

# HART

AFTER HIS LIGHTS

# CRANE



BRIAN M. REED

# Hart Crane

## MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POETICS

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BRIAN M. REED

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I dedicate this book to my parents, William and Pat Reed.

# A Note on Citation

Throughout *Hart Crane: After His Lights*, I will be supplementing the standard MLA documentation style by using the following abbreviations to designate frequently cited works:

|         |                                                                     |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FOHCP   | Frank O'Hara's <i>Collected Poems</i> .                             |
| HCL     | Hart Crane's <i>Letters 1916–32</i> .                               |
| HCCP    | Hart Crane's <i>Complete Poems</i> .                                |
| HCCPSLP | Hart Crane's <i>Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose</i> . |
| O My    | Hart Crane's <i>O My Land, My Friends: Selected Letters</i> .       |
| SSP     | A. C. Swinburne's <i>Selected Poems</i> .                           |
| SCP     | A. C. Swinburne's <i>Complete Works</i> .                           |
| WW      | Walt Whitman's <i>Leaves of Grass</i> .                             |

Further bibliographic details for these texts can be found in the Works Cited section.



# Hart Crane



# Introduction

## *Hart Crane Again*

Hart Crane spent the night of 26 April 1932 as he did many other nights in his short life. He drank compulsively, and then he sought out sailors who might be interested in quick, no-consequences sex. This time, he chose badly. He received a thorough thrashing. While unfortunate, this outcome was no surprise. He had previously been beaten, robbed, and otherwise humiliated during his nocturnal escapades.<sup>1</sup> Part of the pattern, too, was morning-after remorse. The next day he greeted his fiancée Peggy Baird with a typically melodramatic declaration: “I’m not going to make it, dear. I’ve utterly disgraced myself” (Fisher 500–1).

The setting and the circumstances, alas, were not typical. Crane and Baird were aboard the cruise ship *Orizaba*, sailing north from Veracruz to New York City. Worse, Baird had suffered a freak accident—an exploding cigarette lighter—that left her burned, bandaged, and temporarily sedated. As noon approached on 27 April, she was still too thoroughly muddled to be much help. Drunk, disoriented, shamed, and cut off from the friends, relatives, and lovers that had sustained him through earlier, comparable crises, Crane impulsively decided to kill himself. The *Orizaba* was 275 miles out of Havana and following the Tropic of Cancer:

Heedless of the curious glances that followed his progress along the deck, Crane walked quickly to the stern of the ship, and scarcely pausing to slip his coat from his shoulders, vaulted over the rail into the boiling wake.

The alarm was general and immediate. There was a clangor of bells as the ship’s engines ground into reverse; life preservers were thrown

overboard; a lifeboat was lowered. Some claimed they saw an arm raised from the water and others that a life preserver turned over as though gripped by an unseen hand. But the officer in charge of the bridge maintained they had only seen the white disc lifted on a sudden wave. For more than an hour the steamer circled round and round in the quiet blue morning, crossing and recrossing its broad white wake, while the lifeboat crew, resting on their oars or rowing aimlessly, scanned the inscrutable water. (Horton 302)

Dead at thirty-two, Crane left behind a slim oeuvre. He published only two books of verse—*White Buildings* (1926) and *The Bridge* (1930)—as well as a scattering of uncollected lyrics, book reviews, translations, and exercises in literary criticism. A third book, *Key West: An Island Sheaf*, stalled in manuscript, and a final project, a verse drama titled *Cortez: An Enactment*, never went beyond the initial research phase.<sup>2</sup> (All that survives is a single sheet, a mock title page typed on a sheet of stationery from the Hotel Panuco, Mexico City.<sup>3</sup>)

He had, however, already earned a reputation as a rising star, the most gifted of the U.S. poets to come of age reading T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and W. B. Yeats. His verse had appeared in such prominent avant-garde journals as *Broom*, *Poetry*, the *Little Review*, and *transition* alongside new writing by the likes of André Breton, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. The merits of his poetry had been debated publicly by many of the most eminent literary and cultural critics of his day, among them Van Wyck Brooks, Kenneth Burke, Robert Graves, Matthew Josephson, Laura Riding, Allen Tate, and Edmund Wilson.

His suicide, moreover, coincided with a particularly dark point in U.S. poetic history. The Great Depression had quashed the little magazine culture that had fostered literary innovation as well as the emergence of new talent throughout the 1920s. Young writers who hoped to rival the accomplishments of the Eliot-Pound-Williams cohort faced “economic hardship” and almost certain “public neglect”; not surprisingly, then, among ambitious twenty- and thirtysomething poets, Crane’s death was experienced as a generational “tragedy” that “struck terror in all but the hardest” (Bergreen 108). They quickly began turning out agonized elegies with titles like “Fish Food” and “The Suicide.”<sup>4</sup> The book selected for the Yale Younger Poets Prize in 1932—Paul Engle’s *Worn Earth*—contains a representative sample, the lyric “Hart Crane.” The whole of the world, Engle announces, laments the poet’s passing:

the vast  
 General grief of the world, . . . the first green  
 Thrust of the split seed out of the earth, the burning  
 Fingers against wet eyes (O sad  
 Ache of the bitter heart!) will be  
 desolate mourning for you. (50)

This ubiquitous “desolate mourning” finds its quintessence in the roar of the Caribbean Sea, where the poet met his end:

There will be no deeper cry of grief  
 Than that wailing of the dim foam (O song  
 Of the life-caught ghost!) over the black  
 Breathless surge of the falling wave,  
 In that shuddering pause between  
 The last gulp of the lungs and the heart’s splitting. (50–51)

Such poems disregard the messy particulars surrounding Crane’s death—the reader hears nothing of his father’s recent death, his wedding plans, his Guggenheim-funded stint in Mexico City—and instead present a nascent myth, a martyr-hero in germ. Albert Parry’s *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America* (1933) pushes this process of apotheosis a step further. The book ends by recounting Crane’s drowning. The “spiritual disintegration” of an era of “machines” and “starving millions,” Parry claims, led Crane to “cho[o]se to die.” The “brilliant noonday” when “he jumped from the rail into the sea” possesses

the daring and the pain, the bewilderment and the protest, the soaring and the fall of the artist, surrounded by an alien world, whether of 1833, 1883, or 1933. Now, as then, into the garrets and into the early graves those souls are being pushed, or retreat of their own will, who are born too early or too late for their times, who are too sensitive to lack of beauty and to hurts, who cannot find a redeeming clear-cut purpose in the day’s ugliness and pain. The procession of Bohemianism is still going on, and even the loud pretenders constantly falling into its line, cannot mar its historic significance. (358)

In this retelling, Crane soars only to fall. His leap is an admirably all-purpose “protest” against modernity’s ills, its “ugliness and pain.” Anyone who feels



thrust into an “alien world” can look to Crane as an exemplary precursor, and his suicide has undefined but profound “historical significance” for anyone who wishes to diagnose the fallen condition—whether psychological, social, economic, or theological—of the present age.

The Crane myth has had surprisingly long legs. Since the early 1930s, U.S. writers and artists have turned repeatedly to Crane’s life and works for inspiration. There have been near-obsessive admirers, such as Tennessee Williams, who not only wrote a play, *Steps Must Be Gentle* (1980), about the poet’s life but also requested “in his last will and testament . . . that his body be deposited as nearly as possible at the same spot where Hart Crane had drowned” (Bowles vii). More typical have been elegies—Robert Creeley’s “Hart Crane” (1962), Robert Lowell’s “Words for Hart Crane” (1959), Mark Doty’s “Horses After a Hurricane” (1987)—and works crafted in response to particular poems, such as Martha Graham’s *Appalachian Spring* (1944), a ballet which takes its title, tone, and archetypal America from Crane’s “The Dance,” and Jasper Johns’s *Periscope (Hart Crane)* (1963), a painting-assemblage in dialogue with the lyric “Cape Hatteras.” More unusual homages include Fred Chappell’s “Weird Tales” (1984), a horror story in the manner of H. P. Lovecraft with Crane as protagonist, and Samuel Delany’s “Atlantis: Model 1924” (1995), a novella that imagines a sexually charged encounter between Crane and a young African American man on Brooklyn Bridge. Although Gore Vidal overstates the case—as only Vidal can—when he claims that in 1932 “Hart (‘Man overboard!’) Crane dove into the Caribbean and all our hearts,” no one can credibly claim that the poet has been long neglected, let alone forgotten (133). The last few years have been especially kind. The sixth edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2002) includes the entirety of *The Bridge*, as does the second volume of the Library of America’s *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century* (2000). There have also been a new selected letters (1998), a “centennial” edition of his collected poems (2000), and two new biographies, Paul Mariani’s *The Broken Tower* (2000) and Clive Fisher’s *Hart Crane* (2002). In classrooms, bookstores, and libraries, readers find more opportunities to encounter works by or about Crane than in any era previous.

## Instruction

This publishing-world burst of interest has not, however, coincided with a proliferation of academic books on the author. On the contrary, the last major study to focus specifically on Crane appeared more than a decade ago: Thomas Yingling’s *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds*,

*New Anatomies* (1990).<sup>5</sup> In the interim, Crane has suffered a demotion of sorts, from a writer worthy of a monograph unto himself to one who receives no more than a chapter or two in a longer study. Langdon Hammer's *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (1993) is a transitional example. Although Hammer writes eloquently about the ins and outs of Crane's poetics, he also pairs him with Tate, his longtime friend and rival, to provide two divergent test cases for a sociological inquiry into the poet's vocation. Subsequent studies, such as Christopher Nealon's *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (2001) and John Vincent's *Queer Lyrics: Difficulty and Closure in American Poetry* (2002) have undertaken close analyses of Crane's poetry within comparative, historicizing frameworks that dictate equal or greater time to such other figures as Willa Cather and Marianne Moore.

The titles of Nealon's and Vincent's studies also indicate the particular, peculiar, narrow academic niche that Crane has come to occupy. He is currently "the" gay white male American modernist poet. If Yingling—an early exponent of queer studies—did Crane the inestimable service of inaugurating a forthright, sensitive, historically and theoretically aware discussion of the poet's sexuality, he also seems to have succeeded in repackaging Crane as a writer whose queerness is his most outstanding attribute.<sup>6</sup> This marketing job, in turn, has made the writer powerfully attractive to poetry critics intent on understanding (homo)sexuality, its history, and its cultural expressions. One might even venture to say that the quality, character, and style of Crane's verse interest such critics only peripherally. There are, however, a number of other gay male U.S. modernist poets from which to choose, among them such eminent figures as Witter Bynner, Marsden Hartley, and John Wheelwright. When opting to write chapters exclusively about Crane, critics whose ostensible subject is the history of (homo)sexuality are making implicit claims for the value of his verse, even if they sideline the question of evaluation, aesthetic or otherwise, in order to focus on sociopolitical issues.

The lack of an articulate argument for Crane's superiority over his gay brethren reflects the degree to which his canonicity has seemingly become self-evident. Nealon, for one, hardly hesitates to rely on Crane as a synecdoche for *all* U.S. gay men in the first half of the twentieth century. By contrast, Nealon looks not to one person but an entire *genre*, the physique magazine, to ground his study of post-World War II male homosexuality. Crane's demotion to a "chapter" and his reduction to an exemplar of an identity category should not, despite appearances, be seen as indexing a decline in his reputation in the academy. Indeed, the post-1990 respectability of queer sexuality as a topic for scholarly conversation has removed barriers that, as

Yingling details, previously limited and inhibited interest in his writings.<sup>7</sup> In fact, one could plausibly argue that Crane's profile is higher today than in the days of R. W. B. Lewis's monumental *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* (1967) or during the Yale School years, when Lee Edelman published his outstanding exercise in deconstructive criticism, *Transmemberment of Song: Hart Crane's Anatomies of Rhetoric and Desire* (1987). What has changed since Yingling's *Hart Crane* is less the poet's stature than literary criticism itself, a shift which in turn has profoundly affected the market and audience for academic publication. To put it bluntly, since 1990 the single-author monograph has become a suspect genre.<sup>8</sup>

This development stems from more than whimsy, fashion, or irrational bias. In "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject" (1999), Marjorie Perloff ponders why extended treatment of a single poet's poetics has become so outré since the days of her own *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell* (1973) and *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* (1977). She begins by surveying post-structuralist and subsequent theoretical arguments concerning the obsolescence of the author as a unit of literary-critical analysis. Such classic essays as Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1969), she argues, are historically specific manifestos concerning "how to read, how, that is, to construct an existing text without taking its author's intentions as normative" (408). Disturbed by the mid-twentieth-century French academy's proclivity for reverential exegesis of Author-Gods' oeuvres, the poststructuralists rejected the idea that writing is "the simple and direct expression of interiority" (407). They advocated instead an inquiry into the circulation, regulation, and reproduction of texts and the larger discourses within which they participate.

During the 1970s and '80s, Perloff goes on to explain, as critics struggled to make sense of the dramatic "social transformations" in the decades since World War II, the methodological principle of "the death of the author" was gradually reformulated and generalized as "the death of the subject." Fredric Jameson's article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984) famously proposed that "late global capitalism" has so confused traditional distinctions between "inside / outside, essence / appearance, latent / manifest, authenticity / inauthenticity" that not only authorship but individuality itself has become untenable, no more than a thoroughly mystified holdover from an earlier age (408). Although the "transcendental ego" might continue to be celebrated by bourgeois ideology, in practice and in economic fact it has given way to the ego as a switching station for feelings, styles, behaviors, and words that originate elsewhere. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, as Perloff puts it, this contention became "internalized" in "ad-

vanced' discourses about the place of the aesthetic." Past shibboleths of literary study—the "authentic self," the "poet as lonely genius," the "unique artistic style"—have fallen so far out of favor that today they appear only in scare quotes or when accusing others of theoretical naïveté (409).

One might quarrel with the level of detail in Perloff's overview—she elides, for example, the roles played by feminist, critical race, queer, postcolonial, and performance theories in challenging the autonomous self privileged by "English as it was" (Nelson 28)—but her fundamental argument is sound. The parade of Great Literature by Great Authors that provided the primary spectacle in humanistic education during the 1950s and '60s heyday of New Criticism has indeed given way to a problem- and theme-based, interdisciplinary curriculum that eschews idolatry of the stale, pale, and male. Verse, so central to New Critical pedagogy, has likewise lost its erstwhile place of privilege. In such a climate, poetry critics can be forgiven for overplaying Crane's sexuality. They are retooling a challenging, rewarding poet to win him an academic audience beyond the dwindling ranks of specialists in modern verse.

What makes less sense is the particular published form that this retooling has taken. Within the study of twentieth-century poetry, the default plan for a book—one more or less followed by recent "Crane *inter alia*" volumes—has become a four- to five-chapter monograph in which, after an introductory historical, literary, or theoretical overview, each chapter examines a particular writer in the light of an overarching, unifying theme. Ostensibly, this method of argumentation decenters the authority of the individual poets and places emphasis instead on enframing narratives. More often than not, however, the end result represents a strategic but slightly baffling compromise between "English as it was" and "English as it is." That is, instead of writing a whole book about a single poet, a critic merely turns out four or more thematically linked close readings of individual poets. Serial monovocality, if you will, instead of promiscuous polyvocality. Four shorter-than-heretofore-yet-still-single-author studies.

Why continue to write in such a hobbled format? After decades of critiques of the Author-God, why not confront anew just what it might mean to concentrate on the author as a unit for literary-critical analysis? In "Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology" (2003), Seth Lerer points out that, from the Dark Ages down to the twenty-first century, "authors" have always already been anthologies, in other words, arbitrary assemblages of texts, glosses, quotations, commentaries, syllabi, and related readings. Under such circumstances, to prohibit study of an isolated author is to give credence to the false, ideological principle that authorship is somehow

correlated with an integrity of and confidence in selfhood, when in actuality, as Lerer argues, nothing could be more heterogeneous, less easy to fence off or define, less removed from the mud and mire of history, than the “self” of a writer. Little, he suggests, could be more calculated to unsettle English-as-it-was than sustained, demystified scrutiny of the absurd, arbitrary collocation and intersection of texts, discourses, traditions, acts, and events than constitute a poet’s life and works.

There is an added, further benefit as well. Since what Cary Nelson calls the mid-1980s “return to history” (23), a sizeable cohort of scholars has chosen to specialize in one or more sociopolitical vantage points on culture and literature: feminism, neo-Marxism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, American studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies, to name a few. Each of these labels refers to a body of knowledge and a battery of associated methodological practices. While far from impermeable or immiscible—in fact these disciplinary formations, much to their credit, generally strive for complementarity—they all tend to seek to produce new insights concerning their guiding conceptual rubrics, whether citizenship, class, culture, empire, ethnicity, gender, nation, nationality, race, sex, and / or sexuality. By necessity, authors and their works enter such discussions only partially and partway. Whatever does not fit the rubrics in play must be provisionally set aside. The reason is simple: to reach conclusions that hold true across individual cases, critics must sacrifice precision and comprehensiveness. Attempting an exhaustive accounting for *everything* that appears in a set of literary works would so detain and derail an analysis that it would become unwieldy, caveat-choked, and non-generalizeable.

When focusing squarely, intently, and extensively on a single author, however, critics face a different situation. Fidelity to particulars, richness in detail, and finely calibrated explanations become methodological imperatives. Moreover, critics must sooner or later grapple with the centrifugality of such analysis. No single framework could ever persuasively address every issue that might arise. Author-anthologies are just too diverse. Indeed, one can supply rubric after rubric within which to read a given writer’s corpus without exhausting its significance. Such a potentially interminable process of interpretation admittedly risks appearing amateurish and under-theorized. Skeptics would be right to wonder how its restive movement from interpretive frame to frame could ever contribute in any meaningful, cumulative way to ongoing, urgent academic debates. One response: such analysis is usefully nomadic. It refuses to respect the disciplinary lines that cordon off particular subjects as belonging to particular specialists. Consequently, it is more likely to find unusual connections or take unexpected leaps. Such rhetorical moves in turn permit interventionist, “disrespectful” challenges to emergent or es-

tablished disciplinary pieties. Moreover, while offering too small a sample size and too varied results to arrive at the generalizations that more sociologically minded cultural-critical modes provide, author-focused study can nonetheless play a valuable role by defusing, qualifying, or complicating the conclusions reached by more comprehensive, synthetic methodologies by directing attention back to the messiness, contingency, and hybridity of the individual case.

*Hart Crane: After His Lights* undertakes a return to the author that is neither nostalgic nor regressive. It reexamines Crane in full awareness of the dramatic developments in humanities scholarship since the early 1990s. Modern poetry specialists, for example, have grappled prominently with many non-author-specific issues that were hardly on the horizon back when Yingling was writing: the relationship between poetic and technological innovation, especially advances in communications technology; the theoretical, aesthetic, and practical contributions of a dissident tradition of “radical artifice” extending from the European literary avant-gardes of the 1910s to the U.S. Language Poets of the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s; and, finally, the ambiguous centrality of community formation in twentieth-century experimental poetics.<sup>9</sup> How can one turn back to Crane’s verse in the wake of such discussions without being sensitized to aspects, dimensions, and strata whose significance and consequence eluded earlier readers? Similarly, the much-touted New American Studies abets a thorough rethinking of Crane’s legacy insofar as it has refigured “America” within a transatlantic framework, stressed the importance of interdisciplinary investigation, and established the multiplicity, mutability, and imbrication of class, gender, nationality, race, sex, and sexuality in the production of any cultural artifact.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the increasing, field-wide loss of confidence in formerly popular period distinctions—especially the modernist / postmodernist divide—encourages a genuinely creative repositioning of a writer like Crane in relation to received narratives about U.S. arts and letters.<sup>11</sup> Although this catalog of interpretive frames might make it sound like the primary beneficiary is to be the secondary literature on Crane, the dynamic involved is fully dialogic. *Hart Crane: After His Lights* turns to the poet so as, first, to illuminate anew his achievements but also, second, to test and perhaps transform the principles and methods that enable those very insights.

## Résumé

A self-consciously nomadic author-centered literary history faces an important methodological obstacle. If its course is not carefully plotted, it could easily suffer from its lack of a definite, predetermined goal. A wandering-

through might elude the constraints of disciplinarity, but it also chances losing readers in a pathless maze or stranding them in irrelevance. To address this problem, *Hart Crane: After His Lights* strives to strike a balance between local coherence—can I understand where I am heading at the present time and why?—and a more general, programmatic supplementarity—can I also perceive that this is only one of a theoretically infinite series of iterative investigations of the topic?

Throughout, the argument proceeds at two levels. On one level, it examines Crane's career, from his juvenilia to his posthumous reception in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Various other writers—among them John Ashbery, Djuna Barnes, T. S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Marilyn Hacker, Bob Kaufman, and William Wordsworth—enter the narrative as parallels, contrasts, influences, or ephebes. Throughout, the aim is to elucidate the significance and interplay of artifice, excess, erotics, disjunction, compression, and “immaturity” in Crane's poetics. On another level, the book offers an implicit case for the continuing value of author-centered literary criticism today. Serial application of different interpretive frames suggests the challenge and usefulness of the “author-anthology” as an object for close, sustained scrutiny regardless of the literary- or cultural-critical rubric of choice. In the process, certain old-fashioned literary-critical terms such as *epic*, *lyric*, *style*, *genealogy*, and *influence* are redeployed in qualified, and newly self-critical, senses. Neither of the book's two arguments, as should be clear by now, is intended to be definitive or exhaustive. *Hart Crane: After His Lights* will succeed if it reopens debate concerning a purportedly tapped-out mode of academic inquiry (the single-author monograph) and if it reveals that the backward-seeming, persistent emphasis on individual authors in the U.S. study of poetry could in fact, properly rethought, represent a springboard for critical intervention into debates in other, allied fields.

*Hart Crane: After His Lights* is divided into three parts. The first third, “Reading Crane,” tests the value of several of the most common rubrics in contemporary literary study—nationality, sexuality, and period—for charting Crane's poetics. In each case, the labels typically, even automatically, applied to the poet in recent criticism—*American*, *queer*, *modernist*—prove as likely to obfuscate as to reveal the origins, character, and aspirations of the poet's work. The affiliations that the verse manifests, and the desires that impel it, are too fluid, too turbulent, and too various to abide such easy categorization. Chapters 1 (“How American”), 2 (“How Queer”), and 3 (“How Modern”) do not, however, reject the possibility or usefulness of generalization or of grouping Crane with other writers. Rather, they demonstrate the need to attend to the intricate specifics of the writer's life and writings before reach-

ing such conclusions. Pondering the “Americanness” of his verse, for example, serves as an occasion to elucidate his debts to late nineteenth-century *British* precursors such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Contrasting Crane’s and Djuna Barnes’s divergent responses to the neo-decadence of their early mentor Guido Bruno exposes the limitations of celebrating Crane’s “queerness.” Characterizing Crane as “modernist” obscures his conscious participation in a mannerist lineage that extends from William Collins and Thomas Gray in the mid-eighteenth century via Swinburne and Hopkins to John Ashbery and Charles Bernstein in the late twentieth.

The chapters in part 1 (“Reading Crane”) collectively demonstrate that, in the context of author-centered literary criticism, rubrics such as nationality, sexuality, and period are perhaps more readily understood as interpretive vectors than as sources of neat taxonomies. That is, they tend to give critics’ engagements with texts a particular direction, course, and aim. And those texts are anything but a passive medium traversed by these acts of interpretation. Texts dynamically refract, deflect, or reroute critics’ inquiries. In the case of Crane, “American” becomes synonymous with “British import.” “Queer” recedes in favor of “masculinist.” “Modernist” gives way to “lyric possession.” Moreover, part 1 illustrates that dissonance arises as readily as harmony when multiple approaches are employed serially on a single author. A single aspect of Crane’s verse, such as its compressed, elliptical syntax, can appear as either a troubling symptom of his antifeminism (chapter 2) or as an integral feature of his challenge to the “naturalness” of bourgeois society (chapter 3). Interpretive vectors are as likely to interfere with as to reinforce each other.

