary,
he takes "up the stone / As quiet as you can make a man ..." in a
fatalistic acceptance of his earthier needs, even while those same
needs cause him unbearable agony, "turning on smoked forked spires"
in a psychological hell.

M. D. Uroff contends that "Whereas Crane had first imagined the
poet as abandoned by the world, now he pictured the poet as abondoning
the world by going beyond its limits in a creative act." Yet this
creation must be founded upon reality, must enable man to live in the
real world to which he is tied so tenuously, as "Paraphrase" has
indicated. Thus Uroff's vision of Crane flying off into a new realm completely divorced from the old realm of spatial reality presents a distorted view of Crane's poetic process. The new world, the world of illusion or vision, must constantly be tested against reality as the only means of preserving its strength and validity. When the bubble bursts, as it obviously must under such constant probing, the poet is forced back upon reality until his imagination can create a new illusion, thereby beginning the cycle anew but with a different myth at its core. This is exactly the "trust" we are called upon to "witness" in "Possessions." The new illusion, the "pure possession," is slow in coming, but the poet is confident he can build it from the ruins of his past illusions. In the meantime he suffers, awaiting the "white wind" that will "raze / All but bright stones wherein our smiling plays."

The word "raze" in the last stanza (apparently the British spelling of "raze") has been interpreted by most critics to mean "destroy," and indeed it does have that meaning. However, it also means to level something old in order to build upon it something new. That is, one might raze a hill to provide a level foundation for a house, for example. In "Possessions" the "white wind" of inspired imagination razes the old, earth-bound lusts and desires, leaving the "bright stones" (as opposed to the "fixed" stones of lust) of our new illusions built upon the compacted rubble of older, but now superfluous, experiences.
The poet's need for vision is fixed in the real world and allied to his sexual needs and proclivities. It is indeed a "sacrifice (the direst)" for him to attempt to sift "Through a thousand nights [of] the flesh" for one redeeming and illuminating moment, the "bolts that linger hidden." The problem with this "fixed stone of lust" is that, while in one manner it certainly is a burden, in another it is still attractive enough that the poet is "wounded by apprehensions out of speech," that is, apprehensive of breaking with reality and abandoning the dark but familiar "tumbling tabulation" of his numerous encounters while cruising Bleecker Street. The poet/persona is tossed on the horns of a dilemma, trapped in a world of dark passions, literally possessed, in a demonic sense, by his lust, while desiring the unknown "pure possession," the "white wind" of the visionary imagination. The poet is confident that "the inclusive cloud / Whose heart is fire shall come," and a new visionary creation take the place of this "blind sum," but which will remain firmly grounded in it through its heart of fire (possibly another of Crane's many puns upon "Hart").

The expected arrival of the "white wind" is celebrated in the next poem in the volume, "Lachrymae Christi," by the first word of the piece:

Whitely, while benzine
Rinsings from the moon
Dissolve all but the windows of the mills . . . .

Perhaps the most lucid, sensible reading of the poem is that of R. W. B. Lewis, and I will not endeavor to repeat his work here. It suffices to say that Lewis points out that nature in the poem
revivifies the poetic imagination in a burst of song whose religious connotations lift Crane out of the dark "possessions" of the previous poem into the rebirth of the Christ/Dionysus/poet figure who is both destroyed by the world and reborn from it:

Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail
Of earth again--

Thy face
From charred and riven stakes, 0
Dionysus, Thy
Unmangled target smile.

The burning wind of "Possessions" then is transformed into the ritual sacrifice (an echo of the dire sacrifice of the previous poem) of Christ upon the cross and Dionysus at the stakes, and from the ashes, significantly, Dionysus (God of wine and music or poetry) rises alone, his smile "unmangled" and triumphant. Thus the title's ambiguity is aptly resolved--"Lachrymae Christi" is not only the central Christian image of Christ's suffering, which Crane certainly pictures himself as enduring, but is also the name of a very famous Neapolitan wine that links the title directly to the triumphant, reborn Dionysus. The preponderance of images in the poem relating to or connotative of intoxicating spirits, "benzine rinsings" (while benzine is poisonous if drunk, its fumes can make one quite intoxicated), "immaculate venom," "annoint," "distilling clemencies," "perpetual fountains," etc., prepare us for the triumph of Dionysus. The rebirth of vision through Dionysian revels and binges (which Crane was justifiably famous for) is seen in the euphoric grin of the phoenix-like poet/god not only in this poem but in "Wine Menagerie."
But between these two poems celebrating the intoxicated and intoxicating vision of "New thresholds, new anatomies," lies "Passage," a poem whose title indicates a disillusioning return to reality that must be got through, much like a morning-after hangover, before the poet can resume his visionary extravaganzas.

In the first stanza we hear echoes of "Repose of Rivers" in

I heard the sea.
In sapphire arenas of the hills
I was promised an improved infancy.

The idea of an improved infancy also provides a direct link to the end of "Lachrymae Christi," with its images of rebirth, but in "Passage" the overall tone of the rebirth is one of disillusion, as in a promise made but not kept. Therefore the poet sulks in stanza two, "sanctioning the sun." This image recalls the sunlit valley of "Sunday Morning Apples," but the "Brandywine" valley of that poem has become a ravine in which memory, that "casual louse," has been abandoned. All these echoes conspire to negate the euphoric illusions of past poems—the poet's "memories"—the hope and creative energy of "Sunday Morning Apples" and "Repose of Rivers," as well as the promise of inspirational freedom and regenerative power given in "Lachrymae Christi." Now the poet is cut off from the sea, hearing its sound only, and is trapped in an Eliotian waste land where

Dangerously the summer burned
(I had joined the entrainments of the wind).
The shadows of boulders lengthened my back:
In the bronze gongs of my cheeks
The rain dried without odour.
The "white wind" of "Possessions" has died, the third stanza indicates, and the poet is "turned about and back" upon himself and is forced to contemplate the harsh reality of his only "too well-known biography."

The poet, forced back upon memory rather than abandoning it, returns to the ravine, impatiently pacing the "dozen particular decimals of time" until once again his visionary powers awaken and the promise of the "pure possession" is kept. The laurel in the fifth stanza is symbolic of this promise and of poetic prowess and power; the poet, however, reaching out for it, finds not inspiration and uplifting vision but, instead, "A thief beneath, my stolen book in hand." The thief is time, which is "justified in transcence," and from whom the poet has always been "fleeing / Under the constant wonder of your eyes." Time, the thief who steals all our glory, all our triumphs, "closes the book" on the poet's accomplishments and reveals an apocalyptic vision of the sands of time burying the poet, indeed the entire world, in a "glittering abyss." Ironically, even in the abyss of time's trough, Crane's visionary powers lift him "to the sun" where his poetic voice "learned its tongue and drummed." Yet the vision is cruelly lost as the inevitable outcome of any battle against time, and he is unable to recall the vision or retain its essence. Once committed to the page in the form of a poem, the vision becomes a formalized memory and the free flow between the vision and the poet becomes a static artifact, much as was portrayed in "Emblems of Conduct." Thus Crane is denied even the consolation of a true vision.
of his despair, losing both the sound of "fountains" and "icy speeches" in his sobering descent into reality and the perversions time forces upon our memories: "Memory, committed to the page, had broke."

Crane's one recourse, then, seems to be a return to the fiery, intoxicating redemption of Dionysus in "The Wine Menagerie," and indeed the poem opens with wine "invariably" redeeming the poet's "sight" or visionary powers. The special power the wine gives him is "to travel in a tear / Sparkling alone, within another's will," that is, to empathize fully with the sights, sounds, and persons around him to such an extent that "New thresholds, new anatomies" of poetic promise are opened up

                Until my blood dreams a receptive smile
                Wherein new purities are snared.

Yet the visions he has so far "snared" (a man, woman, and boy, and the tensions surrounding them in a barroom) are perceived to be but "frozen billows of" the poet's skill. He must "Invent new dominoes of blood and life," that is, move upward to new visions, for

                Ruddy, the tooth implicit in the world
                Has followed you.

Even in the height of drunken visionary experience the nibbling "tooth" of time and reality pursues the poet, nibbling away in "some dim inheritance of sand" at his powers (an echo of the "glittering abyss" of the previous poem) and leaving so much yet to be mastered in the poet's prophetically short life span: "How much yet meets the treason of the snow."
His tasks unaccomplished, the illusions conjured up by alcohol able to carry him only so far, the poet is forced to look elsewhere for his salvation, for the mysterious synthesis between the real and unreal he so ardently seeks. In the "menagerie" of wine-induced vision there is no synthesis but, rather, only further separation between reality and vision, symbolized by the decapitated images of Holofernes and John the Baptist. Crane seeks unity between the head, the spiritual or imaginative half of man, and the body, the physical or concrete half; therefore, he must return to the "exile" of sobriety and try again, packing his loneliness and frustration on his back like a refugee seeking a new home. The poem closes with the derisory voices of the disembodied heads of John the Baptist and Holofernes whispering about his failure and his inability to be satisfied with their lot. The wine of Dionysus has proved to be an unfruitful and dangerously misleading potion, but one which the poet was to turn to, unfortunately, more and more often as he struggled through the few short years remaining to him. In the words of Monroe Spears, "The poet is betrayed, his head separated from his body like those of Holofernes and John the Baptist; and he is as ineffectual as the puppet Petrushka's valentine." Inefffectual he may be, but defeated he is not, as he searches for the union between head and body, vision and reality, in the last poem of the third cycle, "Recitative."

Hart Crane spoke of this concept of unity in a much-quoted letter to Allen Tate concerning the meaning of "Recitative":

Imagine the poet, say, on a platform speaking it. The audience is one half of humanity, Man (in the
sense of Blake) and the poet the other. ALSO the poet sees himself in the audience as in a mirror. ALSO, the audience sees itself, in part, in the poet. Against this paradoxical DUALITY is posed the UNITY, or the conception of it in the last verse. In another sense the poet is talking to himself all the way through the poem.

The decapitated poet in "The Wine Managerie," then, becomes the "Janus-faced" poet of "Recitative," a dual nature "as double as the hands that twist this glass." As in "Legend," we find the poet gazing into the mirror of his psyche, each half regarding the "twin shadowed" half of the other. In this contemplation of duality and the possibility of unity, the "wind" of restorative creation springs up again:

... darkness, like an ape's face, falls away,
And gradually white buildings answer day.

In unity and harmony the "white buildings" of poetic art or illusion are fused to the day's reality, each inspiring and sustaining the other as the "cleaving and the burning" of "Legend" produced the full resonant cry of the poet's "relentless caper." In synthesis the "wind abides the ensign of your will" and each half walks "through time with equal pride," not the fearful, evasive despair time engenders in the nonsynthetic, fragmented dualism of the past.

"Recitative," then, not only ends the third cycle in White Buildings, but serves as an ending for the first three cycles of the volume. Sherman Paul has pointed out that the poem "... is a summary poem, comparable in function to 'Legend,' except that it implicates us in the poet's experience." In addition to this function as end-piece for a single cycle and three cycles seen as a
linear group, it also serves as the introductory preamble to "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," in which the unity so clearly and cleanly breathed to life in "Recitative" beats on in "One inconspicuous, glowing orb of praise" for the "marriage" the poet hopes to celebrate.

That "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" is concerned with the poet's search for synthesis is indicated by the quote from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* that prefaces it:

> And so we may arrive by Talmud skill
> And profane Greek to raise the building up
> Of Helen's house against the Ismaelite.

The mystical, visionary "skill" of the poet, akin to those ecstatic and mystical skills of certain Talmudic (Cabalist) scholars, is to be fused to the "profane" nature of the pragmatic ("Greek") world of twentieth-century American life. This unity of two apparently irreconcilable mode of existence will enable the poet to raise "Helen's house," symbol of eternal and absolute beauty, against the forces of entropic decay and disillusion. The first two stanzas of the poem, then comprise a description of that "profane" world and its effect upon the mind of the poet:

> The mind has shown itself at times
> Too much the baked and labeled dough
> Divided by accepted multitudes.

The periods of the day are "stacked partitions," filled with the trivia of memoranda, baseball scores, and stock quotations, as well as the "stenographic smiles" of secretaries, all of whose meanings are as
equivocal and ambiguous as the "smutty" wings of urban sparrows flashing by office windows.

The word "smutty" here may refer both to the literal dirt and grime of the inner city and the inevitable office rounds of bawdy jokes provoked by the presence of pretty, smiling secretaries; in either case (or both) the adjective disappears in the first line of the second stanza, when the poet says "The mind is brushed by sparrow wings." If we may take this image of wings as symbolic of visionary flight or poetic imagination, then the difference between the poet and his contemporaries begins to become clear. All of us possess some imaginative and creative powers, and dirty jokes can be seen as excercises (albeit feeble, plebian ones) of those powers. The poet's mind, however, is brushed by a cleaner vision, an uncontaminated one, and his flights of imaginative creation lift him higher than the "smutty wings" of his fellow office workers can ever hope to reach. Yet their lives are not entirely circumscribed by the repellent asphalt, the crowds and curbs of the uban menagerie that channel them toward the daily routines of the "druggist, barber, and tobacconist." In the evening these urban "numbers" (an interesting, even prophetic, use of the word by Crane, since increasingly in our society we seem to be referred to as numbers rather than as individuals) find refuge in "the graduate opacities of evening" and are removed "to somewhere / Virginal, perhaps, less fragmentary, cool."

"There is the world dimensional," the poet says in what can only be likened to an authorial aside, "for those untwisted by the love of
things irreconcilable . . . ." The quotidian mass lives in the realm of normal space/time relationships, the "world dimensional" bounded by periods of night and day, rest and work, fragmentation and "less fragmentary" (but never unified) coolness. They accept it because they know of no other world and are not bothered by any troublesome visions beyond the narrow pragmatism of the Protestant work ethic. The poet, however, is twisted by his love for two seemingly incompatible realms, the "world dimensional" and the nondimensional world of the poetic imagination. As Butterfield remarks, "There is developing in Crane, apparent in this poem, a kind of intellectual schizophrenia. He is deeply involved in the situation of modern man . . . but at the same time he clings to his absolute vision . . . ." What Butterfield sees as a form of mental illness is actually Crane's profoundly difficult task of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable. He is, in short, guilty of holding onto an optimistic idealism and seeking to relieve the twisting agony caused by his love for and involvement in both worlds. The synthetic state he seeks would cure him of his "intellectual schizophrenia" by presenting him with a unified construct capable of withstanding the intrusions and subversions of disillusioning reality.

Thus in the poem the poet enters an absent-minded, trance-like state where he forgets "The fare and the transfer," becomes "lost yet poised in traffic." He is lost in his visionary world, only partly conscious of his surroundings, yet also firmly rooted in them, just as his vision is a part of and apart from the reality of a streetcar:
Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,
Still flickering with those prefigurations--
Prodigal, yet uncontested now,
Half-rant before the jerky window frame.

An ordinary girl, perhaps a secretary going home from her office, is slowly transformed by the poet's imagination into the shape of ideal beauty, "prodigal," and "uncontested" (as Helen's beauty was uncontested after she was chosen by Paris), her half-smiling eyes "flickering with those prefigurations" of the dream merged with the real.

The poet, however, expresses his need for more than a mere vision of unearthly, unattainable perfection, since he is straddling (to borrow a term from "Sunday Morning Apples") both reality and illusion. There must be some way, he says,

... to touch
Those hands of yours that count the nights
Stippled with pink and green advertisements,
to have both visionary and physical possession. Although his own blood is the "bartered" blood of one in contact with reality, rather than the pure essence of creation, still before death, when "arteries turn dark," he would consummate the union of mortal and immortal and "imminent in his dream" offer the delicate "white wafer cheek of love . . . / Lightly as moonlight on the eaves meets snow." Thus in the fifth stanza the poet sees Helen as both virginal and wanton, a combination that recurs again in the vision of feminine beauty presented in the "Three Songs" section of The Bridge. Helen blushes

... when ecstasies thread
The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread
Impinging on the throat and sides . . . .
The physical side of the poet, "the body of the world," weeps "in inventive dust" in its frustrating, mortal lust, despairing of the hiatus that holds it back from a complete merger with this illusion of absolute beauty. The symbol of this hiatus is the "bluet in your breasts," the tragically fragile, perfect blue flower that "winks" tantalizingly above the real world's base concerns and sends it gliding "diaphanous to death" from romantic longing.

Far from giving up in defeat, however, the poet, since he possesses the power of both realms, is able to turn to Helen as the symbol of a form of visionary immortality--the immortality of beauty in the face of death, the force of absolute beauty that endures long after our "troubled hands," contaminated by those symbols of the earth and twentieth-century society, "steel and soil," lose the ability "to hold you endlessly." Thus the consummation is salvaged, and will take place in a world beyond the "million brittle, bloodshot eyes" of the masses, in a realm of "white cities," similar to the "white buildings" of "Recitative," a "world which comes to each of us alone." In the union of real desires and abstract beauty the poet ascends to Helen's level while remaining rooted in the real world, the "Bent axle of devotion along companion ways." There time is suspended in "hourless days" while the poet's eye "beats, continuous . . . / One inconspicuous, glowing orb of praise."

The first section of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," then, presents us with the poet's vision not only of ideal beauty, in the form of Helen, but also with his concept of synthetic attainment
and consummation, where the poet can bask in the "eventual flame" of the illusionary/real construct. Whether he ever joins in any literal sexual union with the visionary Helen is really beside the point. The true "married" in the poem is that between the real world and the unreal or illusionary world. As Lewis has pointed out, "The constraints we have been noting [in the poem] are in fact the elements that must eventually be connected or married; the very point and aim of 'Faustus and Helen.'" Unfortunately for the poet, the long-sought fusion between the illusionary and disillusionary realms portrayed in this first section was to be only a brief ecstatic pause before the inherent contradictions in such a union caused its facade to crack and the pieces to fall back into disunity once again, a truly Faustian predicament that echoes Goethe's "Faustus, Part II."

In section two of Crane's poem the poet descends from the ecstatic height of fusion into the frenetic, bathetic world of the Jazz Age, where "Brazen hypnotics glitter" and "Glee shifts from foot to foot." In this "crashing opera bouffe, ... this ricochet from roof to roof," the poet evokes the emptiness of a society that drives itself in a challenge to the gods, yet finds itself futilely running out of breath: "Know, Olympians, we are breathless." "Through snarling hails of melody" the era of the flapper hurls itself into a danse macabre that lasts "Until somewhere a rooster banter." Butterfield contends that this last line of the second stanza is a bitter, ironic reference to Peter's denial of Christ and symbolic of modern man's denial of the ideal. He continues by suggesting this denial is not necessarily
tragic in itself, since Peter went on to found the Christian church, thus continuing a line of hope for modern man. Seen in the light of Crane's earlier work, however, especially "Emblems of Conduct," the reference seems to be a half-admiring, half-damning observation upon man's persistent attempts to escape the horrors and boredom of his narrow world and his equally persistent fumbling of the attempt. The cry of the rooster ends this "Blest excursion" from ennui and, it is implied, drives the revellers out into the dawn to face another dreary day in the city. The allusion to Peter's denial of Christ symbolizes not continued hope of redemption, as Butterfield would have it, but instead is an echo of the institutionalized despair organized religion represents in "Emblems of Conduct," where men's dreams and visions are perverted into mere panaceas and the apostle gives "alms to the meek."

Helen in this section has become a real woman again, attainable on a physical level but no other. A part now of the poet's world, she is instructed to "Greet naively--yet intrepidly / New soothing, new amazements." In a drunken revel she may fall down the stairs but no one will notice her indiscretions, not even her relatives, who "serene and cool, / Sit rocking in patent armchairs" along the "shores" or walls of the ballroom. Whereas Helen's kinsmen waged war along the shores of Troy to avenge her seduction by Paris, here they sit complacently looking on as she twirls about in this "metallic paradise" where "cuckoos clucked to finches," an obvious reference to her wanton state. In this perverted realm "groans of death" are answered by "titters" of drunken laughter and the ideal beauty of the
divine Helen has become "The incunabula of the divine grotesque" lulled into a false sense of security by the "reassuring way" of the music's self-affirming, hypnotic beat.

The last stanza of the second section brings us to Crane's admission that all he has achieved has crumbled and the seduction of himself and Helen into frantic revelry has been brought on by "The siren of guilty song." Helen herself paradoxically serves as both the siren leading him into this self-destructive state and the naive victim of the entrancing "rhythmic ellipses" produced by the tightly wound "springs" of a Victrola playing records of "incandescent wax." "She is still so young," the poet says, that we cannot really blame her for indulging in this youthful madness, "Dipping here in this cultivated storm / Among slim skaters of the gardened skies." If anyone is to blame for the failure of the synthetic state achieved in the first section to hold together, it is the poet. He has found it impossible to preserve the delicate balance of fusion beneath "gyrating awnings" and amid the "deft catastrophes of drums." The modern world overwhelms the unified construct and, at the beginning of the third section, leaves the poet outside the ballroom as dawn breaks over the city, the synthesis fragmented, his vision dissipated, Helen, in both her immortal and mortal manifestations, nowhere to be seen, and his only company the "delicate ambassador" of death, the "religious gunman" who eventually fulfills the contract that God has taken out on each of us.
Death at the beginning of the third section is seen not, however, as a great evil, but more as a friendly companion, the "Capped arbiter of beauty" who impartially administers the fate of all. Death is no longer a threat to the poet since death itself "will fall too soon" before the immortality of the spirit that "Delve[s] upward for new and scattered wine." The poet, now in the guise of a World War I airman, has done death's work, is intimate with "speediest destruction" and "rifts of torn and bleeding houses," and treating with death on an equal basis says, "Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity." There is no need to pity those who have died, for their troubles are over. Juxtaposed with the memories of those deaths are memories of other flights, both literal and visionary, wherein the

. . . flesh remembers
The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,
The mounted, yielding cities of the air!