The second part of *Hart Crane: After His Lights*, “Crane Writing,” deepens the question of how to historicize Crane’s poetry by inquiring into the process of its composition. What were the circumstances, models, and materials proximately implicated in the actual, practical production of such well-known works as the lyrical suite “Voyages” and the poem cycle *The Bridge*? In chapters 4 (“How to Write a Lyric”) and 5 (“How to Write an Epic”), the book retraces the coming-into-being of these texts so as to expose them as artifactual sedimentations of concrete, specific writerly choices that negotiate and hence register an array of historical pressures, opportunities, and drives. Poems are anything but neutral, free-floating entities that a critic then positions in regard to other discourses or practices in order to buttress abstract statements about culture or literature. They always already incorporate history, oftentimes, moreover, compositional histories that undermine the genres and literary coordinates on which critics habitually rely.



The chapter titles in part 2 are deliberately evasive: Can one call a poem such as “Lachrymae Christi” a “lyric” when it contains no coherent, stable speaker? What does one say about a “lyricism” that at base has more in common with the maddening musical repetitions of Philip Glass or Terry Riley than the contemplative piping of Milton’s uncouth swain? Is *The Bridge* an “epic” if its model is Wagnerian opera? Can it, too, qualify as an epic—an elevated, impersonal recitation of a people’s trials and tribulations—if its verse actively promotes, in its very warp and woof, a movement out of national history into the obliterating atemporality of the ineffable? Above all, “Crane Writing” elucidates the estranging formal interdependency of Crane’s transcendentalist poetics and the basely material reality of his era’s rapid technological advances, more specifically, the invention and popularization of the Victrola. His is inextricably a poetry of the years between Edison’s invention of the phonograph and the post-World War II advent of the LP. Although one might expect the mode of inquiry in part 2—a study of one poet’s eccentric writing regimen—to yield little more than a partial clarification of the intent behind and the meaning of certain works, it turns out instead to represent an exercise in what Rachel Blau DuPlessis has called “social philology,” a “postformalist” close reading that takes into account “social substance, biographical traces, constructions of subjectivity, historical debates, and ideological strata” *en route* to statements regarding “subjectivity, cultural ideology, and social circumstance” (“Propounding” 389).

The final part of *Hart Crane: After His Lights*, like the first titled “Reading Crane,” reprises one of the most traditional of literary-historical genres, the influence study, in order to demonstrate its ongoing utility and flexibility despite its reputed obsolescence. Part 3 examines the reception of Crane the “author-anthology” in a particular milieu, the loosely affiliated, mid-twentieth-century, U.S. avant-garde literary circles retrospectively known as the New American Poetry. After an overview, the analysis concentrates on three figures—Paul Blackburn (chapter 6), Frank O’Hara (chapter 7), and Bob Kaufman (chapter 8)—who represent three of the principal currents within the New American Poetry, respectively the Black Mountain School, the New York School, and the Beats. Throughout, the narrative emphasizes the complexity of individual responses to Crane. Blackburn, O’Hara, and Kaufman differently navigate questions of aesthetics, gender, nationality, race, and sexuality as they selectively reinvent Crane’s poetics in accordance with their own particular understandings of poetry’s place and function. In each case, however, “Crane” not only signifies a body of texts but also serves as shorthand for the pleasures and dangers of the intense homosociality fundamental to most New American Poetry.

Part 3 assents to the poststructuralist principle that generational, genealogical, and oedipal metaphors are woefully inadequate for understanding “influence.” Intertextual encounters are simply too jumbled, wayward, and variable to license the creation of neat family trees. Recognizing the bankruptcy of this one class of metaphors, however, does not require that “influence” be abandoned altogether as terrain for literary-critical inquiry. Chapters 6–8 illustrate that microhistorical reconstruction of an author’s reception within particular literary communities serves several ends. A critic can observe the thorough reconstitution of an “author-anthology” in the light of local conditions, thereby reconfirming the mutability of authorship over time. Moreover, the differential responses to an author-anthology within a community provide an opportunity to investigate that community’s disparate ambitions, internal divisions, and permitted latitude for dissent. (The complete disinterest toward Crane exhibited by women writers involved with the *New American Poetry* speaks volumes.) Finally, a critic can begin to parse the intricate interplay between biography and oeuvre in an author’s reception. Crane’s life, especially his openness about his sexual preferences and promiscuity, cannot be disentangled from the circulation, reception, and status that his poetry enjoyed among the New Americans, however adamantly formalists and purists might wish to limit such “contamination.”

*Hart Crane: After His Lights* ends with a chapter—“Bob Kaufman’s Crane”—in which race comes to the fore. While admittedly not a topic that casts Crane in the best possible light, it is nonetheless a subject that future study of the poet must address forthrightly, and address complexly. The tale of Kaufman’s and Crane’s (mis)connections brings the book’s narrative into the 1970s, when Kaufman was actively participating in the creation of a multi-racial, multicultural poetry scene in San Francisco’s Mission District. His long poem “The Ancient Rain” (1976) showily repudiates Crane in favor of a different hero, Federico García Lorca, who funds a conception of international literary and political agency and community distinct from that to be found in the senescent, white-dominated North Beach Beat bohemia that Kaufman associates with Crane. While not the end of the story—Crane’s latest, most ardent and articulate critics include such African American queer writers as Samuel Delany and Reginald Shepherd—Kaufman’s public setting-aside of the poet represents *an* end, a full stop to one tributary of the homosocial Crane-idolatry characteristic of many New American Poets.

Crane’s story will surely resume before long. Undoubtedly, it will travel in exciting, unforeseen directions. Throughout, *Hart Crane: After His Lights* prepares for such new departures by suggesting that the phase in Crane criticism—and U.S. literary criticism more broadly—that Yingling and his peers in the

late 1980s inaugurated, that is, the years when Crane's (and other gay male authors') queerness was paramount, is giving way to a critical climate in which a much more hybrid, supplementary conception of identity has begun to prevail, in queer studies and elsewhere. Sexuality is, yes, an indispensable, productive, analytically powerful, yet ultimately only a *single* vector that a reader can use to approach a collection of texts. And like any vector it, too, can be rerouted, muted, or intensified by encountering others, whether they be identity based (citizenship, gender, race) or disciplinary (historical, musicological, philosophical). The single-author monograph, in its centrifugality, is an ideal means for acknowledging, complicating, and surpassing the enabling but also constrictive and reductive consequences of an identity label such as "white gay male." Identity, like good poetry, always exceeds the bounds of any act of depiction or interpretation. The peculiar inexhaustibility of Crane's verse—a recurrent theme of this book—could serve as an analogy for how a critic might picture its author, or any author. The Author-God is dead. But that absence ushers in the hard work of description. What is an author? This author? Authorship? Authority? Whose authority? Without answers, the grave of the Author-God will take on the role of an Empty Tomb frequented by the curious, the nostalgic, the melancholic, and the reactionary. The likes of former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett and First Lady Laura Bush will continue to lay funeral wreaths there, and assorted neocons will persevere in spreading the cult. Far better to substitute for this shrine a secular pilgrimage, or more precisely, a *peregrinatio* without prescribed beginning, end, or middle, a vigilant wandering in which the "fabulous shadow" of the poet ever recedes from view (*HCCP* 33). Crane's body was never found; the exact location of his leap is unclear; the arc of his life cannot be permitted to end in a tomb inscribed once and for all "Suicided by Society," "Oedipal Victim," "Martyr to Homophobia," or anything else. Readers—critics included—must keep looking, ever-furthering "the advance in discourse which. . . . Crane, after his lights, has led the rest of us on to" (Olson, *Collected Prose* 253).

# Part One

## Reading Crane



# I

## How American

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many significant U.S. poets—among them T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, H.D., Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams—reacted strongly against the perceived excesses of late nineteenth-century poetry. These authors rejected the elegant, highly wrought poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites and the decadents, as well as the treacly sentimentality of mainstream verse, in order to embrace a more “natural” style in two senses of the word: first, they experimented with contemporary vernacular diction and speech patterns, and, second, they eschewed theatrical or inappropriate displays of emotion.

Crane, however, chose a contrary path. He typically preferred ornate rhetoric to clean imagery, aureation to blunt Anglo-Saxon, and exaggeration to understatement. He disliked vers libre. He increased, not reduced, the gap between his conventionally rhymed-and-metered verse and the language of everyday speech. Simply put, he became a mannerist. He so supersaturated his poetry with the perceived vices of the late Victorian lyric that, like a viewer standing before such notorious late Renaissance works as Parmigianino’s *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1534), his first readers were often unsure whether to snort, giggle, or be swept up in the passion and audacity of the masterful execution.

Crane’s outrageous style has many stereotypically modernist aspects to it: obliquity, indirection, estrangement, and a concentration on the quiddity of its medium, language. Nevertheless, it also represents a bold departure in tone, affect, and temperament from the standard set by such chiseled, reticent, worldly works as Pound’s *Lustra* (1916), H.D.’s *Sea Garden* (1916), Williams’s *Spring and All* (1923), Moore’s *Observations* (1924), and Eliot’s *Pru-*

*frock and Other Observations* (1917). Judged against this backdrop, the lush locutions employed throughout *White Buildings* (1926) and *The Bridge* (1930) left Crane highly vulnerable to accusations of being old-fashioned—an especially worrisome charge, of course, in “the grand dissolution, birth control, re-swaddling and new-synthesizing, grandma-confusion movement” that was Crane’s immediate milieu, the early-century Greenwich Village literary avant-garde (*O My* 194). His frequent, fervent asseverations of being “only interested in adding what seems to me something really *new* to what *has been written*” (*O My* 70; emphasis in original) coexisted uneasily with an awareness that what he perceived as innovations would in all likelihood appear antiquated to his colleagues and contemporaries: “God DAMN this constant nostalgia for something always ‘new.’ This disdain for anything with a trace of the past in it!!” (*O My* 117). When feeling insecure about the novelty of his verse, he tended to denounce the “mad struggle for advance in the arts” and defend his anomalous poetry as occupying its own special niche: “Every kind of conceivable work is being turned out. Period styles of every description. Isn’t it, after all, legitimate for me to write something the way I like to (for my own pleasure) without considering what school it harmonizes with?” (*O My* 87–88).

In subsequent decades, many of Crane’s admirers have felt compelled to defend his anomalous style. Sans such a defense, Crane, the odd poet out, can appear stubbornly perverse, a poetaster who offers “a drunken candy world . . . poisonous at the center” (Sundquist 377). Langdon Hammer’s *Hart Crane and Allen Tate* (1993) labels this aspect of Crane’s poetics a “bravura” effort to revive the “high style” of ages past (198). Gérard Titus-Carmel’s *L’élancement: Éloge de Hart Crane* (1998) portrays it as a forerunner of the poststructuralist embrace of artificiality. Shorthand explanations such as these, though, have failed to do justice both to the literary-historical specificity and to the oddity of Crane’s ecstatic, excessive verse. A lyric such as “Atlantis” is too hyperbolic, too exaggerated, and too uneven to have been written by Christopher Marlowe or by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Nor does “Atlantis” exhibit the depthless play of surfaces celebrated by the *Tel Quel* circle. The lyric is just too embarrassingly sincere in its struggle to express the ineffable.

The question of Crane’s aberrant writing style has yet to receive a fully satisfactory explanation because he has repeatedly been positioned within a literary-historical genealogy that tends to demote his peculiar formal excesses to a sideshow, a merely personal, even personable idiosyncrasy. Literary critics have consistently chosen to read Crane as an heir of the American

Renaissance, a decision that groups Crane with authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman who, although they might share many of his characteristic themes, nonetheless rarely if ever write as he does. To solve the puzzle of Crane's mannered style, one must revise her understanding of Crane's relationship to the nineteenth century and begin to appreciate the degree to which his poetry represents a U.S. offshoot of British Victorian verse, more specifically an update of the poetics of A. C. Swinburne and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Reconstructing Crane's debts to British formal models enables one to appreciate his remarkable decision, while still an adolescent, to ignore "the instruction and drill in basic principles" of the "grammar school of modern poetry," the Imagist movement (Perkins 329). From the start, he eschewed the Poundian virtues of clarity, concision, and precision. His imagery is designedly more baroque, surreal, and clotted than it is clean, direct, and luminous. Of early twentieth-century U.S. poets, few dissented as thoroughly, forthrightly as Crane from the brand of modernism anatomized in Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971). By persisting in his obsolete-seeming mannerist poetics, Crane knew that he risked going down in literary history as an eccentric or, as he put it, "some sort of a beautiful crank" (*O My* 46). He did persist, though, a contrarian to the bitter end, and this chapter outlines his sensibility, so that subsequent chapters may then explore its motivations, ramifications, and long-term significance.

## Not a Whit

In 1947, Yvor Winters's essay "The Significance of *The Bridge*" defended at great length a thesis—that Crane's verse brings to fruition ideas first advanced by Emerson and Whitman—that has dominated Crane scholarship down to the present day.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has enjoyed long-term academic success in large part because it was adopted and reformulated by a subsequent marquee name in the U.S. academy, Harold Bloom. From the 1960s onward Bloom has been using the Whitman-Crane intertextual tie as the basis for insightful commentary on both authors.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, Bloom habitually cites the Whitman-Crane relationship as a prime example of the agon that he believes to be the subterranean force responsible for progress in literary history. Bloom depicts Crane as engaging in "transumptive allusions" to Whitman in poem after poem (*Agon* 255). In other words, Crane repeatedly wills himself to misunderstand or forget selected lines by his chosen precursor—thereby "repressing" them—an action that paradoxically leads him to write



poetry that, however unintentionally, succeeds in elaborating and building upon Whitman's project more powerfully than any conscious imitator could match (264).

Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence has, of course, had immense currency in U.S. literary study. In the process, his argument about the Whitman-Crane connection has likewise spread far and wide. Crane critics of the last few decades have come to rely upon it as a standard *point de repère*. The quintessential example is Lee Edelman's *The Transmemberment of Song* (1987), which employs throughout Bloom's agonistic model of the Crane-Whitman relationship in order to elucidate Crane's convoluted style.<sup>3</sup>

Bloom's deep, abiding interest in the U.S. romantic tradition has caused him to overemphasize the tie between Whitman and Crane. Other scholars, following his lead, have likewise tended to overlook aspects of Crane's poetics that cannot be easily explained with reference to the American Renaissance. True, Crane was an enthusiastic defender of Whitman, in open defiance of public pronouncements by his friends.<sup>4</sup> For instance, when Allen Tate rebuked him for his "sentimental" attachment to the poet in a review of *The Bridge*, Crane considered the charge tantamount to a personal attack. He angrily wrote Tate:

since you and I hold such divergent prejudices regarding the value of the materials and events that W[hitman] 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 [*sic*] 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 universal tendencies implicit in nearly all his best work. (*O My* 433)<sup>5</sup>

So enthusiastic, in fact, was Crane's "allegiance" to Whitman that at times his passionate avowals of preference verge on praise of a beloved. Indeed, the conclusion to "Cape Hatteras," with Crane and Whitman walking off hand in hand, reads like the schmaltzy finale of a B-movie romance, down to the breathlessness of the final lines: "no, never to let go / My hand / in yours, / Walt Whitman— / so—" (*HCCP* 84). The very eagerness here with which Crane associates himself with Whitman undercuts the Bloomian thesis. If Crane aspires to "repress" Whitman in a poem such as "Cape Hatteras," why would he include a moment of such obvious wish fulfillment? Edelman offers one possible response. He asserts that in "Cape Hatteras" Crane so "des-

perately” wishes to project authorial self-confidence that he permits himself overt expressions of filiation while at the same time attempting to demonstrate his independence by departing from his model on the level of form (225–26).

There may indeed be a tinge of “desperation” audible in “Cape Hatteras,” but there is also a less roundabout explanation. In the winter of 1927–28, Hart Crane was hard at work on “Cape Hatteras,” which he considered the future capstone of his epic *The Bridge*, but the writing was going poorly. He was having an immense amount of difficulty turning his preliminary notes and drafts into a completed lyric (*O My* 364). In December of that same winter, Yvor Winters visited Crane in Southern California, where the latter poet was living at the time. It was their first face-to-face meeting. Crane treated Winters to a “wildly vivid recitation” of his newly published poem “The Hurricane,” which begins (Parkinson, *Hart* 108):

Lo, Lord, Thou ridest!  
Lord, Lord, Thy swiftening heart

Naught stayeth, naught now bideth  
But's smithereened apart!

Ay! Scripture flee'th stone!  
Milk-bright, Thy chisel wind

Rescindeth flesh from bone  
To quivering whittlings thinned—

Swept—whistling straw! (*HCCP* 124)

Winters immediately, and quite rightly, thought of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Crane employs a battery of that poet's favorite devices: a vatic, mannered apostrophe to God; word coinage through hyphenation; the blurring of distinctions among parts of speech (“chisel wind”); a concatenation of interjections without regard to syntax; and the insistent repetition of the same sounds from line to line (short “i,” “-ing”). Crane may be more telegraphic and apocalyptic than, say, Hopkins in “The Wreck of the *Deutschland*,” but only by a hair:

‘Some find me a sword; some  
The flange and the rail; flame,

Fang, or flood' goes Death on drum,  
 And storms bugle his fame.  
 But wé dream we are rooted in earth—Dust!  
 Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our flower the same,  
 Wave with the meadow, forget that there must  
 The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come. (*Major Poems* 54)

The two poets even share a proclivity for the same metaphors. Here they shift directly from a warlike storm (“smithereened,” “sword . . . flange and rail”) to the vegetal vulnerability of flesh (“whittlings . . . straw,” “flower . . . meadow”) about to suffer the storm’s mechanical onslaught (“chisel,” “scythe”). Winters was understandably shocked to discover that Crane had never heard of the Victorian Jesuit. He promptly lent him his copy of Hopkins. On 27 January 1928, Crane wrote Winters to thank him ecstatically, effusively.

I hope you are in no great rush for the return of that Hopkins book. It is a revelation to me—of unrealized possibilities. I did not know that words could come so near a transfiguration to pure musical notation—at the same [time] retaining every minute literal signification! What a man—and what daring! It will be long before I shall be quiet about him. I shall make copies of some of the poems, since you say that the book is out of print. As yet I haven’t come to the theoretical preface—nor [Robert] Bridges’ notes—excepting a superficial glance. Actually—I can’t wean my eyes from one poem to go on to the next—hardly—I’m so hypnotized. . . . (*O My* 359; brackets and ellipses in the original)

Thus “hypnotized” by Hopkins, Crane began sending handwritten copies of his favorite lyrics to his friends (369–70). Hopkins, he repeatedly declared, was a “marvel” (364) and a “revelation” (369). He even tried to coax the publisher Liveright into putting out a new U.S. edition of Hopkins’s verse (406).

Despite this evidence of profound affinity between Crane and Hopkins, critics have never had much to say about it.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, the year 1928 is rather late in Crane’s development. He had already written the bulk of his masterpiece, *The Bridge*, before Winters introduced him to Hopkins. If one were to search for traces of Hopkins’s influence, the natural place to look would be the assorted lyrics that Crane intended for *Key West: An Island Sheaf*, his projected third book, but, with the exception of “The Broken Tower,” these uneven poems have rarely received the same, probing attention as the earlier work.<sup>7</sup>

But the point of this story is not so much that Hopkins influenced Crane. Rather, the timing of his discovery of Hopkins tells readers what they need

to know. At the very moment when Crane felt wholly frustrated in his poetic attempts to express his literary debts to Walt Whitman, Yvor Winters, the critic who, along with Allen Tate, first forged the indissoluble link in the secondary literature between Whitman and Crane, on this occasion nonetheless correctly intuited that Crane's greatest affinity was with a British Victorian writer. And Crane experienced that insight as a profound liberation.

With this anecdote in mind, one is now prepared to turn to "Cape Hatteras" itself, in the form that appears in the completed *Bridge*. Edelman, as discussed earlier, claims that the poem is an elaborately contrived piece of rhetoric that honors Whitman on the level of content while declaring independence from him on the level of form. Edelman is certainly correct that Crane writes remarkably little like the poet he celebrates, despite the fact that he goes out of his way to freight his verses with references to and borrowings from that precursor.<sup>8</sup> This can be made abundantly clear by comparing the ninth section of Whitman's "Passage to India" and the portion of "Cape Hatteras" that alludes to it:

Passage to more than India!  
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?  
O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those?  
Disportest thou on waters such as those?  
Soundest below the Sanscrit [*sic*] and the Vedas?  
Then have thy bent unleash'd.

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!  
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems!  
You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never reach'd you.  
(*WW* 327)



[P]ilot, hear!  
Thine eyes bicarbonated white by speed, O Skygak, see  
How from thy path above the levin's lance  
Thou sowest doom thou hast nor time nor chance  
To reckon—as thy stilly eyes partake  
What alcohol of space. . ! Remember, Falcon-Ace,  
Thou hast there in thy wrist a Sanskrit charge  
To conjugate infinity's dim marge—  
Anew. . ! (*HCCP* 80–81; partial ellipses in original)

Crane obviously wishes to present his aviator as an updated version of Whitman's Columbus. Both are symbols of the soul's dangerous quest after inscrutable truths. Despite the shared themes, however, these two passages are written in starkly contrasting styles. Crane employs regular iambic pentameter with frequent trochaic substitution. He uses archaic diction ("levin"), unnecessary aureation ("conjugate"), and old-fashioned constructions ("nor . . . nor"). This faux-Elizabethan texture clashes with such stray bits of the twentieth century as the scientific lingo ("bicarbonated") and the bad Prohibition pun ("*stilly* eyes partake / What alcohol"), not to mention the jarring mismatch between the Homeric tone and the contemporary subject matter, a World War I fighter pilot. Whitman's "Passage to India" possesses none of these traits. Whitman here writes, as always, in the anaphoric, end-stopped free verse that he learned from the King James Bible, which, in turn, derives its style from the Vulgate. Like Jerome a millennium and a half before, Whitman composes in the manner of a classical rhetor, that is, *per cola et commata*, phrase by phrase, building up sonorous periods through such devices as redundancy ("voyagest . . . on voyages") and parallelism ("Disportest . . . Soundest," "like those . . . as those"). Where Crane looks ultimately to Marlowe and Spenser, Whitman looks to St. Paul and Cicero.

If one wishes to read Crane with an eye toward the repressed, Whitman's poetry is the wrong place to turn. He might have admired Whitman and attempted to copy him on some counts, but, given their fundamentally different ways of writing poetry, one may rightly suspect that his fervent, frequent expressions of devotion to Whitman should be seen not as "artful dissimulation" of a deeper intent to usurp the throne of a literary father (Edelman 226) but, in fact, as quite the opposite: an attempt to declare affinity with a poet, or a kind of poetry, in order to stave off identification with someone, or something, else.

The following passage from "Cape Hatteras" exemplifies the lyric's ambivalence toward its stated subject:

Cowslip and shad-blow, flaked like tethered foam  
 Around bared teeth of stallions, bloomed that spring  
 When first I read thy lines, rife as the loam  
 Of prairies, yet like breakers cliffward leaping! (*HCCP* 82)

Crane retells his first encounter with Whitman's poetry as if it were lust at first sight. The Freudian symbols come thick and furious—flowers, foam, stallions, soil, flight, the ocean. Crane even describes the moment as if it took place in an Elizabethan bower ("Cowslip and shad-blow").<sup>9</sup> This heavy-

handedness cannot conceal the fact that, yet again, he writes nothing like his paramour. If a reader were to search for nineteenth-century analogues for this kind of verse, the pastoral setting, the energetic emphatic tone, the archaic diction, the metaphors, and the “leaping” rhythm would probably send him or her not to Whitman, but to Victorian poets writing in traditional forms. This passage, in fact, reads as if it were a conflation of the two following moments, drawn, respectively, from the work of Arthur Hugh Clough and Algernon Charles Swinburne:

[H]e, with the bit in his teeth, scarce  
Breathed a brief moment, and hurried exultantly on with his rider,  
Far over hillock, and runnel, and bramble, away in the champaign,  
Snorting defiance and force, the white foam flecking his flanks, the  
Rein hanging loose to his neck, and head projecting before him. (Clough,  
*Poems* 124)



Ah yet would God this flesh of mine might be  
Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,  
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,  
Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea. (*SCP* 1:148)

Crane's quatrain opens with a dactyl-trochee combination (“cow-slip and shad-blow”) reminiscent of Clough's “galloping” verse (“breathed a brief moment,” “far over hillock”) before then echoing the “white foam flecking” the “flanks” of Clough's “defian[t]” stallion. The word “foam” serves as a transition to Crane's next metaphor, in which he, like Swinburne, compares the “rife loam” of a static landscape (prairie, meadow) to the violent flux of the sea, a superimposition of locations that permits “tides of grass” to “break into foam of flowers.” Moreover, just as Swinburne varies his iambic meter with near-spondaic paired monosyllables (“feet shine,” “grass break,” “long leaves”), so too does Crane exhibit his mastery of pacing, using similarly heavy feet (“bared teeth,” “thy lines”) to slow the delivery and call a reader's attention to important details. In short, although writing about Whitman, Crane demonstrates that he has fully assimilated precisely the Victorian facility in versification that Whitman had firmly renounced.<sup>10</sup>

These two touchstones of the nineteenth-century lyric—drawn from, respectively, Clough's “Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich” and Swinburne's “Laus Veneris”—are quoted with a particular end in view. Insofar as Crane's poetry

approximates Whitman's, it does so in the manner typical of British Victorians, like Clough and Swinburne, who admired Whitman's content and tone but who could not accept the "exceptionally raw material" that he passed off as finished verse (SCP 15:317). As Clough puts it in a letter to his U.S. friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Leaves of Grass* is like a tree that has been "tapped, and not left to bear flower and fruit in perfect form as it should" (*Correspondence* 460). Crane's late-in-life hero Hopkins displayed a similar hesitancy. Whitman's "savage style," Hopkins writes, amounts to no more than "rhythmic prose," a technical inadequacy that detracts from one's initial, spontaneous empathy for the "scoundrel" (*Selected Letters* 170-73).

Crane did celebrate Whitman's actual poetry with an unalloyed ardor that these Victorians never quite allowed themselves.<sup>11</sup> But, as Allen Grossman notes, he also never strayed far from the "basically nineteenth-century forms and diction systems" of poets like John Keats and Coventry Patmore (96). In short, no matter how much he may have idolized Whitman, Crane simply could not bring himself to imitate the unrhymed gush of the man's verse nor to adopt the straightforwardness of his plain style. In a poem like "Cape Hatteras," he found himself in the position of such Victorian forebears as Swinburne, whose stirring panegyric "To Walt Whitman in America" similarly and equally incongruously lauds Whitman's democratic spirit and pantheism in perfectly regular, beautifully turned verse:

Send but a song oversea for us,  
     Heart of their hearts who are free,  
 Heart of their singer, to be for us  
     More than our singing can be;  
 Ours, in the tempest at error,  
 With no light but the twilight of terror;  
     Send us a song oversea! (SCP 2:184)

The twenty-two seven-line stanzas in Swinburne's effusion possess a demanding rhyme scheme (ababccb) and a wonderfully complex metrical pattern that never fully commits to being either dactylic or anapestic trimeter—a performance of Paganini-like virtuosity. Though "To Walt Whitman" is as voluble and buoyant as "Song of Myself," and though it self-consciously echoes Whitman in certain respects (the repetition of "heart" here recalls Whitman's penchant for anaphora), one would hardly describe Swinburne's intricately wrought lyric, as Whitman did his own verse, as "Nature without check with original energy" (WW 50). The same is true of Crane's "Cape

Hatteras,” which recapitulates Swinburne’s mismatch between manner of praise and thing praised. Crane likewise shows himself constitutionally incapable of assenting to Whitman’s basic reformist impulse, “to get the poetry out of poetry so that it could be poetry” (Davenport 1).

Herein lies the mistake of overplaying Crane as Emerson’s grandson. That lineage has obscured both Crane’s rejection of the pentameter’s heave and his near-childlike delight in the full battery of traditional poetic artifice. (Few poems since Byron’s “The Destruction of Sennacherib” [1815] have taken such meretricious pleasure in the mimetic use of meter and consonance as “Cape Hatteras,” as evidenced by the line “yet like breakers cliffward leaping.”) Moreover, “The Scion of Emerson” sound bite may have concealed from view the possibility that Crane, although a self-appointed chronicler of U.S. sacred history, may have been more “British” in his poetic sensibility than scholars have heretofore been willing to appreciate. One does not have to assent when a critic such as Thomas Parkinson says that intuiting a resemblance between Hopkins and Crane is a mark of a “young writer” or that the similarities between the two authors are “accidental rather than essential” (“Hopkins” 58–59). True, the two poets are utterly at odds in important respects, such as their disparate attitudes toward nature and their opposing opinions regarding anachronism in poetry.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, there also exist continuities between Hopkins’s and Crane’s poetics that do seem “essential” and that still await elucidation. Moreover, what Hopkins and Crane share is a set of poetic attributes present in other Victorian writers, especially, for reasons that shall now be explored, in the works of A. C. Swinburne.

### Arrested Development

When Hart Crane first began writing poetry in the 1910s, he was a precocious adolescent living in Ohio, and he was unashamedly under the spell of the British *fin de siècle*. His favorite poet at the time was, yes, Algernon Charles Swinburne (Unterecker 33).<sup>13</sup> The “expansive rhythms” of early works such as “Annunciations” and “The Moth That God Made Blind” are records of this period of apprenticeship (Lewis 16):

The anxious milk-blood in the veins of the earth,  
That strives long and quiet to sever the girth  
Of greenery. . . . Below the roots, a quickening quiver  
Aroused by some light that had sensed,—ere the shiver  
Of the first moth’s descent. . . . (*HCCP* 139; ellipses in original)



The alliterative phrases in this passage smack of Swinburne, as does the elegant metrical symmetry that occurs midway through, when a dactyl-trochee combination gives way to its mirror inversion, an iamb followed by an anapest:

|           |        |                       |
|-----------|--------|-----------------------|
| /   ^   ^ | /   ^  | ^   /   ^   ^   /     |
| quickenig | quiver | Aroused by some light |

At this point in his life, Crane was also a devoted reader of such other Yellow Nineties poets as Lionel Johnson and Oscar Wilde (Unterecker 32). In fact, his first published poem, “C 33,” was an homage to Wilde. (The cryptic title is a reference to Wilde’s cell number at Reading Gaol. It was also the pseudonym under which the first six editions of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* were printed [Robbins 152]). Crane’s poem begins,

He has woven rose-vines  
 About the empty heart of night,  
 And vented his long-mellowed wines  
 Of dreaming on the desert white. (*HCCP* 135)

“C 33” appeared in *Bruno’s Weekly* on 23 September 1916. Guido Bruno, the journal’s eponymous editor, was a Greenwich Village impresario famous for his efforts to publicize British decadent poetry. Crane’s career, it just so happens, was launched by the same man who first published Lord Alfred Douglas’s poetry in America.<sup>14</sup>

But Crane’s days as an American decadent were numbered. In December 1916 he moved to New York City. He was immediately plunged into the ferment of its cosmopolitan literary scene. He quickly became involved in little magazines such as the *Pagan*, for which he worked as an assistant editor, and the *Little Review*, for which he served a stint as advertising manager.<sup>15</sup> The result was a crash course in the European and U.S. avant-gardes. Victorian poetry, Crane learned, was yesterday’s news. The leading lights in Anglo-American poetry were confidently asserting in the time-honored manner of tastemakers that “we” had outgrown the *fin de siècle*. His hero Swinburne was deemed especially passé.<sup>16</sup> In his essay “Swinburne as Poet,” T. S. Eliot takes it as a given that “the present generation” no longer has any use for such juvenile writing:

[A]greed that we do not (and I think that the present generation does not) greatly enjoy Swinburne, and agreed that (a more serious condem-

nation) at one period of our lives we did enjoy him and now no longer enjoy him. (*Sacred Wood* 145)

Ezra Pound, in “Swinburne Versus His Biographers,” similarly attributes a love for Swinburne to literary immaturity:

Moderns . . . awake to the value of language will read him with increasing annoyance, but I think few men who read him before their faculty for literary criticism is awakened—the faculty for purely literary discrimination as contrasted with melopoeic<sup>17</sup> discrimination—will escape the enthusiasms of his emotions, some of which were indubitably real. (72)

Poets such as Pound and Eliot had a vested interest in characterizing a partiality for Swinburne as a passing adolescent phase. They were eager to repudiate their own, early, highly derivative verse. Pound, for instance, would quite rightly later speak of an early outing like “Salve O Pontifex!”—his pretentious “hemichant” for Swinburne (*A Lume Spento* 63)—as a “stale cream puff” (7), and Eliot had good editorial reasons other than its homoerotic content for foregoing the publication of such early Swinburnian efforts as “The Love Song of St. Sebastian.”<sup>18</sup>

Printing a poem like “C 33” at the very moment when the premier modernists were ostentatiously disowning the *fin de siècle*, Crane was bound to appear a callow provincial. “C 33” showed its author to be utterly oblivious of the Three Principles of Imagism that Pound had been touting since 1913 as a bracing cure for the mushy, effeminate softness of late romanticism:

1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing,’ whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.<sup>19</sup>

In “C 33” Crane recycles a fistful of tired Yellow Nineties clichés—roses, night, deserts, hearts—failing to treat any “thing” directly. He uses a needless adjective (“empty”) to fill out his chosen meter, iambic tetrameter. True, the poem’s first line is trochaic trimeter, a very unusual choice. That innovation, though, is short lived, and not only does the verse fall into a predictable pattern thereafter, the quatrain form proceeds to undercut the first line’s distinctiveness. Pound would have been particularly scornful of the inversion

(“desert white”) undertaken for no other reason than to complete the rhyme scheme.

Pound’s aversion was not hypothetical but actual. In 1917, after Crane published “In Shadow,” another faux-decadent piece (“Out in the late amber afternoon, / Confused among chrysanthemums. . . .” [HCCP 13]), Pound attacked Crane in print. He wrote, “Beauty is all very egg . . . but so you haven’t yet the ghost of a sitting hen or an incubator”—thereby giving Crane just cause to complain of Pound’s “rabid dislike of my things” (*O My* 19).<sup>20</sup> In February 1918, Pound went so far as to order Margaret Anderson, the editor of the *Little Review*, not to print Crane’s poetry: “I have writ Crane a line. Don’t publish him” (*Pound / Little Review* 185).

Thrust before his time into the rough-and-ready world of international modernism, Crane retrenched. He was careful to praise Pound in his letters to literary acquaintances.<sup>21</sup> He also took pains to portray himself as an avid reader of all the most fashionable modern authors: Sherwood Anderson, Charles Baudelaire, e. e. cummings, Fyodor Dostoevsky, T. S. Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce, Jules Laforgue, Wallace Stevens. . . . The first half of his selected letters are choked with name-dropping. He curried favor in other ways. In July 1918, a mere four months after Pound’s “Swinburne Versus His Biographers” appeared in *Poetry*, Crane published a letter entitled “Joyce and Ethics” in the *Little Review* that lauded Joyce and Baudelaire at the expense of his erstwhile Victorian favorites:

I noticed that Wilde . . . and Swinburne are “stacked up” beside Joyce as rivals in “decadence” and “intellect.” I am not yet aware that Swinburne ever possessed much beyond his “art ears,” although these were long enough, and adequate to all his beautiful, though often meaningless mouthings. His instability in criticism and every form of literature that did not depend almost exclusively on sound for effect, and his irrelevant metaphors are notorious. And as to Wilde,—after his bundle of paradoxes has been sorted and conned,—very little evidence of intellect remains. (*O My* 14–15)<sup>22</sup>

Given the literary climate of the day and given Pound’s open distaste for his work, one can understand why Crane would have felt compelled to distance himself from Swinburne and Wilde in order to establish his credentials as a bona fide avant-gardist. Nevertheless, even in this recantation, he cannot help praising Swinburne’s “art ears.” Moreover, after twice qualifying this assertion, he ends up writing a resonant phrase (“beautiful, though often meaningless mouthings”) that sounds like Swinburne: falling rhythms, allit-

eration, a mix of di- and trisyllabic feet. Crane proves unable to renounce his first literary role model fully.

Not much time passed between this public act of expiation and a dramatic, private act of backsliding. In the spring of 1919, Crane undertook the positively Herculean task of reading the whole of Swinburne's *Complete Poetical Works* (Unterecker 137). Swinburne would remain a part of his literary range of reference until the end of his life—as indicated by a December 1929 postcard he wrote to Samuel Loveman while en route to England:

Gorgeous weather all the way. Today is like the “Tristram” verse of Swinburne. Millions of sea gulls following us and soaring overhead with such a flood of golden light as seems tropical. The coast of Cornwall is in sight, and Plymouth by tea time. (HCL 332)

Crane has in mind a very specific moment in Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*: a protracted passage from book 8, “The Last Pilgrimage,” in which Tristram sails along the Cornwall coast and marvels at the beauty of its sea cliffs (SCP 135–37). Although the episode is too long to cite in its entirety, the following excerpt gives a sense of its eloquence:

[W]hensoever a strong wave, high in hope,  
Sweeps up some smooth slant breadth of stone aslope,  
That glowed with duskier fire of hues less bright,  
Swift as it sweeps back springs to sudden sight  
The splendour of the moist rock's fervent light,  
Fresh as from dew of birth when time was born  
Out of the world-conceiving womb of morn.  
All its quenched flames and darkling hues divine  
Leap into lustrous life and laugh and shine  
And darken into swift and dim decline  
For one brief breath's space till the next wave run  
Right up, and ripple down again, undone,  
And leave it to be kissed and kindled of the sun. (SCP 4:137)

The style is pure Swinburne—who else would dare use so many triplets in so few lines?—but note as well the surprising similarities between these verses and Crane's own poetry. As in “At Melville's Tomb,” “Cape Hatteras,” “O Carib Isle!,” and “Voyages” I the setting is seaside, the mode is the grand style, and the ostensible descriptive subject matter shades into a luxuriant paean to eros and mutability.

The resemblance is more than coincidental. Unlike Hopkins, to whom Crane came too late, Swinburne is a recurrent presence in the poems of Crane's maturity.<sup>23</sup> In addition to incessant verbal echoes of Swinburne in Crane (Grossman 96), one can also discern obvious traces of Swinburne's practices in several of Crane's characteristic idiosyncrasies. For example, Swinburne's famous synaesthetic experiments, in which, as he puts it, "Light [is] heard as music, music seen as light" (*SSP* 172), find their echo (or reflection?) in his heir's hallucinatory imagery, as when, in *White Buildings*, Crane conveys the experience of viewing a striking, tanned visage by saying that he sees "bronzed gongs of . . . cheeks" (*HCCP* 21). Another shared eccentricity: Swinburne and Crane habitually yoke adjectives to apparently "incorrect" nouns in order to skew their descriptions ever so slightly and lend them an atmosphere of dream-like confusion. When, for instance, in "A Ballad of Life" Swinburne declares, "I found in dreams a place of wind and flowers, / Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass" (*SCP* 1:139), he does not intend to imply that the grass itself is "glad." Rather, he displaces the gladness of the "dreams" and the dreamer onto the landscape. Crane, too, is given to phrases such as "a nervous shark tooth" (*HCCP* 71)—in which "nervous" describes not the "tooth" but the mental state of the pendant's wearer (or perhaps that of the agitated speaker).

Occasionally, Swinburne's example seems to inform the way Crane writes a poem from the ground up, as it were. A Crane poem such as "The Dance" is a good illustration. At the climax of "The Dance"—which several critics have singled out as the pivotal moment in *The Bridge*—the poet-speaker so identifies with an Indian warrior being burned at the stake that they become indistinguishable. They, in turn, merge with Pocahontas, Crane's mythic personification of the American landscape.<sup>24</sup> Crucial to this mythic metamorphosis is the agency of Crane's loving, recondite, baroque language. Like Sappho in Swinburne's "Anactoria," Crane's visionary speaker so confuses inflicting and / or receiving pain and / or bliss, and does so in such hyperbolic, inflated language, that coordinates like *subject* and *object* are deprived of meaning, fused in the fire of ecstatic poetic expression.

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs  
Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.  
Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs  
And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air. . . .

I, too, was liege  
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone. . . .

I could not pick the arrows from my side.  
 Wrapped in that fire . . .

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,  
 And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;  
 Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms  
 Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat. (*HCCP* 63–64)

This homoerotic, Orphic moment of torture-cum-transcendence owes much to Swinburne's forays into sadomasochism in *Poems and Ballads*, First Series (1866). One hears echoes of such memorable lines as "stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine / That Love was born of burns and foams like wine, / And eyes insatiable of amorous hours, / Fervent as fire" (*SCP* 1:191); "Till the hair and the eyelids took fire, / The foam of a serpentine tongue, / The froth of the serpents of pleasure, / More salt than the foam of the sea, / Now felt as flame" (288); and "The white wealth of thy body made whiter / by the blushes of amorous blows . . . And branded by kisses that bruise" (292).<sup>25</sup>

"The Dance" might also represent an ambitious response to a single, specific Swinburne lyric. In a 1927 letter to his patron Otto Kahn meant to elucidate the structure of *The Bridge*, Crane explains the starring role of Pocahontas.<sup>26</sup> Crane analogizes Pocahontas, the recurrent "mythological nature symbol" that represents "the physical body of the continent," to "Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology" (*O My* 345)—the very goddess who serves as the eponymous speaker of Swinburne's most ambitious cosmological statement, "Hertha" ("I the grain and the furrow, / The plough-cloven clod. . . ." [*SCP* 2:138]). If Crane does have Swinburne's "Hertha" in mind, then it would mean that Swinburne stands behind the architectonics of Crane's epic and that Swinburne's pantheism, espoused so memorably in "Hertha," might very well be a source for Crane's redemptive vision of America as a sprawling goddess, the sum of its land and peoples. In other words, when the visionary poet, Maquokeeta the Indian brave, and Pocahontas become one entity at the finale of "The Dance," Crane could be dramatizing the collapse of differentiated identity that is Hertha's ultimate lesson about the nature and experience of Godhead: "Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I" (*SCP* 2:145).

Crane may never cite Swinburne by name as a source or model for *The Bridge*, but his reticence on this point proves little. Pilloried during his first New York period for his fin de siècle leanings, Crane thereafter had reason to be circumspect. His subsequent experiences would only reconfirm this hesitancy. During his Ohio exile (1920–23), Crane, pining after friends and rec-

ognition, forged through his correspondence ever closer ties to an up-and-coming literary clique—which included Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, Waldo Frank, Matthew Josephson, and Gorham Munson—that tended to style itself as a robust American reaction against effete expatriates like Eliot and Pound.<sup>27</sup> Few of these writers would have looked kindly upon Crane’s covert interest in Swinburne, who was, after all, a consummate British decadent and a Francophile to boot. When Crane at last returned to New York in 1923, he came, triumphant, bearing a poem that would bring him immediate fame in the city’s artistic circles and that would install him as the poet laureate of the Burke-Cowley-Munson group: “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.”<sup>28</sup> Significantly, “Faustus and Helen” subtly repudiates Swinburne on patriotic grounds. In the second part of that poem, Crane’s “siren of the springs of guilty song” (*HCCP* 30) offers up a uniquely modern, American kind of “song”—jazz—as a strategic alternative to the Parisian music of Baudelaire, whom Swinburne had eulogized in “Ave Atque Vale” as the “springs of song” (*SSP* 161).<sup>29</sup>

As the 1920s progressed, Crane, encouraged by his writerly acquaintances, increasingly presented himself as the Next Great American Poet. He planned *The Bridge* as a sacred history of the United States that would rebut T. S. Eliot’s portrait of London in “The Waste Land” (1922). This plan, moreover, had something of a committee aspect. As Crane exasperatedly wrote his friend Charles Harris, even at its “inception” *The Bridge* was “constantly attended by sharp arguments with Burke, [Slater] Brown, Munson, Frank, [Jean] Toomer and Josephson on all kinds of things that have much or little to do with it.”<sup>30</sup> Too overt enthusiasm for a poet like Swinburne would have undermined Crane’s new, collectively reinforced self-presentation. Crane could, however, give free reign to his enthusiasm for Whitman—to whom Frank and Munson had introduced him in 1923 specifically in his guise as the American Bard (*O My* 53, 137). One traditional interpretation of *The Bridge* is that Crane uses Whitman for leverage against the overly “European” T. S. Eliot.<sup>31</sup> But near Eliot, just out of the spotlight, one can make out Swinburne’s profile, too. The vexing, sentimental conclusion to “Cape Hatteras”—in which Crane goes off hand in hand with Walt Whitman—has generally been construed as Crane’s imaginative response to such lines from *Leaves of Grass* (1891) as the following:<sup>32</sup>

- Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged; / Missing me one place, search another; / I stop somewhere, waiting for you (*WW* 96)
- [F]ill’d with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found, The Younger melts in fondness in his arms (327)
- Whoever you are, holding me now in hand . . . Here to put your lips

upon mine I permit you, / With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss, or the  
new husband's kiss (114)

- Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem  
(200)

But there appears to be another, closer parallel. Here is a passage from Swinburne's "Ave Atque Vale," in which the Victorian poet imagines consummation with his own literary hero, the Frenchman Charles Baudelaire:

Not thee, but this the sound of thy sad soul,  
The shadow of thy swift spirit, this shut scroll  
I lay my hand on, and not death estranges  
My spirit from communion of thy song—  
These memories and these melodies that throng  
Veiled porches of a Muse funereal—  
These I salute, these touch, these clasp and fold  
As though a hand were in my hand to hold. (SCP 3:48)

These verses exhibit Swinburne's typically mannered use of appositives, vague syntax, emotive punctuation, and breathless histrionic tone. Here, I would argue, one beholds the general rhetorical and formal model for the thespian side of Crane evident, nigh unto mawkishness, in such poems as "Cape Hatteras," "Indiana," and "Cutty Sark." Crane would like the reader to believe that at the conclusion of "Cape Hatteras" he chooses (the American) Whitman over (the expatriate) Eliot. To do so, however, he borrows from a British writer. Crane's impulse to affiliate himself with Whitman as an antidote to European ills is also less "American" than one might at first presume. In "To Walt Whitman in America," Swinburne had described Whitman's poetry as:

A note in the ranks of a clarion,  
A word in the wind of cheer,  
To consume as with lightning the carrion  
That makes time foul for us here;  
In the air that our dead things infest  
A blast of the breath of the west,  
Till east way as west way is clear. (SCP 2:185)

As Crane would later do in *The Bridge*, Swinburne calls upon Whitman's optimism and bluster to dispel the "foul[ness]" and the "dead things" that hover over the Waste Land that is the Old World and thereby renew a literary tra-



dition grown senescent. Thus, even the purportedly jingoistic side to Crane's epic can, in fact, be shown to be something of a "foreign" import! From the time Crane arrived in New York in December 1916 until the day he leaped off the cruise ship *Orizaba* to his death, Swinburne was a discomfiting precursor that Crane either indulged in secret or effaced by officially writing under the sign of another author—but whose imprint nonetheless remained everywhere evident.

Admittedly, Swinburne is not a skeleton key to Crane's poetics. One must acknowledge that Crane read very widely indeed. Concentrating on a single writer's precedent can never fully capture the diversity of traditions that Crane attempted to synthesize. Nor is such a strategy likely to do justice to the breadth and depth of his aesthetic interests, which extended well beyond literature into arts such as painting, sculpture, and music. Nevertheless, Swinburne's persistent presence in Crane's verse, from the beginning to the end of his career, despite Crane's overt efforts to "forget" him, speaks to something elemental that the two poets shared. Moreover, Crane's specific debts to Swinburne lay in the same general areas as the similarities earlier identified between his work and that of Gerard Manley Hopkins: in tone, rhetorical mannerisms, and sound play. Arriving in New York after Imagism's heyday, Crane was the only major U.S. poet in the 1920s who never seems to have participated in, or even flirted with joining, the Pound Era. Wallace Stevens wrote much of *Harmonium* in terse Imagist-style vers libre; T. S. Eliot let Pound pare down *The Waste Land*; Crane, in contrast, willfully continued to "rhapsodistify," as Pound would have put it, distilling, magnifying, and exaggerating the ecstatic, eccentric mannerisms of his Victorian forebears: "Through the bound cable strands, the arching path / Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,— / Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate. . . ." (HCCP 105).<sup>33</sup>

## Alien Nation

Subsequent chapters will examine in more detail why Crane so stubbornly adhered to this mannerist poetics, as well as develop further why he considered certain strains of nineteenth-century poetics indispensable in responding to the exigencies and opportunities presented by post-World War I life in the United States. Before beginning this inquiry, however, it is worth pausing to say a few more, final words about the purported "Americanness" of Crane's verse. The uniform insistence in the secondary literature on his participation in a national(ist) lineage of writers has, it must be confessed, a solid basis in fact. In *The Bridge* Crane tries to repackage his Victorian-riddled

poetics as American-Homeric, a grand style for hymning the Grand Ole Flag. Why not, then, take Crane at his word and read him first and foremost as an American writer? The question presupposes that one knows what “an American writer” is in the first place. As already discussed, the national particularism and nativism of *The Bridge* are superimposed on a poetics that harks back to *Tristram of Lyonesse* and *Poems and Ballads*, First Series. The logical if somewhat counterintuitive conclusion: if Crane is authentically American, then “American” also implies a history of transatlantic cultural exchanges.