For those who "have survived" Death no longer holds any mystery or fear, merely the desire to "persist to speak again" of the dual nature of life, the reality of "stubble streets" that have not been blown to rubble yet, "curved to memory," and the vision of infinite beauty that is rooted in that reality, the lowering "arc of Helen's brow." The poet's aim in continuing to speak out is to "saturate" the world with the "blessing" of illusion and the "dismay" of disillusion until the "repeated play of fire" brings about the fusion once again and lifts the poet above those "Who dare not share with us the breath released." In the third from last stanza of the poem, Crane, "the lavish heart," turns the poem into a personal statement of
intention, in which he aspires to raise ("leaven") the ordinary pleasures and indulgences of the world through poetry ("spread with bells and voices"). Just as flour and water need yeast and baking to become bread, so the ordinary things of life, "A goose, tobacco, and cologne," need leavening by the poetic imagination. Thus Hart atones for the dreary reality of life while remaining inextricably meshed with it, and "Distills," as Emily Dickinson said, "amazing sense / From ordinary Meanings." Crane feels himself to have been drafted into this task ("shall always have to leaven") by his very nature, and has no choice as a poet but to attempt the reconciliation between "the abating shadows of our conscript dust" and the eternal and visionary "gold-shod prophecies of heaven."

Those who are unable or too timid to attempt such gargantuan tasks, who are unwilling to "Delve upward for the new and scattered wine," will face only the ironic laughter of Death, the "brother-thief of time," as he measures "out the meager penance of their days."

Ironically, however, Crane and Death are brothers in that they both defeat time, one by ending its passage through dissolution and decay, and the other by staying its influence through poetry and shining visions. Both exhaust the world, leaving it "drilled and spent beyond repair," in the search for the golden embrace of unity between the illusionary and the real, the beloved "shadow of gold hair" rather than the gold hair itself. The loved one, symbolized by "gold hair" as seen in "Praise for an Urn," and here representing Helen, is not a physical embodiment of the spirit but a spiritual embodiment of the
physical, a "shadow" sustained by the imagination, which "spans beyond despair" and whose memory long outlasts the more prosaic and ultimately ineffective props of the mundane world, the "bargain, vocable, and prayer." As Weber, in one of his more lucid moments, said of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,"

Crane felt it requisite to pass beyond Marlowe in concluding on a note of hope. His Faust is not destroyed by tragedy but rises ennobled from the flames like a phoenix. 42

The poem's cyclic nature, then, progresses from the disillusion of the modern world to the illusion of the poetic and sexual beauty of Helen and toward the fusion of both realms. Though the synthetic state is only briefly achieved and the "marriage" soon disintegrates in a divorce precipitated by the pressures of a plunge into the realities of modern life, the poet maintains his faith in his ability to create and stabilize the synthetic state despite the repellent influence of the asphalt-coated, jazz-mad, disillusioning real world. In his continuing search for synthesis through recurrent cycles of inspiring illusion and dispiriting disillusion, Crane turns, in the final cycle of White Buildings, to the one forceful symbol that, so far, had never failed to bring him peace and fulfillment of vision--the sea.

This final cycle in White Buildings consists of "At Melville's Tomb" and "Voyages" I-VI, although most critics have persisted in considering the first poem and anomalous break in the affirmative flow from "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" to the "Voyages" series. Lewis does see some relationship between the three poems (taking
"Voyages" as a single entity) because of the Melville poem's "transfiguration of the 'twisted' historical world, with its love of the irreconcilable and its 'spouting malice,'" but beyond a simple grouping related to language and imagery, says he has "been unable to make out any significant design in Crane's ordering of the lyrics in White Buildings." Only Sherman Paul indicates that "At Melville's Tomb," written after "Voyages," was meant by Crane to serve as a preface to the entire "Voyages" sequence. He postulates that Crane, by identifying himself with Melville, appropriates for these last poems in the volume a controlling vision of the sea as a symbol of the hard, disillusioning side of nature in opposition to the Whitmanian vision of the sea as a fruitful place of mythical promise. M. D. Uroff, on the other hand, while ignoring the connection with "Voyages," sees the poem as "a deepening of the celebratory tone of... For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," Part III, and 'Lachrymae Christi.' Uroff sees "At Melville's Tomb" as dwelling upon the darker facts of existence while simultaneously raising its affirmative tone from them in a manner that brings about a natural resollution to the ending of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen."

It seems to me that a combination of Paul's identification of the poem as a preface to "Voyages" and Uroff's linking it with the previous poems in the volume allows it to serve a transitional role and ease the reader's passage into the last cycle with some grace and aplomb. Certainly Uroff's view of the poem as essentially affirmative in tone reinforces the idea of it as a "bridge" between two
essentially positive cycles. In reading the volume as a whole, therefore, I think one should see the poem in this light to some extent; however, if one were reading only the "Voyages" series out of context of the book, he should begin his endeavor with "At Melville's Tomb" as a natural introduction to one of the world's greatest lyric achievements.

Thus from "Anchises' navel, dripping of the sea" in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," Crane opens the poem facing the sea, an apt metaphor for the tomb of Melville:

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Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.
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The poet, standing on the beach, recalls that Melville must often have stood thus, seeing in the ceaseless beating of the waves and the grinding action of wind, water, and sand, the eternal process of dissolution that occurs in nature, where "drowned men's bones" are precipitated out of the sea's salty solution as "dice," that is, ground to fine particles by the forces of nature. "Dice as a symbol of chance and circumstance is also implied" in these lines, according to Crane's own explication of the poem sent to Harriet Monroe in 1926.46 Voyaging is, therefore, a dangerous gamble, as is life itself, ending all too often in the obscurity of death, where one is merged with the "numbers" of the multiple dead and all identity is erased. The "embassy" bequeathed by these dead men's bones ground into cubes of ivory by the sea is symbolic of undelivered messages and abandoned responsibilities, according to Crane's letter. An embassy,
however, is also a place where one's nation is represented in a foreign land, and in that sense the drowned men also represent a kind of ultimate citizenship in the nation of the dead, whose passport, the implication of "bequeath" leads us to, we shall all one day bear.

Joseph Warren Beach has demonstrated that "At Melville's Tomb" was inspired by the closing scene of Moby Dick, when the Pequod sank beneath the waves "in the circuit calm of one vast coil." Thus the passing wrecks "without sound of bells" in the second stanza recall the silence of the Pequod's doom, and the "bounty" of flotsam and jetsam released by the "calyx" whirlpool of her sinking leaves a "scattered chapter" upon the surface as the only explanation of her fate. In the "livid hieroglyphic" of floating spars, barrels, planks, and other wreckage, we can glimpse the "portent" of our own doom, which we also find, the poet says, "wound in corridors of shells." Shells, the remains of once living creatures, are analogous here to the "dice" of the first stanza as emblems of mortality, a part of "death's bounty," their emptiness and the double meaning of "wound" serving as portents of life's ultimate fragility.

It is not until the third stanza of the poem that Crane begins to lift the weight of overwhelming mortality and obliteration the sea sometimes evokes in him, and brings forth the peaceful, comforting image of a calm sea after the wreckage has disappeared, "Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled." Then it is that "frosted eyes" "lift altars" and "silent answers" creep "across the stars." In his letter to Harriet Monroe, Crane remarked that these lines refer
... simply to a conviction that a man, not knowing perhaps a definite god yet being endowed with a reverence for deity—such a man naturally postulates a deity somehow, and the altar of that deity, by the very action of the eyes lifted in searching.

Thus the poet, in his search for resolution and synthesis, postulates the existence of that unity by the very act of searching for it, just as the eyes of sailors, "frosted" by stars in life or sandblasted by death, create godhood and meaning in the world simply through their search for its presence. The instruments of mariners, "Compass, quadrant and sextant," no longer serve to extend the boundaries of man's world as he reaches for a new realm beyond the circumscribed limits of reality and, in death, abandons those instruments as symbolic of restrictions no longer in force. "High in the azure steeps" of the postulated heaven or poetic vision, the poet's monody does not disturb the mariner, now dead and long past the need for such things. The sea retains only a "fabulous shadow" of what once was, elusive hints, in the form of "dice," "shells," and "wrecks," of those who, like Melville, one of the lost mariners or "voyagers" of this poem, have passed beyond the limits of temporal-spatial reality into the visionary realm of postulated immortality.

The poetic imagination, therefore, "spans beyond despair" in the very act of searching for synthesis, reinforcing the triumph over death celebrated in the last third of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen." As Uroff maintains, "Although this poem is about death, the tomb of the sea, it celebrates the creative and inspiring mastery over death which is the highest aspiration of the artist."49 It is in
continued hope of this mastery, then, that the poet enters the "Voyages" sequence, seeking through the illusionary qualities of love and the calm, powerful, and dangerous reality of the sea, for some resolution that will unlock the "calyx of death's bounty" and "Bind us in time" ("Voyages II") with "The silken-skilled transmemberment of song" ("Voyages III"). While "At Melville's Tomb" is, indeed, expressive of Crane's death wish, "his desire to lose himself in the murderous, motherly embrace of the sea," according to Butterfield, it is a wish not for oblivion but for a different kind of life, for the moment, in which the poet's visionary "song" overpowers mortality while remaining inextricably fused with reality's all-embracing "calyx of death."

In "Voyages I," then, we find the poet still standing on the beach, gazing seaward and contemplating both the sea and a group of children playing "Above the fresh ruffles of the surf." Their games are those of innocent and mischievous youth, as they "flay each other with sand" and "crumble fragments of baked weed / Gaily digging and scattering." In contrast to (Crane says "in answer to") their high-pitched squeals of delight in summer sun and surf, "The sun beats lightning on the waves, / The waves fold thunder on the sand." Lurking behind the ecstatic revelry of youth, an echo of the boy running through sunlit valleys in "Sunday Morning Apples," lies the basso profundo monody of the sea, which the poet attempts to interpret. Yet this interpretation, comprising the lines in the third stanza, is a silent warning, as Evelyn Hinz has pointed out. If the
children could hear him, he would tell them; since they cannot, he remains silent. Implied here is the inability of most of us to "hear" much beyond our own noises and those of the surrounding world, simply because we are too inexperienced and preoccupied with ourselves to listen. Also implied is the poet's frustration at being unable to communicate effectively the import of what he, through careful listening and communion with the world, has gleaned by hard experience.

Nature's "answer" to these children's cries of delight, if they would only listen, is that "The bottom of the sea is cruel," that is, the sea can trap and pull a person down in a "caress" that is all too "faithful," resulting in death. Thus they should play their little games upon the shore and not endeavor to cross the line separating the land from the open sea, lest its "wide breast" smother their "spry cordage."

As the "Voyages" series is, by general consensus, a passionate love sequence, the feminine, embracing, yet deadly image of the sea in the first poem becomes important. As in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," the search for synthesis between the ideal and the real takes the form of the search for illusionary love and beauty firmly attached to the phenomenal world. The sea, therefore, becomes a metaphor for both the search for and the conception of the synthesis. It is both beautiful and cruel, caressing and destructive, loving and rejecting, and in its embrace one might find either union or dismemberment. The metaphoric voyage of love the poet is about to
embark upon is a dangerous one, and not to be attempted by naive, immature children. Like Melville and the drowned mariners of the previous poem, the poet must seek through the imagination some manner of delivering his "embassies," and not let the possibility of failure deter him. How well the poet knew the destructive potential of love, yet, as I have mentioned earlier, it was only through such risks that Crane felt able to achieve anything of value. The sea, then, is both the feminine, erotic ideal (as was Helen in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen") loved and pursued by the poet, and a reflective foil for the poet's image of the human loved one, Emil Oppfer.  

"Voyages II," then, continues the cycle by immediately posing an objection to the previous poem's last line:

---And yet this great wink of eternity,
0 rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love.

The sea can be cruel, especially to the uninitiated, but the sea is also superbly beautiful, eternal, "rimless," and erotically suggestive as the waves cause its "belly" to undulate and thrust upward to the moon in a manner reminiscent of a woman's sexual thrustings below her pendant lover. The joyful release ("unfettered leewardings") of erotic imagery evoked by the sea seems to reflect the joy the two human lovers feel. The sea is "Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love," that is, echoing the lovers' happiness in sympathetic union. "Wrapt inflection" here carries a double connotation, that of lovers' secret words and double entendres understood only by themselves (and
possibly by the sea), thus "wrapt" or covered, and "inflected" or
given special meaning by emphasis, and the rapture that is the
trademark of such desmodromic communion.

The poet/persona has moved us, thus far, from the embarkation
point of love in "Voyages I," where the poet calmly contemplates the
possible consequences of his enterprise, to the full-blown realization
of that early rapture only newly joined lovers can know. The
"voyages" are now fairly begun, attended by the royal image of the
omnipotent, "sceptered" sea and "diapason knells / On scrolls of
silver snowy sentences." The "scrolled" white caps of the waves
appear as the recorded notation of the sea's song, ranging through the
full musical scale with bell-like notes ("diapason knells"). The
poem's imagery is saturated with musical references to evoke and echo
the enchanting, rhythmical melody of the sea that moves in synchrony
with the two lovers. The "diapason knells" of the second stanza are
echoed by the "bells off San Salvador" in the third stanza, and the
voyage of love itself is likened to "adagios of islands," in which the
lovers' pace is slow and stately, rhythmically attuned to the "knells"
and "bells" of the sea, as they pass each "island" or stage in their
new love.

The image of the regal sea, accompanied by the syncopated music of
wind and water, depicts not only the laughing, sympathetic side of a
benign monarch but its "sceptered terror" and whimsical moods, "well
or ill," as well. The sea may be essentially benign, but it is wise
to remember the power that resides in that vast body, as was
illustrated in "At melville's Tomb" and "Voyages I." Yet it seems to the poet that the sea's power is not absolute, for one thing can apparently withstand the tyrannical forces of nature: "the pieties of lover's hands." Thus the dictatorial demands nature or reality (in the guise of the imperial sea) makes upon man can be nullified to some extent by the holy ("pieties") power of love, which is, after all, largely a function of the imaginative or visionary side of humanity. However, the two powers thus represented are not mutually exclusive, for at the root of love's attraction lies the very mundane requirement of a biological imperative, while the basis for the sea's regal bearing and music is to be found in the poet's ability to see or imagine that which others miss. The poet, then, is not far from achieving the balance between the real and the ideal that leads to synthesis when voyaging into love's illusions, backed by the very real power of the sea's natural metaphor to waft him along. Thus the "prodigal" lover and the poet join to "complete the dark confessions" the sea is forced to make, the confession that the mysterious power of love, if not greater than that of the sea, is at least equal to it.

Unfortunately, human love is mortal and the sea is not. The poet is therefore forced into the position of a supplicant, as passing time calls upon him to "mark" how the rolling waves (the sea's "turning shoulders") constantly measure out the lovers' remaining span ("wind the hours"). He must "hasten" and "hasten" again, while time passes, to ensure the preservation of this one glorious instant of union. "Hasten while they are true," he says, because "sleep, death, desire,"
are closing in on the fragile "flower" of love's ecstatic moment. The
appeal the poet makes is to be set free of subjective time, that is,
for the two lovers to be bound together throughout time, the "floating
flower" of this momentary union kept fresh until

Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

The appeal to the powers of reality, in the form of the seasons of
the year, and to the powers of illusion, in the form of the metaphoric
ship of the poet's song ("O minstrel galleons of Carib fire"), is for
the voyage of love to continue forever ("Bequeath us to no earthly
shore") or at least until death overtakes it. Indeed, the poet
petitions the ruling power of this fusion between reality and the
imagination to continue the love affair even into death and beyond, as
the poem ends with the hope that the two lovers will "gaze toward
paradise" together from "the vortex of our grave" (an echo of "the
calyx of death's bounty" in "At Melville's Tomb"). The "answer" thus
provided is an answer to time and mortality, a solution to the
ultimate dilemma of man's dissolution and the decay of his illusions
under the impact of reality. As Uroff says, "His is no voyage to
another person. Rather, his voyaging and his desire are for
possession... of something permanent, eternal, harmonious."53 Thus
the seal, a creature of no imagination, may gaze with wide but
uncomprehending or obscured vision into eternity ("spindrift," or
seaspray here echoing the "frosted eyes" of "At Melville's Tomb"),
but the poet, if his prayer is answered, may hope for a clearer, more
comprehending vision of what lies beyond life, with "paradise" in the
last line referring both to the concept of an afterlife and to the shared paradise of lover's arms.

In the third voyage of love undertaken by the poet, the lovers are joined by an "Infinite consanguinity" to one another, and the loved one is also related to the sea through the sympathetic reflection of him it throws back to the poet's eyes: "This tendered theme of you that light / Retrieves from sea plains." The sky and the sea are shown in mutual embrace, "where the sky / Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones." If one takes the sea as a metaphor, on one level, for Crane's conception of natural forces and reality, and the sky as another metaphor for the powers of the soaring imagination, then their union through the binding power of love is indicative of the synthetic state for which he has been striving for so long. As long as the poet sails at the side of his lover, "with no stroke / Wide from your side," the synthesis is upheld and preserved by the "reliquary hands" of the sea. However, should the poet's love falter, one infers, then the preserving, sheltering hands of the sea would open and the synthesis be destroyed. The use of "reliquary" here is a brilliant touch by Crane and aptly illustrates what he meant by the "logic of metaphor." The word carries connotations of sainthood (reflecting back upon "pieties of lovers' hands") and the preserving of relics against the forces of decay, along with the implied healing powers associated with saintly relics. Additionally, the image of their being housed in a reliquary formed by hands is reminiscent of the healing and rejuvenation brought on by Christ's laying on of hands.
"And so," the poet says, he is "admitted through black swollen
gates," that is, through the dark swells of the sea, that would
otherwise block his voyage were he not so favored, down through the
depths of the sea to its bottom, where the sea, still in sympathetic
union with the sky ("Star kissing star through wave on wave"), gently
rock the two entwined lovers in its arms: "unto / Your body rocking!"
The image here is evocative of the two lovers being gently rocked to
sleep, after their passions have been exhausted, wrapped in each
other's arms and in the approving, motherly arms of the sea as well.

Death here is negated, "shed," and "Presumes no carnage"; there
is, at the bottom of this symbolic sea,

... but this single change,--
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
The silken-skilled transmemberment of song.

The "change" experienced by the lovers is not that of death but that
of the glorious ecstasy of complete synthesis, and the coined word
"transmemberment," formed from the word "member," adds numerous rever-
berating connotations. Immediately called to mind are "remember" and
"dismember," but the prefix "trans" carries the poet beyond memory and
implies, through its sense of a binding or uniting force, protection
from death's "carnage." Implied also is the idea that, while the poet
and his lover belong, in one sense, to each other, they have now been
transported beyond mere membership in the club of earthly lovers and
are members of a different, more refined ("silken-skilled") and the-exclusive group who have achieved fusion between the real and the
ideal through the poet's song. Finally, the sexual connotations of
"member" are recalled, with the poet emphasising here that the lovers have passed beyond mere carnality into another state. Crane described this new purity in a letter to Waldo Frank in April of 1924, when he said of his love for Emil Oppfer,

I have seen the Word made Flesh. I mean nothing less, and I know now that there is such a thing as indestructability. In the deepest sense, where flesh became transformed through intensity of response . . . where sex was beaten out, where a purity of joy was reached that included tears.

In the final line, whose apt simplicity renders it exquisitely beautiful and appropriate, the poet addresses his lover in a reverent, humble, awed tone: "Permit me voyage, love, into your hands . . . ."

It is, as Lewis has said, a relaxation "into that post-erotic peace beyond understanding," and in the image of the lover's hands one finds echoes of the "reliquary hands" of the first stanza--strong, protective, gentle hands of love.

"Voyages IV" is a continuation of the ecstatic affair that reached its climax in "Voyages III." In fact, the syntax of the first stanza only seems to make sense if one sees the fourth voyage as intimately linked to the last line of the third in such a way as to give the impression that "Voyages III and "Voyages IV" are really one poem:

Permit me voyage, love, into your hands . . .

Whose counted smile of hours and days, suppose
I know as spectrum of the sea and pledge . . .

The hands of the lover, which the poet knows only too well, receive their strength and comforting power through their metaphoric link to the "reliquary hands" of the sea. The hands are also a pledge, as a
handshake is a form of pledge (or a form of kiss, in an oblique allusion to Shakespeare's "palmer's kiss" in Romeo and Juliet), that binds the two lovers and allows them to soar metaphorically in great circles above the real world, from tropical palms (the pun on palms and hands here seems deliberate) to the chill, immutable northern waters of the arctic. The soaring ecstasy of their entwined flight is far greater than that of any other love ("Whose circles bridge, I know.../No stream of greater love"), it is the singing union of mortal "clay" fused to immortal vision, the meeting ground of madness and logic in the synthetic "region that is ours to wreath again." The portended meeting of eyes and lips in "the chancel port and portion of our June" shall close around the lovers as flowers close around stems, and in another sense, the poet must enter a kind of death from which he rises to "tell" the "signature of the incarnate word," that is, to relate the tale of this synthesis in the living words of poetry. Phoenix-like, the poet rises to the "widening noon within our breast" and alights upon the "island" of his love, sheltered there by the "inviolably / Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes."

Lewis contends that "something is obviously wrong with either the grammar or the punctuation" of the last two lines of the poem:

In this expectant, still exclaim receive
The secret oar and petals of all love.

He supposes "still" to be the intended noun of the next to last line, and the comma to have been misplaced. He reads the line as "In this expectant still, exclaim [and] receive," etc. Yet all the evidence about Crane indicates he was too careful a poet to allow such a
mistake as a misplaced comma to go long uncorrected. It seems to me that in the line, as Crane wrote it, "exclaim" must function as the noun and "still" and "expectant" must function as adjectives; thus, I read the line as "In this expectant, still exclaim[ation,] receive," etc. This is the moment before sexual union, the eagerly expectant, yet strangely silent moment of anticipatory excitement that precedes the vocal exclamations of conventional physical love-making.