This conclusion would not surprise present-day specialists in American Studies. Recent revisionist scholarship has thoroughly debunked the “monolingual and monocultural myth of ‘America’” that prevailed in the discipline during the early cold war years (Rowe 4). Books such as Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993) and Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000) have proposed instead inter-, trans-, and postnational framings as the proper horizon for analyzing the production and circulation of cultural artifacts. In this broader perspective, any assertion of national exceptionalism is suspect. Nation-state borders are simply too variable, porous, and arbitrary. People, goods, texts, languages, and ideas move too freely and unpredictably, and their interactions and consequences are too hybrid, for any nation to proclaim in good faith its integrity, unity, or superiority. Today’s Americanists would almost automatically assume that, no matter what grandiose claims might be made on its behalf, Crane’s “Americanness” is, at base, almost certainly a mishmash of dissimulation, displacement, appropriation, and purest fancy, a sedimentation of geography, history, economics, and accident.

Assuming such a thing is not demonstrating it. Furthermore, as any historian knows, presupposing the arbitrariness of ostensibly natural, organic identities is only the first step in limning their anatomies, behaviors, and pasts. Attending to Crane’s specific formal debts brings to light the intricacy of his literary affiliations and disaffiliations, in the process exposing the waywardness and provisionality of national labels. Is Whitman, for instance, still an “American” poet if Crane comes to him via the likes of Hopkins and Clough? If the myth of America offered by “The Dance” is actually a rewrite of Swinburne’s “Hertha,” can one say that to be “American” is in fact first to be “British”? The messiness of literary history prevents responsible critics from ever assuming “the discreteness of different cultures” and then “articulat[ing] resemblances and differences according to structuralist binaries” (Rowe 8). Indeed, graphing authors’ elective affinities can be a most subtle means of deconstructing neat oppositions. Cairns Craig, for example, has explored the extent to which, in the 1990s, to be an “authentically” Scottish or Irish poet meant *writing like Walt Whitman* (192). Explaining this paradoxical

fact requires one to ponder a slew of possible communal identities—British, English, European, U.S., Celtic—as well as the creation of a national-regional parliament in Scotland (1997) and a provisional, consociational legislature in Northern Ireland (1998). Stylistic choices are also political statements, and examining their whys and wherefores exposes subterranean contestations of the value, use, and meaning of nationalism.

Literary and cultural historians, unfortunately, have not always been sensitive to the hybrid identifications legible in their objects of study. This chapter has strived to redress in a small way one particularly persistent, egregious example. The disciplinary division between “American” and “British” in U.S. English departments has for decades inhibited recognition of those terms as mutually implicated and determining. Instead, academics have tended AmerLit and BritLit Jesse Trees with a bare minimum of transatlantic grafting permitted. Harold Bloom’s thesis that Emerson is the paterfamilias of subsequent, significant U.S. verse is exemplary in this regard. He writes as if, after Emerson imported Wordsworth and wrote *Nature* (1836), invisible, impermeable protectionist barriers slammed into place to prevent further exotics from taking root. Yet, as Elisa Tamarkin has shown, the ensuing, much-ballyhooed American Renaissance was in fact a period of “spectacular exhibitions of Anglophilia” in U.S. letters. During the years that Alcott, Dickinson, Douglass, Fuller, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and Thoreau were writing their best work, the very definition of being an intellectual in polite society was to evince “a cosmopolitan susceptibility to other nations,” above all to British culture (453). As a consequence, not only did American Renaissance literary figures respond in a myriad of ways to British authors, but they also typically had a difficult time being taken seriously in their native land.<sup>34</sup> Piqued by this state of affairs, Herman Melville, in “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850), resorted to a crude, only half-facetious appeal to his readers’ patriotism: “believe it or not England, after all, is, in many things, an alien to us. . . . [L]et America first praise mediocrity even, in her own children, before she praises . . . the best excellence in the children of any other land. Let her own authors, I say, have the priority of appreciation” (134). Acknowledging and exploring Crane’s British connections helps restore a sense of “American literature” as always already an import from elsewhere, never an organic product of *Volk* and *Erde*.

## How Queer

Illustrating Crane's adherence to Victorian verse norms usefully transgresses hoary disciplinary lines by demonstrating the need to think about modern U.S. poetry in a transatlantic context. Such a gesture is, however, in itself unlikely to win the poet new admirers, whether in or out of the academy. Whatever its national origins or affiliations, Crane's anomalous writing style remains vulnerable to accusations of being meretricious, self-indulgent, or even reactionary. To reply to such charges means finding a way to attribute significance to Crane's *démodé* Swinburnian leanings, a task which, in essence, requires that one supply a frame that could situate this story within broader narratives or debates.

Crane's decision to opt out of the Pound Era provides a useful starting point. Crane's dissent appears gauche, inexplicable, or conservative only if one buys into the Poundian narrative of poetic progress from Victorian "sissified fussiness" to Imagist clarity to Vorticist kinetics.<sup>1</sup> Since the early 1990s there has been a growing consensus that the conventional, oft-repeated narratives of modernist formal experimentation and breakthrough—the sort of narrative enshrined in such classics as Pound's *How to Read* (1931), Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971), and Christopher Beach's *ABC of Influence* (1992)—have frequently concealed as much or more than they reveal. Scholarly attention has shifted toward the investigation of what Andreas Huyssen, following Dilip Gaonkar, calls "alternative modernities," that is, "trajectories," "relations," and "crosscurrents" of thought and development that have always existed alongside canonical modernism but that have, up to now, rarely received extended scrutiny from metropolitan academics (367). In opposing his poetics to Pound's, Crane could have been asserting himself as

*differently* modern, that is, as a writer whose modernity proceeds from different principles toward different ends.

In the past, critics have commonly contended that Crane's poetics are unusual, even unique, because of his sexual orientation. Thomas Yingling, for instance, asserts that Crane, as a homosexual poet, could not write like his straight counterparts. Instead he penned "homotextual" verse informed through and through by his queerness. This line of argument could have led to repositioning Crane as a participant in an "alternative modernity" worthy of celebration, scrutiny, or critique. Unfortunately, most efforts at "queering" his poetry—whether it be by Yingling, Merrill Cole, Langdon Hammer, Robert K. Martin, or Christopher Nealon—have presented him in relative isolation from his queer contemporaries. Insofar as Crane appears as part of a group, he does so either within an eclectic, cross-period miscellany of gay writers (alongside the likes of Whitman, Wilde, Rimbaud, Auden, Ginsberg, Merrill, and Ashbery) or as a homosexual loner within a predominantly straight male clique (Kenneth Burke, Allen Tate, Waldo Frank, Matthew Josephson, and Gorham Munson). Little effort has been made to understand Crane's mannerist poetics as a specifically 1910s and '20s queer-inflected response to the writings of his straight, more straitlaced friends and rivals.

This lapse arguably stems from a long-overdue comparison between Crane and the female authors of his day. Rarely if ever have Crane's writings been read in tandem with gender-bending and sexually transgressive works by the likes of Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Gertrude Stein.<sup>2</sup> A wealth of recent scholarship on these women writers, however, can help one contextualize Crane's otherwise perplexing, idiosyncratic formal choices.

## Barnstorming

Over the last decade, an "alternative modernity" that has gained particular academic prominence is "Sapphic modernism." Erin Carlston has concisely summarized its emergence as a literary category. During the first stage, feminists challenged the exclusion of women from the canon of modernist writers studied and taught in the academy:

In the early 1980s, feminist literary critics began to call into question the characterization of the modernist canon . . . as that body of experimental writing produced by a group of expatriate men between about the turn of the century and World War II. Feminists argued that this androcentric vision of literary modernism distorted a history in which women had in fact been central, as authors, critics, editors,

and publishers; they rediscovered the work of long-neglected women writers . . . like Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Mina Loy.

Certain feminist scholars then proceeded to make a bolder claim: “the politics and thematics of gender and sexuality” had not only shaped decades of syllabi but had in fact “played a formative role in the developments of a modernist poetics.” Shifting their analytic focus from formal innovation to the construction and performance of gender and sexuality, these critics remapped Anglo-American modernism:

Critics like Shari Benstock even went so far as to suggest that women writers of the period—many of whom could be considered lesbian or bisexual, in contemporary terms if not always their own—were excluded from a “male modernism” that was inherently reactionary and misogynist, and constituted an entirely different literary movement: Sapphic Modernism. (2)

Nowadays the term has achieved sufficient currency to appear regularly in the titles of such monographs as Carlston’s own *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (1998) and Diana Collecott’s *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism* (1999).

The growing secondary literature on the topic has revealed that certain early twentieth-century women writers—among them Djuna Barnes, Natalie Clifford Barney, H.D., and Renée Vivien—identify much more strongly than their male counterparts with the British *fin de siècle*. They tend to find inspiration in the period’s relatively high degree of sexual ambiguity and gender fluidity. Cassandra Laity’s *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1996), for instance, argues that H.D. grounds her mature poetics in the decadent spectacle of the *femme fatale* and aesthete-hermaphrodite because they could serve as a “feminine” basis for modernist experimentation. Laity contrasts H.D.’s desire to build upon Victorian precedent to the more rebellious “masculine” Anglo-American modernism of T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and W. B. Yeats, which preaches stoic impersonality as an antidote to the “soft,” “effeminate” modes of writing that characterize the late nineteenth century. As Laity puts it in an earlier piece, the “exile” of late romanticism after World War I “may have created a ‘wild zone’ of creative power for some women writers who sought alternatives” to the “androcentric” “modernist poetics of male desire” (“H.D. and A.C.” 224–25).

There are obvious points of contact between Laity’s argument about H.D. and the story of Crane’s own vexed relation to A. C. Swinburne: an interest

in fin de siècle poetry that runs counter to Poundian precepts; a fascination with Swinburne's decadent sexuality; and a desire to find a poetic form congenial to expressing unconventional varieties of eros. The fact that a defined circle of writers shared Crane's programmatic dissent from Imagism—and the suggestion that they may have done so for reasons of sexuality and gender—could potentially place Crane's poetry in a valuable new synchronic context. Moreover, the literary-historical argument that these female writers affiliated themselves with late Victorian poetics so as to pursue their own particular species of "modernism" could offer a corrective to the common, lingering stereotype of Crane as a belated romantic. Finally, scholarship on Sapphic modernism could benefit. The secondary literature on the subject has yet to abandon altogether its initial, rather rigid opposition between male heteronormative / female homoerotic.<sup>3</sup> Broadening the discussion to include gay male writers would usefully complicate the picture.<sup>4</sup>

The point of such a move would be neither to challenge nor to dilute the developing picture of a dissident, women-identified modernism. Crane was no Sapphist, nor, aside from his respectful admiration of Gertrude Stein and a short, intense, platonic friendship with Laura Riding, were his gender politics even detectably feminist.<sup>5</sup> (His letters in fact drip with disdain when he mentions the likes of Marianne Moore and Edna St. Vincent Millay.<sup>6</sup>) Rather, by investigating convergences with and divergences from Sapphic modernism in Crane's poetry, one gains an enriched sense of the field of literary possibilities in the first third of the twentieth century, as well as added insight into the period's complex interplay between sexuality, gender identity, and constructions of modernity. Crane's vexed affinity for Hopkins and Swinburne falls somewhere on a spectrum between H.D.'s encomium to Swinburne in *HERmione* and Ezra Pound's all-out war against effete Swinburnian mannerisms. In occupying this intermediary zone, he hopes to stake out for himself an aesthetic position that is, on the one hand, legibly queer while, on the other, still falling within the purview of the "acceptably" masculine. Charting Crane's compromise path—especially its concrete manifestations in his verse—will further what feminist critic and modernist scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls "the examination of gendered materials in the apparatus of poesis" by providing a new slant on the "cultural conventions and institutionalized topoi inside poetry that have a gendered torque" ("Pro-pounding" 389–90).

A methodological obstacle immediately arises: the difficulty of generalizing about authors grouped together primarily because of a shared or imputed sexual identity. As Carlston has cautioned, Sapphic modernists in the

years 1910–40 were distinguished less by exhibiting the same “organized identity” than by displaying a “hypersensitivity” to “(homo)sexuality as an aesthetic problematic and a political *enjeu*” (6). Such “hypersensitivity,” of course, could and did manifest itself in a plurality of ways. The biographies, writings, and allegiances of the relevant women vary too much for any critic to speak with absolute confidence about a common agenda, joint aesthetic, or overlapping conceptions of authorship.

For the present purposes, however, one can provisionally sidestep the problem of Sapphic modernism’s daunting heterogeneity. By concentrating on a figure central to the secondary literature on this “alternative modernity”—Djuna Barnes, author of *Nightwood* (1936), the famous novel of doomed lesbian love—one can forestall the need for endless, premature qualifications and voluminous passages of compare / contrast. This initially narrow focus will insure that whatever comes to light during a discussion of Crane will be true, if not of Sapphic modernism *in toto*, then of a strand of it that is so thoroughly, so tightly interwoven into the rest that picking it free would substantially alter the design of the whole. (“What had there been in literature between Sappho and Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*? Nothing,” as the feminist philosopher Monique Wittig once proclaimed [qtd. in Meese 58–59].)

Barnes, it turns out, knew Crane well. Indeed, for several years their careers moved in parallel, which makes her a particularly apt foil for pondering his evolution as a writer. By recounting the biographical and writerly points of contact between the two authors, it becomes possible to discern a set of shared intuitions about the interconnections between mannered artifice, utopian ambitions, and the historicity of queer identity. One cannot speak of a shared project, let alone claim that they participated in a joint artistic movement, but one can discern the contours of a period-specific queer response to more mainstream literary developments.

## Broken Strain

Djuna Barnes took up residence in Greenwich Village in 1915, a year before Crane. She blazed a path that he, too, would follow by quickly becoming a star performer in Guido Bruno’s stable of U.S. aesthetes. The impresario touted Barnes as “sincere” in her “morbidity,” an heir to “the decadents of France and of England’s famous 1890s” (Barnes, *Interviews* 338). Her first literary publication, a collection of verse titled *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915), appeared as the second volume in Bruno’s chapbook series; it predates



by ten months Crane's first published poem, "C 33," which appeared in another Bruno venture, *Bruno's Weekly*. If during this phase of his career Crane was indulging in Swinburnian "meaningless mouthings" while "confused among the chrysanthemums," Barnes was experimenting with other, comparably over-the-top Yellow Nineties mannerisms: "preciosity, artifice, and 'extreme stylization' . . . [,] images of vampires and 'the Oriental' and dead flowers, and of course the marked derivation [of her drawings] from Aubrey Beardsley" (Carlston 50).

The last chapter moved quickly past this inaugural moment in Crane's poetic career. In that context, it sufficed to note that "C 33" was an homage to Oscar Wilde and that its style, judged by the standards of Imagism, was unforgivably *recherché*. Now, however, one has an opportunity to revisit this sample of Crane's juvenilia and elucidate its poetics and their ramifications by juxtaposing it with some of Barnes's earliest writings. Both writers, familiar with Imagism and its precepts, jointly chose to dissent from Pound's "androcentric" poetics. Moreover, they did so while under the influence of the same man, Guido Bruno, who, bankrolled by Charles Edison (the son of Thomas Alva), had already served as the principal conduit for introducing the writings of (the notorious inverts) Oscar Wilde, Lord Alfred Douglas, and John Addington Symonds to a much broader segment of the U.S. public.<sup>7</sup> To understand Crane's—and Barnes's—lasting attraction to British decadence, one must sort out the tangle of aesthetic, sexual, political, and gender-based motives that inform their initial *clinamen* from the main current of U.S. vanguardism.

The enigmatic title "C 33" is, you might recall, a reference to Oscar Wilde's cell number at Reading Gaol. Most critics have assumed that the "he" of the first stanza thus refers to Wilde and that the remainder of the poem is Crane's rather murky, faux-decadent statement of a poetic vocation. Read along these lines, the lyric's advocacy of a "minor, broken strain" rings a little false, like a rote repetition of literary cliché. Crane, showing himself still more apprentice than master, clumsily mimes the effete debility of his *fin de siècle* models:<sup>8</sup>

He has woven rose-vines  
 About the empty heart of night,  
 And vented his long mellowed wines  
 Of dreaming on the desert white  
 With searing sophistry.  
 And he tented with far truths he would form  
 The transient bosoms from the thorny tree.

O Materna! to enrich thy gold head  
And wavering shoulders with new light shed

From penitence, must needs bring pain,  
And with it song of minor, broken strain.  
But you who hear the lamp whisper through night  
Can trace paths tear-wet, and forget all blight. (*HCCP* 135)

When read closely, however, “C 33” is a peculiar, intricate poem that refuses to be pigeonholed as a superficial exercise in *imitatio*. In fact, it seems to invoke Yellow Nineties conventions largely so that it can then proceed to unsettle them. True, Crane does bring together predictable references to wine, roses, tears, dreams, night, and the transience of love. But in contrast to the elegance characteristic of Dowson, Swinburne, or Lionel Johnson, the form and the rhetoric of Crane’s poem are so off-kilter that one has to linger over its eccentricities in order to contemplate what this particular blend is supposed to achieve.

For instance, the poem is thirteen lines long, which is close enough to the regulation fourteen to give one pause. One could, after all, read “desert,” “searing,” “bosoms,” and “tear-wet” within a Petrarchan tradition as well as the *fin de siècle*. Is “C 33” a love poem? To whom, then? To Wilde? Or to “Materna,” the mother? Does Crane wish to intimate forbidden love, homoerotic or oedipal? There are other curious traces of the sonnet form in “C 33.” The apostrophe that begins line 8 is something of a *volta*, and considering it as such would divide the poem into sections of seven and six lines, close to but not quite an octave and sestet. The poem also seems to be striving toward iambic pentameter. It opens with a line of trochaic trimeter, but lines 2–4 settle down into iambic tetrameter. Afterward the meter remains predominantly iambic with occasional trochaic substitution, and, by the third stanza, five beats per line has become the norm.

If “C 33” is a broken sonnet, or an aspirant one, that perplexing incompleteness extends to other aspects of the poem. Line 8, for instance, seems willfully shortened by a syllable. It would read much more smoothly if “golden” replaced “gold.” Similarly, line 12 scans regularly, as iambic pentameter with a trochaic substitution in the 4th foot (“whisper”), but it would flow more innocuously if Crane had inserted “the” between “through” and “night.” As he will throughout his career, Crane favors compression over fluidity, even when it results in awkwardness.

The syntax, too, seems rather imperfect, intentionally so. Line 6, for instance, deliberately lacks the punctuation that might clear up a fundamental

confusion. Is “tented” a verb or a participle? Is Crane exploiting asyndeton here, the omission of a conjunction? If so, one could construe the line as “he tented with far truths [and] he would form / The transient bosoms.” Alternatively, Crane is using *conduplicatio*, the repetition of a word in successive clauses for emphasis or amplification. “And he, tented with far truths, HE would form. . . .” This syntactical ambiguity draws attention to a word, “tented,” whose exact referential meaning is also unclear. According to the OED, “tent” can mean “to dwell temporarily,” “to probe,” “to stretch,” and “to attend to.” Is Crane’s “he” covered by “far truths”? Invaded by them? Racked by them? Or does “he” travel “far” away to dwell among “truths”? Crane insures that readers ponder this uncertainty by rhyming “tented” with the earlier “vented,” from line 3. At the same time, he also concludes this vexed line (6) with the only end word in the poem that fails to rhyme: “form.” “C 33” balances itself precariously between alternatives, deformation and formation. Will it crystallize or lapse into chaos?

Crane sees to it that the narrative subtending the poem is strewn with as many obstacles as the poem’s syntax. The “he” of the first stanza resembles a demonic-Byronic hero. The action of the opening lines, “He has woven rose-vines / About the empty heart of night,” recalls the braggadocio of Manfred or Child Harold, and there is an apposite hint of hubris in the wasteful act of pouring out the “long-mellowed wines / Of dreaming” into the hot desert sands. The abrupt address to Materna interrupts this vignette, however, and matters of agency and identity become thoroughly confused. Crane uses an impersonal construction, “must needs,” to express what must happen if Materna is to be “enriched” by a “new light shed / / From penitence.” The reader is not told whether “he,” the poem’s speaker, or someone else desires to create “light” from repentance. Moreover, the locution “must needs bring pain” leaves it unclear whether this unspecified singer comes to Materna in order to inflict pain or comes to Materna full of pain. Then, in a final couplet, Crane suddenly introduces a “you” who may refer to Materna, the reader, Wilde, or the “he” of the first stanza. Just as the status of “pain” was in doubt, now it is “tears.” Are the “paths tear-wet” on account of “your” crying? Or are these “tears” a metaphor, dew that catches the light of the “lamp”? Inner and outer, agent or receptor, Crane sidesteps such distinctions. Just as, through synaesthesia, “you” may “hear the lamp whisper,” so too other conceptual divides collapse.

The message that one is to take away from “C 33” remains elusive. The mention of a “thorny tree” in relation to “him” encourages one to read the poem as a statement about a martyrdom, indeed, a sexualized one (“transient bosoms”), that Materna can somehow redress. Perhaps she, as symbolic

mother, can absolve a son's private sin of onanism (the pouring out of those "long-mellowed wines" onto desert sand). A chastened, "minor, broken" poetry might be the proper vehicle for the requisite prayer of intercession. On the other hand, "you" perhaps escape this bind in order to "trace paths tear-wet" and "forget all blight." If blight is forgotten, one might ask, does that avert any compulsion to repent? Does pursuing the "lamp" of knowledge absolve "you" of "your" crimes? Crane's poem can, surprisingly, be read either as endorsement or a repudiation of the need for "penitence," depending on how one fills in the blanks. "C 33," with its coy title and its refusal to take a stand, promises "a new light shed" but delivers instead "night," or obscurity. This almost sonnet *almost* makes sense. It is a remarkable rhetorical performance by a seventeen-year-old novice poet.

### Damn, Nay

Djuna Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915), like Crane's "C 33," seeks to perplex and haunt rather than "shed light." Critics have long considered *The Book of Repulsive Women* a rather disturbing, "thin" piece of juvenilia worth reading primarily for its precocious treatment of such later, characteristic Barnesian themes as urban desolation, sexual perversity, and the fate of independent women in early twentieth-century society (Benstock, *Women* 240–2). The poetry qua poetry has received little praise. Louis Kannenstine, for example, finds the book's "descriptive ornamentation and persiflage" wholly unsuccessful and blames Guido Bruno's fierce partisanship of aestheticism and decadence for the "obsessive lurid and grotesque touches" that "lead to excesses in tone and strain in diction" (19–23).

A lyric such as "From Fifth Avenue Up" merits closer attention, however. In this "lurid and grotesque" vignette, the first in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, Barnes offers an updated version of the sensational lesbian episodes common in risqué European literature from the mid-nineteenth century onward. "From Fifth Avenue Up" descends from such precursor texts as Baudelaire's "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" (1857), Swinburne's "Anactoria" (1866), and Marcel's voyeuristic description of Mlle Vinteuil and her lover in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913). Barnes's poem (rather uncomfortably) reprises the sadomasochism, simmering self-hatred, and scopophilia of this tradition, but, significantly, she also deploys none of the seductive fluidity of Swinburne, Proust, or Baudelaire. Her "stylistic excess" is of a different order altogether, and it is here one discovers her swerve from the masculinist tradition of the "tormenting and tormented Sappho."<sup>9</sup>

In order to do so, "From Fifth Avenue Up" both evokes and violates the

formal conventions of the late nineteenth century. Like “C 33” it presents itself as a “broken” poem. Barnes’s poem consists of eight stanzas of an unusually “fractured” kind. Visually, each may possess six lines, but aurally, there are only three. That is, each stanza, when read aloud, divides readily (with a few exceptions) into iambic pentameter triplets that rhyme *aaa bbb ccc*:<sup>10</sup>

Someday beneath some hard  
 Capricious star—  
 Spreading its light a little  
 Over far,  
 We’ll know you for the woman  
 That you are. (13)

^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
 Someday beneath some hard capricious star—  
      /   ^   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
 Spreading its light a little over far,  
      ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
 We’ll know you for the woman that you are.

Barnes has inserted line breaks that separate out the final two stresses of the underlying iambic pentameter so as to create shorter lines that generally scan as amphimacers ( / ^ / ): “Over far,” “That you are,” “Length of thighs,” “Spleen you draw” (13–15). (Again there are a couple of exceptions—such as “Capricious star” in the quote above, which scans as two iambs.) The fact that within a given stanza these amphimacers also deploy perfect rhyme (star / far / are, space / lace / face, you / drew / do, fear / leer / ear), whereas the accompanying longer lines typically fail to rhyme, further accentuates the stop-start, off-balance feel to the poem.

Barnes does nothing to smooth out the oddity of this stanza form. “From Fifth Avenue Up” relies mostly on mono- and disyllabic words, a decision that tends to reduce the poem to singsong (for example, “For though one took you, hurled you / Into space”). On the other hand, there are glaring lapses. The lines “Naked-female-baby / In grimace,” for example, begin by switching to trochaic meter, a perfectly acceptable substitution, but the heavy drumbeat rhythm that a reader begins to expect renders the last two words, “In grimace,” a definite stumbling block. One wants to read it “IN grimACE,” a stress pattern that would simultaneously continue the rhythm of the line previous, fulfill the desire for a perfect triplet (face, grimACE, space),

and respect the poem's preference for amphimacers in the shorter lines ("Over far," "Coil in fear"). The sudden intrusion of both a slant rhyme and an amphibrach ( ^ / ^ )—two unique and simultaneous variations from the poem's stanzaic form—in, of all places, the middle of the final stanza truly does make one wish to "grimace."

One could attribute this kind of metrical infelicity to Barnes's inexperience. But the poem seems too tightly controlled for that to be the case. For example, there are only four words of more than two syllables in "From Fifth Avenue Up," and each of them has been carefully selected to carry particular weight: "capricious," "saliva," "musicians," and "Babylonian." The last of these, "Babylonian," is not only the only four-syllable word, but it also appears situated for maximum effect: "And hear your short sharp modern / Babylonian cries." It occurs at the beginning of a line that breaks the general pattern by containing three stresses instead of two ( / ^ / ^ / ). Moreover, like the two other three-beat short lines ("Pulsing in the beat," "Trick musicians do"), "Babylonian cries" is a self-reflexive statement about sound in poetry. The rough, lurching, heavy gait of the poem is a "trick music" and a "Babylonian cry," a "pulsing" not *to* some "beat" but *in* "the beat," a "cry" forced out by arousal and repugnance.

Barnes, not incidentally, calls the lyrics in *The Book of Repulsive Women* "rhythms" on her title page, not "poems." They are meant to be visceral and drumming, to speak from the body out, like D. H. Lawrence's tortoises "crucified into sex" (363). Moreover, for Barnes the female body is no idealized, aestheticized object. Instead, as she will later insist upon with great verve in *Ryder* (1928), the reality of a woman's body much more closely approaches the leaky, grotesque, expansive, and incomplete female bodies of the carnivalesque and Gothic traditions. "From Fifth Avenue Up," for instance, explicitly counters the long male tradition of the poetic *blason* of a woman's body, which by and large limits itself to decorously enumerating secondary sexual characteristics. Barnes, like, say, Spenser in Sonnet 64 of *Amoretti* ["Comming to kisse her lyps, (such grace I found)"], lists body part after body part: legs, lip, face, eyes, thighs, ear, arms, heart, hair, breast, belly. Unlike Spenser, though, who confines his catalog to his beloved's head and torso, Barnes's camera-eye is much more invasive. She mentions internal organs ("spleen") and genitalia ("damp'd damp under lip"). Moreover, her women sweat and drip. Their arms "grow humid," they salivate, they engage in actual intercourse. There is no detour into trope that expresses yet civilizes desire, as in Spenser's final lines, "Such fragrant flowres doe give most odorous smell, / But her sweet odour did them all excell" (613).

Barnes's immediate target seems to be the sort of misty love lyric associ-

ated with the Celtic Twilight and Pre-Raphaelite verse. The “damp chemise” and “soft saliva” mock through their concreteness the poetic never-never land evoked by earlier details such as “cool pale eyes” and “lang’rous length / Of thighs.” Moreover, she brings out the voyeurism of such love poetry by having a nebulous, gender ambiguous “we” record the pornographic proceedings in obsessive detail. Although the title of the book instructs one to consider the woman depicted in “Fifth Avenue Up” “repulsive,” readers of the poem have to wonder whether they are in fact more “repulsed” by the woman being observed or the implied person(s) observing the scene.

### Arsy-Versy

Although there are undeniable differences between Barnes’s and Crane’s earliest poetry—most notably, Barnes’s Swiftian-Sapphic scrutiny of female flesh, but also Crane’s proclivity for syntactical slippage—one can nonetheless identify a clutch of common themes and formal strategies. They employ clunky mannerisms such as word inversion and archaic diction. They invoke conventional verse forms only to warp or break them. They seem strangely at ease with any resultant ugliness, confusion, and awkwardness. Similarly, they make use of the trappings of love poetry to adorn poems that steadfastly decline to behave in good Petrarchan fashion. Pound would have been horrified. (And was.)<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, though, these poems *also* fall short of the standard set by Barnes’s and Crane’s decadent precursors. No self-respecting member of the Rhymers’ Club would have published work so riddled with metrical solecisms or exhibiting such irregular, wayward stanza forms. Wilde, Dowson, and Johnson famously fetishized craft, producing lyrics and songs with gem-like hardness and glitter. Through consummate Paterian artifice they sought to create beauty so perfect that it could withstand the awesome, destructive power of time. Barnes and Crane distinguish themselves from this earlier generation by incorporating into their writing blockage, rupture, leakage, and waste. They weave decay into the very fabric of their verse.

Their “broken strain” poetics is not offered up as formal innovation for its own sake. Rather, Crane and Barnes both propose connections between the generic and formal perversity perceptible in these poems and their sexually deviant subject matter. (While not as overtly homoerotic as Barnes’s lyric, Crane’s “C 33” nonetheless, in its title, evokes Wilde’s fall, a frame that makes readily available for other insiders a gay reading of the almost sonnet.) Moreover, the relationship between sexuality and form is historically specific. Two U.S. writers living in Greenwich Village in the 1910s—a neighbor-

hood already known for its thriving queer community<sup>12</sup>—look back to the British fin de siècle of Swinburne and Wilde to provide formal models for expressing same-sex desire. The results, they seem to be saying, are necessarily warped, strained, broken. However devoutly one might wish to revive the androgynous glories of a generation previous, a profound discursive rupture intervenes.

The glittering surface and substanceless eloquence of late nineteenth-century decadence were deliberately “campy.” They were often a way of communicating to those “in the know” that the apparent lack of any objective correlative for a gesture was, in fact, an indication of the presence of the unspeakable, that is, homoerotic desire.<sup>13</sup> For readers attuned to this elaborate interpretive dance, or so the argument runs, a fictional figure such as Dorian Gray would have been identifiably homosexual—there would be no other way to explain Wilde’s odd evasions and significant silences in regard to his protagonist’s behavior. The exaltation of stylization and artifice thereby succeeded in giving homosexuality a means of expression in the public sphere. But Wilde’s conviction for sodomy in 1895 had brought that airy castle crashing down. Art for art’s sake, a refuge from the pressures of the world, suddenly became art *contra naturam*, a departure from nature that verged on a crime against it. By the 1920s, as Langdon Hammer notes, in the United States the diction and mannerisms that aestheticism had popularized were readily legible as indications of homosexuality (59). Intended as a liberation, the fin de siècle public unveiling of homosexuality instead left people standing vulnerable in the public spotlight.

“C 33” and “From Fifth Avenue Up” resolve to carry on the struggle to publicize queer eros. Barnes and Crane put into play “broken” decadent forms, tropes, and representational strategies because they acknowledge the obsolescence, the ruination, of fin de siècle camp. But they also intuit the contemporary potential to use these “decoded” mannerisms to convey forthrightly what heretofore went without saying. The decadent poets bequeathed to their self-appointed heirs a rudimentary language for writing homoerotic desire.

Neither Barnes nor Crane were wholly satisfied with this situation. Their lyrics both express anxiety over the value of *ars contra naturam*, more specifically its sterility, or what Erin Carlston has called its “non(re)productiveness” (51). The spilled, poured, and dripped bodily fluids in “C 33” and “From Fifth Avenue Up” are one expression of this worry, but the figure of the fecund mother is the focus of greatest ambivalence. Can poems (and poets) that repudiate the heterosexual cycle of reproduction produce anything of merit—or for the ages? Is recovering and furthering a seemingly dead-end



poetics a fertile or a futile act? In reproducing a past style, what else might you be reproducing, negative as well as positive?

The poems hint at but never quite manage to articulate these questions. Indeed, they muddily, melodramatically avoid committing themselves to any straightforward statements about maternity. Crane's "Materna" may or may not be the solution to "his" wandering in the first half of the poem. Depending on how one reads "must needs bring pain," she is either a healer or the intended object of violence. Whether she is redeemer or seductress, "you" are tempted to flee on "paths tear-wet" (from guilt? from pain?). "From Fifth Avenue Up" is even more feverishly uncertain about motherhood. It ends with a grotesque image of a girl-child born pregnant, whose "bulging belly" recalls both the sexualized "bulging hair" several stanzas before and the "fertile fields" where the poem's sexual encounters take place. The poem seems to condemn "you" for preferring a same-sex partner to a more productive, heterosexual relationship, but the poem also presents fecundity itself as an uncanny, horrific aspect of a woman's body. The "you" in these poems is hailed into intense, shifting scenes that verge on nightmare.

In 1915–16, a self-consciously "broken" decadence was a mixed blessing. It could speak queer desire, after a fashion. It could also permit writers like Barnes and Crane to express, obliquely, the torment of negotiating a puritanical sex-gender system. But U.S. neo-decadence also had to grapple with troubling, inherited topoi: the indistinguishability of sex and death; a self-imperiling pursuit of extremes; the limited, limiting choice between sumptuous yet sterile artifice and revolting yet fertile nature.

Crane's and Barnes's apprenticeships to Guido Bruno were invaluable but by necessity short. During and immediately after World War I, they both gravitated toward more aggressively forward-looking cliques, especially the Provincetown Players and Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap's *Little Review* set. From 1916–19 they moved in many of the same, self-consciously modernizing circles and shared such visionary friends as Eleanor Fitzgerald and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Recognizing a kindred spirit, Crane endeared himself to Barnes by irregularly sending her boxes of candy made in his father's factory. She recalled these gifts with great fondness until the end of her very long life (Unterecker 178; O'Neal 31–2).

This first phase in their friendship came to an end in 1919, when Crane's finances dictated a retreat to Ohio. They did not correspond. *McCall's* sent Barnes to Paris in 1921 on assignment, and she promptly expatriated herself. For the next seven years Barnes and Crane matured separately as artists. She missed Crane's triumphant return to New York in 1923 and his subsequent, rapid progress as a poet. He did not witness her evolution from poet and

playwright to novelist. Though he dreamed of La Rotonde and hankered for the sexual freedoms of Paris—"O God that I should have to live within these American restrictions forever" (*O My* 127)—he knew nothing of Barnes's marquee role in Natalie Barney's Sapphic salon. When next they met, during Crane's tumultuous 1928–29 sojourn in Europe, they had left their days as Bruno's disciples far behind. Nevertheless, they had both wrestled for over a decade with the legacy of decadence, especially the problem of *ars contra naturam*. Comparing their works of this period, one can discern the lineaments of a more fully developed queer aesthetics.

## Go West

When Crane arrived in Paris in January 1929, he brought with him materials intended for two different books of poetry. He quickly acquired new patrons—the millionaires Harry and Caresse Crosby—who successfully pressured him into completing the older of the two manuscripts. Accordingly, in 1930, after seven long years of delay, incubation, and frenzied revision, Crane's second book, *The Bridge*, was published by the Crosbys' Black Sun Press. As chapter 6 recounts, this book-length poem, his storied "mystical synthesis of 'America,'" soon provoked a round of controversy among the U.S. literati that secured him the indelible reputation of a failed, impractical, yet glorious American visionary (*O My* 131).

The second manuscript that Crane brought with him to Paris never achieved final form. In 1927 he announced a long "Carib suite" that he was working on as a respite from his weary labors on *The Bridge* (*O My* 343). Five years later, at the time of his death, this book project remained ongoing and open-ended. He left behind a manila folder, titled "Key West," that contains thirty-two unpaginated sheets. There is no way of ascertaining if the present ordering reflects Crane's intentions. An included list of contents names only thirteen of the nineteen lyrics in the folder. In addition, typescripts of other poems, such as "The Broken Tower," may have been removed from the folder at some point (*HCCP* 237–39).

However inchoate and preliminary, the "Key West" manuscript is nonetheless superior to *The Bridge* if one wishes to explore the development of Crane's poetics in the years 1927–30, as he moved from the odic gush of "Cape Hatteras" through the American surrealism of "O Carib Isle!" toward the gnomic, stuttering mode of "The Circumstance: To Xochipili." *The Bridge*—as chapter 5 will demonstrate—stages a complex play of centrifugal and centripetal tensions that so warp the poetry that early and late layers of composition interpenetrate and refuse easy separation. Crane aspires to collapse

linear time and the sprawl of space into a mythic ever- and omnipresence. The “Key West” poems provide what *The Bridge* cannot: Crane unconstrained by a creaky nationalism, freed to write occasional verse, able to experiment with new forms and themes from poem to poem, in short, a poet in the process of variously investigating means of moving his poetics forward.

The collection’s eponymous poem, “Key West,” while not fully representative of the other lyrics, nonetheless can serve as a benchmark in measuring Crane’s development as a poet subsequent to his Guido Bruno days. Like “C 33,” it opens in an allegorical landscape and, again like “C 33,” it ponders the question of ultimate origins:

Here has my salient faith annealed me.  
 Out of the valley, past the ample crib  
 To skies impartial, that do not disown me  
 Nor claim me, either, by Adam’s spine—nor rib. (*HCCP* 126)

Lines 2–4 concisely if obliquely sum up the speaker’s youth, from birth (“Out of the valley”) through sheltered childhood (“the ample crib”) to a skeptical adulthood, in which no ersatz parent, no god or goddess, reigns in the “skies impartial” or governs him by right of an imputed genealogy back to the dawn of humanity, to Adam and Eve (“Adam’s . . . rib”). The meter and form of the verse track and reinforce this implied growth toward wisdom:

/   ^   ^   / ^ ^   /   ^   /   ^  
 Here has my salient faith annealed me.  
 /   ^   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
 Out of the valley, past the ample crib  
 ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /   ^  
 To skies impartial, that do not disown me  
 ^   /   ^   /   ^   ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
 Nor claim me, either, by Adam’s spine—nor rib. (*HCCP* 126)

The first line contains only four stresses, and the feminine ending ( / ^ ) renders it ambiguous whether the meter of the remainder of the poem will be rising or falling, iambic or trochaic. The second line opens with the same rhythmic pattern as the first ( / ^ ^ / ^ ) but then proceeds to contain five feet, the final four of them audibly iambic. The momentary metrical confusion of the first line begins to give way to familiarity and regularity. The third line takes another step in this direction. Its first ten syllables scan as iambic pentameter. There is a final, superfluous unstressed syllable, that is, another

feminine ending, but this extra word, “me,” is the same as appeared at the end of line 1. This second “me” directs attention toward the problem of the speaker’s identity, especially the difficulty of articulating that identity within orderly, structured speech. One is led to wonder, can polished verse do justice to “me,” or do the strictures of versification render a speaker’s identity a secondary, superfluous concern? Line 4 resolves this tension. The word “me” occurs yet again, but this time it is internal to line 4 as a neutral, unstressed syllable. The speaker now has confidence in his adult capacity to shape and direct his language and meaning. There is no longer a potential conflict between selfhood and its literary extension. Reassured and self-assured, the speaker introduces an elegant variation on the iambic meter, an anapest within which falls a caesura, only to balance it at the quatrain’s end with an emphatically iambic foot—

^     /         ^     /         ^     ||     ^     /  
 (1) Nor claim (2) me, ei-(3) ther,         by A-  
        ^         /                     ^         /  
 (4) dam’s spine         (5)—nor rib.

The first stanza of “Key West” thus recapitulates many of the same themes and techniques evinced in “C 33”—an assertion of vocation amid the crystallizing emergence of conventional form—but here the goal is reached more rapidly, and the poet’s liberation from initial dependency on heterosexual origins (Adam and Eve) is stated unequivocally.

There have been other developments, too. “C 33” contained words and syntactical constructions that obstructed interpretation. Here the peculiarities are more productive. In the first line, for instance, “salient” and “annealed” are designedly polysemous. A “salient faith” is presumably a conspicuous or prominent faith, hence a faith that the poem is likely to detail further, but the phrase is unusual, and a reader is likely to pause over it and consider possible, alternative meanings. Coming so soon after the title “Key West,” “salient” suggests “saline,” providing a sound echo that smoothes the transition from a specific location to the much more abstract, allegorical landscape of the lyric. “Salient” also refers to the forward projection of a battle line, a martial significance that the word “annealed,” which summons up images of forges and blacksmiths, quickly reinforces. This is a faith akin to a knight’s, one expressed conspicuously both through acts of devotion (*kneeling*) and through wielding the sword (made of annealed steel), preferably at the forefront of the battle. The next three quatrains will carry on this complex of chivalric themes. The speaker will “strike a march” that may lead to

“heaven or hades,” but his “wrist and bicep” may have strength enough to set him apart from the “millions” who “reap of dead conclusion” and value “gold” above “conscience.” The wordplay in Crane’s post-1923 poetry is subtle yet pervasive, rewarding a reader who employs extensive lateral and inferential thinking.

The syntax of “Key West” displays a comparable degree of sophistication. Unlike the repeated “he” and the “must needs” in “C 33”—glaring, awkward cruxes—the syntax of this later lyric is seductively but misleadingly fluid. For example, although it is easy to miss on one’s first pass through the poem, lines 2–4 are a sentence fragment. “Out of the valley,” “past the ample crib,” “To skies impartial” lead a reader to expect (or supply) a motion verb that never arrives. Instead, the verses veer into a subordinate clause—“that do not disown me”—that promptly tangles itself in waves of negation—“do not disown me / Nor claim me.” The “Nor” here is confusing. Does it negate or restate the “not” in “do not disown”? Are the skies claiming or not claiming “me”? The final negation in the quatrain—“nor rib”—adds to the uncertainty. It sounds as if it parallels “Nor claim,” yet to do so “rib” must be a verb, not the noun that its immediately preceding phrase, “by Adam’s spine,” leads one to expect. Are the skies “ribbing” “me” or not? If it is “Adam’s rib” he’s talking about, the problem still remains how to read the preposition “by.” Is it locative, like the other prepositions in the sentence fragment (out of, past, to)? Is it instrumental, expressing how the skies do or do not claim me? Is it vocative, as in “by God’s blood” or “by our Lady”? Once one begins asking hard questions about the syntax, the destination that the stanza proposes on the level of narrative—independent, disillusioned adulthood—does not arrive when or as expected.

This deferral prepares a reader for the ambiguous finale of “Key West,” in which speaker closes with an apparent asseveration of *contemptus mundi*: “There is no breath of friends and no more shore / Where gold has not been sold and conscience tinned” (126). Crane seems, initially, to be saying that everything has been corrupted by capitalism. Money has debased morality (“conscience”) and social relations (“breath of friends”) around the world. But the negations cloud the picture. “Where gold has not been sold” suggests that the poem is talking about a place in which gold has no exchange value. In that case, the poem suggests that “friends” exist only in places where gold “has . . . been sold,” a most pessimistic moral, since it would mean that all friendship is dependent in some fashion on a monetary economy. But those places where “gold has not been sold” also possess “no more shore,” which suggests that they do not exist, which could explain why friends cannot be conceived as existing there, either. The final, elliptical phrase “conscience

tinned” stirs the pot further. Given the construction, one could make a case for the omission of *either* “has been” or “has not been,” a fact that renders impossible the assertion of any clear, stable link between the “tinning” of “conscience” (its devaluation, as in tin replacing silver? its containment, as in a tin can?) and the presence or absence of a commodity culture. Crane’s convoluted syntax frequently brings concepts, objects, and actions into relation without straightforwardly prescribing causality, hierarchy, or precedence.

By the time he was writing the “Key West” poems, Crane had set aside the externals that had once made him a decadent manqué. His landscapes are sere and chiseled, not tear-wet and dusk-hushed. His speakers have outlived the sensitive indecision of his chrysanthemum-confused adolescence and now confront troubles theological (“skies impartial”) and economic (“gold was, scarcity before”). As the second stanza of “Key West” concisely illustrates, his diction and imagery are less derivative and the imagined realms less conventional:

The oar splash, and the meteorite’s white arch  
 Concur with wrist and bicep. In the moon  
 That now has sunk I strike a single march  
 To heaven or hades—to an equally frugal noon. (*HCCP* 126)

Crane here brings together sky, sea (“oar splash”), and fire (“white arch,” “noon”); the afterlife (“heaven or hades”) and the workaday world (“wrist and bicep”); night (“moon”) and day (“noon”). In this temporal and spatial collapse, events and objects “concur,” that is, take place at the same time. Motion cannot therefore be understood in the same manner: one heads “equally” to every destination simultaneously. In such circumstances—in which one is already everywhere one would wish to go—a “march” is not so much accomplished as it is “struck,” ambiguously both undertaken (as in “strike a match”) and abandoned (as in “stricken off a list”).

In the “Key West” poems, Crane remains dedicated to traditional rhyme and meter, but these are never deployed as static templates. Instead, they become akin to actors onstage, emerging or decaying, working with or against syntax and sense. Individual phrases and words, too, are eccentric players in this drama, capable of impeding, deflecting, or advancing it. The poems proffer hallucinations, impossible utopias, and speculative wordscapes that depart from without completely forsaking the geography and history of the modern world. The artifice is forthright and stubborn but ruptured. The same verses seduce and repel through their blend of virtuosity (flashy effects, rhetorical complexity, intellectual subtlety) and incompetence (faulty syn-

tax, incomplete narrative, overplus of symbols). His poems struggle toward scattered, brief, never-total escapes from the mundane. The intensity of that struggle, and the meager partiality of the results, persuade one of the inestimable value of those few flights that succeed.