Lewis has, however, correctly identified "the secret oar and petal" in the last line as symbolic of male genitalia, and notes that Crane universalizes his image through the use of the word "all," thereby encompassing heterosexual as well as homosexual love. Yet the universal nature of the symbols is far deeper than that provided by a mere adjectival qualification; while the "oar" is obviously phallic and the "petals" can be construed as representations of testicles, the petals also can be viewed as representing the female flower that is passively penetrated during pollination. Thus the image of the flower transfixed by the oar can be taken as a particularly graphic image of homosexual or heterosexual affinity, depending upon the reader's inclination and orientation in such matters.

"Voyages V" seems to have about it a tone of post-coital depression, with the lovers rudely awakened from their dreams, and the synthesis Crane had built so carefully beginning to disintegrate. In "At Melville's Tomb" and "Voyages I" the poet was not on the sea but standing at its edge. In the next three poems he was obviously sailing upon the metaphoric sea and often immersed in it to the point
of symbolic (and cathartic) death and rebirth. It was only through this immersion in and identification with the sea that the fusion Crane sought between the real and the ideal could be reached. In "Voyages V" there is no immersion or fusion—the lovers are not even on the sea but ashore, gazing with longing and a sense of loss at the "meticulous," "infrangible and lonely" estuaries. Estuaries are not really part of the sea but are, instead, a brackish mixture of fresh and salt waters at the margins of land and ocean; the poet and his lover have run aground and the bonds between them, "the cables of our sleep," dangle loosely like "shred ends from remembered stars."

The sea and sky are no longer in sympathetic union as they were in "Voyages III and IV," for "The bay estuaries fleck the hard sky limits. // --As if too brittle or too clear to touch!" The moon, symbolic lover of the sea in "Voyages II," is now "deaf" and presents merely a harsh grimace, "One frozen trackless smile," instead of the loving smile of synthesis. The illusion of complete synthesis was impossible for the poet to sustain forever, and the two lovers have been "overtaken" by Crane's constant enemy, time, in the form of a "tidal wedge" "no cry, no sword / Can fasten or deflect." The moon also returns as a symbol of time, as it was in "Praise for an Urn," and Crane finds himself trapped in the "Slow tyranny of moonlight" that moves the "tidal wedge" and inexorably drives the lovers apart. The moonlight, once so soft and "loved," has now "changed" into a harsh reminder of the poet's loss and bitterness.
Beneath the banalities of his lover's comments upon the scene, moonlight etching the estuaries on a clear night, the poet reads a double meaning:

... "There's

Nothing like this in the world," you say,
Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look
Too, into that godless cleft of sky
Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.

The voyages into "reliquary hands" and "lover's hands" have ended, the poet unable to support both the illusion of immortal love and the reality of "that godless cleft of sky" in sympathetic union any longer. The "dead sands" of the moon, now a lifeless planet, speak only of the void in a "flashing" message of despair like some giant neon sign in the sky. " Sands," of course, sustains the symbol of the moon as indicative of passing time, echoing the "glittering abyss" of trenched sand in "Passage," and the poet marvels that, lost as he was "In all the argosy of your bright hair," he had anticipated "Nothing so flagless as this piracy." Again echoing "Passage," time has become a thieving pirate, owing allegiance or alliance to none ("flagless") and ultimately conquering all resistance. Truly, there is nothing like this empty, despairing feeling in all the world.

Although aware that the union between them is at an end, the poet philosophically takes what little is left, as he tenderly urges his lover to "Draw in your head and sleep the long way home." His companion's thoughts are already moving on to other "voyages" ("Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam") and other memories ("Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know") that do not include the
poet. "But for tonight, at least," (if I may freely paraphrase) the poet seems to be saying, "let us take some last comfort in one another; even though we are now separate ('your head, alone and too tall here'), let us at least have one last night together."

From the tender, sad, but stoic ending of "Voyages V," Crane plunges into the last poem of the series, and of White Buildings, with an echo of "At Melville's Tomb": "Where icy and bright dungeons lift / Of swimmers their lost morning eyes." It is, however, no longer eyes that lift altars but the sea that lifts "lost" eyes, and the poet has become a "derelict and blinded guest," wandering aimlessly through his shattered illusions, through now estranged "ocean rivers" and "stranger skies," awaiting the unspoken name "I cannot claim," the name of poet and visionary purpose reborn. He longs for a rebirth ("harbor of the phoenix breast") such as he has experienced in the past, for a return to that synthesis that sustains his poetic vision in the harsh light of the phenomenal world. "In lines that surge and fall, that pound almost audibly to a turbulent oceanic pulse," the poet urges the sea to provide some remedy for his pain, to raise a powerful, savage theme that can overcome his despair and supply "some splintered garland for the seer." The poet claims that, although the voyages into love have foundered, the "lounged goddess" of the sea has made a "fervid covenant" that is still in force, and to which the poet holds her: the promise of "Belle Isle, white echo of the oar."

The covenant here is a pact between the poet's imaginative powers and those of reality to create some enduring artifact, even if it is
only a poetic "echo" of the "oar and petals of all love" in "Voyages IV." The final stanza of the poem, then, presents a dual statement, much like Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," according to Evelyn Hinz, in which one is forced to choose between the real world and its imperfections, and the static world of the poem, the "imaged Word." The poet finds no easy solution, for the illusions of the "Voyages" cycle, indeed of White Buildings itself, are not borne out, and the poet admits at least a temporary defeat in his search for synthesis, while continuing to stress and reaffirm the necessity of striving for the ideal fusion of pure art and real life.

This paradoxical state remains, unfortunately, tantalizingly just beyond the poet's reach, except for brief explosive moments, and the poet is forced to settle for the "unbetrayable reply" of the poetic artifact, the record of those brief synthetic moments and the peaceful hush they brought to his wounded psyche, "Whose accent no farewell can know."

Memory, so often despised and rejected in previous poems, seems to be all the poet has left in the form of White Buildings. In the volume, however, Crane celebrates the possibility of meaning in individual circumstances, while he demonstrates through the dramatic contexts of the poems that meaning and achievement are temporary products of what Combs calls his "creative-destructive mind," thus negating the efficacy of the poems as mere memories of achievements now lost. The poems' honesty and skepticism continually penetrate and deflate the efforts of the mind to join in synthetic harmony with the
world, yet the poet never abandons his search for the fusion and retains a flexibility that, in his genius for disagreeing with himself, is his greatest strength. This, then, not mere memory alone, is the true import of the "imaged Word." The poet, while creating poems that do encompass both painful and pleasant memories, is also building within them a structure he hopes will enable him to achieve permanent synthesis and a true "unbetrayable reply" to the transience of imagination and the brutality of reality. Through a continuing process of carefully structured illusions and thrusts toward synthesis, and an equally continuing process of destructive testing against reality, Crane searches for the sign, the theme, the "imaged Word" that will sustain him permanently between the two realms of reality and illusion. It was in his longest, most ambitious work, to be discussed in the next chapter, that Crane thought he had found the "bridge" he needed to reach and maintain the longed for ultimate synthetic state.
ENDNOTES


3 Ibid.


6 Unterecker, pp. 187-190.

7 Lewis, p. 29.


12 Lewis, p. 44.


14 Paul, p. 83.

15 Unterecker, p. 261.

16 Paul, pp. 89-90.


19 Lewis, p. 38.

20 According to Weber (p. 111), Butterfield (p. 43n), and Hazo (p. 31), Crane's mother had "golden hair," and his fondness for blondes is probably due to his love for his mother and a transference of sexual feelings. Also, see Hilton Landry and Elaine Landry, *A Concordance to the Poems of Hart Crane* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, Incorporated, 1973). "Gold hair" or the color
gold associated with love occurs in the following poems: "Praise for an Urn," "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen III," "C33," "Indiana," "The Hive," "Interior," "Virginia," "The Tunnel," and "Key West." In addition, "bright hair" is to be found in "Voyages V."

21 Lewis, p. 39.

22 Butterfield, p. 43.

23 Letters, p. 46.

24 Ibid., pp. 35-37.


26 Butterfield, p. 40.

27 Dembo, p. 258.

28 Weber, p. 78.


33 Lewis, p. 140-147.


36 Paul, p. 129.

37 Butterfield, p. 66.

38 Lewis, p. 101.

39 Ibid.

40 Butterfield, p. 59.

41 Crane often used the word "heart" as a pun on his own name. See Unterecker's chapters on Crane's life in 1921 and the Walker Evans photograph in the same volume (between pp. 772 and 723) signed: "To Charlotte and Richard, from the 'Heart.'"

43 Lewis, p. 210 and 210n.

44 Paul, pp. 133-134.

45 Uroff, p. 199.


48 Weber, CP, p. 239.

49 Uroff, p. 203.

50 Butterfield, p. 115.


52 Unterecker, pp. 355-358.

53 Uroff, p. 77.

54 Letters, p. 181.

55 Lewis, p. 165.

56 Ibid., p. 168.
57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 174.

59 Hinz, p. 325.

60 Combs, pp. x-xi.
Chapter III: "Antiphonal Whispers In Azure Swing":

The Quest For Fusion In The Bridge

Most prominent criticism of The Bridge tends to assess Crane's most ambitious work as a magnificent failure, that is, magnificent in its lyricism and evocative bursts of poetic beauty, but a failure in its avowed aim of creating an American epic through the assimilation of American history into a myth encompassing both past and present. For instance, Butterfield remarks that a poem's fatal flaw "is the result of a man trying to write a poem to a programme ... in which he could not fully believe,"¹ while Tate asserts "The poem is the effort of a solipsistic sensibility to locate itself in the external world ..." and "... I think he [Crane] knew the structure of The Bridge was finally incoherent, and for that reason ... he could no longer believe even in his lyrical powers."²

Such statements, echoed by other critics such as Weber, Winters, Lewis, and Blackmur (all of whom are discussed in Chapter I), appear to rest largely upon three main points of critical contention: Crane's letters to Otto Kahn and others reporting his intention to create a new American epic, and his subsequent refusal to follow an established epic form patterned on, say, Homer or Milton, that his scholarly friends and critics could immediately recognize and appreciate; his often difficult syntax and eccentric imagery, along with his seemingly dissociative juxtapositions of symbols and historic figures, which give the reader an initial impression of disharmony and
confusion that fosters a conclusion that the poem lacks unity or, worse yet, that the work isn't even a poem at all, but a collection of separate lyrics only tenuously linked by appositions of subject, theme and imagery; and, finally, by Crane's own admission of his doubts about the task he had set himself, as reported by Horton, in which the poet says,

The form of my poem rises out of a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I'm at a loss to explain my delusion that there exist any real links between the past and a future destiny worthy of it.

Fortunately, Crane recovered from his moment of Spenglerian doubt to leave not only a finished work but other statements evidencing his faith in the unity of the poem, especially a letter to Otto Kahn on September 12, 1927, in which he tells of the tremendous effort he had expended to assure that

I had assembled my materials in proper order for a final welding into their natural form . . . . Each section of the poem is a separate canvas, as it were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others. One might take the Sistine Chapel as an analogy.

Recent critics have tended to trust that Crane knew whereof he wrote, and have ardently pursued their conceptions of the essential unity of The Bridge. For example, M. D. Uroff deals with Crane's patterns, thus disposing of the difficulties of Crane's metaphoric and symbolic creativity, and says The Bridge "is the symbol of man's longing for a new life, his petition for grace in his outcast state, and of his desire for unity and wholeness." Thomas Vogler tackles the problem of the epic nature of Crane's poem, and sees "the central emotional
element in Crane's Bridge, as it was in Blake, Wordsworth, and Keats, [as] the hope that motivated the uncertain pilgrim in his quest for a vision to be the basis of a faith. It seems an apropos irony that, just as Crane's poetry is cyclic in nature, the criticism of that poetry also appears to follow a cyclic pattern, and one can anticipate that another generation of critics will naturally gravitate back to something approximating the positions of Tate, Winters, and Weber.

For the present, however, I too see The Bridge as a unified construct, a single poem whose sections, while they may indeed be "separate canvases," are united by a controlling thematic and structural imperative: The conflict between the real world and the illusory world of poetic vision, and Crane's search for a synthesis with which to stabilize his constant cycling between the two worlds. As I pointed out in Chapter II, White Buildings is essentially motivated by the same impulses; the difference, however, is that in White Buildings the poet cycles between two modes whose characters are basically present-tense oriented (with the exception of a few poems like "My Grandmother's Love Letters" and "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen")-- the real now as opposed to the illusory now of the poet's imagination-- while in The Bridge this cycle is modulated to encompass more of the conflict between present reality and the illusory phantasms of the past that somehow form our conceptions of the present. The poet's quest in The Bridge, then, remains basically the same as it was in White Buildings, with its focus broadened to include both the historic and mythic past.
There is another difference between the two volumes that serves to distinguish them and at the same time provides a much needed link or "bridge" for the reader who delves deeply into Hart Crane. Throughout White Buildings the enemy of synthesis is always time; in The Bridge, then, it is natural for Crane's quest for synthesis to revolve around the problems of time and attempt to reconcile its disillusioning "reality" with that of the poet's far-flung vision. Thus Crane's "American epic" is based upon the conflict between the apparitional mythos of our past and its apparent rejection by the hard, technologic, nonmythologic present, and it is in the midst of this conflict that he seeks some stable platform or "bridge" of his own with which he can stitch the two into a compatible, endurable whole.

The fact that Hart Crane apparently failed in his personal quest is of little consequence when one endeavors to gauge the importance or merits of his work, although this failure to achieve a permanent synthesis seems to have indicated to some critics that Crane's long poem also was a failure. The heroic failure, however, has a long and honorable place in mankind's history and, as Cervantes, Shakespeare, Poe, and Hemingway (to name only a few) have shown us, it is not the achievement of one's dreams that ultimately matters, but the attempt to realize them engendered by the indefatigable human spirit. As Thomas Vogler has so aptly put it,

The attempt to move from the initial moment of inspired lyric vision to a sustained and comprehensive vision that retains the original intensity cannot be passed off as a mistaken strategy or a confusion of tool and purpose. It
cannot be passed off, that is, unless we also . . . declare a moratorium on the epic until our culture solves for its poets the problems they attempt to solve through their poetry.

The Bridge, then, begins with Vogler's "initial moment of inspired lyric vision" in the form of a paean to Brooklyn Bridge, in which the poet uses the image of a bridge to create the first important symbol and unifying motif of the entire poem, the concept of circularity embodying both stasis and movement, enclosure and openness, sufficiency and receptivity. The image of complex circularity is first vested in a seagull, whose

. . . wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult . . .

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes,
in the first two stanzas, and then in the structure of Brooklyn Bridge itself, which has "Some motion ever unspent in thy stride," and "Unto us lowest sometime sweep, descend / And of the curveship lend a myth to God."

As the gull spans the region between the seas and the heavens (one must recall here that the sea and the sky in Crane's earlier poetry often symbolized corresponding states of reality and imagination), so, too, does the idea of a bridge come to stand for the middle ground between the concrete reality of twentieth century urban life and the illusionary vision held by the poet. Just as the gull is a part of the two realms, being both mortal creature and winged vision, the bridge also belongs to both realms at once, thus serving as the "harp and altar, of the fury fused."
Samuel Hazo has remarked that the bridge as symbol encompasses four distinct areas of meaning or existence: architectural construct, manifestation of man's shaping of the material world to his own purpose, joining or unifying force, and Crane's search for the Absolute. In one sense the symbolic bridge does function on all these levels at once, yet it is as a joining or unifying force that the bridge functions most vibrantly and consistently throughout the poem, embodying as it does Crane's desire for synthesis between disillusioning reality and illusionary vision. Brooklyn Bridge does, literally, join Manhattan to Brooklyn, thus serving as a unifying steel stitch across the East River's cold incision. For Crane it was an easy leap from literal suture to symbolic suture, from steel platform to metaphoric synthesis.

The curving bridge, then, ties the poet's vision to his reality, but it functions quite differently from the image of wheeling unity implied by the seagull's flight in the first two stanzas. The gull's unity is ephemeral, it

... forsake[s] our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away.

Lovely as it is, the gull's image is too insubstantial for the urbanite office worker caught in his daily routine, appearing almost as transient as the bored drudge's daydreams of sails that intermittently interpose themselves between the worker and his work. But beyond the gull's twisting circumgyrations the persona/poet sees the dazzling vision of Brooklyn Bridge, solid, tangible, "silver-paced /
As though the sun took step of thee." Robert K. Martin has pointed out that Whitman's sense of "unity through flux" is probably the source for Crane's construction of the seagull imagery in the "Proem," and it is though this "flux" that the "inviolate curve" of the gull in the second stanza leads to the curving "panoramic sleights" of the third stanza, the "harp" of stanza eight, the "unfractioned idiom" of stanza nine, and the "curveship" of stanza twelve. The progression is one of movement toward unity and stability through vision based upon concrete reality, and away from ephemeral "apparitions" that may inspire momentarily but which have no ultimate staying power.

Crane is not, however, denying the usefulness of such fading visions as the gull's flight, for without its powerful impact, "shedding white rings of tumult," the persona/poet's faculties might not have been drawn toward the more durable, less tumultuous "rings" of Brooklyn Bridge, condemning him to see it, as he once did in a moment of despair, as of "no significance beyond an economical approach to shorter hours, quicker lunches, behaviorism and toothpicks." The fading glimpse of the gull jogs the poet's imagination into "a new state of consciousness, a unitive state," according to Donald Sugg, in which the poet begins, in stanza three, to "think" of the "multitudes" around him as also ephemeral, participants in "panoramic sleights" and "flashing scene[s]" on a movie screen, whose significance is "never disclosed" but "Foresaid to other eyes on the same screen." The multitudes are also involved in a complex circular pattern, a frenetic trap they have "hastened to again" and again,
without the apparent freedom of the gull's soaring oscillatory curves. Unlike the gull, in lines reminiscent of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," stanza three indicates that modern man's circuit appears to be bound by the rising and falling of elevators that circumscribe our workdays, and the spinning, flickering illusions of spools from Hollywood that circumscribe our nights and imaginations.

In the midst of this musing upon the basic dichotomy of man's modern existence, the persona/poet, seeking some secure median from which to confront and decipher the illusions of the night and the all too real rhythms of the day, spies "Thee," Brooklyn Bridge,

... across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,--
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Here the inspiration is both static and moving, tangible and visionary, bound yet free. The poet finds in this image the "implicit freedom" that, in what is only a seeming paradox, binds imagination and reality, fuses the visionary and the real. As we saw in "the Wine Menagerie," Hart Crane was always seeking this unity between the disparate "head" and "body," was always, in the words of Robert Martin, "an ardent Platonist, seeking a return to the unity of body and soul."12 Thus Brooklyn Bridge, both as image and as construct, embodies elements of both vision and reality, the brilliance of its "rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene" and the darkness of the bedlamite's suicide from its towering parapets.

The suicide image in stanza five serves not only as an indicator of society's darker aspects fused with the poet's bright vision, but
also reverberates a stern warning similar to that presented in the
beginning of the "Voyages" sequence—the effort of holding two
opposites in union may be a quixotic task, the admirable but
irrational actions of a madman. Certainly while, in one sense, the
bedlamite on the bridge's tower leans or "tilts" momentarily before
going over, he also, in another sense, seems to be associated with
Cervante's Don Quixote, "tilting" madly at windmills and thin air,
shriek shirt balloning," while "A jest falls from the speechless
caravan." There is a possibility, Crane's logic of metaphor insists,
that the poet's task may be impossible, the poet a madman laughed at
and egged on by the spell-bound crowd that always seems to gather in
rapt fascination at the scene of public self-destruction. The "jest"
that "falls" may, also according to the Cranian logic of metaphor, be
the pierrotic poet, the artist as jester and pathetic clown detailed
in "Chaplinesque," whose spirit is finally crushed by disillusioning
reality. That the suicide in stanza five appears "Out of some subway
scuttle, cell or loft" seems to bear this interpretation out, since it
is nearly a direct allusion to Crane's perception of himself in "Black
Tambourine," "forlorn in the cellar, . . . in some mid-kingdom, dark."
If this stanza is indeed, on one level, about the poet's doubts and
fears regarding his possible failure, still, as Vogler has pointed
out, one of the most enduring and inspiring themes of all literature
is that of a man trying, by sheer will and faith, despite all odds and
fears, to find a purpose in life, " . . . the heroic argument or epic
theme of our age. And it is certainly the closest we have come to a
theme that can excite anything like an epic response from [our] poets."

Thus with eyes wide open, illuminated by the noontide sun that "leaks" through the girders and down Wall Street, the poet assimilates his doubts and his dreams, his fears and his desires, into the image of Brooklyn Bridge, whose "cables breathe the North Atlantic still," and where "All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn." The Bridge "breathes" its inspiration from the sea, familiar source of the fusion between reality and illusion seen in "Repose of Rivers," "At Melville's Tomb," and the "Voyages" sequence. The inescapable reality of technologic achievement, symbolized by the words "acetylene," "derricks," "girder," and "cables," is fused with the illusionary beauty engendered by the poet's vision as "noon leaks" among the girders, the sun flashes with the construction workers' torches, the derricks turn among clouds, and the cables draw life from the sea.

Brooklyn Bridge becomes an obscure

... guerdon ... Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

That is, it comes to stand for the median between the ephemerality of vision (the gull's flight) and the durability of the urban milieu (with "Till elevators drop us from our day" providing an opposite yet still circular contrast to the flight of the gull) in which the poet's reward or "guerdon" is an anonymous "accolade." Here the poet uses accolade in both its meanings, that of spiritual knighting or blessing and that of a reversed curve in an arch. The poet's sensibility is
thus bent sympathetically toward union by the inspiring curve of the bridge's symbolic meaning, and he receives spiritual admission to that anonymous group of questors who have gone before him, an echo of the select company of voyagers in "At Melville's Tomb."