What of this, if anything, merits the label *queer*? Unlike “C 33,” in the “Key West” poems Crane avoids specific, overt references to queer history. A case in point: in the later 1920s Key West had yet to acquire its status as one of the premier gay resorts in the United States. The cavalcade of gay writers who would later midwife that reputation—among them Tennessee Williams and Elizabeth Bishop—did not arrive until after the likes of Hemingway and Wallace Stevens had publicized the area as a fishing paradise. For Crane, who never seems to have visited the place, “Key West” probably signified a liminal space, partway between the America eulogized in *The Bridge* and the Caribbean that he knew from his numerous visits to his grandmother’s property on the Isle of Pines, off the coast of Cuba. Moreover, Crane had no reason to romanticize Florida. In 1925 his mother had been the victim of a Miami real estate swindle that left her ill, far from home, and alone with a dependent parent (*O My* 210, 215). Yes, Crane did have a penchant for eroticizing the tropics, and, true, his dissipations in Havana were ferocious and legendary. Nevertheless, his choice of “Key West” as a title and setting reflects less sexual tourism than a messier mix of motives. Partly a search for a *locus amoenus*, a place of desire, his “Key West” poems also display both a recognition of the hybridity of Caribbean culture and an awareness of the greed for beachfront land development that underlay its myth as a vacation wonderland. The poem “Key West” first proposes an ecstatic collapse of time past and future into a luminous eternal present only then to veer toward a consideration of the problem of “gold.” As usual in Crane, the movement toward an imagined utopia coexists with another vector, a plunge into bitter disillusionment.

Can one call this dramatic conflict *queer*? As Michael du Plessis has warned, the word has lost its bite, not to mention its social referent, as it has gained academic currency (508). The issue here is more than terminological. As discussed earlier, Crane began his writing career by explicitly revisiting and endeavoring to extend fin de siècle strategies for articulating queer content. A decade later, does his writing retain this component of erotic dissent? Can he help one appreciate queer strategies for challenging or eluding the (heteronormative) androcentrism of such writers as Frost, Lawrence, Lewis, Pound, and Yeats? Turning to Djuna Barnes’s writings of the same years—more specifically, to her *Ladies Almanack* (1928), a central text in the canon of Sapphic modernism—one can begin to clarify which aspects of Crane’s

poetics converge and diverge from that strain of Anglo-American queer(ed) modernism to have received the closest literary-critical scrutiny.

## Ladies First

*Ladies Almanack* is a bawdy roman à clef that satirizes the Académie des Femmes, an expatriate lesbian circle in 1920s Paris that regularly gathered at the salon of Natalie Clifford Barney.<sup>14</sup> Barnes chose this subject matter, at least in part, to rebut Proust's representation of Parisian lesbian life in *So-dome et Gomorrhe* (1921–22).<sup>15</sup> The loose, episodic narrative, divided into twelve parts named for the twelve months, gleefully recounts the adventures of Dame Evangeline Musset, Barney's alter ego.

This plot, however, serves chiefly as a pretext for displays of Barnes's technical virtuosity. Over the course of the book, Barnes adapts her story line to suit the conventions of several disparate genres: mock epic, hagiography, creation myth, picaresque, almanac, verse catalog, debate, epistle, lullaby, and ode. This generic instability corresponds to the mercurial diversity of the work's prose:

[T]he text speaks cryptically, figurally, evasively. Sentences are winding, inverted, unfinished, or impossibly long. Antecedents get misplaced, verbs dangle, pronouns lose their source. Key words are sometimes elided from sentences whose meanings remain forever indeterminate . . . Archaisms are common . . . neologisms are frequent; grammatical forms are resurrected from the Renaissance or invented on the spot. There is a continual mingling of registers as well as lexicons: plain modern English coexists with fancy Elizabethan; obscure terms are juxtaposed with blunt Anglo-Saxon unpleasantries. Metaphors often make one strain desperately and still end up not quite making sense. (Lanser 157–58)

In 1972, Barnes retrospectively tried to dismiss *Ladies Almanack* as a "slight satiric wiggling," yet the raw ambition that initially motivated her should now be evident ("Preface" 3). Her experiments in narrative prose rival those of her friend James Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* had recently begun appearing in the journal *transition* under the title "Work in Progress."<sup>16</sup>

Joyce, however, was seeking to create the ultimate, self-enclosed, autotelic high modernist artifact. Once complete, *Finnegans Wake* would round upon itself, its last, partial sentence completed by the book's first. *Ladies Almanack*, in contrast, pushes further the aesthetic of ruptures, leaks, and stutters al-



ready observable in *The Book of Repulsive Women*. The results recall the poetics subtending the “Key West” poems, although Barnes, just as she was in 1915, is much more forthright about the roles that sex, sexuality, and gender play in her “broken” style.

Barnes creates a tenuous fantasy realm, at once a timeless utopia of fulfilled erotic, linguistic desire and a time-bound, tawdry, confessedly substanceless piece of escapism. The uneasy coexistence of these two aspects of the text does not detract from the artistry of *Ladies Almanack*. On the contrary, through the pursuit of such irreconcilable aims, Barnes successfully breaks, or crazes, the prose, producing an uneven artifice that forces dream and reality to interpenetrate, to fold one into the other, until separating them proves impossible.

The July chapter of *Ladies Almanack* illustrates this dynamic. The chief topic for July is love talk between women. Barnes characterizes the heterosexual endearments that “teem” in “Our own” present-day “Journals” as reticent, slightly silly understatement. As she puts it, when “Beards” address their “Maids,” their “very highest encomiums reach no more glorious Foothold than ‘Honey Lou,’ or ‘Snooky dear’” (43). In contrast, lesbian lovers are volatile, excessive, and irrepressible. They pour out torrents of embarrassingly sentimental praise:

To you I give my Bays, my Laurels, my Everlastings, my Peonies, my hardy Perennials and my early percipient Posies, that bloom for such effulgence as shines along from your Countenance! . . . for you alone I reserve that Gasp under Gasp, that Sigh behind Sigh, that Attention back of feigned; that Cloud’s Silver is yours—take it! (44)

After several pages of this glittery fluff, the ostensible author of *Ladies Almanack*, a self-described “Lady of Fashion,” suddenly breaks off. She declares that she can never give an adequate representation of such ceaseless babble:

I cannot write it! It is worse than this! More dripping, more lush, more lavender, more mid-mauve, more honeyed, more Flower-casting, more Cherub-bound, more downpouring, more saccharine, more lamentable, more gruesomely unmindful of reason or Sense. (45–46)

Lesbian self-expression, it seems, exceeds all bounds. It is always “more” than its decorous heterosexual analogue. “Downpouring” and “dripping,” such discourse is superfluous in the etymological sense of the word: an overflowing.

It is, of course, quite conventional to depict homoerotic desire as super-

fluous. Same-sex eroticism has generally appeared unnecessary, or supplemental, within kinship systems and societies predicated on the heterosexual marriage tie. In “From Fifth Avenue Up,” the wastefulness of lesbian love had, accordingly, been figured grotesquely as the “dripping” female body; *Ladies Almanack* instead posits that the superfluity of such desire is neither trivial nor non(re)productive but titanic, a veritable flash flood of libido. Such superabundance cannot be forcibly controlled by a writer (“strophed to a Romanesque Fortitude”), nor pruned to suit an audience’s expectations (“as clipped of Foliage as a British Hedge”), nor made to conform to the demands of heterosexual society (“as an Infant’s Cap . . . is somewhat of a Head’s proportion”) (42–43). Instead, homoerotic speech “flows and drips away and adown,” eludes the structures and strictures that seek to contain it (43).

A great deal of the fun in the July chapter of *Ladies Almanack* stems from the text’s own participation in what it ostensibly, if lovingly, criticizes. The speaker relies heavily on hyperbole and exaggerated catalogs. Moreover, the prose is “excessive” in its forthright artificiality and ornament. The chapter opens with something utterly “superfluous” to the narrative, an illustration whose chief theme is sentimental self-indulgence. The reader encounters a drawing of a woman, recumbent, among clouds. She wears an old-fashioned, frilly, lacy dress, complete with a ruff. Beneath her, flowers fall to earth. Three cherubs flutter above her. And, above them, a monstrous ribbon, even larger than the woman, flares and droops. In the background, as if from heaven, beams and words radiate downwards: “HONEY HEART / AND HASTY HEAVEN / PRISTINE / PET / AND A / NEW BORN LOVE.” What self-respecting novelist, a reader might very well ask, would ever include such a silly drawing in a serious work?

Distracting decoration also impedes access to the text proper. The look of the page is deliberately archaic. Vaguely in the manner of the eighteenth century, the lettering is large, covered with serifs, and littered with unnecessary capitalization.

THE Time has come, when, with unwilling Hand,  
I must set down what a woman says to a Woman  
and she be up to her Ears in Love’s Acre.

Barnes closes the chapter, as she does many others in *Ladies Almanack*, by shaping her final lines into a triangle that rests its point on a star:

Surely it is admirable to have a Fancy and a Fancy when  
in Love, but why so witless about a witty Insanity? It

would loom the bigger if stripped of its Jangle,  
 but no, drugged such much go. As foggy as a  
 Mere, as drenched as a Pump; twittering so  
 loud upon the Wire that one cannot  
 hear the Message.  
 And yet!

\*

Given this design, and the insistence on “flow” in the July chapter of *Ladies Almanack*, one cannot help but be reminded of the text triangle at the opening of the Anna Livia Plurabelle episode in *Finnegans Wake*. Consider, too, that, much as in the ALP chapter, Barnes’s words carry a strong underlying rhythm, here predominantly iambic and anapestic.

^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /  
 to have a Fancy and a Fancy when in Love,  
 ^ / ^ / ^ ^ / ^ / ^ ^ / ^^  
 but why so witless about a witty Insanity

The resulting singsong effect is exacerbated by a *Wake*-like, childlike exultation in repetition (“a Fancy and a Fancy,” witless / witty); alliteration (when / why / witless / witty); consonance (but / wit / about / insanity); assonance (in / wit / insanity); and rhyme (fancy / witty / insanity).<sup>17</sup>

The Joycean analogy, however, fails to explain the deliberate tension in the July chapter between expression and thing expressed. The “Jangle,” visual and verbal, of these lines obstructs access to the scene depicted and the very real argument being made, that same-sex love, though a fact of life from the dawn of time, has been rigorously excluded from the public sphere: “from Fish to Man there has been much Back-Mating and Front to Front, though only a Twitter of it comes out of the past” (43). *Finnegans Wake*, in contrast, offers no single, stable substrate to anchor an interpretation. *Ladies Almanack* strategically chooses a rather more conventional approach by revisiting the Platonic split between mind and body, content and form. Around this central conflict it puts into play a series of other binary oppositions: essential / superfluous, sober / exuberant, serious / ludicrous, heterosexual / homosexual, substance / surface, rigid / liquid, message / interference, rational / unreasonable, natural / unnatural.

This kind of complex has a long, prestigious lineage. In her article “Cosmetic Theology” (1981), Marcia Colish has in fact traced back to the Stoic

philosophers of antiquity the philosophical compulsion to differentiate between the correct, true, and natural and those qualities that adulterate these positive goods. Shari Benstock has contended that Barnes, like other Sapphic modernists, sets about inverting such age-old truisms. Barnes becomes fascinated with ornament and maquillage as she feels out the possibilities for creative expression available to a woman artist in the 1920s working within a patriarchal value system (Benstock, *Women* 242–46). She accepts the many, gendered distinctions between things essential and superfluous only to reverse the value judgments. The “inferior” term in each binary becomes valorized, and suddenly she becomes not a marginal artist but a central one, authorized to write as she will.

The resultant, counterfactual narrative presents itself as something utterly new, wholly unmoored from convention, history, and inherited literary canons. The weirdly wondrous, luxuriantly artificial realm that Barnes describes—in which every “Vixen” gleefully, openly cavorts with her “Wench of Bliss” (60)—belongs to no recorded time or space. It is a utopia, a “no place,” in Thomas Moore’s original sense of the term, that is, a fanciful, fictional country whose only existence is textual and literary.

In this Sapphic utopia, removed as it is from time’s flow, history can be highly malleable, subject to radical revision, rearrangement, or collapse. *Ladies Almanack* is written in a bizarre, thoroughly anachronistic mishmash of Robert Burton, King James Bible, and William Shakespeare (“who ever held that Soliloquy was for Hamlet alone?” [32]). Moreover, just as one learns what Juliet was really pining for, so too Barnes reveals the stories that stick-in-the-mud men like Moses hold back, such as Jezebel’s seduction of the Queen of Sheba (41). A short section titled “Zodiac” pointedly redresses the gaps in Genesis, announcing, “This is the part about Heaven that has never been told” (24), before proceeding to explain how the “first Woman born with a Difference” was the product of parthenogenesis, all men having been kicked out of paradise along with Satan (26).

However delightful such anachronisms and carnivalesque, even cosmological, inversions may be, they prove impossible for Barnes to sustain throughout *Ladies Almanack*. Just as in Crane’s poem “Key West,” the pressure of reality pushes back against the power of the imagination. The character Patience Scalpel, the voice of heterosexual reason, is particularly “cutting in its Derision” (12). During her first chilly appearance in *Ladies Almanack*, appropriately enough in the January chapter, she restates the homophobic stereotype of lesbians as grotesque, dripping, sterile women with which Barnes had wrestled in “From Fifth Avenue Up”:

I am of my Time my Time's best argument, and who am I that I must die in my Time, and never know what it is in the Whorles and Crevices of my Sisters so prolongs them to the bitter End? Do they not have Organs as exactly alike as two Peas, or twin Griefs; and are they not eclipsed ever so often with the galling Check-rein of feminine Tides? So what to better Purpose than to sit the Dears on a Stack of Blotters, and let it go at that, giving them in their meantime a Bible and a Bobbin, and say with all Pessimism—they have come to a blind Alley; there will be no Children born for a Season, and what matter it? (11–12)

Patience Scalpel contrasts the “twin Griefs” of lesbian coupling to loving “in the olden Formula,” which is necessary for the survival of the human race. “My Daughters shall go amarrying,” she avows, whereas “they themselves [the Sapphists] will have no Shes, unless some Her puts them forth” (13).

After the January chapter, Scalpel reappears periodically and unexpectedly in *Ladies Almanack* to resume her jeremiad against lesbian infertility (e.g. 68–69). When, in December, Dame Musset dies without heir, Scalpel's dire prophecies reach fruition. The through-the-looking-glass realm that Musset rules cannot survive her passing, and the narrative that celebrates her reign, despite its paean to the ceaselessness of lesbian chatter, must also come to a close. Barnes reminds one that the Sapphic escapism of *Ladies Almanack* is terribly fragile. It is embarrassingly dependent on the heterosexual economy of reproduction from which it devoutly wishes to distance itself. It is also dependent on the charisma, courage, and leadership of exceptional individuals. Escape is hard won, and fleeting.

The May chapter ponders this tragic interplay between Sapphic utopia and patriarchal history, and it hints at a messianic solution. In its opening tableau and exchange, Patience Scalpel appears, like the prophet Nathan before King David, to accuse a wayward monarch of sexual immorality:

Patience Scalpel held forth in that divine and ethereal Voice for which she was noted, the Voice of one whose Ankles are nibbled by the Cherubs, while amid the Rugs Dame Musset brought Doll Furious to a certainty.

“What,” said Patience Scalpel, “can you women see in each other? Where is the Parting of the Ways and the Horseman that hunts? Where,” she reflected, “there is Prostitution and Drunkenness, there is bound to be Immorality, or I do not count the Times, but what is this?”

“And,” said Dame Musset, rising in Bed, “that's all there is, and there is no more!”

"But oh!" cried Doll.

"Down Woman," said Dame Musset in her friendliest, "there may be a mustard seed!" (30–31)

Introduced as an agent of the "divine," Scalpel observes and condemns the spectacle of two women making love. Her comments, naturally, spoil the moment. Dame Musset breaks off. Doll Furious is left "crying" for satisfaction after Musset's brusque declaration "there is no more." Musset then consoles Doll with the enigmatic promise of "a mustard seed." Given the religious framing, she almost certainly has in mind two of Jesus's parables:

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. (Mark 4:30–32)



And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matt 17:18–20)

Read via these parables, Dame Musset's "mustard seed" portends one of two not irreconcilable outcomes. First, the "heaven" that is two women in bed is, in the current world, something tenuous, vulnerable, subject to interruption and disruption, as flyaway as the smallest of seeds. But that heaven shall sprout, and the flimsy utopia that *Ladies Almanack* sketches will then "shooteth out great branches," become a rooted, productive reality, a shelter for "the fowls of the air," the women who today can only imagine such a thing. Alternatively, the "mustard seed" signifies the faith necessary to make such changes in the world. If you truly believe in the utopia despite its absurdity, its defenselessness, "nothing shall be impossible unto you." Dame Musset opposes Patience Scalpel's strictures with a millenarian, revolutionary vision.

The "mustard seed" scene gains even greater importance when one learns that Doll Furious is based upon Dorothy "Dolly" Wilde, Oscar's equally outrageous niece (89). If the neo-decadent moment that produced Crane's

"C 33" and Barnes's *Book of Repulsive Women* labored under the shadow of Oscar Wilde's fall, *Ladies Almanack* leaves the next generation of Wildes in suspense, devoutly desiring a climactic "certainty" but still subject to surveillance and rebuke by the uncomprehending, moralizing "divine . . . Voice" of authority (30–31). The free, unfettered libidinal gush of homoerotic desire may not yet be fully lawful or possible, but it is nascent, in germ ("seed"), in the present situation. Barnes's *ars contra naturam* concedes the ongoing, active suppression of homosexuality in 1920s transatlantic culture in order to suggest that the worst may be past, a corner may yet be turned.

The text of *Ladies Almanack* ends at daybreak, at the close of a nightlong vigil kept by one hundred "mournful baying" women. Dame Musset's funerary urn is placed "on the Altar in the temple of Love. There it is said . . . one may still decipher the Line, beneath its Handles, 'Oh ye of little Faith'" (84). An apparent slam of her lesbian faithful, the motto also harks back to Dame Musset's promised mustard seed, and Doll Furious's later "lament" for "A grain, a grain!" (31). Barnes leaves a reader unsure whether the book's close is dismissive or triumphal. *Ladies Almanack* puts into play the conflicting vectors of oppression and reaction, nightmare and idyll, abjection and carnival. If in the *Book of Repulsive Women*, Barnes sought to recycle the detritus of decadent discourses, in *Ladies Almanack* she has learned to separate out the self-hating, self-destructive morbidity in decadence from its potential, via high artifice, to critique the discourses of nature, divinity, and virtue that bolster compulsory heterosexuality.

## Smear Queer

*Ladies Almanack* is clearly much more overtly invested than Crane's "Key West" poems in defining, celebrating, and speaking to a queer audience. Their respective publication histories illustrate this difference. Apparently, Barnes intended for her book to be circulated solely in manuscript. When it did appear in print, from Darantière Press, the cost of printing was paid by a friend with Sapphic credentials (Robert McAlmon—the gay husband of Bryher, H.D.'s lesbian patron and lover). "Lacking a standard distributor," the book was "merrily and effectively hawked along the Left Bank by bold young women" (Barnes, *Ladies* 88). *Ladies Almanack* was thus a coterie venture, a portrait of a subculture for that subculture by one of its members.

In contrast, Crane's "Key West" poems were slotted for a general audience collection of verse. Lyrics that appeared in print during his lifetime surfaced in such avant-garde journals as *transition* and *Contempo*. The unfinished state of the manuscript does not reflect the poet's hesitations about publish-

ing risqué or dangerous material. When sex enters these poems, it does so in surreal fashion (“silking of shadows good underdrawers for owls”—*HCCP* 115); as a grotesque detail (“the boy straggling under those mimosas . . . likely / Fumbling his sex,” 118); or in gender-ambiguous, gauze-filtered soft focus (“I had come all the way here from the sea, / Yet met the wave again between your arms,” 127). This deliberate indirection contrasts to Crane’s frankness in his private correspondence, especially with Wilbur Underwood, his *soeur* from Washington, D.C.: “I have been driven at last to the parks. The first night brought me a most strenuous wooing and the largest instrument I have handled. Europa and the Bull are now entirely passé” (*O My* 94). One could say that Patience Scalpel, in the guise of Crane’s internal censor, excised any comparably “mid-mauve” material from the “Key West” manuscript before the lyrics ever reached paper.

Crane’s caution should not disqualify the “Key West” poems, however, from consideration alongside *Ladies Almanack* as samples of late 1920s queer aesthetics. As with “C 33” and “From Fifth Avenue Up,” there are important parallels between Barnes’s and Crane’s writings. First and foremost, they both counterpoise utopia and history. In both cases, the result is a disorderly, fractured variety of high artifice. Passages of mannered virtuosity are interrupted by concessions to the hard facts of everyday living.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, both writers, as an integral part of their embrace of artifice, indulge in stylistic anachronisms and in anti-mimetic wordplay. They thereby dramatize the gulf between the liberated imagination and the regulated, regimented course of life as prescribed by the nigh-divine “Voice” of convention, tradition, and patriarchal authority. Giving readers textual fantasias that acknowledge their own limits and provisionality, the authors confidently extend yet transform the decadent legacy in reaction to and in dissent from the sex-gender norms and economic realities of the 1920s.

This aesthetic is recognizably un-Poundian. It departs from Imagism insofar as it values the imaginary, the impossible, and the artificial over fidelity in representing the world-as-perceived. (As Crane once swore, “The imagination is the only thing worth a damn,” *O My* 93). This approach to art also prefers the anachronistic or timeless to the “modern,” if modernity is to be understood as a march of progress that locates, infuses, and surpasses the present moment as it arches into futurity. Barnes and Crane cannot so easily place their trust in history’s unfolding. In their eyes, unredeemed by messianic intervention, it is as likely to turn out to be bloody, baffling, and unjust as uplifting or inspirational. When their writing “includes history,” it cannot resort to the collage method of the *Cantos*. History enters not as the raw stuff of the past, and therefore proof of authenticity, but instead as a counter-



weight to mythopoesis. The tension between the two threatens utopian dreaming even as it renders that dreaming precious, a momentary escape valued all the more for its transience.

This aesthetic also dovetails with Sapphic modernism, insofar as one can speak in such generalities. Crane, like not only Barnes but also Natalie Barney and other members of her circle, delights in the ornamental possibilities of literary language.<sup>19</sup> (As he once, affectedly, put it, “I admit to a taste for certain affectations and ornamental commissions,” *O My* 45.) His poetry shares certain Sapphic modernist traits, such as a suspicion of the “ideological valences” of “motherhood” and “reproductive labor” (Carlston 7); a conflation of aestheticism and homosexuality (32–33); an attraction to “abnormality” (50); the almost excessive “embodiment” of a speaking voice in the texture of writing (Collecott 26); the knowledge that “‘rapture’ is ever threatened by ‘rupture’” (27); the struggle to assemble a completed text out of what can appear fragmentary utterances (28); a penchant for the “unnecessarily arcane” (Benstock, *Women* 243); a tendency to “elaborat[e] the ‘irrelevant’” (243); and an effort to disassociate “morbidity” from more useful aspects of fin de siècle poetics (285).

Honoring, even exaggerating, the purported excesses of late nineteenth-century literature, Crane, like the Sapphic modernists, reveled in registers of writing that their straight male counterparts denied themselves on account of their supposed effeminacy. To this extent, Crane participates in a queer counteroffensive against heteronormative policing of what subject matters and what subject positions would, in the 1910s and ’20s, count as modern and mature, and which would be exiled from history as anachronistic, impossible, rootless, or infantile. His mannered style—his “natural idiom (which I have unavoidably stuck to in spite of nearly everybody’s nodding, querulous head)” —does, then, as he vividly put it, “carr[y]” his “very blood and bone” (*O My* 135). In a historically specific manner, it articulates, and defends, his sexuality, that is, his particular sense and experience of himself as a desiring and desired body.

There are, however, manifest limits to eulogizing Crane as a queer writer. Barnes and her Sapphist colleagues went further in their opposition to canonical, androcentric modernism. The richly ornamented prose of *Ladies Almanack*, for instance, accommodates a freer rush of language, “more lush, more lavender, more mid-mauve, more honeyed, more Flower-casting” than Crane ever attempted (45). Crane, in fact, had great disdain for “the bucket of feminine lushness that forms a kind of milky way in the poetic firmament” (*O My* 69). He probably would have found Barnes’s near torrent of

verbiage nigh intolerable. Moreover, like Pound—or Williams, or Frost, or most every male modernist in the Anglo-American canon (with the possible exception of Joyce)—he surely would have cringed upon discovering the book's profuse, precious decorations: cherubs, bows, hearts, flowers, smiley suns, scrollwork, drapery, and capering seminude wenches. This brand of ornament would look most out of place adorning the “dark musky, brooding, speculative” poetry that Crane preferred to “feminine lushness” (*O My* 69–70).