In these lines is also mentioned for the first time in the poem the theme of time itself as dispenser of fate. According to Crane, the passage of time does not often "raise" one from anonymity but, instead, usually deepens and entrenches one's obscurity, as we saw in "Praise For An Urn." Yet the synthetic power of the bridge is such that it can, like the sea in "Voyages," grant "Vibrant reprieve and pardon" from time's obscuring machinations, perhaps allowing the poet to escape the bedlamite's end portrayed in the fifth stanza.

Thus the bridge becomes both instrument and place, "harp and altar," of the poet's new stance, his synthesis of vision ("harp" obviously a conventional metaphor here of song or poetry and, therefore, easily referenced to poetic vision or illusion) and reality ("altar" representing a physical symbol of the godhead and, therefore, standing for concrete reality imbued with spiritual qualities), "of the fury fused." As the "threshold" of the "New thresholds, new anatomies" Crane invoked in "The Wine Menagerie," the bridge constitutes an answer to the outcast's ("pariah") prayer and the "lover's cry" heard in "Chaplinesque" and "Voyages VI," the "still fervid covenant, Belle Isle," transposed to Manhattan.

As Lewis has indicated, the language of "Proem" rises to a religious intensity that bombards the reader with words and phrases
whose connotations add up to a monumental religious experience, almost a glorious transfiguration. The "unfractioned idiom" of the bridge, that is, its unbroken, linear statement to the poet, is an "immaculate sigh of stars, / Beading thy path--condense[ing] eternity." With eternity collapsed into one "immaculate sigh," the symbolic bridge holds back darkness ("And we have seen night lifted in thine arms") as, "Under the shadow, by the piers," the poet waits and watches in rapt fascination. Ironically, "Only in darkness is thy shadow clear," that is, only in opposition to the darkness of reality is the significance and influence--"shadow"--cast by the bridge's curving span clear. As the city submerges into the bleak, cold decay inevitably wrought by time ("The city's fiery parcels all undone, / Already snow submerges an iron year . . .") the synthetic/religious symbol of the bridge is all that remains to hold back the despairing night of disillusion and bedlam:

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Ever awake, ever expanding in significance, symbolic of the fused fury of the poet's faith in both reality and visionary experience joined, the bridge encompasses not just Manhattan and Brooklyn but the world, "sea" and "prairies," and can lend its cables' tensile strength to the lowliest among us, offering redemption to any who can hold faith in its "curveship" and hear the vibrating promise in its thrumming song. Thomas Vogler has remarked that "It becomes increasingly clear throughout the poem that the myth to God is an attitude of
mind rather than an allegoric organization of symbols.15 I would also say that here Crane is paralleling traditional religious symbolism for its emotional and connotative impact, although the bridge does have a spiritual effect upon the poet. His faith lies, however, in his ability to unite opposites and create a balanced state in which the tension between disillusion and illusion is cancelled.

Robert Martin has indicated his belief that after "Proem" the entire body of The Bridge moves toward the "attainment of a state of suspended balance"16 through the apposition of Columbus and Pocahontas, a duality requiring no third intermediary. L. S. Dembo also insists upon the existence of a basic duality in the poem as a whole, saying, "In Crane's hierarchy we find not a Trinity but a Duality—a bridge and an Indian maiden."17 Of course, they are both correct as far as they go, but there is a necessity in Crane's search for a balanced unity for more than a mere duality of appositional cancellation of conflicting forces. There is indeed a trinity at work in The Bridge, with the illusionary realm of vision represented by the mutable myth of Pocahontas, the concrete realm of the pragmatic world represented by the many references to modern society throughout the poem, and, to provide the fulcrum for the delicate balance between the two and complete the trinity, the poet himself, in his many narrative guises, and his concept of the synthetic state represented in "Proem" by the bridge itself.18 The bridge, then, at the end of "Proem," not only represents Vogler's "state of mind," but also the circular promise of completion, balance of tension, unity of faith,
and reunion of poetic and pragmatic purpose. As we shall see in the following sections of *The Bridge*, the poet unites the past with the present, the apparent real world with the apparent myth, and places himself at the center, hoping to hold it all together through the synthesizing powers of the "curveship" or bridge.

The first section of *The Bridge* proper, "Ave Maria," shifts the reader from contemporary New York to Columbus' first return voyage in 1493, and is prefaced by a quotation from Seneca's *Medea*, in which the voyage of Jason's *Argonauts* is celebrated and the limitless worlds of man's universe are prophesied. The parallels between Jason's quest for the golden fleece and Columbus' visionary quest for the rich orient are obvious and have been thoroughly explored by other critics. Just as he is like the mythical Jason, so too is Columbus much like the persona in "Proem." Both have reached dark stages in their voyages, both believe they have discovered what they set out to discover, and both beseech the powers they see as governing us for guidance and protection. Crane's choice of Columbus, however, implies a deeper, perhaps ironic parallel of which Crane must certainly have been aware: Columbus thought he had found the orient ("I bring you Cathay") when in reality he had found something immensely different, intriguing, and, ultimately, more profitable for the world, if not for himself. Although Columbus' perception of his discovery was incorrect, that fact does not diminish the importance or value of his discovery. Therefore, in one sense, Crane may be implying (perhaps unconsciously) that his own perceptions of salvation through the
synthesis of reality and illusion may be skewed so badly that he would never recognize them if the truth was revealed. Even so, the implication is that the discovery by both poet and explorer is of immense value beyond the reckoning of the discoverer. Another, more sobering parallel between Crane and Columbus is the fact that, although the Genoese sailor accomplished far more than he had set out to do, he also ended his life in poverty and bleak despair, his illusions shattered and his faith in vision destroyed.

The Columbus of "Ave Maria," however, is on the deck of his ship invoking, in the words of Crane's own gloss, "the presence of two faithful partisans of his quest," Luis de San Angel and Juan Perez. He calls upon them to "Witness before the tide can wrest away / The word I bring," the word of Cathay promised and delivered, which "no perjured breath / Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay." Just as the poet in "Proem" sought some "Vibrant reprieve and pardon," so too does Columbus petition for "One ship of these thou grantest safe returning" so that the "word" will not be lost. The "Indian emperies" have been left behind and "Here waves climb into dusk on gleaming mail" and "fall back yawning to another plunge." In the darkest hour of his voyage Columbus notes that while it is morning in the land he has discovered and left behind him, the bright dawn shall be "lost, all, let this keel one instant yield." Columbus, then, becomes associated with the poet of "Proem," and his ship becomes reminiscent of the bridge in "Proem" that suspends the poet above the abyss and serves to tie two realms together. If the ship founders, the
poet/adventurer, hence the fusion, is lost, and Columbus' aspirations come to be, as in "At Melville's Tomb," the "dice of drowned men's bones." Thus the ship comes to stand not only as a symbol of the bridge between the real and the illusionary (Columbus' "orient" was, after all, only an illusion kept alive by the force of his vision), but by association stands also for the vagaries of chance, the dangers of reality, and the fragility of the poet's balance between the real world and the imaginative one. The poet, as the carrier of the message, and hence the only true embodiment of the concept of the fusion, is subject to the physical laws of the universe. His "ship" may sink and the union be dissolved, or the "bridge" collapse, sending poet and poetic construct shrieking down into the East River, a reminder of the bedlamite's end in "Proem."

As L. S. Dembo has pointed out, just as Columbus in the midcrossing between two worlds tries to complete the "bridge" between dream and reality by carrying home word of the discovery, so the poet tries to "join myth and reality by returning with the crucial sign from the past to the modern world."20 Crane's Columbus thinks of his native Genoa and "this truth, now proved, / That made me exile in her streets." His dream has been proved, his quest nearly fulfilled, and the vision he has carried has made him

More absolute than ever--biding the moon
Till dawn should clear that dim frontier, first seen
--The Chan's great continent...

Similarly, the poet himself thinks on his own homeland and time in stanza three of "Proem":


I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen.

If the modern multitudes are unable to decipher the scenes "foretold" by contemporary illusions, then the poet must, just as Columbus did, bring back the "Word," Dembo's "crucial sign" that unites past and present, bridges illusion and reality. But first he must voyage into that past, to hear "the surf near" and see for himself "The first palm chevron the first lighted hill."

Crane uses the word "chevron" as a verb in this third stanza of "Ave Maria" to present the reader with two immediate images. The first is that of the ship's captain sighting the tip of a tree above the horizon long before he spies any actual land, while the second image is that of the recurrent bridge in the form of a pointed arch. It is appropriate that the first sign of the New World Columbus sees is a symbolic bridge, for Columbus himself was a form of bridge between the old world and the new, both in his obvious historical, spatial relationship and in the less obvious, but just as important to Crane, philosophic and cultural relationship. John Irwin has provided an excellent discussion of Columbus as the meeting point or link between the old world of religious or humanistic myth and the new world of scientific empiricism.21 Columbus, according to Irwin, combined two extremes into one man—a man who could, on the one hand, perform one of the most important feats of navigation in history, solidly based upon the scientific assumption of a spherical Earth, while, on the other hand, carry out his voyage under the mythical
protection of the Virgin and invoke her magical intercession at every
turn. Thus Crane sees Columbus as the first to bridge the gap between
vision and reality, between comforting myth and disillusioning
expience, and the first to use his new-found synthesis to alter the
face of the world. The Ultima Thule of this section's preface has
been surpassed; in like manner, the poet also seeks to surpass the
limits of our own circumscribed, patterned, delimited world through
his own synthesis of illusion of disillusion.

Irwin has stated that the Old World and New World indicate,
respectively, illusion or religious myth, and scientific pragmatism.
Yet, in another sense, it is the Old World of Spain and Europe that
represents the pragmatic, disillusioning element of the trinitarian
complex involved in the fourth and fifth stanzas of "Ave Maria,"
while the New World represents the visionary element. Spain, with its
late fifteenth-century wars against the Moors, was in no position to
encourage expansion or sponsor ascetic dreamers like Columbus. The
court of Ferdinand and Isabella needed hard, calculating, practical
men who could fight or who could help fill the nation's coffers. Thus
it was that the visionary's voyage was sponsored by hard-hearted
greed, and Crane has his Columbus issue a warning to his king on the
dangers of too grasping an approach to the new world:

--Yet no delirium of jewels! O Fernando,
Take of that eastern shore, this western sea,
Yet yield thy God's, thy Virgin's charity!

--Rush down the plenitude, and you shall see
Isaiah counting famine on this lee!
The warning and the lesson are appropriate, for by ignoring Columbus' plea the Spanish raped a continent, destroyed civilizations in some ways greater than their own, obliterated an entire race of people, and ultimately brought disaster upon themselves.

The implications for the poet are clear: too narrow or extreme an approach to the world brings about ruin. Not only were the Aztecs and Incas of the New World destroyed, but the massive influx of wealth from the Americas spawned an inflationary spiral that so corrupted Spain that her power declined rapidly, the reformation emerged triumphant, and, today, she lies nearly powerless at the foot of Europe. The opposite extreme is no less dangerous, for too impractical a faith in one's illusions leads to a failure of realization. As Crane says in the fourth and fifth stanzas: "For here between two worlds, another, harsh, // This third, of water, tests the word." The "word," the poetic vision, must be tested in terms of reality, else its validity and stability are suspect. The ideal path, according to Crane, is a trinal one in which reality is constantly testing vision and vision is constantly adjusting itself to reality in a process of cyclic illusion and disillusion, with the poet attempting to remain in the median, sustained by his faith in the "curveship" that unites the two, "Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth."

The informing spirit addressed in the last, hymn-like section of "Ave Maria," the "God" of Crane's own special trinity and Columbus' more conventional Christian one, illustrates the voyagers' faith in a successful fulfillment of their quest.22 God, who is both "Inquisi-
tor" and the "incognizable Word / Of Eden," is both intimate with man and separate from him, "O Thou who sleepest on thyself, apart." This is the God "Who grindest oar" and "Subscribest holocaust of ships," yet also

... sendest greeting by the corposant,
And Teneriffe's garnet--flamed it in a cloud,
Urging through night our passage to the Chan.

This is the God of synthesis, the essence of the "fury fused" in "Proem," who both tests and tempers man through outrageous trials and urges him onwards in pursuit of the illusionary vision He inspires. Columbus certainly understands the realities of nature, just as he understands the signs, "a herb, a stray branch among the salty teeth," that indicate he is approaching land, and also is driven to the revelation of his vision, now proved, that the world is "one sapphire wheel, / The orbic wake of thy once whirling feet."

"Te Deum laudamus, for thy teeming span," he cries in his prayer, praising God for providing the "span," the bridge that enables the questor to return triumphant. The span God provides Columbus is, of course, the ability to synthesize vision and the real world, faith and practicality. With the practical compass, "a needle in the sight, suspended north," the visionary can explore as much of the world as time allows, "all that amplitude that time explores"; thus through "inference," that is, rational interpretation of natural phenomena in the real world, the navigator guides his ship. Earlier in the poem Columbus reminded us how natural signs, "the jellied weeds that draw the shore," gave assurance that "Tomorrow's noon will grant us Saltes
Bar," and bring an end to the voyage. Yet for all man's certainty in his pragmatic abilities, there remains an element of uncertainty; "perhaps" the voyage will end successfully with "tomorrow's noon," but for now "dark waters" still "shake the dark prow free." There is still a necessity for "Some Angelus" that "environs the cordage tree," that is, some element of faith is essential to protect the ship from disaster and bring it safely into harbor.

In the next to last stanza of "Ave Maria" these disparate elements of faith and rationality are brought into union. The navigator uses his rational "inferences" when they apply and "discard[s]" them when they do not. He juxtaposes "faith" and "true appointment" (verifiable determination of his course) to avoid the "hidden shoal." It is the visionary approach to God's ordering of the universe, then, that allows Columbus to discern those concrete signs in nature that lead eventually to the realization and fulfillment of his dream. God's "disposition" of the stars and planets leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Earth is spherical, thus uniting the dream with reality through the visionary's ability to hear the echo of God's "sounding heel," an echo of Genesis, "The orbic wake of thy once whirling feet." God thus provides not only the vision and the practical means of supporting it, he also provides the synthesizing "span" through which the two are joined, the "true" or on-course ship sailing "Utter to loneliness," yet accompanied and guided by the "burning blue" corporant "flamed . . . in a cloud."
In the last stanza of "Ave Maria," Columbus sees a final vision of future ships whose sails are gathered "In holy rings" through the "White toil of heaven's cordons" (recalling the white gull's circling flight in "Proem") and "charged" with exploring the vast new continent he has discovered. In these lines Columbus is granted a glimpse of the true nature of the "word" he brings back; it is not "Cathay," but a new land, and the "Husked gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat / Of knowledge" are revealed to him ("round thy brows unhooded now").

This "kindled Crown" of knowledge contains an echo, through its imagery, of the union between vision and reality: the fiery crown recalls Christ's crown of thorns and the spiritual element of His life, and "knowledge" implies the ultimate in realistic appraisal of the natural world. Also implied, of course, is the idea that such "knowledge" may be as painful as Christ's torment, but without the assurance of resurrection, and the navigator, in his passionate ecstasy, proclaims the fateful truth that God's purpose is "still one shore beyond desire," that is, encompasses more than Columbus' original (and present) desire for "Cathay" and all its glittering treasures. He sees his future destiny guided by God's "Hand of Fire" and discerns future "kingdoms" with a heart "trembling" in both anticipatory excitement and fear.

Columbus, then, is linked at the end of "Ave Maria" with the present through his final vision. He sees the future just as the poet of "Proem" sees the past, and the two seem joined in mutual unity of
purpose. Columbus' God grants him the synthetic powers to realize his dream of "Cathay" just as the poet's conception of the godhead grants him the symbolic power of the synthesizing bridge in "Proem." It is now time for the poet to move closer to his own time and continue the consolidation and development of the union between illusion and reality he hopes to wrest permanently from the cyclic nature of his quest.

"Powhatan's Daughter," the second section of *The Bridge*, moves us from the late fifteenth to the early twentieth century and then alternates the time frame of the poem in such a way as to shift us back in time with each succeeding division of the section. To effect these cycles, Crane uses the power of his own memory tempered with historical perspective, so that in "Harbor Dawn" the action takes place in the present but includes a dream sequence about an Indian maiden from 400 years ago, "Van Winkle" contains a reflection by the narrator on his childhood, "The River" includes more reminiscences about childhood scenes and adventure while reaching back in time for the body and soul of the continent, "The Dance" returns us to the time of Pocahontas and Maquokeeta, and "Indiana" moves us forward again to the mid-nineteenth century era of western expansion and pioneers.

In attempting to bring to fruition his union between urban chaos and the illusionary world of poetic vision and order, Crane is attempting to fuse the past with the present, to dissolve the barrier imposed by time that, as he said in "Van Winkle," "splits a random smell of flowers through glass." To bring about this union he must
fuse himself, a twentieth century cosmopolite, with the spirit of a long-dead Indian maiden who represents, at least in Crane's mind, the essential beauty and spirit of America, whom we all unconsciously touch, in the words of Crane's gloss for "The River," "knowing her, without name, nor the myths of her fathers ...." To possess this spirit, to "know" her in the fullest sense, involves both normal and biblical meanings of the word. As spirit of the continent and as sexual partner whose erotic nature is capable of rejuvenating and enlightening the poet, this possession becomes, in the words of M. D. Uroff, "all that is most sacred to the poet: light, harmony, unity, even the song with which to celebrate beauty." Yet this evocation of the spirit of America often seems cruelly indifferent to the poet, unobtainable, beyond even his considerable powers of synthesis.

Possess her he must, however, and thus it is he begins his difficult task in "The Harbor Dawn" with his first recognition of her elusive presence and his need for her in what Crane's gloss calls a "waking dream." Half of the poet's awareness is in the real world of the present while half remains within the illusionary world of his dream, a synthetic state that slowly dissolves as the sun rises and dissipates the morning fog. The sounds of the city intrude "insistently through sleep," as the poet is pulled inexorably from his dream by "a tide of voices," the sound of trucks moving on the wharves, and "a drunken stevedore's howl and thud below." Yet from his bed the poet's perception of these disorderly intrusions is blurred and the process of sundering slowed. The sounds of the city are
The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:
Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
Far strum of fog horns ... signals dispersed in veils.

In his dozing state the sounds come "echoing alley-upward through dim
snow," distorted, indefinite, muted, with much of the charm and effect
of soothing music. The pull of the dream, then, is not easily
defeated, and as the poet's consciousness of the waking world recedes
once more, the noise outside his room becomes a dimly perceived choir
that, "if they take your sleep away sometimes / They give it back
again[;] Soft sleeves of sound" that momentarily surround and cover
the poet and "Attend the darkling harbor, the pillowed bay" of his
dreams.

The fog imagery in the fourth stanza epitomizes the poet's state--
ephemeral, ghostly, "Flurried by keen fifings, eddied / Among distant
chiming buoys--adrift." The poet is also adrift in the floating
sensation so familiar to the half-dreaming state, and the "Cool
feathery fold" of the sky "suspends, distills / this wavering
slumber." All that is necessary to achieve the dreaming union that
wavers between sleep and wakefulness is "nothing but this sheath of
pallid air."

The poet turns in his slumber to "you beside me, blessed now,"
whose "cool arms about me lay." While the fog's "myriad snowy hands"
press against the window panes, turning back the morning's approach
that "stealthily weave[s] us into day," the poet takes his dream-lover
one last time in an explicity sexual embrace, "to merge your seed":

    your hands within my hands are deeds;
    my tongue upon your throat--singing
arms close, eyes wide, undoubtful
dark
drink the dawn--
a forest shudders in your hair!

This exciting phantom incorporates imagery associating her with the earth that "drinks the dawn" and the vast virgin woods that once covered a continent and now have been transmuted into her trembling hair. The dream woman, whom we are to know as Pocahontas in later divisions of this section, also has eyes "wide," "undoubtful," and "dark," in contrast to the staring, monstrously glittering "window-eyes" reflecting "From Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters" as they "disk / The sun, released." Thus she becomes associated not only with the past and the spirit of the new continent discovered by Columbus in "Ave Maria," but also with the poet's vision or powers of illusion, the antithesis of the modern age. Where has she come from, this maiden who haunts the poet's dreams and whose memory will monopolize his waking hours? Even Crane himself seems unsure of her origin, as he says in his gloss, "400 years and more . . . or is it from the soundless shore of sleep that time recalls you to your love."

Is this really Pocahontas, historical figure from more than 400 years ago, or is this a blend of fact and imagination bred in the poet's psyche and delimited by time?

At this point in the poem Crane does not clear up the mystery, leaving his image of the dream-woman as blurred and indefinite as the fog that accompanies her presence. The one thing that is certain about her at this stage of the poem's development is that her dark, undoubting eyes cannot face the prismed eyes of morning. As symbol of
illusion and vision, she fades before the onset of reality and the poet's synthetic state does not hold. He awakens alone, possessed by her memory and obsessed by his desire to recapture her. Crane here recalls the gull of "Proem" with his image of the morning's sun "aloft with cold gulls hither." Like the beauty of the seagull's wings, "shedding white rings of tumult," but too ephemeral for any lasting enterprise, the illusion of Pocahontas is echoed by the gulls' flight into the morning. She is now "cold," inaccessible, fading into the distance, "a star" that "Turns in the waking west and goes to sleep," while the poet enters the day with memories of her beckoning promise of reunion "As though to join us at some distant hill," out of a dissolving dream. The poet goes in quest of that star and his union of illusionary love and disillusioning reality in the harsh light of morning, a faithful but somewhat bewildered Rip Van Winkle abruptly awakened from his magical slumber.

The poet, merged with and guided by a modern Manhattan version of Rip Van Winkle, begins his quest for the fusion amid the clutter and bustle of city streets in the "Van Winkle" division of "Powhatan's Daughter." That he is on the way to the subway (which he finally reaches in "The River" and, after many diversions and digressions, again in "The Tunnel") we know from Crane's 1927 letter to Otto Kahn, in which he says

The protagonist has left the room with its harbor sounds, and is walking to the subway. . . . The walk . . . arouses reminiscences of childhood, also the "childhood" of the continental conquest, viz., the conquistadores, Priscilla, Capt. John Smith, etc. The parallelisms unite in the figure
of Rip Van Winkle who finally becomes identified
with the protagonist... He becomes the
"guardian angel" of the journey into the past.24

Before calling up these memories, however, Crane opens the section
with another bridge image, this one of the intercontinental highway
that spans the distance between New York and California:

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate:
Listen! the miles a hurdy-gurdy grinds--
Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds.

The grey ribbon leaps across the continent, tying its prosaic and
visionary elements together, the "Far Rockaway" of hum-drum Long
Island joined to the "Golden Gate" of illusionary promise. Emblematic
of attainable goal and the synthetic union of the pragmatic and
aesthetic, it is indeed apropos that one of the world's most famous
bridges should have been named "Golden Gate" not long after Crane's
death, although the connection is coincidental. Another significant
word serving to tie the image together is "tunny," which Lewis has
traced to its etymological roots in the Greek word for leap,25 another
coincidental and felicitous usage by Crane. Finally, in lines echoing
the "adagios of islands" of "Voyages II," the long miles are spun out
by the music of a street organ that ". . . grinds-- / Down gold
arpeggios mile on mile unwind," and in the unwinding or descending
notes of successive octaves (arpeggios) the grey macadam becomes a
highway into the past, spooling out like ribbon through the covenant
of the poet's memory.

Memory, rejected in numerous poems in White Buildings as
unsuitable for a sustained synthetic state, is still a useful tool in
attaining that state, for, according to Crane's gloss, "Memory . . . is time's truant," able to escape for a bit from the discipline time imposes on all things. Thus the poet's memories of childhood school-days and stories of "Pizarro in a copybook," Cortes, who reined "tautly in-- / Firmly as coffee grips the taste" (surely one of the most unfortunate similes in Crane's poetry, and unworthy of his talent), "Priscilla's cheek close in the wind, / And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty," free the poet's memory and imagination for his assumption of Rip Van Winkle's persona, "bowing by the way."

It is interesting to note that nearly all the major critics of Crane's poetry have ignored the next line in "Van Winkle": "Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend--?" Two prominent exceptions to this neglect are Dembo and Lewis, both of whom did little digging into the possible relevance of the line to the poet's situation in the poem. Lewis somewhat condescendingly displays his knowledge of Washington Irving (and assumes Crane's ignorance) by saying Crane's Rip Van Winkle is "somewhat gratuitously [sic] made to inhabit Washington Irving's other famous tale, 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.'"\textsuperscript{26} Dembo, meanwhile, although he expresses a knowledge of Irving's work, apparently makes the same error Lewis charges to Crane by making reference to "the Sleepy Hollow figure of Rip Van Winkle."\textsuperscript{27} All of this would, of course, be mere pedantic nitpicking if it was not for the relevance of Crane's choice of first stopping place in his journey into the past. I have already mentioned in previous chapters Crane's penchant for punning on his own name, and the main character in Irving's story
about Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod Crane, appears to be no exception. Sleepy Hollow is the home of the headless horseman who so terrified Ichabod Crane that he too, in a figurative sense, may be said to have lost his head. Since Crane's main task throughout his career was to unite the physical and spiritual sides of man's nature, figuratively the body and the head, what more appropriate place to begin his search for the union than Sleepy Hollow? Crane has used the decapitation image before in the form of Holofernes and John the Baptist in "The Wine Managerie," and was certainly not averse to aligning himself personally with the personas of his poems.

Thus Hart-Ichabod Crane, in his search for unity, recognizes Rip Van Winkle as a kindred soul, for he too "was not here / nor there," and inquires whether this place memory's macadam has carried him to is indeed Sleepy Hollow. Van Winkle's reply is cut off before it begins, in a sharp bifurcation in which the Rip/persona/poet figure, now merged, is nevertheless shown as a disjointed personality, lacking in synthesis, unable to reply or hold more than a menial job.

... And he--

And Rip forgot the office hours,
     and he forgot the pay;
Van Winkle sweeps a tenement
     way down on Avenue A,--.

Although Rip's memory is flawed, he is still "time's truant" and thus able to span both the past and present, and, through Crane's gloss, is, in his position as guide, mysteriously allied with Pocahontas who "shall take you by the hand" and lead the poet to salvation and reunion, if only he can find her. The "Rip" in these
lines who lost his memory, however, can also be seen as representative of the visionary poet who creates while ignoring the pressures and responsibilities of modern life, the dreamer (for whom he certainly stands in Irving's story) who miraculously cheats both time and reality, while the more formal "Van Winkle" who works at menial tasks in disreputable neighborhoods is representative of the harsh and dismal future awaiting the dreamer when he wakes.

Crane's identification with Ichabod Crane and his search for Sleepy Hollow (the place name echoes his reluctant awakening in "The Harbor Dawn") reflects his desire to regain the fleeting synthesis achieved in his own dreams, while his choice of Rip Van Winkle as "guardian angel" indicates the necessity of joining with someone completely out of time, even if he is not immune to its effects, in order to continue the search for the elusive sleeping star--Pocahontas--he lost in "The Harbor Dawn." But the search must be made in a state of wakefulness in which the dreamer's dreams are not dissipated but in which he is allowed to see his dreams for what they are: illusions in conflict with reality but which must be brought into a state of fusion with that same reality. The poet resorts to more potent, vibrant, and emotional memories, recollections of his own childhood, and slowly his guide/persona is

.. made aware
    that he, Van Winkle, was not here
  nor there. He woke and swore he'd seen Broadway
    a Catskill daisy chain in May--

"Recall--recall," the poet exhorts him, and Rip at last responds to the slowly dawning awareness of his position as man out of time, "not
here nor there," and does recall the past, a shimmering illusion of a Catskill meadowland before it was transformed into the ugliness of modern Broadway.

It is memory, then, that is essential to the task at hand, for it can "strike a rhyme out of a box," that is, forge a poem out of the most humble of articles, "Or split a random smell of flowers through glass." The smell or essence of the flowers in this line is "split," divided from the poet by a pane of glass, perhaps in a florist's shop. The flowers, then stand for the real world, the boxed, divided, unnatural reality of the twentieth century, while their fragrance, inferred by the poet's memory, is indicative of his ability to conjure up their proper state in nature through his visionary powers. Thus the real and the illusionary are seemingly separated by an invisible barrier only memory can pass, and without that memory the poet is unable to create the illusions necessary to his art.

The forgetful Van Winkle, slowly being made aware of his position and his role in the poet's quest, is then prodded by the most potent memories Crane has at his disposal, those of his father's tyranny and punishing nature, "... the whip stripped from the lilac tree / One day in spring my father took to me," and his recollection of his mother's "Sabbatical, unconscious smile" brought to him only once, never to return. This last memory of the poet's mother as a reluctantly loving saint is enough to fortify Van Winkle for his trip on the subway into a past that is both the poet's and the nation's. Armed with a nickel for car-change (the transfer from the local subway
of the poet's memories to the Twentieth Century Limited's journey into the past of America detailed in "The River") and a copy of The New York Times, Van Winkle is admonished by the persona to "hurry along . . . it's getting late!"

The nickel for car-change carried by Van Winkle on his journey has additional significance, as it represents the traditional payment one must make to the ferryman (or, in this case, the conductor) before undertaking any mystical voyage, especially one into the underworld of the past. Although we never meet the mythical Charon in The Bridge, the parallels between crossing the river Styx and bridging the East River, entering the underworld and taking the underground subway, and meeting heroes of the past in Hades and encountering the phantoms of America's history through an inspired vision of the past, are too blatant to be ignored. In addition to his nickel, Van Winkle's copy of the Times has a significance beyond its prosaic nature, for the persona is asking literally whether his guide now has his time sense straightened out well enough to continue the quest. Ironically, time itself, so useful in one aspect (without it there could be no memory), is also an inimical force that seeks to delay or terminate the quest for synthesis. The hour is late, time hurries on, and the train is about to depart as we enter the next division of "Powhatan's Daughter."

Crane avowed that the first twenty-three lines of "The River" were written in a jazz rhythm and were an "intentional burlesque on the cultural confusion of the present--a great conglomeration of noises
analogous to the strident impression of a fast express rushing by. 28 While the "jazz" rhythm is debatable, certainly the stridency and burlesque of contemporary values and mores is evident as the subway of "Van Winkle" is translated into the fast express, "So the 20th Century—so / whizzed the limited," carrying its passengers into the mythic past of America. The vehicle for this quest-journey is a tool of the present, the technologic wonder of a transcontinental railroad providing the motive force that propels the personal into an illusory age predating even the conception of such a device.

In this opening passage the poet's "conglomeration of noises" reflect the equal influences of "SCIENCE—COMMERCE and the HOLY GHOST," the alternating images of "WALL STREET AND VIRGIN BIRTH," all of which are competing for our attention in the real world, but none of which can capture that attention completely nor holds true significance or relation to the others or to ourselves. This lack of connections in modern life was one of the elements Crane was trying to remedy by providing a span or bridge that would unite the disconnected fragments of cosmopolitan America that now exist "WITHOUT STONES OR / WIRES OR EVEN RUNNING brooks connecting ears." The "ears" of the poet can discern no more than this stridency in the jumbled, jumping score of twentieth century life, "no more sermons," and only "windows flashing roar / breathtaking." For the majority of the passengers (hence, the majority of inhabitants of the twentieth century) this is just "as you like it," life as great rushing express "whistling down the tracks / a headlight rushing with the sound," with "no more sermons" to remind
them of their responsibilities and the utter emptiness of lives in which science, commerce, and the "roaring" of radios in every home have taken the place of more traditional values. Yet not all inhabitants of our world ride this blind express; as the train whizzed into the night, it

...--roared by and left
three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slipping gimleted and neatly out of sight.

Thus our age roars by, Crane is saying, leaving a few, the poor, the dispossessed, the dreamers (and the poets), who do not partake of the great technologic feast, who are left "still hungry on the tracks" by an age that fails to provide them with the spiritual nourishment they need. These are men who "take their liquor slow--and count... / The river's minute by the far brook's year," the cast-off "hoboes" of a society that seems bent on destroying nature ("The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas"), who take life in sips, rather than gulps, and who savor its flavor in a spiritual relationship all their own--"they'll confess no rosary nor clue." While the modern world unsuccessfully tries to unify itself with more "keen instruments, strung to a vast precision," to "Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream," the malnourished ones, the hoboes who have more than mechanical, clock-like dreams bound by telegraph wires, "range in nomad raillery":

Under a world of whistles, wire and steam  
Caboose-like they go ruminating through  
Ohio, Indiana--blind baggage--  
To Cheyenne tagging... Maybe Kalamazoo.
They, like the poet, are "elemental" creatures, tagging "Cabooselike" behind the modern world's so-called progress, and who "construe" from "time's rendings, time's blendings" a relationship to nature that accepts the final judgement of the seasons, "final reckonings of fire and snow."

The poet has seen such creatures before, as he calls, once more, upon his memories of "Rail squatters," "Behind my father's cannery works." Although they are childlike, unimportant, unpretentious men, Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods[,] Yet they touch something like a key perhaps . . . . --They know a body under the wide rain; . . .
They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue--
Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west.
--As I have trod the rumorous midnights, too."

They have intuited the female spirit of the continent, but are "Possessed, resigned," for they can do no more than "lurk" across her body, the land, fragmented like Humpty-Dumpty who could not be put together again. They can relate in some vague way to the illusory presence of Pocahontas, but since they are cut off from the modern urban complex their knowledge is "rumorous," inarticulate, incomplete, and their contact with the "key" is tenuous, nonsynthetic, and disorganized. In his search for synthesis, the poet, too, has known and trod these same paths, and in his dreams, as in "The Harbor Dawn," has journeyed "to her body bare" and "dreamed beyond the print that bound her name." The poet, however, is not cut off from reality and modern life, and is able to synthesize the sound of the "real" train
whistle wailing through the blizzards into the sound of "Papoooses
crying on the wind's long mane."

Yet this union of reality and illusion remains incomplete, the
cries of the past are "Dead echoes!" But the persona/poet has known
"her body," and knows the "myths of her fathers," the "old gods of the
rain" abandoned and torn "By iron, iron--always the iron dealt
cleavage," and in his knowledge, incomplete perhaps, but far better
than the totally intuitive ignorance of the hoboos, he sees that to
heal the rift between myth and reality the modern technologic age
("iron dealt cleavage") has produced, he must turn the symbolic iron
of the train into the symbolic iron of the bridge that spans the
cleavage and also spans time and space, symbols of the gulf separating
him from union with the beloved spirit of America.

Thus it is that the poet does not leave the train and join the
hoboos. He has been with them before and knows they merely "touch"
the "key" without possessing it. To join them at this point would be
as futile an exercise as joining wholeheartedly into the frenzied
world of the "Pullman breakfasters," performing "a dance of wheel on
wheel." The train, with its modern inhabitants, spans space,
"straddles the hill," but not time, "You have a half-hour's wait at
Siskiyou," while the hoboos span time, remaining childlike, "Holding
to childhood like some termless play," but not space, "They win no
frontier by their wayward plight." The poet's task, then as always,
is to unite the two elements, space and time, reality and the illusory
past, in his own person:
Oh, lean from the window, if the train slows down,
As though you touched hands with some ancient clown,
---A little while gaze absently below
And hum Deep River with them while they go.

At this juncture of the persona/poet's journey into the past, the merging place of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, where "the waters breathed that you might know," the passenger/poet takes some essence of the hoboes, "Memphis Johnny, Steamboat Bill, Missouri Joe," to join with himself and the human flow in the river of time. The river of steel that is the railroad becomes the Mississippi, timeless in its flow and thus symbolic of time itself, which is beyond its own effects, and the poet, part of the "Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow, "becomes "lost within this tideless spell ... / A liquid theme that floating niggers swell," a phrase reminiscent of Crane's conception of the poet as a victim of society from "Black Tambourine."

Unlike "Black Tambourine's" despairing, defeatd poet, however, here the "iron dealt cleavage" has been spanned, the poet has once more found his "bridge" in the form of the river that passes "Over De Soto's bones" and "the City storied of three thrones," until at last it reaches the sea. The river then becomes a real bridge, as it "lifts itself from its long bed, / Poised wholly on its dream." The river's fulfillment is its union with the sea, and in that union it spans the land and the ocean, the present and the past, the real and the unreal in an erotic "Passion" that, at the moment of penetration, "hosannas silently below." The poet, as part of this "liquid theme," joins in the embrace of the "stinging sea" and thus breaks through onto "the pure mythical and smoky soil at last" of Pocahontas and
Maquokeeta. Crane was indeed correct in alllying his effort with that of Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel, since it was the touch of his persona's hand to that of "some ancient clown" standing by the tracks that precipitated his merger with the river, much as Michaelangelo depicted God's fingertip-to-fingertip communion with Adam as providing the spark of divinity that awoke man. The poet is submerged in the river and the sea, much as he was in "Voyages"; in fact, he even blends his river essence with that of the sea here, thus regaining the protection the sea offered in "Voyages III and IV" while retaining his place in the bridge-like river that leaps over the cleavage between reality and illusior, and brings him, in "The Dance," face-to-face with Pocahontas.

The transition from the poet's singing merger with the river and the sea in "The River" to the "swift red flesh" of "The Dance" is abrupt, almost as if, having broken the barrier to he past, the poet plunges immediately into the prehistory of the continent. Ironically, however, we meet not, at first, Pocahontas, but rhetorical questions about her lover Maquokeeta, through whose person the poet will eventually join once more with his lover from "The Harbor Dawn":

The swift red flesh, a winter king--
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;
She spouted arms; she rose with maise--to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, steamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.
If Pocahontas is the essence of the continent, an archetypal vegetation goddess who "rose with maize--to die," a "glacier woman" who descends from the sky, then Maquokeeta is her priest as well as her lover, who "steamed the mesa sands" with her cult's now forgotten prayers, serving as consort, escort ("squire") and holder of "the twilight's dim, perpetual throne." Just such a position, of course, is what the poet aspires to, and the ghost of Maquokeeta, whose name means "Big River," becomes his means of attaining it. Even though "loth" and "disturbed," this "shade that haunts the lakes and hills" greets the persona and speeds him on his way to his rendezvous with the past through the intervening years ("Now lie incorrigibly what years between"), not through any choice in the matter but because it is "destined" that he retire "into denser green" and let the poet pass.

We finally see the prefigured dream woman of "The Harbor Dawn" in the fourth stanza of "The Dance," where

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride--
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.

M. D. Uroff says that the "earth goddess" has had no lover and that her dance is "broken play" in which all hope for union is dissipated. I see this passage, however, as the hopeful, anticipatory prelude to what the poet believes will be a consummatory act. This is Pocahontas' promise, that play indeed has ended, is "broken," and it is time to assume the responsibilities and pain of adulthood. The bride will lose her virginity, the veil be lifted, and her "tawny pride" be revealed on her marriage "bed of leaves." Yet this
consummation has already taken place and, thus, this fourth stanza is, in another sense, a report of the union of Pocahontas and Maquoikeeta some 400 years before the poet's own time. The only way in which the poet might join in more than a merely vicarious, voyeuristic union with his beloved is for him to join his spirit to that of Maquoikeeta, first by forgetting his white man's upbringing and becoming, in essence, an Indian in spirit and attitude, if not in fact, and, second, by empathetically sharing Maquoikeeta's ritual death and rebirth, the "Dance" from which this section of "Powhatan's Daughter" takes its title.

Thus the poet "left the village for dogwood" in an Indian canoe, allowing himself to learn to see the world through Indian eyes, to perceive the spirit of Pocahontas in the river, "Your hair's keen crescent running" and "to catch the trout's moon whisper." He drifts in his canoe, unmindful of time (since he is, in essence, outside of time here), but not of time's effects, as the "fleet young crescent" of the new moon is replaced by "one star" that ascends to

\[ \ldots \text{take its place, alone,} \]
\[ \ldots \text{Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass}--\]
\[ \ldots \text{Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.} \]
\[ \ldots \text{I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass} \ldots \]
\[ \text{I took the portage climb} \ldots \]

Here, then, is the place we have spent "Powhatan's Daughter" journeying to, the recovery of the "star" of "The Harbor Dawn" that promised to "join us at some distant hill." We have arrived at that hill, "the mountain pass," and the poet, seeing the star as symbolic of his arrival at his destination, leaves his boat and steps onto the
land, literally that "pure mythical and smoky soil" where Pocahontas, Maquokeeta, and the poet will meet and join.

His steps upon the earth here recall the earlier gloss of "The Harbor Dawn," in which Crane describes his dream union by asking "Whose is the flesh our feet have moved upon?" Here his feet move once more upon that flesh, the flesh of the continent, and the physical union, while not complete, is at least begun as the poet finds himself rushed forward ("I could not stop") in an overland journey that is at least half descriptive of real movement and half composed of sexual metaphor:

I took the portage climb, then chose
A further valley-shed; I could not stop.
Feet nozzled wat'ry webs of upper flows;
One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks!—wished of azure wands.

The erotic, suggestive imagery here, "feet nozzled wat'ry webs," "white veil," entering valleys, gaining ledges, and discovering his beloved's "steep inaccessible smile," reinforces Pocahontas' association with the land, where her thighs are valleys and her breasts mountains, and illustrates the poet's growing arousal as he speeds over this feminine landscape to the ceremonial village of "Grey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead, / Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade."
Maquoettea dances in the village, while all around him a "cyclone threshest in the turbine crest," and thunderstorms "blanket ... the skies," as the earth, Pocahontas's spirit, responds in a frenzy that is both the music that drives the dance and expression of Pocahontas' grief at her lover's impending death: "The long moan of a dance is in the sky. / Dance, Maquoettea: Pocahontas grieves. ..." In his dance, Maquoettea's body surges toward union with the elements, "every tendon scurries toward the twangs / Of lightning," as it crackles through his hair. He does not flee the storm, the cry of his beloved, but welcomes its electric "fangs" as his teeth also emit sparks, "Now snaps the flint in every tooth."

The Indian chieftain is then likened by the poet to a shedding snake, specifically the snake of time ("Time like a serpent") seen in "The River." He begins to give up his body, "casts his pelt," and in the process of dying becomes, like the serpent of time itself, immortal. The only way for Maquoettea to join with Pocahontas, whose body is the Earth, is to die and return to earth, literally to mingle his essence with hers in an orgy of self-immolation and destruction, a truly corporeal marriage and one from which he can never be divorced.

Such a view of death and life, and immortality through death, is reminiscent of parts of Whitman's Leaves of Grass, especially section 6 of "Song of Myself,"

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what anyone supposed,
and luckier,
and section 49,

And as to you Corpse, I think you are good manure,
but that does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polished breasts of melons.

Crane's echo of Whitman's fluctuating life-death-life cycle, with its sexual overtones and sensual merging of the natural and the erotically imagined is not coincidental, as Crane comes to acknowledge his debt in "Cape Hatteras," calling Whitman his Panis Angelicus ... beyond all sesames of science" and beyond mortal corruption and death.

Thus Maquettea dances and, in his frenzied agonies, is joined by the persona/poet's empathetic spirit. The two merge in a mystical union where the poet literally becomes, in one sense, his rival Maquettea while, in another, paradoxical sense, he retains his status as distanced observer:

... --I, too, was liege
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:
Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!
And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;
I could not pick the arrows from my side. . . .