Crane's boorish erotic fixation on hypermasculine, working-class images of masculinity—sailors, boxers, soldiers, factory workers—extended to his self-presentation in and through his writings. He typically permits women to enter his poetry only momentarily and in guises less than innocent or playful: as spectacles for the male gaze (“For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” “National Winter Garden”); as archetypal mothers (“Indiana,” “Van Winkle”); or as female personifications of abstractions such as the dawn (“Harbor Dawn”) and America (“The Dance”). This exclusion and subordination is also registered in his style. He has a strong preference for compression, ellipsis, and other techniques for surcharging his verse with meaning. The ruptures in his text are frequently grammatical, internal to the sentence, as if the torque and drive of his vision could not help but degrade the vehicle forced to convey it. A poem such as “Key West” might have perceptible historical and literary connections to fin de siècle decadence, but it also betrays an aversion to softness, laxness, fluidity, mellifluousness, and the other stylistic devices that Pound, following T. H. Hulme, declared outmoded because drip-pily effeminate. The poem's depiction of a prophet-poet coming into the full of his powers depends, at least in part, on its containment and exclusion of the feminine (“nor [Adam's] rib”). Anti-Imagist in its artificiality, “Key West” remains “androcentric” in its restraint. Failing to rethink the binary masculine-feminine adequately, Crane never arrived at an incisive critique of the U.S. sex-gender system on par with Barnes, H.D., or Gertrude Stein.

There is an oft-told anecdote about Crane's stay in Paris in 1929. The first time he dropped by to visit Djuna Barnes, he left a note pinned to her door with a dagger (O'Neal 31). The story, apocryphal or not, is worth lingering over. Barnes, who habitually appeared in public wearing an opera cape, was an ideal audience, in a certain sense, for this prank, which smacks of *Treasure Island* or *The Pirates of Penzance*. Two inveterate drama queens, Crane and Barnes savored extreme, mannered expressions of passion. They also appreciated, even thematized, the violence inherent in artifice, both in the artist's effort to pull away from things as they are and in the revenge that the given

world then wreaks on them for their hubris. One could construe the incident as Crane's campy, absurdly apt greeting to a fellow ephebe of decadent morbidity.

But this is the story of a man who stabs a dagger into a woman's door. The violence here is explicitly, crudely gendered. Crane might have counted Barnes as a friend, but on this occasion he thought nothing of threatening her directly, sexually. Yes, the dagger was probably a joke, but he remains guilty, at the very least, of an astounding faux pas. Crane might deserve a seat in the queer heavenly host, but he does not merit a place in the Empyrean Rose.

### 3

## How Modern

The last chapter's synchronic frame—its concentration on Crane's relationship to Sapphic modernism and its literary strategies—helps resolve the problem that chapter 1 posed, namely, Crane's long-term, albeit qualified, commitment to decadent aesthetics. His *ars contra naturam* updates 1890s strategies for expressing homoerotic desire to suit a less naive era. Wilde's fall, furthermore, continued to influence in discernable, isolable ways the style and substance of queer literature into the 1920s. Crane's "alternative modernity" thus proves to be exceptional but not exceptionalist, eccentric but not reducible to eccentricity.

This chapter supplements, extends, and complicates this argument in two fundamental respects. First, it pauses to ponder whether labels such as "modern" and "modernism" (however redefined or rearticulated) should be applied to Crane's poetics without further qualification. This issue is more than semantic. It speaks to the usefulness of periodization when interpreting a writer's work—a usefulness that is anything but evident, given the last several decades of vigorous, persuasive criticism of literary-historical periods as convenient disciplinary fictions.<sup>1</sup> Why not, following Raymond Williams, recognize that every slice of time, and a fortiori every work of literature, contains residual, emergent, and dominant cultural traits (121–27)? Such a perspective would license one to read Crane's writings not so much as "modernist"—whether canonical or alternative—but rather as texts participating variably in multiple historical trajectories. This chapter seeks to place Crane's *ars contra naturam* within a broader time frame so as to avoid the potential myopia of an overly synchronic, modernist-focused analysis.

This diachronic approach dictates a second departure from chapter 2's

methodology, namely a different treatment of sexuality. Sexuality is anything but a stable concept, quality, or set of behaviors. Indeed, as Freud long ago taught, erotic desire is highly mobile, multifoliate, and astonishingly malleable. Chapter 2 sidestepped this problem by limiting itself to the confines of a given historical period, that is, in relation to the inherited, available literary means of articulating sexual dissent in the 1910s and '20s, an era when "gay," "lesbian," and "homosexual" were well on their way to solidifying as identity categories.<sup>2</sup> Viewed within a span of centuries, however, the question of erotic desire in Crane's poetics is perhaps best approached otherwise than through the lens of identity politics.

Crane's specific writerly affiliations and disaffiliations illustrate the danger of too-hasty generalization based on an imputed sexual orientation. Without a doubt, he felt drawn to Swinburne's sadomasochism. Dismemberment, bloodshed, and inflicting or suffering hurt are among Crane's favorite themes ("I, turning, turning on smoked forking spires . . . Tossed on these horns, who bleeding dies"—*HCCP* 18). Like Swinburne, Crane associates these gruesome images with the violence done to the ego in the moment of sexual or religious transport. Such pain is at once erotic and sacred—hence a (perverse) consummation devoutly to be wished. Crane also probably thrilled at the powerfully homoerotic streak in Hopkins's verse, most evident in such poems as "Felix Randal" and "Harry Ploughman" ("Each limb's barrowy brawn, his thew / That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank"—*Major Poems* 101). He tended to celebrate masculine beauty in an equally hyperbolic, vigorously Anglo-Saxon manner ("Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean"—*HCCP* 64). One cannot deny that Hopkins and Swinburne would have given him congenial models for recasting his erotic fantasies in a publicly acceptable literary form.

Nevertheless, assuming some shared, transhistorical "gay sensibility" cannot fully explain Crane's lasting enthusiasm for these two writers, nor can it account for the enduring similarities between his and their verse. When Crane was drawn to an author or to a book because of homoerotic content, that attachment usually did not have a long-term effect on the particulars of his writing style. For instance, as "C 33" demonstrates, at the beginning of his career Crane identified strongly with Oscar Wilde. And, as the previous chapter shows, the aftermath of Wilde's trials continued to figure in Crane's ongoing revision of fin de siècle poetics more than a decade later. Wilde's actual poetry, however, left little imprint. After 1918, Crane never attempted to copy Wilde's world-weariness, his wit, his devastating irony, or his aristocratic self-possession. Crane makes little use of his characteristic poetic devices, such as the refrain, nor does he strive to match the nonchalant com-

plexity of his stanza forms. A general rule might be: although Crane always displayed a favorable bias toward literature that he deemed by, about, or for gay men, he did not feel obligated to imitate such work.<sup>3</sup> Even his admiration of Walt Whitman to the point of lovesickness did not fundamentally alter his “natural idiom (which I have unavoidably stuck to in spite of nearly everybody’s nodding querulous head)” (*O My* 135). This chapter will not abandon the topic of eros—far from it!—but desire will enter the discussion in guises other than a preestablished, categorical opposition between “queer” and “straight.” More specifically, within a diachronic perspective, Crane’s “queerness” might best be explained not by reference to object choice but by reference to the perverse libidinal economy of his writing. Crane’s is a poetics of pyrography, of words incandescing, erotically inflamed by a tension between controlled compression and extravagant wastefulness.

This chapter’s quest to place Crane within a suitable historical context begins with the effort to chart accurately the contours of the poetic terrain jointly occupied by Crane and his predecessors Swinburne and Hopkins. Just as in chapter 1, Crane’s effusive letter to Yvor Winters of 27 January 1928 can serve as a point of departure. In that letter, Crane claims to be “hypnotized” by the “daring” and by the “revelation” of “unrealized possibilities” that he finds in Hopkins’s poetry. More specifically, he writes, “I did not know that words could come so near a transfiguration to pure musical notation—at the same [time] retaining every minute literal signification” (*O My* 359). He conflates the mystical (revelation / transfiguration), the ecstatic (hypnotization), and the musical. He praises Hopkins’s ambition, craft, purity, and novelty. In these reactions to Hopkins, tossed off in the heat of the moment, Crane is groping toward a succinct statement of the family resemblance between his and his British precursors’ poetics.

Using the Hopkins letter as a template, one can arrive at a hypothesis regarding the grounds of this resemblance. Crane tends to cite four traits that distinguish his verse and that he finds exemplified in Hopkins: beauty, ecstasy, rhyme, and rhythm.<sup>4</sup> He saw the latter two formal elements as productive of the former two abstract qualities. In other words, he believed that aural artifice could achieve aesthetic and mystical ends. Moreover, the two sides of this equation possess a direct correlation. The greater the artifice, the greater the aesthetic-ecstatic impact. These basic tenets are more or less shared equally by “his” Victorians, one who styled himself an ecstatic mystic in the Counter-Reformation mode (Hopkins) and the other who styled himself a fiery combination of political revolutionary and pagan prophet (Swinburne). Furthermore, both Hopkins and Swinburne are perhaps best known to literary history for their aural artistry, Hopkins for his elaborately contrived the-

ory of sprung rhythm and Swinburne for his uncanny ability to disport in pure sound.<sup>5</sup> An intemperate, vatic embrace of aurality is, in turn, a venerable albeit controversial basis for a poet's sense of vocation, traceable back to Plato's *Ion* and forward to 1970s and '80s Language Poetry. "Modernist," however useful in certain respects, must ultimately be deemed a less accurate, potentially more misleading label than "mannerist" or, if one prefers, "radical artificer."

## Just Whistle

The latter term is derived, of course, from Marjorie Perloff's classic study *Radical Artifice* (1991), which can provide some initial, invaluable bearings in the quest to speak meaningfully about the transatlantic cluster Crane-Swinburne-Hopkins. *Radical Artifice* teaches that the recurrent opposition between the "natural" and the "artificial" in discussions of poetry is too simplistic. Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, each literary generation has tended to judge the poetic idiom of the previous outmoded, "artificial," in need of renovation if poetry is to remain timely and relevant.<sup>6</sup> Perloff replies that all poetry depends upon artifice. When poets use "artificial" as a derogatory term and use "natural" as a term of approbation, they are actually distinguishing between different kinds of artifice. By introducing a false binary—*ars* versus *natura*—into arguments about poetics, poets (and those who write about poetry) strand themselves in logical and ideological sand traps.

*Radical Artifice* looks back to William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to provide a paradigmatic instance of this confusion (29–36). This methodological move is worth repeating here, even though Perloff undertakes it in another context entirely, that is, the elucidation of particular post-World War II developments in U.S. poetry. Revisiting Wordsworth's Preface can help clarify why late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poets such as those of concern here might, like their later counterparts, defy the conventional wisdom of the English-language literary tradition by writing in a gloriously artificial manner.

One of Wordsworth's chief targets in the Preface is the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Gray's famous assertion that "The language of the age is never the language of poetry."<sup>7</sup> In response, Wordsworth argues that "poetic diction" and "mechanical device[s] of style" impede what matters most, "the company of flesh and blood." He enjoins that a poet should "adopt the very language of men" and reject anything that is not a "natural or regular part of that language" (162). Consequently, at a given point in time "there neither

is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (163). When "renewed" by the "language closely resembling that of real life," the mere "blind association of pleasure" produced by "the music of harmonious metrical language" is "imperceptibly" elevated to a "complex feeling of delight" (169). As Marjorie Perloff illustrates, Wordsworth's polemical preface so persuasively links the natural, the real, and the plain that for two centuries now it has encouraged poets writing in English to pontificate against the dangers of superfluous artifice. Its many twentieth-century echoes include Ezra Pound's *Three Principles*, W. B. Yeats's "the natural words in the natural order," T. S. Eliot's "return to common speech," Allen Ginsberg's "first thought best thought," and Charles Olson's celebration of heart, ear, and eye in his manifesto "Projective Verse."

Victorian poets knew Wordsworth's Preface well, too, but did not necessarily endorse it. In particular, Hopkins and Swinburne seem to have defined their own ideas about poetry's nature and purpose in conscious reaction to it. In an undergraduate essay, Hopkins maintained contra Wordsworth that "metre, rhythm, rhyme, and all the structure which is called verse both necessitate and engender a difference in diction and in thought" (*Journals* 84). Later he would go on to define poetry in a distinctly un-Wordsworthian manner, as "language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself" (*Selected Letters* 129). A. C. Swinburne saw Wordsworth's Preface as a willful attempt to conceal the true course of British poetic development. He found the "indiscriminative depreciation" that Wordsworth wreaked on eighteenth-century poetry appalling, and he particularly wished to rehabilitate William Collins's Pindaric odes as a model for lyric poetry. In Collins's grandest poems, he claims, one can hear the "pulse of inborn music irresistible and indubitable" that marks a true poetic genius (*SCP* 14:149–51).

Hopkins and Swinburne, then, could be construed as participants in Perloff's line of radical artificers. Both poets wish to rehabilitate highly wrought aural artistry. But they also implicitly dissent from Wordsworth in another respect that, although tangential to Perloff's project, is essential in the present context. Wordsworth repeatedly stresses that "passion" plays a dubious role in writing a poem. "Passion," he writes, must be married to "knowledge" before it can be effective (167). That is, although "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," these "influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts," which is why "poems to which any value can be attached . . . were never produced but by a man who . . . had also thought long and deeply" (160). Such "thoughts" are necessary to "remov[e] what would otherwise be painful or disgusting" in a "passion" (167). The process of writing a good poem furthers this end, too. Meter superadds "plea-



sure” and “the sense of difficulty overcome” to any utterance, thereby “tempering the painful feeling” induced by “powerful descriptions of the deeper passions” (169). In the Preface, then, Wordsworth denigrates not simply the artificial but also the excessive. He preaches temperance, moderation, and self-control. Throughout one hears the under-murmur of his quiet rebuke to his sister Dorothy in “Tintern Abbey”: “these wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure” (*Poems* 361).

Sobriety—not a virtue that one associates with Crane, Hopkins, or Swinburne! Wordsworth sides with Plato’s *Ion* against the Dionysian poetic tradition to which these later poets adhere, and he specifies the kinds of chastened artifice suitable for communicating decorously and effectively with a popular audience. In contrast, Hopkins, Swinburne, and Crane react to Wordsworth’s reprise of Plato by asserting their rights to be immoderate, stately, obscure, overblown, and ecstatic, all in a richly aural, aureate idiom defiantly not that of “the common man.” They explore what “wild ecstasies” can achieve in poetry when they do not “mature” into responsible, predictable patterns.

The dispute here is primarily an ethical one: should poets give their passions and talents free reign to follow the course dictated by inspiration, or should they apply bridle, blinders, and whip in order to keep from losing their way? The decision between these two options naturally has consequences for the form of the poem. In his essay “The Realistic Oriole,” Northrop Frye distinguishes the “poetic” element of verse from the “act of mind” that brings poetry into existence. He writes,

The “poetic” normally expresses itself as what one might loosely call word-magic or incantation, charm in its original sense of spell, as it reinforces the “act of mind” in poetry with the dream-like reverberations, echoes and enlarged significances of the memory and the unconscious. (253)

Frye argues that the best modern poets, such as T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, are successful because their “acts of mind” are properly disciplined, in Eliot’s case by “a sense of a creative tradition” and in Stevens’s case by “the sense of an autonomous poetic theory” (253). They are therefore able to master the primitive, incantatory power of the “poetic” and redirect it toward higher ends and true artistic achievement. Frye, obviously, would side with Wordsworth. Crane, Hopkins, and Swinburne, however, prefer other birds to the realistic oriole: seagulls, windhovers, and skylarks. These high-flying poets explore the far reaches of the “poetic,” eagerly investigating the “charm”-

like potential of “word-magic.” These flights of fancy and rhetoric take them far beyond the terra firma provided by rigorous philosophizing or by the Mind of Europe.

Susan Stewart’s provocative 1995 article “Lyric Possession” offers a more contemporary take on the same topic that eschews Frye’s somewhat vague talk of “word-magic.”<sup>8</sup> She labels arguments such as Wordsworth’s and Frye’s instances of a “recurring anxiety” that centers on the problem of the “poetic will” (34). She explains that poets have traditionally insisted that their verse is not so much written by them as it written “through” them by some external agency, whether it be the gods, a muse, the unconscious, or objective chance. This stance leaves them vulnerable to a particularly damaging accusation. That is, if writing poetry is a special case of “ventriloquism,” do poets themselves retain any agency? Why should one pay attention to poets as individuals if the responsibility for their achievements lies elsewhere? Stewart argues that most poets, in an effort to defend their own vocations, have consequently had to negotiate “the paradox of willed possession,” to delimit how and under what conditions they render themselves susceptible to external control (36).

Stewart singles out a second crucial consequence of the “ventriloquist” understanding of lyric poetry. If a given poet’s work is produced to whatever degree by “an unfathomable and external agency,” then that work is culpable for having placed “words into the social realm where they will continue their profoundly irresponsible effects or consequences.” More specifically, the work puts into circulation poetic concepts and habits—especially patterns of rhyme and meter—that are capable of “possessing” future writers. Stewart labels this stratum of meaning “somatic” because it appeals to (and in a way “haunts”) bodies (for example, the ear, the tapping foot). The “propositional will” of the individual poet, that is, the will to be possessed, must confront or be reconciled to this “somatic” vector of poetic transmission and reproduction (38). Stewart goes on to assert that the aural aspects of a poem (again, rhyme and meter) thus carry “residual meanings” that cannot be credited in any way to a given poet’s intentionality (39).

Wordsworth’s Preface is an exemplary instance of the “anxiety” about “lyric possession.” He labors to downplay the significance of rhyme and meter, which he dismisses as in themselves productive of no more than “blind pleasure” (169). He advises poets to moderate their treatment of the passions—in other words, no getting carried away, no letting the animal in a person, the id, dominate his or her intellect. Wordsworth does, of course, attribute external agency to nature and truth—but only in retrospect, when recollected, annealed, and censored to render the verse acceptable to the “sound

and vigorous" reader (169). He recognizes that his compositional precepts entail a rupture with poetic tradition, especially with inherited forms and diction, but tradition must not be allowed precedence above one's own "good sense":

Something I must have gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense, but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets. (162)

His declared counterexample is Thomas Gray, who mistakenly believes that being "curiously elaborate" in his "poetic diction" is a sign of having turned out an "elevated" lyric (163). Instead of insuring that his verse is written in the direct, no-nonsense language of well-written prose, Gray, in the name of "the common inheritance of poets," brazenly accentuates the artificiality and anachronism of his lyrical style. If one were to rephrase Wordsworth's attack on Gray in Stewart's terms, one would say that Gray permits a "bad" external agent—the "somatic" vector, that is, traditional sound, diction, and form—to take control of his verse at the wrong time. As Wordsworth sees it, Gray ought to have applied his propositional will (his "good sense") more stringently. Viewed from this perspective, Wordsworth's position is closer to Enlightenment rationalism than generally thought. He takes a stand for the autonomy of the individual writer, who, through innate "good sense," can master the influx of perception and craft a reasoned, responsible reply.

In contrast, poets like Crane, Hopkins, and Swinburne seem eager to cede "good sense," indeed, their individuality altogether, in their rush to submit to external agency. And, in each of their cases, that strategy of what one might call "active passivity" results in a two-fold possession: by the sound of language (the "somatic" vector again) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by a higher power (more or less identified with God). These poets belong not in Wordsworth's camp but in that of the eighteenth-century mode that Wordsworth repudiates, the elevated style of Thomas Gray's and William Collins's odes: Gray, who commands his "Æolian lyre" to "give to rapture all thy trembling strings" (*Complete* 12), and Collins, who experiences "Ecstatic Wonder" when, in Fancy's Hall, "Seraphic Wires were heard to sound" (*Works* 33). Collins's "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands" could serve as a veritable manifesto for the later but equally artifice-intoxicated poets. Collins there instructs his reader not to "blush that . . . false Themes [en]large / Thy gentle Mind." A poet should "Proceed, in forcefull

sounds, and Colours bold" to write "Scenes . . . which, daring to depart / From sober Truth, are still to Nature true, / And call forth fresh delights." "To Nature true," yes, but not to romantic *natura*.<sup>9</sup> True, rather, to the "Nature" of "Th'Heroic Muse" and true to the "Truth" that intoxicates and overwhelms the "Poet, whose undoubting Mind / Believe[s] the Magic Wonders which he s[i]ng[s]" (61–62).<sup>10</sup>

Crane identifies with Hopkins and Swinburne first and foremost because of their Dionysian poetics and only secondarily because of their sexual ambiguity. All three men held that ceding self-control to sound and sonorous rhetoric was a possible means of reconnecting the human and the divine. Putting one's faith in intemperate ecstasy, regardless of consequences, can, of course, also be a means of psychic and spiritual liberation in an age that actively punishes any hint of sexual dissent. "O God," Crane complained to Gorham Munson in 1923, "that I should have to live within these American restrictions forever, where one cannot whisper a word, not at least exchange a few words!" (*O My* 127). This fervent desire for release from the constraints of the quotidian resonates throughout Crane's work, and, to that extent, Langdon Hammer is correct to claim that in Crane's writings the sexual and the nonsexual are impossible to distinguish (130). For Crane, "possession" by the "somatic" aspects of poetry (sound, rhyme, meter) surely offered erotic satisfaction. But that satisfaction was achieved through losing the self in the stuff of language—a variety of eros, one should note, in which the sex of his muse could be incidental. "The Broken Tower," written during his late but happy engagement to Peggy Baird, differs little in technique, tone, or ambition from "Atlantis," written to consecrate his love for Emil Opffer, a handsome blond, blue-eyed Danish sailor. Crane's perverse poetics redirect eros from genital satisfaction to oral and aural pleasure, as well as to the corporeal more generally. One inhabits and is inhabited by the ethereal body of the beloved, the word. As Susan Howe, a contemporary vatic-ecstatic poet, has put it: "we are language Lost / in language" (*Europe* 99).

## Back to the Future

As a writer who prioritizes "possession" by "the poetic" over a disciplined, well-conceived "act of mind," Hart Crane can appear to be a poet of both surplus and impoverishment. On the one hand, his poetry is excessive. Its wordplay, soundplay, and rhetorical flourishes impede a reader's ability to envision what he describes or to paraphrase what he is trying to communicate. The poetry is also intemperate. It remains at a constantly high pitch, swinging madly from mania to melancholy to exhortation to prayer. There

are few or no moments of repose and few or no opportunities for reflective contemplation. He thrusts a reader into a poetic bazaar where the vendors eagerly display garish goods. In short, Crane's poetry is an embarrassment of riches.

On the other hand, Crane's verse can appear destitute. The bluster can seem empty wind. The hymns to the ineffable lack a basis in things of the world, and they fail to address a defined deity. If one hunts the poetry for Crane's precise thoughts on pressing contemporary issues in economics, philosophy, politics, religion, or science, one is likely to come away pretty much empty-handed. He offers no solution to the ills of the human race in the manner of Pound or Eliot. He does not offer a rigorous theory of the imagination in the manner of Stevens. He can seem to focus on the act of performance so exclusively that he disregards fidelity to his content.