O like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
--And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
At last with all that's consummate and free
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

As Maquettea dives "to kiss that destiny," his blazing, glorious, meteoric death/union is shared by the poet, but only in a purely visionary sense and not in any real or literal sense. His union with
the Indian chieftain, hence his union with Pocahontas through Maquoikeeta's death, is, despite the poet's synthetic powers that led him to it, an illusion based upon the abrogation of time and space. In one sense, Maquoikeeta has served as a bridge to Pocahontas, but the trinity conjured up here is not one that can be maintained indefinitely in the illusory past as long as the poet lives in the concrete present. Somehow the poet, now that he has experienced this visionary union, now that he "knows" Pocahontas in the several senses of the word, must translate his knowledge into an illusion that will retain its force and shape while coexisting with the hard, disillusioning, probing essence presented by the twentieth century gestalt. Maquoikeeta, "Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean," gazes across time's "infinite seasons" and sees his "bride immortal in the maize." He has the "strong prayer" of faith "folded" in his arms, likened to the limbs of a majestic tree, wherein "The serpent with the eagle," that is, time and space ("Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark, / And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair"), rest in the "boughs." The poet has danced with Maquoikeeta, "beyond their farms," and "In cobalt desert closures made our vows. . . ."
The poet must now bring those vows back into the present and, as spiritual successor to Maquoikeeta, find his own sturdy limbs to span and join time and space, synthesize illusion and disillusion.

R. P. Blackmur has said of "The Dance" that it places upon the reader "the burden of reading two poems at once, the one that appears and the 'real' poem which does not appear except by an act of
faith," while Butterfield claims it is an "escapist desire to deny objective reality." I can only state that most poetry in general, and all symbolic poetry, exists on more than one perceptual level, and that half the pleasure to be gained from reading poetry lies in the "burden" placed upon the reader to travel beneath the simplistic surface and engage his mental faculties with an act of faith. As to the charge of escapism, it should be quite clear by now that Crane is decidedly more than an escapist; in fact, he insists far more than many authors upon a strict accommodation with reality while refusing to deny the potential of vision. As Lewis has said, "What the poet has first to do is stress exactly the temporal and psychological distance between the modern consciousness and the mythic view of reality." Far more than that, in my opinion, he attempts to demonstrate not only the existent dichotomy but also how that dichotomy can be spanned, how the "mythic view" can be brought into alignment with the nonmythic view, how the elements of illusion and disillusion can be joined in one mind.

Thus Crane enters the last section of "Powhatan's Daughter" in a state of movement toward the present. "Indiana" presents an intermediary step between the prehistoric past and the convoluted present and allows the poet to illustrate how the link with Maquokeeta and Pocahontas can be passed from generation to generation across racial lines, and furthermore, intimates how the link will be abused and forgotten by all but a few men in the modern world. The persona appears to be a failed pioneer woman who has returned eastward on "the
long trail back," after having searched fruitlessly for "A dream called Eldorado." This failure, however, is not the personal defeat of the persona, but the defeat of her husband, Jim, who was buried "far / Back on the gold trail." Her real defeat is a defeat of love and of promise, and she has carried home to Indiana only her memories of gilded dreams destroyed, a chance, mystical encounter with a squaw, and, the most potent memory of all, her son Larry, "all that's left to me of Jim / ... the only one with eyes like him." The cycle of hope and synthesis, then, has begun to turn downward, a trend that will continue in steeper gradients throughout the rest of the poem until the end of "The Tunnel," when it will turn sharply upward again for the brief burst of glory that is "Atlantis."

The pioneer woman speaking to her son in "Indiana" appears to reflect the poet's concern for his own trip back from the past. He too has followed his dreams, and his realization of them has been, at best, visionary and inspired; there remains, however, the implication that the attempt to wrest a permanent union of past and present, to transfer his knowledge of Pocahontas and the conquest of time and space into the present, may have "no charter but a promised crown / Of claims to stake," may be, in fact, nothing "But gilded promise, yielded to us never, / And barren tears." For this reason the poet dares not flash instantaneously back to the twentieth century lest he lose the link, the historic and mythic connective line, that preserves his vision as the present draws nearer.
The link between Pocahontas, the persona, Larry, and the present is that provided by "A homeless squaw-- / Perhaps a halfbreed," who was heading west while the persona was heading back east. In a moment of mutual communion between the white pioneer woman and the Indian mother (representative of the spirit of Pocahontas--she even carries a child of her own, an oblique reminder of the fiery consummation of "The Dance"),

I held you up--I suddenly the bolder,
Knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer.
She nodded--and that smile across her shoulder
Will still endear her

As long as Jim, your father's memory, is warm.
The heritage, then, of the spirit of the continent and the dreams it has inspired in the poet are passed on to the white child, Larry, instead of to the Indian babe the squaw carries. The essence of the land passes to the future inheritors of that land, the persona and her son, in what seems to be an admission from the Indian's eyes, "not black / But sharp with pain," that her own son's future (hence, that of her race) is doomed.

The persona inherits, in some sense, this spirit of the land; she seems to have an unconscious link to it and appears, in her own words, to be a part of it in a metaphysical and material sense: "I'm standing still, I'm old, I'm half of stone." Her son Larry, the intended recipient of both the squaw's blessing the the "smile across her shoulder" (the shoulder across which the serpent of time was draped in "The River" and, therefore, literally a smile across time itself from
Pocahontas) should have inherited the same spiritual link with the essence of the land as his mother, which, in part, he did. But only in part, for he also inherits from his father the visionary's restless need to wander, thus providing what Martin calls the marriage between the Columbus principle and the Pocahontas principle. The principle of the wandering visionary, exemplified in "Ave Maria" by Columbus, in "Powhatan's Daughter" (generally) by the poet/persona, and in "Indiana" by the pioneer Jim seeking his own version of Eldorado, is wed to the stationary, rooted principle of the earth goddess Pocahontas, and the result of this marriage is the boy Larry, a "ranger" who is going to sea and whose mother implores him to remember his land-based heritage as "first born" and "Kentucky bred," and to keep his pledge to return to Indiana. Indiana here, while not the land of his genetic father, Jim, is the land of his spiritual mother, Pocahontas, (Crane's choice of Indiana as the scene of this section provides the punning connection) thus providing a link to the past. However, in the persona's sentimental farewell to her son there is a presentiment that the two sides of his personality will be in constant conflict, that the pledge may not be kept at all, "(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)", or that he may not return until after she is dead. Larry is most closely identified with the poet at this point, the son who is both stranger and friend to the animating spirit of the land, yet also is essentially a wanderer in search of visionary fulfillment.
The "traveller" Larry, however, is not the poet, but a kindred soul who somehow loses track of himself and his inheritance, literally becomes rootless as a sea creature in his wanderings, and winds up the defeated, disillusioned old salt of "Cutty Sark." While he provides a transitional link between the end of "Powhatan's Daughter" and the beginning of the poet's attempts to deal with his vision in the real world, he also functions as the epitome of the purely visionary soul who has denied all contact with the stable roots of his ancestors, who is literally adrift in the modern world, unable to maintain contact with both his illusions and his reality. Here, then, is the warning, once again, that Crane injects so often into his quest, as he did in "Proem" with the bedlamite's end, of the pitfalls of too extreme an approach to the mysteries of life. The balance necessary for fulfillment is lacking in Larry, whose rootless wanderings and lack of concrete purpose have led him finally to a desperate, alcoholic old age. In some cases, as in that of Columbus in "Ave maria," the vision clouds reality but also reaches some accommodation with it, and provides some reward for the visionary seeker. In other, as in "Cutty Sark," the clash between vision and reality results in shattering, pathetic disillusion mitigated only by the hollow echoes and fading memories of ships whose hulls have long since foundered.

As I have already explicated "Cutty Sark" in my first chapter, I will not repeat the exercise here. Suffice it to say that the cycles illustrated in that exegesis, the disillusion with dreams of tall, fast ships and beautiful coastlines, the fading vision of Atlantis,
almost grasped but lost through the sailor's inability to maintain his vision in the face of reality, and the fading ghosts of clipper ships, phantoms forever lost, are reminiscent of the poet's own voyage into the past in search of Pocahontas. It would have been so easy for the poet to have allowed his personal memories to dominate, rather than guide, stimulate, and inform his quest. He could, like the sailor, have gone in search of "Atlantis" armed only with his vision, and wound up like the old salt, a denizen of Bowery bars stumbling "up Bowery way while the dawn / was putting the Statue of Liberty out."

Though both the old sailor and the poet/persona are disillusioned, the persona's disillusion is tied to his concept of the bridgeship; his illusion may have been destroyed by his encounter with the sailor in "Cutty Sark," but his power of vision has not. The past, in the form of those old sailing ships, is dead, but its beauty, magnificence, and spirit are not. The difference between the two men in this section is that the sailor has been unable to come to grips with the reality of the passing of his vision, while the poet has been able to formulate a plan whereby the essence of the vision is fused with reality. Thus Crane's persona says "I started walking home across the Bridge . . .," the essential emptiness and futility of the sailor's vision, as well as its majesty and beauty, continuing to echo in the poet's mind as he grapples with the problem of keeping his own balance intact, the image of the sailor's grizzled visage haunting him like some distorted reflection of his own face. The fading, questioning impression of old ships, "a long tack keeping," is
reminiscent here of the apparitional gull disappearing into the trackless skies of "Proem." The seas are empty of sails and the poet, with "The seas all crossed, weathered the capes, the voyage done," settles down in "Cape Hatteras" to the business at hand of reconciling the spirit of the past and the spirit of the present, the visionary realm of illusions to the pragmatic realm of disillusion.

If Columbus' ship in "Ave Maria" was, in one sense, his bridge between the old world and the new, between darkening reality and illuminating vision, the clipper ships of "Cutty Sark" show how the modern world perverts and limits the synthetic uses of its ships. The clipper ships were built to sail quickly between China and the east coast of the United State ("I bring you Cathay"), yet the only vision illuminating the voyages of their masters was the eminently practical one of commercial exploitation. The visionary mind sees them as objects of great beauty, yet lacks the type of control over their destinies that Columbus exercised aboard his ship. In "Cape Hatteras" the magnificent old vessels have been replaced by their modern, graceful, soaring counterpart, the airplane, "O sinewy silver biplane," but, as in "Cutty Sark," the poet's conception of its purpose and synthetic possibilities is that of an observer, not a pilot. Thus Crane directs the daredevil pilot to

  . . . Remember, Falcon-Ace,
  Thou hast there in thy wrist a Sanskrit charge
  To conjugate infinity's dim marge--
  Anew . . .!

The poet is not in charge here and is unable to join with the pilot in empathetic union as he did with Maquoette in "The Dance," or in the
union between the pilot and Death explored in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen." The poet's "charge" to the pilot that he has, through his direct, physical control of the aircraft, the potential to "conjugate infinity's dim marge," that is, join the land and the sky, the real and the illusionary ("conjugate" here is used in its sense of to marry or to couple), is the charge all of us are given, but essentially it is a reminder to the poet himself that he must find his own bridge, his method of direct control here in the twentieth century. The gyrating biplane, an echo of the twisting, circling gull of "Proem," is too ephemeral a support for the poet's quest, its lithe grace too easily perverted into the "surcease of nations" and, finally, "dashed" into "mashed and shapeless debris." If the event horizon, the "dim marge" separating sky and land, seemingly stretching on forever, is to be spanned, the cleavage bridged, then it is the poet who must do it. The pilot is too reliant upon the pragmatic and, like the old sailor who is too reliant upon pure vision, he fails to achieve the necessary balance between illusion and reality that enables one to reach any sustained, successful synthesis.

"Cape hatteras" is introduced with a quotation from Section 8 of Whitman's "Passage to India," a quotation significant to Crane's meaning only when examined in context with its surrounding lines:

Reckoning ahead 0 soul, when thou, the time achieved,
The seas all crossed, weathered the capes, the voyage done,
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attained,
As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The younger melts in fondness in his arms.38
This is the second half of The Bridge, what one might almost call the downward slope that leads the poet in an increasing rush toward what he sees as the fulfillment of his desires. Looking ahead, gauging the signs around him, as Columbus did on the second half of his voyage, the poet's reference to "Passage to India" anticipates the union sought with such avidity, the welding of the "Elder Brother" and the younger in the union that "frontest God." Lewis, however, contends that The Bridge really has no second half and

does not respond to usual notions of symmetrical design; and what we observe is not a single point which is unmistakably midway in the poetic action, but rather a series of moments at which the action takes a series of new but analogous directions.

I believe Lewis to be in error here simply because the entire tone of the poem changes with the beginning of "Cutty Sark." The poet is no longer in the past but in the present, his "passage" is no longer a voyage toward a vision of mystical union with an earth goddess but a voyage toward union with the hard, technologic, chaotic urban complex of the twentieth century. The dividing line between the two halves is the break between "Indiana" (the title suggesting the Indian spirit the section represents as being passed on to the present) and "Cutty Sark" (whose title echoes "cutting" in a divisive sense, as well as the familiar image of clipper ships and, in its Madison Avenue reincarnation as the name of the brand of Scotch Whiskey, the boozey, befogged, Bowery Lane pitfalls awaiting the unwary or careless modern voyager). The parallels with Columbus' voyage in "Ave Maria," the return trip toward the disillusioning world and away from the purely
visionary "Cathay," the dangers cited, the reliance upon both faith and science, and, ultimately, the revealing vision of the future given to Columbus, are all directly reflected in the last half of The Bridge. In "Cutty Sark" the return voyage is ending, "Cape Hatteras" and "The Tunnel" vividly depict the dangerous "shoals" of the modern world, science and faith are combined in "Cape Hatteras" and "Quaker Hill," and the final glorious vision is revealed in "Atlantis."

Additionally, just as Columbus appealed to his benefactors Juan Perez and Luis de San Angel, so the poet here appeals to his benefactor. Just as Columbus' friends smoothed the way for his "journey" through the intrigues and machinations of the Andalusian court, so does Whitman, as Martin has pointed out, become for Crane the "poet he chose to play Virgil to his Dante." 40 Despite the attacks by numerous critics upon Crane's "desperately sentimental" 41 and "pseudo-primitive" 42 paean to Whitman in "Cape Hatteras," the praise is not overdone nor sentimental. What better guide could Crane have wished for in his arduous journey toward synthesis, than Whitman, who said in "Democratic Vistas,"

What the Roman Lucretius sought most nobly, yet all too blindly, negatively to do for his age and its successors, must be done positively by some great coming literatus, especially poet, who, while remaining fully poet, will absorb whatever science indicates, with spiritualism, and out of them, and out of his own genius, will compose the great poem of death. Then will man indeed confront Nature and confront Time and Space, both with science, and con amore, and take his right place, prepared for life, master of fortune and misfortune.
What is this but the idea of synthesis between the practicality of "science" and the vision of "spiritualism," and what more has Crane been attempting beyond a synthesis of these elements, the confrontation of nature, time and space? It is well to remember Crane's own justification to Allen Tate in response to Tate's criticism of "Cape Hatteras" Witmanesque tone:

It's true that my rhapsodic address to him [Whitman] in The Bridge exceeds any exact evaluation of the man. I realized that in the midst of composition. But since you and I hold such divergent prejudices regarding the value of the materials and events that W. responded to and especially as you, like so many others, never seem to have read his Democratic Vistas and other of his statements sharply decrying the materialism, industrialism, etc., of which you name him the guilty and hysterical spokesman, there isn't much use in my tabulating the qualified, yet persistent, reasons I have for my admiration of him, and my allegiance to the positive and universal tendencies implicit in nearly all his best work. 44

Another, perhaps more unconscious, reason for Crane's choice of Whitman as spiritual guide in the last half of The Bridge, and one that Tate eventually recognized, was "the homosexual thing . . . the notion of 'comrades,' you see, and that sort of business." 45 Martin has adequately described the affinitive tie between the two poets and says,

... for him the plight of the homosexual in a heterosexual society and the plight of the artist in a materialistic society were conjoined. The solution must also be double: it must resolve Crane's anxieties about his artistic vocation and its relationship to the more democratic mission of expressing the potential of his own society, as well as his anxieties about his homosexual identity. . . . only Whitman was able to provide a solution to this dilemma, for only Whitman affirmed his homosexuality as a source not of alienation but of brotherhood.
Crane's Whitman, then, is not only guide and mentor but brother and spiritual lover as well, and as such helps the poet overcome his fears and embark on the last monumental quest of *The Bridge*, the conquest of space. Time, we recall, was the preeminent problem in "Powhatan's Daughter" and was conquered through the powers of an imagination able to circumvent the limits imposed by reality. Space, another limit imposed by reality, must also be conquered in the same way, and just as Crane called upon Rip Van Winkle and Maquokeeta to bring him closer to Pocahontas, so does he now call upon Whitman to help him span "that deep wonderment, our native clay." The immensity of the land rises like a dinosaur, ancient, imponderable, and limitless in the eyes of most men. There are some, however, who "round the capes, the promontories," exploring and defining the limits of space in a Columbian manner, always, of course, returning "home to our own / Hearthys," there "to read you, Walt." The poet's reliance upon Whitman is slow to emerge in these first stanzas, but already one sees how the poet's affinity to his mentor is tied to his love of the "red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas," whose depths he has already savored in the "continental folded aeons."

Time has "pledged us" this "thrall" in our journey into the past; yet time's "periscope" can be perverse, can inform not only our "joys or pain," but can also trap us in a "labyrinth submersed / Where each sees only his dim past reversed." Thus time is not really subjugated at all. The poet has won a victry of sorts by his journey into the past and return to the future, perhaps, but not the war, as "that
star-glistened salver of infinity . . . / Is sluiced by motion—
subjugated never." The prime elements of reality, time and space, are
combined in a crucible that can never be completely dominated by the
poet's powers of vision alone, but through the complex circular power
of the poetic synthesis these elements can be brought into states of
balance where they both inform and are informed by, limit and are set
free by, the opposing but equal elements of poetic vision.

For now, however, time as a solvable set must be considered as a
separate problem to be placed aside while the poet concentrates upon
solving the immediate problem of space:

    Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist
    Of the ambiguous cloud. We know the strident rule
    Of wings imperious . . . Space, instantaneous,
    Flickers a moment, consumes us in its smile.

The "eagle" of space occupies the poet's mind now, and he sees his
state as one in which his "dreams" cancel one another, that is,
achieve a balanced stasis, "in this new realm of fact / From which we
wake into the dream of act." The world of fact, that is, reality, is
now, paradoxically, also seen as a dream realm, a "dream of act," that
implies not only "action" but "actual," in which the primary illusion
is man's ability to perform meaningful actions in the world, "Man hears
himself an engine in a cloud," but whose actuality is his
infinitesimal participatory role in Whitman's great poem of death,
"Seeing himself an atom in a shroud."

Hence the ironic appeal to

    "--Recorders ages hence--" ah, syllables of faith!
    Walt, tell me Walt Whitman, if inifinity
Be still the same as when you walked the beach
Near Paumonauk--.

The tone here recalls some of the bitterness of "Emblems of Conduct," but the passage also stands as an appeal to the poet's spiritual guide for the strength and example with which to assimilate the vastness of the universe into an illusion of personal purpose. Here, too, space becomes allied once more with time, the far reaches of infinity (a property of time) assuming the spatial qualities of distance and perspective, "the panoramas and this breed of towers." The "towers" of the modern world, "the world of stocks" and "canyoned traffic," are different from the quieter, "lone patrol" of Whitman, and the poet's faith in his mentor's ability to guide him through such an alien landscape seems to waver. Here "The nasal whine of power whips a new universe" and the visionary "New thresholds, new anatomies" of "The Wine Menagerie" become the realistic "New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed / Of dynamos, where hearing's leash is strummed."

Perhaps this new universe of infinite technologic horizons can be employed, through its "oil-rinsed circles of blind ecstasy," as a substitute for vision in the conquest of space. Yet Hart Crane constantly decried the "coiled precision" of the technological age throughout his work, most vividly in "The River," where the ever more precise instruments of the modern world restrict man's dreams rather than inform them; the experiment, however, must be tried, cannot simply be rejected out of hand. Thus, ironically, Crane is embarking on an experiment that he knows in advance must collapse, at which point he will return to Whitman for the confidence he needs to
overcome the collapse. The "sinewy silver biplane, nudging the wind's withers," is just too attractive a tool to pass up in his attempt to conquer "The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space." Unfortunately, as Crane is well aware, in the conquest of universal spatial relationships the device of the "Wright windwrestlers" has become symbolic of the doom of modern man, whose "soul, by naptha fledged," is given "New latitudes" that all too quickly "soon give place / To what fierce schedule, rife of doom apace!"

This is the "dragon's covey," driven by "Hell's belt" in a "tournament of space," where balance and synthesis are not sought but arrogant, self-satisfying domination is:

This tournament of space, the threshed and chiselled height,
Is baited by marauding circles, bludgeon flail
Of rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us
Wounds that we wrap with theorems sharp as hail!

As Martin has pointed out, "Crane is often thought of as an 'orgasmic' poet ... [however] ... his characteristic state is an achieved (or desired) peace." Hence his ultimate disenchantment with the illusion of technological progress toward his goal is not surprising but actually anticipated, especially by such phrases as "Hast splintered space," an indication of the fragmenting, rather than synthesizing, effects of our antagonistic technological obsession.

The aircraft here is a tool of war, not peace, engaged in a great aerial dance of death, not life. Though Crane challenges the pilot to "conjugate infinity's dim marge," he also applies "The benediction of the shell's deep, sure reprieve." The biplane, "perforated" by anti-
aircraft fire, twists agonizingly, with "enormous repercussive list-
ings," "down gravitation's / Vortex into crashed / . . . dispersion."
Since, to my knowledge, there has never been an actual aerial battle
over Cape Hatteras, it is apparent that Crane is using a little poetic
license here to symbolize the mordant sacrificial death of the pilot,
analogous but not equal to the death of Maquoitea in "The Dance,"
brought about by gunfire originating on the Earth, the "red, eternal
flesh of Pocahontas." The aircraft is also analogous here to the
circling gull of "Proem," except that this "bird's" flight is pierced
by "searchlights like fencers" and the pilot is intoxicated by the
sheer vastness of the "alcohol of Space" he presumes to master.
Instead of climbing until he fades from sight like the gull, the pilot
and his craft are deliberately sacrificed in "agonized quittance,"
becoming at last only a "beached heap of high bravery!" The pilot is
no Columbus, whose craft carries him safely home, but one whose crime
is that of Icarus, whose arrogance and disregard of the spiritual side
of such flights, whether those of actuality or fancy, caused the gods
to send him spiralling ignominiously to his death, and the vision he
inspires is as apparitional and ephemeral as that of "Proem's" gull.
Modern man's hubris has caused him to be blinded by the allure of
technological conquest over the natural world (Stars scribble on our
eyes the frosty sagas, / The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space"),
and the pilot's death brings no redemption; his union with Pocahontas
is merely that of one who impinges (albeit rather violently) upon her
body without knowledge or understanding.
"The stars" Crane says again, "have grooved our eyes with old persuasions / Of love and hatred, birth, surcease of nations." We have become trapped into old, habitual patterns of thought, and it is at this point that the poet returns to Whitman for some guidance in breaking out of those blinding, limiting grooves: "But who has held the heights more sure than thou, / O Walt!" The poet's guide and mentor, who has joined with Pocahontas (and thus has conquered time), as is indicated by Crane's referring to him as "the competent loam, the probable grass" (one might recall here Whitman's own ending in "Song of Myself," where he says "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love. / If you want me again look for me under your boot soles")48), and who also "holds the heights" of space, now rises "upward from the dead" to bring "a pact, new bound / Of living brotherhood!"

Out of the "Ghoul-mound of man's perversity at balk / And fraternal massacre," Whitman, the Civil War wound dresser, rises to comfort the disillusioned poet:

\[
\ldots \: \text{Thou, pallid there as chalk,}
\text{Hast kept of wounds, O Mourner, all that sum}
\text{That then from Appomatox stretched to Somme!}
\]

Butterfield has said that "if Pocahontas is the body of the continent, Whitman is the spirit."49 I must disagree, however, for it seems, as I have demonstrated above, that Pocahontas is both body and spirit of the continent, the mystical essence of the land personified. Whitman, far from being the successor to Pocahontas' spirit, is instead resurrected as the successor to Maquoitee. He is lover, priest, keeper of
the faith, and singer of praise who, finally, like the chieftain in "The Dance" he emulates, joins with his beloved. Thus it is apropos that Crane speaks of having first read Whitman in the spring when "Cowslip and shad-blow, flaked like tethered foam / Around bared teeth of stallions" bathed the land in abundant beauty, and that Whitman's poetry paralleled that spring effusion, "rife as the loam / Of prairies, yet like breakers cliffward leaping!"

But even more than singer of the Earth and symbolic husband to its spirit, Whitman is also the poet of "Years of the Modern! Propulsions toward what capes," of "Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace." He is the poet of the synthesis, the only one who has managed, in Crane's eyes, at least, to connect both the spirit of the land and the spirit of the technologic intellect, the past to the present, the ideal to the real. Hence he is Crane's "Panis Angelicus," his lover-guide-brother whose eyes are "tranquil with the blaze / Of love's own diametric gaze, of love's amaze." Martin says that many critics have misunderstood Crane's use of the term "Panis Angelicus," having imagined Crane misunderstood the meaning of the Latin and thought he was referring to Whitman as Pan. . . . But the primary meaning is indeed the religious one: Whitman is the heavenly bread, the earthly and secular communion which is to replace the ecclesiastical. As in Emerson, there is no need for transubstantiation, since the bread is already divine.

It is of this divine bread that Crane partakes, and from Whitman gains the former poet's strength, "Beyond all sesames of science . . . / To bind us throbbing with one voice." It was Whitman who first showed
Crane the potential of the fusion, first pointed out to him the necessity of some stable platform or bridge that, mythlike, would connect poetic illusion to prosaic reality:

And it was thou who on the boldest heel 
Stood up and flung the span on even wing 
Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!

Whitman, who has passed the barrier of death, like Maquoikeeta, into "something green" (recalling Maquoikeeta's passage "into denser green" in "The Dance"), embodies the cumulative unitive force of all past peoples and their descendants, "New integers of Roman, Viking, Celt-- / Thou, Vedic Caesar, to the greensward knelt!" Now, as the poet and the human race are launched "Toward endless terminals" by the new technologic freedom that just possibly may conquer space, he plays the role of bridge himself, uniting man, in his outward thrust to the stars "On clarion cylinders out of sight," to man's past, his vision to his reality, and his myths to his actuality: "thy vision is reclaimed! / What heritage thou'st signalled to our hands!"

With Whitman's guidance and reassurance,

... --no, never to let go
My hand in yours,
Walt Whitman-- so--,

the poet's quest for synthesis can march forward to its conclusion. Crane's Whitman, now personifying a bridge of beauty, promise, and hope ("And see! the rainbow arch--how shimmeringly stands / Above the Cape's ghoul-mound, O joyous seer!"), has reversed the earlier ironic
"syllables of faith" into true hope for balance and synthesis.
"Recorders ages hence" shall indeed, without ironic content,

In their own veins uncancelled thy sure tread
And read thee by the aureole 'round thy head
Of pasture-shine, Panis Angelicus!

And Crane, in company with the "Meistersinger," hopes to move forward into the same unitive role, becoming, as M. D. Uroff says, the force to transmute "the motion of his world into a poetic dream of harmony." 51

After the auspicious and somewhat reverential beginning of this grand march forward toward the conquest of space, time, defeated but not subdued, rears its head again as the agent of disillusion and destruction of vision in the "Three Songs" section of The Bridge. If, as Whitman says, "a keelson of the creation is love," 52 then it is only natural for Crane, perpetually falling in love himself, to seek some accommodation between time, space, and love. Perhaps it will be through the unitive power of love that the fusion will come, as in "Voyages" or "The Dance," or perhaps the poet will find only the puerile trap of lust, the "tom-tom scrimmage with a somewhere violin, / Some cheapest echo of them all." Regardless of the potential for disaster that even Crane could see in such an endeavor, still we must remember that for Hart Crane love was essential not only to life but to poetry and vision as well. As I have noted previously, when Crane was in love he was also closest to achieving the synthesis he so desperately sought. To attempt that fusion in The Bridge without attempting once more the lover's path toward it is almost too much to
ask of a poet whose greatest literary triumphs have come in the midst of passionate abnegation. Thus "Three Songs" presents a lover's interlude in which the cycle of love's illusionary and disillusionary existence is played out in an endless loop of conflicting emotion and sex, namelessness and infinite names, resurrection and destruction.

While this endless cycle seems to trap the persona in a rolling cage of alternating lust and revulsion, ecstasy and despair (see Chapter I for a complete exegesis of this section), the last division, "Virginia," provides an escape path into "Quaker Hill" though its religious/mythical overtones. The fairytale Mary, "leaning from the high wheat tower" and letting down her hair, is reminiscent not only of Rapunzel's storied access to and from her tower, but also of the "golden" glory of the Virgin Mary shining down from heaven. Thus she is "Cathedral Mary" as well, an echo of the dominant spiritual presence in "Ave Maria," and her grace urges us forward into what Crane says was once

... the Promised Land, and still it is
To the persuasive suburban land agent
In bootleg roadhouses where the gin fizz
Bubbles in time to Hollywood's new love-nest pageant.

The poet, then, has the choice of continuing to cycle through the dead dreams and lusts of "Three Songs" or escaping that relatively pleasant trap for the bleaker, but ultimately more rewarding, descent into Hell begun in "Quaker Hill" and continued in "The Tunnel."

Crane also provides another connection that serves to draw him out of the problems of nonsynthetic lust and love, the analogous and equally frustrating problems of "friendship's acid wine." In "Quaker
Hill" the scene shifts from Manhattan to a summer resort not far from Patterson, New York, where the "Friends" or Quakers had once established a meeting house.53 But the religious Quakers have departed, their place taken by the quotidian herd, "Cows that see no other thing / Than grass and snow," and who contentedly "Keep that docile edict of the Spring." The great herd of mankind continues in its placid, cowlike observance of the passing seasons (while the poet and his circle of friends look on), not knowing, from their illusionary "perspective," the perilous state of modern culture nor caring what precious orchards of heritage they trample. The cultural fodder of this herd will soon be grazed over, and they are too ignorant to replace that which they so thoughtlessly consume,

> ... do not trouble
> Even to cast upon the seasons fleating 
> Though they should thin and die on last year's stubble.

Though the modern age produces no cultural nourishment for itself, marginally existing instead on the meager fruits of the past, "last year's stubble," the poet's circle seems equally unproductive of new provisions, taking a role that is merely preservationist instead. The metaphoric pressing of the cider mill in the second stanza produces hard cider that will last far longer than mere apples, that is, the condensation and distillation of the past produces an intoxicating product for the present, the "bright annoy / Of friendship's acid wine" that cleanses the mental palate of the clogging cultural "phlegm" produced by modern life. Yet this symbolic cleansing, which should be in preparation for new utterances or, if the metaphor can be
extended a little more, the sustenance that enables us to survive
until a new "crop" is harvested, merely intoxicates the self-righteous
imbibers and leads to drunken "shifting reprisals," unkind jests, and
fruitless searches for elusive phantoms. The faith of these seekers
after "ghosts" is "faith in other men" rather than in themselves, a
necessarily ephemeral, corruptible, and inadequate faith that leads to
artistic penury instead of fusion.

Above them all, the poet, installed in "Old Mizzentop, palatial
white / Hostelry," sees from the high cupola not "the borders of three
states" but "death's stare in slow survey / From four horizons that no
one relates. . . ." This is the Eliotian vision of cultural and
religious death from *The Waste Land*, where "Weekenders avid of their
turf-won scores" abuse the biblical "Promised Land" with irreverent,
useless, and arrogant golf games and cigars. The promise of the
"Promised Land" is no longer milk and honey but profits, and the new
prophet of this century is no Moses but a "perusive suburban land
agent." The temples have become "bootleg roadhouses" and places of
sexual assignation, "Hollywood's new love-nest pageant," while

    Fresh from the radio in the Old Meeting House
    (Now the New Avalon Hotel) volcanoes roar
    A welcome to highsteppers that no mouse
    Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.

The meeting house of the Quakers has become a hotel, reminiscent
of Eliot's portrayal of a church turned into a whorehouse in the first
part of "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land*, and the splendidly
visionary volcanoes of "Emblems of Conduct" and "Cutty Sark," symbols
of artistic vision and power, have become "volcanoes" of roaring radio
static. The poor church mouse, who remembers the quiet piety of the "Friends," is bewidered by the changes wrought by these new "high-steppers." The essence of our cultural heritage has been turned into a search for cheap antiques, the appreciation of fine old furniture and the history it represents has been transmuted into a Yankee lust for bargains, the "Table that Powitzky buys for only nine- / Ty-five at Adam's auction." The moral bankruptcy that prompts the buying and selling of history and culture in the name of preservation is a disease that ironically "eats the seal, / The spinster polish of antiquity." The motives of the Adams' and Powitzkys, the greed and hunger of the twentieth century, "eat the pattern with ubiquity," that is, universally destroy the fabric of the culture, leaving only the "resigned factions of the dead" to preside over the roturieran remnants.

The "ranger" Larry ("Or will you be a ranger to the end?") from "Indiana" and "Cutty Sark" reenters the poem at this point as a metaphor for failed vision and lack of synthesis. His cultural death, "Dead rangers bled their comfort on the snow," drives the poet away from his "scalped Yankee" visage and back to that of the ritually dead but spiritually alive "slain Iroquois" Maquoeka to guide him. (According to popular myths about Indian beliefs, the scalped warrior was doomed to wander in limbo forever, a perpetually dissatisfied ghost that would never be able to enter the happy hunting grounds. Hence the significance of Crane's referring to Larry, the failed visionary wanderer who will never fulfill his quest, as "scalped.")
The "sundered parentage" Crane speaks of here is, as nearly everyone is fond of pointing out, a reference to Crane's divorced parents, but it is also, in a more fundamental sense, the "iron dealt cleavage" between the mystical, illusory, visionary past and the boorish, brutal, realistic present. The poet, a product of both ages, is struggling for some catalyst or clue that will enable him, perhaps "with birthright by blackmail," to bring the sundered "parents" of his heritage back together, unite the illusion with the real in "a new destiny to fill."

Thus the poet must descend from his cupola at the top of "Quaker Hill," from "the hawk's far-stemming view" where only the larger picture of cultural death is visible, and inspect the present from a "worm's eye" view "to construe / Our love of all we touch." "One last angelus," one final Columbian prayer of hope lifts from the poet's throat as he prepares to enter the pain-wrecked world he viewed from "Quaker Hill," the world of pain that Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Isadora Duncan endured before him. The echo of love and friendship explored in "Three Songs" and "Quaker Hill" is condensed into one lonely whippoorwill's cry, a heartbreaking monody that "unhusks the heart of fright." Its foreboding sound "breaks the heart" (possibly another pun on "Hart") of the poet yet saves him as well, because its reminder of past pain endured provides the "armour" (a word calling up echoes of "amour") "that shields love from despair--when love foresees the end." Just as the ritual death of Maquoikeeta was needed before the chieftain could merge with
Pocahontas, so the symbolic death of the poet's ordinary loves and friendships is necessary before his descent from the hawk's eye view of "Quaker Hill" to the worm's eye view of "The Tunnel." As the illusions of love and friendship in the contemporary world drop from his soul, he descends into the darkest portion of his quest for synthesis:

Leaf after autumnal leaf break off, descend-- descend-- descedn--.

The path to synthesis lies, as "The Tunnel's" introductory epigraph from Blake shows, "Right thro' the Gates of Wrath," and the poet enters the hellish "Gates" of modern Manhattan's subway system "As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late, / His news already told." He knows quite well what he will find in this asphalt hell, but hopes to win through its fires the redemptive harmony that will realize a union between heaven and hell, illusion and disillusion. "The Tunnel," then, opens with a description of the crowded, Dantesque circles of New York's inner boroughs,

Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights
Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces--
Mysterious kitchens... You shall search them all.

From Times Square, the visionary beginning of the poet's quest in "Powhatan's Daughter" and representative of the poet's conquest of time, to Columbus Circle, representing Columbus' achievement of the synthesis, the poet's metaphoric journey lies through the infamous Hell's Kitchen ("Mysterious kitchens") where the crowds of theatre
goers and street people are only anonymous faces channeled into streams of purposeless humanity. Through a rather successful pun on place names (Times Square and Columbus Circle), Crane indicates time's essential "squareness" as opposed to the "circular" unity of Columbus' return trip in "Ave Maria." While time folds back upon itself like the sides of a square do (as the poet knows from his trip into the past), it does so in a linear, rather than circular, manner, and the associations connected with time's square--angularity, flatness, sharpness--reinforce its role as opposite, yet still related, to the regular, invitingly smooth orb of fusion. Thus in a world where the poet often wishes only to be curled up in bed with his newspaper ("tabloid crime-sheets" that report and distort the horrors of modern life, providing a vicarious rather than real experience), the complex circularity of the poem's beginning images and allusions serve as an attraction that draws him, with a distinctly Prufrockian reluctance, out into the night:

Then let you reach your hat
and go.
As usual, let you--also
walking down--exclaim
to twelve upward leaving
a subscription praise
for what time slays.

Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride;
A walk is better underneath the L a brisk
Ten blocks or so before? But you find yourself
Preparing penguin flexions of the arms.--
As usual you will meet the scuttle yawn:
The subway yawns the quickest promise home.

Lewis has suggested that the "twelve upward leaving" are indicative of the twelve apostles who transcended time through their
love of Christ, and to whose upward journey the poet can only give
verbal recognition and assent, since he has yet to come to the
transcendent vision himself. Yet Crane's appraisal of modern
religion has always been that it has failed man, or at least been
perverted by him, and the twelve apostles are thus more likely here to
be leaving the tunnel before travelling through it, their faith having
failed them as well in the face of modern reality. The poet, then,
having given up ordinary loves and friendships in "Three Songs" and
"Quaker Hill," is here abandoning traditional religious principles as
well, and is indeed abandoning all hope save the uncertain one of
eventual safe passage and synthesis at the other end of the dark
journey yawning before him. He does, however, acknowledge the
apostles' effort, although in a rather supercilious, automatic manner
("subscription praise"), to achieve some permanence in the face of
"what time slays." The poet understands the apostles' weakness, for
he has attempted this passage to synthesis before, as his use of the
phrase "as usual" in each of these stanzas, and his previous attempts
to reach the fusion, recorded in White Buildings, indicate. Thus he
stands dithering over whether to enter the subway or avoid its dark
necessity by walking home; however, he finds himself drawn almost
unwillingly into "the scuttle yawn" by his habitual and almost
instinctive drive toward the synthesis. This, he knows, is the path
that will provide the "quickest promise home," the shortest route to
the unity he seeks.
Sundquist, in a severely Freudian analysis, says that this section of "The Tunnel" is an "oral metaphor" representing the "vagina dentata" into which "hellish orifice" the poet must descend in a symbolic castration sacrifice, recalling Maquoikeeta's ritual emasculation, and leading to a rebirth at the end of the tunnel/vagina. 55 Such an interpretation is plausible if one sees Maquoikeeta's immolation as an "emasculition," but it seems to me that Crane was quite capable of describing the Manhattan subway system in terms of sexual metaphor if he wished to do so; one only has to look at "Voyages III and IV" for examples of Crane's use of psychosexual imagery to great effect. Additionally, it seems doubtful whether a symbolic eunuch could command the fortitude to even attempt, let alone complete, the fearful task the poet has before him. This is, therefore, no "oral metaphor" depicting the gaping, tooth-filled vagina reportedly feared by the stereotypical homosexual, but a voluntary philosophical shrinking of the poet's expanded sense of self into the confining, limiting "hiving swarms" of the damned. His goal, "the Circle burning bright" (indicating both the obvious "burning" entrance to the subway-hell and the brightness of the symbolic Columbus Circle at the other end), hangs before him, drawing him out of the planar elements of "the square": "And down beside the turnstile press the coin / Into the slot. The gongs already rattle."

In the subway, among the culturally and spiritually dead passengers, the fragmentary snatches of conversation overheard by the poet indicate the fallen state of the world Columbus discovered.
Instead of the "Hushed gleaming fields and pendent seething wheat" of "Ave Maria," we have the world of Floral Park and Flatbush "on the fourth of July." As Messerli indicates, the white settlers have indeed possessed the land and even celebrate the fact in a national holiday, "but the dream of those settlers has been corrupted into a 'pigeon's muddy dream,' and the Indians' and settlers' intimate relationship with the soil has been inverted into an image of tawdry rape of the land." Our spoken words act as indicators ("Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes") of the states of our souls, the answer frozen by repetition into "sucursal of the bone." The mechanistic shining of disappointed love,

"... it's half past six she said--if you don't like my gate why did you swing on it, why didja swing on it anyhow--",

and the callous reply, "after / the show she cried a little afterwards," reinforce the poet's bitter view that the repetitive trap of lust explored in "Three Songs" is but "A burnt match skating in a urinal."

The poet's mind itself, in its tormented distortion, stands as a metaphor for a kind of subway system, "The phonographs of hades in the brain / Are tunnels that re-wind themselves," and in this mental and physical purgatory the persona/poet encounters a fellow traveller, the decapitated figure of Edgar Allan Poe. The hallucinated Poe, seen "In interborough fissures of the mind," indicates, in part, the poet's own fears of his fate in this horrible milieu. The path is dangerous, and
"Death, aloft, giganticly down" hovers over the poet, "Moving through you--toward me, O evermore!" As Poe was destroyed by the aristocratic southern society he longed to join, but was never quite accepted into, so the poet is in danger of the same destruction should he fail in his quest for union, and is haunted by Poe's swollen visage, with "eyes like agate lanterns--on and on / Below the toothpaste and the dandruf ads."

The question the poet asks of Poe about his death in Baltimore concerns another meaning the severed head has for him:

and when they dragged your retching flesh,
Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore--
That last night on the ballot rounds, did you
Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe?

Was Poe, in his weakened, drunken state, so analogous to Crane's own state as he grew older, able to hold onto some shreds of integrity, "deny the ticket" or false ballot he was dragooned by hoodlums to cast, or did he cravenly acknowledge the fraud and sell his soul? The answer, at least as far as Crane is concerned, lies in Poe's decapitated state, reminiscent of Holofernes and John the Baptist in "The Wine Menagerie." Poe is symbolic here of the fragmented prophet/poet, lacking synthesis between body and soul, and indicates the failure of integrity in a man whose unitive powers have been destroyed. This terribly prophetic vision, "in back forks of the chasms of the brain," of his own possible fate, to lose not only his life (which he has been more than willing to sacrifice throughout The Bridge) but his poetic integrity, hence his integrative powers as well, is one of the most
agonizing and fearful images of the poet's journey, and represents his deepest descent into the black hell of "The Tunnel."

From this point on, the journey levels off, even begins an upward slant, as "For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street. / The platform hurries along to a dead stop." The obvious puns on "Gravesend," "Chambers," and "dead stop" indicate the nearness of the end of the subway journey; this is the literal end of the line of life, the bottom of the grave in which the modern urban complex has buried itself. It is also, according to the pun on "Gravesend," the beginning of the end of the poet's exploration of the cultural grave of mankind. The disembarking passengers, forevermore like automatons staring at their feet, "bolting outright somewhere above," seem to be escaping the dark tunnel under the river still to come. Yet there is no salvation in their cowardice, just as there was none for the "twelve upward leaving," for the poet knows that only by staying aboard for the entire trip to the end of the line can he find the unity he desires. The "somewhat emptier than before" train, now personified into a demented demon, crazily lurches and hunches down the tracks before "Taking the final level for the dive / Under the river."

In the black vacuum of the tunnel proper, where "Newspapers wing, revolve and wing," and "Blank windows gargle signals through the roar," the poet examines a fellow traveller, a "Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair" on her way home. She is, in the poet's eyes, the lineal descendant of Columbus ("O Genoese"), but her vision is not
that of new worlds to be explored held by her ancestor; it is, instead, one of loving beauty and motherhood, echoing that of the Virgin Mary in "Ave Maria." As the only other passenger left on the train besides the poet, she serves to remind him once again of the fact that this particular passage is one that is taken only by the few, and that the ability to love, instead of lust, is in some sense a requirement for a successful completion of the quest. Thus he inquires of her, in a purely rhetorical fashion, "do you bring mother eyes and hands / Back home to children and to golden hair?"

The "Daemon" train, whose path plunges into the "demurring and eventful yawn" of the tunnel under the East River, laughing insanely at its passengers' fright, gives the poet the momentary impression that his brightness will always be trapped in this deep blackness, "O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam." Dead, buried, and even consumed ("Condensed, thou takest all"), his song momentarily silenced ("--shrill ganglia / Impassioned with some song we fail to keep"), the poet, however, inexorably rises, like Lazarus (or Maquokeyta) from the grave of the river's tunnel, emerging at the other end

And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,
The sod and billow breaking,—lifting ground,
--A sound of waters bending astride the sky
Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . . !

He has made the journey into the darkest depths, has ridden out the bleakest despair, and emerged into night air full of the sounds of tugboats and a night sky filled with distant stars. The complexly circular path delineated in "Proem" has been completed at last, and the poet finds himself upon emerging from "The Tunnel" at the place
where he began his quest, "Under thy shadows by the piers" of Brooklyn Bridge:

And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
Tossed from the coil of ticking towers. . . .
    Tomorrow,
And to be. . . . Here by the River that is East--
Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory.

Having plunged into the visionary past, into racial, historic, and personal memory, and having returned to the spatial present to endure the hell of disillusionary reality, the poet finds the lone star he pursued so long ago, the star of the dream of synthesis, "has pooled the sea," that is, has encompassed and made coherent the "abyss" beneath which time and space, the hands of memory, "Shadowless . . . unaccounting lie." Shall the hands be withdrawn, the visionary and the real be sundered, thus killing the fusion at its inception? The answer seems to be a resounding and joyous "No," as the godlike "Hand of Fire," the same visionary destiny that, at the end of "Ave Maria," so blessed Columbus, bestows the bendictory acknowledgement of the poet's agonizing quest and gathers the poet's powers for the final synthetic effort of "Atlantis":

    Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest
    O Hand of Fire
    gatherest--

This is not, as Eric Sundquist has suggested, the "exultant suicide of silence," but the exultant silence of the "Word that will not die," the gathering potential of the poet's song (which until now he has been unable to sing: "some song we fail to keep") of unity between illusion and disillusion, the long-sought synthesis or "bridge."
Thus, as in the link between "Voyages III and IV," the last lines of "The Tunnel" lead directly and (syntactically) into the first lines of "Atlantis":

... Thou gatherest
  O Hand of Fire
  gatherest--

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path
Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,--
Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires,
Up the index of night, granite and steel--
Transparent meshes--fleckless the gleaming staves--
Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream
As though a god were issue of the strings. . . .

The implied direct object of these lines is the poet (and his song) being gathered by the hands of the god of the synthesis, the "hands" of space and time cupped in a musical union around him. The sound of the wind in the cables of Brooklyn Bridge is the flickering voice of prophecy ("Sibylline voices flicker") giving the poet a vision of the synthetic state every bit as vivid as the futuristic vision given to Columbus at the end of "Ave Maria," while his gaze rises to the arching bridge beneath which he waits, "the arching path upward," and feels his soul drawn inexorably "up the sides of night, granite and steel" in the "transparent meshes" of "One arc synoptic."

The many arcs and arches of the architectural bridge, then, become one bridge of hymn-like sound, as if all the ships at sea, all the "labyrinthine mouths of history," had culminated in this one balanced, choiring, joyous moment to cry out the certainty of love and union, thereby to "weave whose song we ply!" The "dream" of the oceans is for unity; the loving dream of the poet is the same. The force that
brings vision and reality together is the same force that brings two people together, that ties the tides together, the synoptic arch of "Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm . . . !" Therefore, as Lewis says, this final section is indeed a poem of complete synthesis, "one which at every point is trying . . . to enact a pervasive universal harmony whereby every aspect of reality is linked with everything else." Yet even more than a mere linking of objects in the physical, pragmatic world, the "Atlantis" section of The Bridge itself becomes and embodies the bridge of fusion between the illumined, illusionary poetic vision and the dark, disillusioning present. "Atlantis" is "suspended somewhere in ether like Absalom by his hair," Crane said, that is, suspended like Brooklyn Bridge is suspended, both anchored on earth (reality) and at the same time existing above it (in vision). Thus Crane can petition his synthetic construct, named "Atlantis," to support him in his effort to hold the union between reality and vision, and keep him from the bedlamite's end of "Proem" or the old sailor's end of "Cutty Sark":

Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold—
(C Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)
Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!

The problem with "Atlantis," then, is, Dembo has stated it, "not to explain Crane's disillusion [in the second half of The Bridge] but to determine the meaning of his reaffirmation." Is the poet, as Vogler terms him, left with only the hope "that he can continue to resurrect Atlantis not as a vision held, or a vision lost, but as an embodiment of the desire for a vision he hopes will not die," or is
he essentially the esemplastic iconoclast who, unlike most seers, holds out not universal hope for mankind but personal achievement for his own sake? Certainly it seems that Crane fits the latter mold, for he has separated himself from us and joined a select company of visionary artists who were also realistic pragmatists: Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Isadora Duncan. Unlike the tone of the works of Whitman and the others, however, what hope we may, by whatever means, derive from Hart Crane is purely incidental; the beginnings of salvation for each man lie in his own efforts. This is the hope Eliot holds out at the end of The Waste Land, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" and "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," yet Crane's salvation, unlike Eliot's, lies not in shoring up the ruins of culture and civilization with its fragments but in reuniting them, bridging them, if you will, into one coherent, seamless, stable whole.

Crane's reaffirmation, then, is one of union through achievement, not one of mere desire for the hope that will prevent vision's deterioration. Thus he says of the bridgeship he both observes and merges with,

O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
The agile precincts of the lark's return;
Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing
In single chrysalis the many twain,—
Of stars Thou art the stitch and stallion glow
And like an organ, Thou, with wound of doom—
Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm
As love strikes clear direction for the helm.

The bridge is in a sense, alive, a "Cognizance," that leaps into the promisory, visionary realm, "The agile precincts of the lark's
return," and encircles it in a "chrysalis" of future beauty (from which the "butterfly" of future vision will metamorphose, the image implies), and stitches the stars together into a unified fabric. It spans both space, in the physical sense, and time, "Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm," and with loving clarity, "Swift peal of secular light," guides and supports the poet at the tiller of what is now embodied as an analogue to Columbus' ship: " Strikes clear direction for the helm." There is but "--One Song, one Bridge of Fire" now, as the "sidereal phalanxes" of vision and reality "leap and converge":

    . . . Is it Cathay,
    Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring
    The serpent with the eagle in the leaves . . . ?
    Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.

The poetic act, the poetic construct, the bridge, and the poet himself are joined in one final fusing approximation of the godhead, the achieved synthesis between illusion and disillusion, vision and reality.

Yet what of the final image in The Bridge? Has the poet really achieved "Cathay," or has he, through ignorance or misinterpretation, missed the meaning of the joining of the eagle of space and the serpent of time by the rainbow song of synthesis, just as Columbus misread the interposition of North America between himself and Asia? On this question of the final vision in The Bridge, Unterecker says that Crane provided no final answer, no final vision. What is of significance, however, is the last line of the poem, where
an antiphonal choir comes to mind, for something is stated and then the reverse echoed by an opposing choir--that is, such a choir works out of apposition. There is no simple statement in an antiphonal structure. The synthesis that comes is the synthesis that we achieve in our own minds. . . . When The Bridge ends, it vacillates, it swings from one antiphonal voice (the optimistic voice) to the other antiphonal voice (the despairing voice). . . . The "whispers" that are "antiphonal" answer each other, "swing," giving no final answer except the one we privately supply.

From the blue of the sea to the blue of the sky, "whispers" from the opposing realms of illusion and reality choir in conflicting syncopation, joined in one body while remaining distinct. Will the synthetic state hold beyond this ecstatic moment, or will the forces at work in the world and moving beneath the poet's visionary mind fragment the choir once more?

The answer is left hanging by Crane, for if the synthesis that has been achieved after so much trouble now swings in a delicate azure balance of antiphonal voices, the resulting oscillation may be either an indication of stability through regular, predictable cyclic movement, or could just as readily indicate a basic instability in which each swing from voice to voice would gather strength, the "whispers" actually become shouts, and the synthesis fly apart under the increasingly powerful forces at work on it. If one looks not to Crane's life after The Bridge but to his accomplishment in the poem itself, the question remains moot and any answer superfluous, for the achievement of the synthesis, even in an ambiguous or approximated sense, is far more than many other artists have been able to reach
and, in a sense, is one of the most magnificent accomplishments of
twentieth century poetry.

If one places Crane's masterpiece in context with the rest of his
life, however, then it appears that the synthesis did not hold for
long, at least not in any personal sense, and it is from this
observation that many critics seem to have based part of their
condemnation of Crane's effort as a magnificent failure. This type of
biographical appellation, however, produces a distorted view of the
artist and his work, for The Bridge is only a failure in the extremely
narrow sense of Crane's personal failure to achieve in his own
lifestyle the synthesis he sought in his poetry. It is, in other
words, a failure at living due to forces beyond the poet's control.
The poem as poetry, rather than the poem as biography, is infinite and
unforgettable, tightly structured, profusely and intricately
patterned, and, as I hope I have demonstrated, unified by a single
thematic thrust toward the fusion of the ideal and the real, a quest
for the stable merger of the realms of poetic illusion and realistic
disillusion.

While The Bridge ends in a grand crescendo, Hart Crane must have
realized that after the crescendo comes the dimenuendo, and
eventually, silence; nothing else is possible. Thus Crane's life also
reached its crescendo in the cumulative effort of The Bridge and
descended into the dimenuendo of Key West: An Island Sheaf, and,
eventually, the pervasive silence of the bottom of the sea. That the
search for fusion ultimately may have proved to be the grandest
illusion of them all, and the crashing disillusion the spur that drove him to the "bedlamite's end," is a speculation we will never be able to prove with any certainty, and perhaps might not wish to even if we could. The artist, as Brom Weber has said, must "search into the heart of things . . . and, regardless of the flotsam and jetsam which he brings to the surface, there is no other way in which he can function vitally and with integrity." Hart Crane's vitality and integrity were tied to the search for poetic synthesis. If that unitive thrust failed him in real life, it is indeed tragic, yet also noble, and does not in any way negate his poetic accomplishments nor lessen their impact upon ourselves.

CONCLUSION

With this, the formal exegesis of *White Buidlings* and *The Bridge* is completed; there remain, however, a few final observations about both works, especially in regard to the essential unity they represent. I have stated in the first chapter of this study that the primary motif in Crane's two published volumes is a continuous series of cycles in which the poet is constantly building elaborate mental illusions or poetic visions of the world and just as constantly testing these contracts against reality in an effort to achieve equilibrium, a state in which both illusion and disillusion, vision and reality, are reconciled. This is not mere solipsistic escapism, for while Crane was aware that man's imagination can produce scenarios that transform an otherwise dreary existence into something seemingly
better, he also was aware that such transformations, which place men outside reality, ultimately can become unstable, transitory, and, in some instances, pathetic refusals to live in the world as it is and see things as they truly are.

The sinusoidal pattern of the first cycle in *White Buildings*, then, leads the poet from disillusion and despair to an ecstatic rebirth of hopeful aesthetic vision and an attempt to build a stable synthetic state. The attempt fails, but with each succeeding cycle in the volume Crane comes closer to an ultimate realization of fusion between poetic vision and disillusioning reality, culminating in the high lyricism of "Voyages," in which the synthesis is achieved, albeit only briefly. At the end of the volume, however, Crane seems to have destroyed every illusion he has raised against reality, illusions of artistic efficacy and purpose in the first cycle, illusions of juvenile passion and immature love in the second cycle, illusions of sensuality, eroticism, and intoxication in the third cycle, and illusions of mature physical and mental love in the fourth and fifth cycles. Each illusion has been tested against reality, and each has been destroyed, leaving the poet with only painful memories for all his trouble. The poet's longing for a synthesis that will sustain his poetic vision in the harsh light of the phenomenal world is temporarily frustrated, yet he continues to reaffirm in "Voyages VI" the necessity of striving for the ideal fusion between pure art and real life. For the moment, however, he is forced to be content with mere poetic artifacts, echoes of the "white oar" of synthesis, the
artificial memories of his painful climb toward, and excruciating fall from, the heights of fusion.

Yet all was not wasted effort, for the search for the "unbetrayable reply" in White Buildings provides the foundation, the "imaged Word," that sustains him in his quest for synthesis in The Bridge. Crane's long masterpiece, then, is based squarely upon the conflict between the apparitional mythos of our past and its apparent rejection by the hard, technological, nonmythological present, and it is in the midst of this conflict that he seeks some stable platform or "Bridge" to support him in a synthetic state. The "memories" that are all he seems to have left at the end of White Buildings are recalled and put to good use in The Bridge. The American mythos is, as far as Crane is concerned, a facet of the American collective memory, illusionary phantoms from the past that somehow inform and construct our collective conceptions of the present, just as personal memories inform and construct one's personal perceptions of present reality.

History, myth, and memory, then, become useful tools in the search for synthesis, and Crane demonstrates that he knows how to use these tools through his journey into the mythic past of our continent and his assumption of the personas of Columbus, Pocahontas, Maquokeeta, and Larry, the ruined sailor of "Cutty Sark." It is, in fact, personal memory, such as he was left with at the end of White Buildings, that allows him to proceed into the larger collective memory of historic myth in "Powhatan's Daughter." His recollection of powerful personal memories propels his guide/persona, the sleepy and
reluctant Rip Van Winkle, into the precolumbian past and, eventually, to union with Pocahontas, spirit and essence of the American continent.

Memory, so derided at the end of White Buildings, becomes essential to the task of achieving synthesis between the illusionary past and disillusioning present. It "strike[s] a rhyme out of a box" and "split[s] a random smell of flowers through glass," that is, it penetrates the invisible barrier between the past and present and enables the poet to create the fused harmony he desperately seeks. Time, the poetic nemesis of White Buildings, becomes the generative force of memory and history, thus providing the poet with, paradoxically, both the barrier to his quest and the path by which he fulfills it.

The Bridge, then, is a continuation and culmination of the process begun in White Buildings. In fact, the two volumes could profitably be read as a whole work, separated only by the expedients of composition and publication, much as one might read and think of a two-volume novel as essentially one long work between four covers instead of only two. Such an approach would necessarily produce a dangerously skewed view of Hart Crane's poetry, however, unless one was able to maintain this unified view while also maintaining a conception of the two volumes as separate works able to stand and be read by themselves. Such an oxymoronic stance may be difficult to sustain, yet it is necessary because of the nature of Crane's art and of literary art in general. It is possible, if I may be allowed an
example from a different century and genre, to read Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Series as one tremendously long novel about the life of Natty Bumpo, archetypal American iconoclastic hero. It is also possible to read only one novel of the series, say The Deerslayer, without considering the rest of the story presented in the other novels. To take either course alone would, of course, yield an aesthetically impoverished experience, since both the parts and the whole form the corpus of the literary work. At the risk of being accused of reducing a complicated critical problem to a simplistic solution, I would say that one must achieve a balance between close inspection of the parts and a wider inspection of those parts as they compose the whole if one is to avoid doing the artist or his work grievous injustice.

As with Cooper, so with Crane; one must strive for a balanced view, have both the "worm's eye" and the "hawk's eye," as Crane said in "Quaker Hill," before one can begin to do justice to both the poet and his poetry. The relationships between White Buildings and The Bridge are numerous and cannot, without great critical peril and aesthetic loss, be ignored. For example, surely there is a correspondence between the seafaring lover of the "Voyages" series and the lost ranger of "Indiana" and "Cutty Sark." Both have travelled the seas in search of their respective illusions, and both have failed to find a sustainable synthesis that accommodates vision as well as reality. Both also have entered into a relationship with the essence of the sea itself, the voyager for the purpose of exacting a permanent
synthetic state as the sea's regal grant, and Larry for the purpose of
dedicating his life to the sea in an eternal search for the Atlantean
vision. The sea grants both requests, but only in part. The
voyager's synthesis is transitory, while Larry is allowed only a
tantalizing glimpse of Atlantis, the ideal of poetic vision and power,
before it sinks once more beneath the mocking waves.

Another area of striking correspondence between the two volumes is
the flight imagery in "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and The
Bridge in general, especially the "Cape Hatteras" section. The
sparrows' wings of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" become the
wings of the gull in "Proem" and other sections of The Bridge, while
the combat pilot motif recurs in both poems as a strong image of the
potential ecstasy man's physical realm can provide when joined in
harmony with his visionary powers. In the former poem the
pilot/persona is allied with death in an effort to negate the
degenerative effects of time upon the synthesis, while in the latter
poem the poet's image of the pilot is one of a man whose faith is
based entirely upon the grandeur of man's technological triumphs in
the real world, a fatally unbalanced state that leads only to
disaster. In both instances the reliance upon technology fails to
preserve or allow access to the synthetic state.

In addition to these, and numerous other, correspondences of
imagery, motif, and theme, White Buildings and The Bridge are linked
structurally. While there are five main sections in the former, and
eight in the latter (nine, if one counts the "Proem"), each section of
both poems recounts its own cyclic movement encompassing disillusion and illusion, reality and vision. The two works form a linear progression in the poetic search for synthesis, with the statement of conflict laid out in the first and second cycles of *White Buildings*, plot complications introduced in the third and fourth cycles, and an intermediary, or false climax produced in the fifth cycle. The first and second sections of *The Bridge* introduce further complications and "Cutty Sark" produces a second false climax, while the remaining sections of the poem lead ultimately to the true denouement of "Atlantis" and the final fusion of vision and reality in an antiphonal choir of harmonious synthesis. The two false climaxes and the final denouement all contain Atlantean or oceanic imagery as expressions of the presence of the ideal synthetic state, a device first developed by Crane in "Repose of Rivers." The antiphonal oscillation of "Atlantis" directly reflects the sinusoidal oscillation of the first cycle of *White Buildings*, thus bringing the complex circularity of the two volumes to a close, and the harmonious choir of "The serpent with the eagle in the leaves," "One song, one Bridge of Fire!", fulfills the outlined course first plotted in "Legend" that has led us, "drop by caustic drop" toward "a perfect cry" that

> Shall string some constant harmony,—
> Relentless caper for all those who step
> The legend of their youth into the noon.

Thus the two volumes, linked by imagery, symbolism, theme, purpose, and structure, are of a piece and can, in one sense, be read and studied as one continuous work. Yet, conversely, they are
separate books, designed by the author as such, and each contains its own complete set of cycles, structures, images, motifs, and symbols that, as the vast majority of critical opinion has proved, can stand by themselves. One must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of allowing himself to deny this separateness its full measure of attention, and thus it is that throughout this study I have attempted to maintain a balanced assessment of the two volumes that sees them as both unified and separate at the same time. After all, *The Bridge* occupied more than half of Crane's creative life and any effort that tremendous must of necessity provide a different focus that serves to distance it from its predecessor. *White Buildings* is, from one point of view, a collection of lyrics, separate entities that can be read by themselves as complete poetic statements, even though an examination of the entire volume provides one with another, more encompassing statement. At the same time, an even larger, grander, and in some ways, nobler statement about the indefatigable Cranian aesthetic spirit and its refusal to concede defeat in its quest for the artistic and spiritual denouement of synthesis, "the fury fused," is available to those who can see both the particular and the general, who can, as Crane himself did, crawl with the vision of the worm and soar with the perspective of the hawk. Only then, perhaps, will the critic also hear with the poet the "Whispers antiphonal in azure swing," the perfect cry of "some constant harmony."

Interpretations are, of course, various in respect to their functions, purposes, and appeals, and obviously no single study or
even collection of studies can ever say all there is to say about a poet's work. The infinity of poetic statement and the never-ending variety of interpretation are part of what makes poetry the most fascinating and durable of literary arts. One presents one's interpretation, then, with a certain amount of humility, knowing that time will alter not only one's opinion and appreciation of it, but also one's perception of its purpose with respect to the purpose of the poetry one studies. Perhaps in this way one finally perceives the true "arc synoptic," the divine "Hand of Fire," and comes eventually either to his own approximation of the synthetic state or, like Hart Crane, to the aft railing of the Orizaba's stern.
ENDNOTES


7 Ibid.


12 Martin, p. 115.


16 Martin, p. 136.


19 For the best discussion of the significance of this passage, see Lewis, pp. 257-258.

20 Dembo, p. 31.

22 For a discussion of religious and literary influences upon this section and a discussion of the religious aspects of *The Bridge* as a whole, see Lewis, pp. 267-286.

23 Uroff, pp. 48-49.

24 *Letters*, p. 306.

25 Lewis, p. 293.


31 Butterfield, p. 168.

32 Uroff, p. 99.


35 Butterfield, p. 169.

36 Lewis, p. 308.

37 Martin, p. 151.

38 Whitman, p. 368.

39 Lewis, p. 320.

40 Martin, p. 137.


42 Allen Tate, "A Distinguished Poet," *Hound and Horn*, 3 (July-September, 1930), p. 584.

43 Whitman, *Complete Prose*, p. 255.

44 *Letters*, pp. 353-354.


46 Martin, p. 117.
47 Ibid., p. 146.


49 Butterfield, p. 183.

50 Martin, p. 158.

51 Uroff, p. 117.

52 Whitman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 66.

53 Lewis, p. 348.

54 Ibid., p. 320.


57 Sundquist, p. 396.

58 Lewis, p. 370.

59 *Letters*, p. 236.
60 Dembo, Sanskrit Charge, p. 11.

61 Vogler, Preludes, p. 192.


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