The groundlessness of Crane's artifice perhaps explains a curious feature of his posthumous legacy. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound first admired and then later sternly disapproved of Swinburne; Crane, too, has spoken powerfully to some writers in their youth, who then, as they age, cease to revere him.<sup>11</sup> Robert Lowell's case is perhaps the best known. As has long been recognized, his early Pulitzer-winning book, *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), is written in an intense, convoluted style that owes much to Crane's example.<sup>12</sup> The syntactical compression, sonority, and swagger of "A Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket," for instance, powerfully recalls Crane's vatic posturing in such lyrics as "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and "Voyages." A decade later, however, in *Life Studies* (1959), Lowell famously shifted toward a "confessional" mode of writing that featured laxer forms, looser meter, and a discomfiting specificity of autobiographical detail. As if to signal his farewell to his earlier, more visionary style, Lowell placed the elegy "Words for Hart Crane" at the end of the volume's third section, immediately prior to the oft-celebrated fourth section, which includes such searing, dark poems as "Man and Wife," "Waking in the Blue," and "Skunk Hour." As Terri Witek has written, Lowell "names" Crane among his "exemplars" so that he may then "supersede" him "in the book's forward progress" (5).<sup>13</sup> By the time of *Notebook* (1970), Lowell was ready to criticize Crane directly and candidly. He does so at the conclusion of the sonnet "Death and the Bridge":

In daylight, the relaxed red scaffolding is almost  
breathing; no man is ever too good to die. . . .  
We will follow our skeletons on the girder,  
out of life and Boston, singing with Freud:  
'God's ways are dark and very seldom pleasant.' (142; emphasis in original)

Lowell has produced a demonic inversion of the closing image of Crane's *The Bridge*. That long poem ends with the line: "Whispers antiphonal in azure swing" (HCCP 108). Evoking the old romantic trope of the Aeolian harp, Crane observes that wind through the cables of Brooklyn Bridge causes them to sway and resound. This perception enables an epiphanic moment of contact between human and divine, an instant when artifice (the bridge / *The Bridge*) is inspired (*inspiro*, to breath into or through) and made to speak ("whispers") of things transcendental ("azure"). In "Death and the Bridge," Lowell replaces Crane's heavenly blue with "red," the color of danger. The "scaffolding" is like a scaffold, a place of death, not inspiration, and the "whispers" of the divine spirit are replaced by a bitter hymn to a tormenting, inscrutable Old Testament God. For a generation versed in Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, Lowell informs Crane, the ardent pantheism of *The Bridge* looks childish at best, at worst pathological.

Langdon Hammer has argued that Lowell's feelings toward Crane were bound up in a complex, rather peculiar oedipal drama involving two other influences on his early poetry, T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate.<sup>14</sup> Poets, however, have continued to "outgrow" Crane since the eclipse of Eliot's literary-critical pre-eminence. Something more seems at stake in Crane's "youth appeal" than the midcentury choice that Hammer delineates between Eliot's self-denial and Crane's self-indulgence. One example: Marilyn Hacker's first book, *Presentation Piece* (1973), is redolent of Crane throughout. At the time, she was so fascinated by Crane's work that she and her then husband Samuel Delany, during their regular evening walks along the Hudson, ritually tried to guess which apartment window had been Crane's in 1924, the year that *The Bridge* was originally conceived (Delany, *Motion* 109). The conclusion of Hacker's sestina "An Alexandrite Pendant for My Mother" concisely illustrates her attentive study of Crane:

This is an island city, propped on stone,  
 whose roots are swamp, whose tallest tower bends  
 when trembling earth shatters to a new dawn;  
 as when, across the lake, glimpsed through the rain,  
 serpent and eagle coupled signs within  
 the glyph of death where warriors make their home.

Mother of exiles, home of enduring stone  
 within the glimpsed point where the road bends,  
 rain fortune on my voyaging this dawn. (11)

From Crane's "The Broken Tower," Hacker has borrowed her setting ("dawn," a "quiet lake"), scenery ("a lofty tower"), and materials ("earth," "stone") (HCCP 160–61). From *The Bridge* she has taken the image of the "serpent and eagle coupled" (for example, HCCP 65, 108). She also makes use of several recurrent Cranean themes: bending, breaking, death, exile, voyaging, and new beginnings ("new dawn"). As in much of Crane's best verse, Hacker's speaker is less a particularized individual than an enraptured visionary, and the events are recounted in a mythic, not documentary, register. And Hacker ends, as Crane ends the first and last lyrics in *The Bridge*, with a fervent prayer for intercession (HCCP 44, 107).

Marilyn Hacker's subsequent books of poetry have been markedly less Crane-like. She, like Lowell, appears to have "grown out" of her early attachment to his verse. Her 1986 sonnet and villanelle sequence *Love, Death, and the Changing Seasons*, which won a National Book Award, favors an entirely different style:

It's not that I'm inimical to sleaze.  
I most fondly remember getting it on  
with her, crammed standing in an airplane john,  
airsprayed, spotlit, jeans bunched around our knees. (6)

In an effort to enliven a clichéd form—the Petrarchan sonnet cycle—Hacker employs slang ("sleaze," "getting it on," "john"), colloquial constructions (the periphrastic phrase "It's not that I'm"), and references to the mundane realities of twentieth-century life ("airplane," "jeans"). Occasionally, she still resorts to stereotypically modernist techniques to add a bit of spice, as in the run-ons "airsprayed" and "spotlit," which would look at home in Dos Passos's *42nd Parallel* (1930). Throughout the collection, however, she eschews the diffuse erotics evident in *The Bridge* (and, too, in *Presentation Piece*), wherein words, phrases, and sounds acquire an oft-inappropriate, overripe voluptuousness. In *Love, Death, and the Changing Seasons*, Hacker instead writes frankly, even pornographically, about sex and sexual desire in the manner of much post-Stonewall lesbian and gay poetry.

To gain a sense of the gulf between this kind of poetry and Crane's, one only has to compare their very different use of similar devices. In the quatrain above, Hacker includes one awkwardly aureate word ("inimical"), but, in contrast to Crane's desire to bedeck his verse in Latinate splendor until it achieves grotesque grandeur ("translating time / Into what multitudinous Verb the suns / And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast / In myriad syllables"—HCCP 106), Hacker's intent is straightforwardly comedic. She wishes to ex-

culpate herself of charges of elitism and preciosity by mocking the elaborate rhetoric traditionally associated with the sonnet. She also uses solecisms to make her language resemble everyday speech as closely as possible. The participles “airsprayed” and “spotlit,” for example, are ambiguous modifiers that logically ought to be construed with the “her” in the previous line (or to the unstated “we” who are “getting it on”). Grammatically, though, these participles could just as easily, if counterintuitively, be construed either with the “john” or the “jeans.” Such sloppiness is, of course, characteristic of conversation or informal writing.

Hart Crane’s ambiguous modifiers belong to another order of expression altogether:

My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored  
Of that tribunal monarch of the air  
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word  
In wounds pledged once to hope,—cleft to despair? (*HCCP* 160)

The participial phrase that closes this quatrain, “cleft to despair,” could be parallel to the one immediately previous, “pledged once to hope,” which would mean that it modifies “wounds.” Alternatively, it could be “hope” that has been “cleft,” since the phrase does immediately follow that noun. But the comma and em-dash suggest a more attenuated linkage, as if, perhaps, “cleft to despair” refers to a prior noun, maybe “Word,” or even the “monarch” of the second line. After all, “Whose thigh . . . once to hope” is a single dependent clause; there is an outside chance that “cleft to despair” could be intended as its syntactical parallel. In short, “—cleft to despair?” is a phrase without a sure home. Unlike Hacker, Crane’s anomalous grammar eludes easy clarification and strands a reader in unanswerable speculations. Crane’s crux-crammed verse suggests that his speaker, in the throes of contemplating eternity, cannot articulate what he sees within the constraints of conventional discourse and must, therefore, deform language in the quest to say the unsayable.

Lingering over this comparison between Hacker and Crane usefully highlights several important aspects of Crane’s “post-Victorian” mode of writing poetry. Hacker’s mature poetry, like Crane’s, is written in regular forms and traditional meters even, or especially, when treating “modern” subject matter, such as a flight in an airplane. Hacker, again like Crane, is a homoerotic love poet. And both write long poem sequences. Both poeticize New York City’s frenetic life, from its bars to its literary salons. Yet two works could not be more unlike in their approach to poetic language than *The Bridge* and



*Love, Death, and the Changing Seasons. Presentation Piece* shows that Hacker is capable of modeling her poetry on Crane's; her later verse suggests that she chooses not to do so. Hacker seems to have felt that the autobiographical subject matter of *Love, Death, and the Changing Seasons*—a tumultuous romance with a much younger woman—demanded a less oblique, more narrative mode of writing than that of *The Bridge*. Hacker wants to make it very clear that the eros saturating *Love, Death and the Changing Seasons* is directed not at language or at a pantheistic God but at another woman's body.

This chapter has asserted that Crane's artifice can appear groundless. Perhaps "groundless" here is best understood in the sense that an electrician might use it. In *White Buildings* and *The Bridge* there is so much enthusiasm, labor, and play in evidence that (as Delmore Schwartz once put it) they "overpower" the poems' ostensible subjects (*Letters* 28). Allen Tate called the disproportion between craft and subject matter in Crane's verse "sentimentality," but one could also call it polarization.<sup>15</sup> The verse has been deliberately charged with surplus energy, and there is no "ground" provided to run off the excess current. Crane has expended too much effort in the wrong ways to achieve the task at hand; the resultant poetry burns like "incandescent wax" (*HCCP* 30), a veritable "glowing orb of praise" (28). No wonder Crane has appealed to certain writers in their youth but not after their majority. His is a "Relentless caper for all those who step / The legend of their youth into the noon" (3), not a poetics of adequation between expression and desired result. To write like Crane is to be like the nobles condemned to the seventh circle of Dante's hell because they built bonfires out of money. Sobriety, good judgment, and barest self-interest would seem to dictate a more expedient use of a poet's talents.

A case can be made, however, on behalf of such an "immature" way of writing. In "Writing as a General Economy," the Canadian poet-critic Steve McCaffery vigorously defends wasteful expenditure as a defining characteristic of good poetry. He builds upon Georges Bataille's distinction between a "restricted economy," one whose "operation is based upon valorized notions of restraint, conservation, investment, profit, accumulation and cautious proceduralities in risk taking," and a "general economy," which includes "all non-utilitarian activities of excess, unavoidable waste and non-productive consumption" such as "orgasm, sacrifice, meditation, The Last Supper, and dreams" (201-3). According to McCaffery, "the single operation of writing" is "a complex interaction" of these "two contrastive, but not exclusive economies" (203). Most writing, admittedly, is intended to participate in a restricted economy—people, after all, generally tailor what they write to attain particular ends—but that does not prevent seemingly utilitarian texts from

also conveying “wasted” meaning through accidents such as rhyme, meter, punning, typographical error, and so forth.

McCaffery argues that lyric poetry’s innate emphasis on the materiality of language makes it a genre in which the interplay between general and restricted economies can assume greater urgency than usual. That is, a poet, unlike a philosopher or a memo writer, cannot rely upon the “language of instrumental reference” to “repress” the fact that language is forever producing “wasteful” meanings inadvertently (204–5). Instead, since poets must attend to such features of language as the sound, rhythm, and spelling of words, they are forever confronting (if not necessarily recognizing) the fact that language communicates in an array of nonsemantic ways, many of which may appeal to the senses but fail to convey utilitarian, paraphrasable “meaning.” There are, McCaffery hastens to point out, many available means by which poets can discipline or justify their writing so that others do not accuse them of being engaged in unproductive labor. Poets can (like Hacker) reduce the showiness of their artifice so as to concentrate a reader’s attention instead on the striking, politically progressive content. Or they can (like Lowell) make poetry a *memento mori* in which its wastefulness symbolizes the futility of any earthly activity. Or they can (like Yvor Winters) claim to be following the dictates of reason and morality. In short, a high infinite number of intellectual, political, philosophical, or theological commitments could be cited by poets to rationalize why they are using something as “unmeaning” as assonance.

McCaffery takes a stand on behalf of that rare poetry that exhibits “deployment without use, without aim and without a will to referential or propositional lordship” (214). Drawing upon Marcel Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowski, he argues that such special poetry operates not according to the restrictive economy of capitalism but according to the logic of the “gift exchange,” in which “the object is exhausted, consumed in the very staging” of the gift and no return or reward is expected. As in a potlatch, a perspicacious poet displays and exhausts the abundance of his or her most prized possession, language. “TO WASTE,” McCaffery writes, “IS TO LIVE THE EXPERIENCE OF WEALTH” (219). A reader who recognizes the performance of potlatch poetry for what it is can then participate in a utopian plenitude:

[T]he intense exchange within the textual experience which would register as semantic loss, [*sic*] would not gain the status of a content (hence a transferable “transmission” to a reader) but would manifest as a loss-exchange among the signs themselves. To envisage such a text would be to envisage a linguistic space in which meanings splinter moving

fields of plurality, establishing differentials able to resist a totalization into recoverable integrations that would lead to a summatable “Meaning.” (220–21)

This argument owes much, of course, to French poststructuralism. Thinkers such as Barthes, Derrida, and Kristeva share McCaffery’s dream of finding a literary language capable of “resist[ing] totalization” through absolute, irreducible heterogeneity. McCaffery’s novelty is to draw attention to the implicit pact between poet and reader. The poet writes in a wasteful manner, without regard to any ulterior motive; a reader agrees not to search for or impose meaning, logic, or structure where there is none to be found. Poet and reader thereby treat the poem as a “linguistic space” in which words Fourth-of-July-like blaze and burn out. In this “space,” meaning is secondary to spectacle. When author and reader depart, they are tied together in a noncoercive, non-obligatory, but nonetheless quite real fashion by the “intense” experience of having jointly witnessed a sublime, ritual act.

Hart Crane’s poetry dramatically stages the dynamic interplay between McCaffery’s general and restricted economies. Crane firmly establishes a restricted economy by uniformly writing in conventional rhyme and meter. In fact, much of the emotional impact of Crane’s verse stems from his determination to make his outlandish diction, intricate aural play, and mannered oratory conform stubbornly to a metrical pattern. In rather curious fashion, however, Crane’s efforts to compress, constrain, and mold his language result in verse that behaves according to the logic of a general economy. That is, the poetry is so full of tension and torsion, the poetic texture so supersaturated with soundplay, and the chain of argument so convoluted and obscure that at almost every point the verse “incandesces” with possible implications, hinted connections, and, as McCaffery would put it, myriad “lines of escape” from instrumental reason:<sup>16</sup>

Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile  
Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height  
The imagination spans beyond despair,  
Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer. (*HCCP* 32)

Here, in the concluding lines of the long, three-part poem “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” Crane rapidly piles up references to agriculture (“thresh”), architecture (“spans”), religion (“prayer”), economics (“bargain”), and chemistry (“volatile”). A reader who expects “Faustus and Helen” to end

on a didactic note or to end by resolving previous paradoxes is likely to be stumped. One might suspect that these metaphors all somehow relate back to the Faust legend of the lyric's title. Faust, of course, summons Mephistopheles and makes a "bargain," only later to "despair" and, belatedly, "to pray." Crane could be making a statement about the Faustian overtones of the romantic idolatry of "imagination." Figuring out precisely what that statement might be, however, would take a ream of exegesis. A reader would have to labor inordinately in order to tie everything together, to produce what McCaffery calls "a summatable 'Meaning.'" In pursuit of that unifying interpretation, a reader, no matter how thorough, would likely have to "repress" the mostly "unmeaning" *copia* that makes the quatrain so memorable:

- The fast-paced alternation between the plosives "b" and "p": sPans Beyond desPair outPacing Bargain vocaBle and Prayer.
- The phrase "spans beyond despair," which begs a reader to contemplate that the lowercase letters "p," "b," and "d" are mirror images of one another.
- The dance of "t" and "h" in the phrase "thresh the height," in which Crane seems to want to test every possible way these two letters may be pronounced.
- The phrase "Blamed bleeding," which badly strains the iambic meter and comes uncannily close to being a pair of anagrams: BLamED BLed.
- Another near anagram: "praise" and "despair," differentiated only by the letter "d" that begins the latter word.
- The fact that the final word, "prayer," resembles a contraction of the earlier words "praise" and "years."
- The verb "spans," which may describe a static state (as in "the bridge spans the gorge") or which may describe motion (as in "walking across the bridge of despair"). The agency of the imagination is left in doubt.
- The ambiguous grammar of the final line, in which "Outpacing" may refer back to "despair," "imagination," "hands," "years," or the unstated subject "you" of the imperative "praise." Each construction would dictate a different narrative.
- The ambiguous grammar in the first line, in which "whose" could refer to "years" but could also refer to the implied subject "you" of the imperative "praise." (The latter option is a common Renaissance technique for syntactical compression, originally an imitation of a common Latin locution. Crane's opening line reads like a word-for-word translation of, say, a lost Horatian ode beginning "*distincte lauda annos cuius volatiles. . .*")

One could go on. In fact, the very endlessness of such a list is one of its most important features. No matter when a reader decides to stop enumerating the strange aural, syntactical, and graphical features of the verse, there are bound to be other, unstated possibilities, ones that, in being left unspecified, are thereby “lost” or “wasted.” The tightly restricted economy of Crane’s meter coexists with a tropological, aural, and grammatical general economy that, in its centrifugality, resolutely undercuts any proposed comprehensive interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

This claim is not meant to restate the old New Critical position on the heresy of paraphrase. Crane’s poetry, instead, *actively* solicits readers to undertake interminable analysis. It asks them to participate in a pact of the kind described by McCaffery, in which the reader joins the poet in an imaginative utopia of infinitely abundant spectacle. Langdon Hammer has pointed out that something on the order of sixteen monographs have tried to reread Crane’s writings in their entirety, as if to reintroduce his poetry *de novo*. Such books came out, one every few years, from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, when the bias against single-author monographs began to take hold and extended close readings began to fall out of fashion (123–24). This lack of scholarly consensus, despite decades of intense discussion, is a predictable consequence of Crane’s high-wattage poetics: one cannot exhaust these lyrics. They do not make neat or unambiguous arguments. They betray no discernible intellectual underpinnings. They incandesce in and with the potential of language. Critics are likely to continue suggesting new, often contradictory, approaches to and readings of Crane. Hopefully readers will learn to acknowledge that all interpretations are provisional, more (wasted?) words that cannot and should not impose restrictions on what the poetry is or will be.

## Endgame

Crane’s dual strategy—to impoverish his verse semantically while also energizing it nonsemantically—appears prescient from the standpoint of the beginning of the twenty-first century. This becomes especially evident when one turns to those less well-known lyrics where he gave vent to this dual impulse in a more playful, less Marlovian manner:

But so to be the denizen stingaree  
 As stertorous as nations romanized may throw  
 Surveys by Maytimes slow. . . . Hexameters  
 Suspending jockstraps for gangsters while the pil-

Bland (grim)aces Plutarch's perch. And angles  
 Break in folds of crêpe that blackly drape  
 The broken door . . . Crouch so. Amend

Then; and clinch. (*HCCP* 177; all punctuation Crane's)

Such writing is recognizably Cranean. It contains his faux-humanist touches ("Plutarch," "Hexameters"), awkward aureation ("denizen," "stertorous"), references to Prohibition-era realities ("gangsters"), and mandatory homoeroticism ("jockstraps"). Yet Crane departs from his standard practices, too. He fragments words ["pil-," "grim(aces)"], indulges in fingernails-on-the-blackboard doggerel ("crêpe that blackly drape"), and denies a reader any stable sense of speaker, setting, or action. Crane thereby turns out verses that still sound remarkably contemporary in their gleeful defiance of readerly expectations. They hold up well when placed next to, say, the opening lines of Charles Bernstein's 1994 poem "Heart in My Eye":

Motion rises, sustains a  
 predilection in askance  
 who periodize location, slush

boat to chimes  
 slows emotion, like as  
 in thumping pummels  
 or pulverizes punt

vicarious want to  
 be possessed no room  
 arrays diphthong slope (*Dark City* 113)

In verse such as this, one can find echoes of any number of Crane's characteristic devices, such as anachronism ("like as"), rampant consonance ("thumping pummels"), and confusing relative clauses ("who periodize location"). Moreover, Bernstein combines all these within verse that scans surprisingly well for all its seeming strangeness:

/ ^ / ^ ^ / ^  
 Motion rises, sustains a  
 / ^ / ^ / ^ /  
 predilection in askance

^     /   ^     /   ^  
 in thumping pummels  
 ^     /   ^   /   ^     /  
 or pulverizes punt

The predominant meter here, as in most of Crane's work, is iambic, with frequent trochaic substitution. (This is not a case of influence so much as convergence. Although Bernstein has read and praised Crane, Swinburne, and Hopkins, he owes as much or more to such other authors as Zukofsky, Ashbery, Ginsberg, and Clark Coolidge.<sup>18</sup>)

Crane seems to have considered the lyric whose opening lines are cited above—which is titled in manuscript “Euclid Avenue” and tentatively dated 1923—to be too whimsical to publish. It does not appear in *White Buildings*, *The Bridge*, or the list of poems projected for “Key West.” He probably would have classed it with such other inconsequential light verse in his canon as his e. e. cummings parody “Of an Evening” and “Well / Well / Not-at-All,” a silly squib beginning “Yakka-hoola-hikki-doola / Pico-della-miran-dohhhh-la” (*HCCP* 208). Today readers might agree with that classification but disagree with Crane over the relative significance of the poem. The absurdity and humor evident in “Euclid Avenue” plainly encouraged Crane to indulge his bent for wordplay in a more relaxed, fanciful fashion than in the more “serious” lyrics written in the same year that did eventually appear in *White Buildings*—“Emblems of Conduct,” “Possessions,” “Recitative,” and “Stark Major.” Charles Bernstein has defended poetry in which “language goes on vacation” because in such verse poets often hit upon new forms, syntaxes, and varieties of expression (*Content's* 84). Arguably, in the holiday outing that is “Euclid Avenue,” Crane trusted his ear to guide him much further along the paths suggested by his poetic principles than he ever permitted himself in poetry specifically intended for publication.<sup>19</sup> Crane, by the way, wrote at least four drafts of “Euclid Avenue” (*HCCP* 250); he knew that he was involved in more than a one-shot, free-associative game.

The very purity of the poem's whimsy might have intrigued him. Much of the fun of “Euclid Avenue” stems from Crane's happy recognition that what he is writing truly has no ground and that he is free to assemble words however he sees fit. This joy in unmotivated play explains the tonal similarity between a lyric like “Euclid Avenue” and a Bernstein poem like “Heart in My Eye,” both of which offer up elaborately sounded but nearly inscrutable strings of words for their readers' delectation. Both poets appear confident that their lyrics sing and that their idiosyncratic wordplay conveys delight. In such poetry, as Bernstein writes in his essay “Thought's Measure,” “the

‘content’ and the ‘experience of reading’ are collapsed onto each other, the content being the experience of reading, the consciousness of the language and its movement and sound” (*Content’s* 69).

The heirs to Crane’s incandescent poetics are not likely to be found among writers with pressing political commitments, nor among philosopher-poets, nor writers of devotional verse, no matter how much they might admire Crane as a writer. Like Lowell and like Hacker, those poets are likely to moderate their love for his poetry as they learn the limited utility of imitating it. Rather, Crane’s mantle (or opera cape?) has been inherited by contemporary poets—such as Bernstein but also Peter Gizzi, Cole Swensen, and Susan Wheeler—who, like Crane, treasure the communicative power of nonsemantic aspects of language and who, like Crane, perceive that ariatic artificiality can convey intense affect without succumbing to psychologism. Crane learned the rhetorical power of unapologetic artifice from late-nineteenth-century British poetry, but today’s poets can help one appreciate that the resultant poetry is not something “juvenile” that U.S. literature has subsequently outgrown.

### Dionysus Rings Thrice

Crane’s mannerist verse stands at an important crossroads: between the Dionysian strain in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British poetry, on the one hand, and, on the other, certain varieties of experimental verse in the present-day United States. In each case, the poets opt for the “artificial” over the “natural”—a division that appears to belong to the *longue durée* of the English-language lyric, not to any one period, whether romantic, modern, or postmodern. Accordingly, radical artificers from different centuries often share more in common with each other than with their contemporaries. Charles Bernstein, for instance, makes much more sense when set alongside Gray, Hopkins, and Crane than he does rubbing elbows with Marilyn Hacker. Likewise, Bernstein, Swinburne, and Gray are more collegial company for Crane than Pound and Moore. Period labels—just like national and sexual ones—can provide handholds and signposts to critics first encountering new material, but their meaning and utility cannot be prejudged.

The continuing value of author-centered literary history lies in its capacity to deploy such rubrics only to complicate them inordinately. When attentively and minutely focused on the messy, proliferating, idiosyncratic details of a given writer’s life and works, a critic cannot readily assent to commonplaces about nations, cultures, traditions, or authorship. And as a critic pursues different paths through his or her material, the results are un-



predictable, sometimes creating synergy and other times interference. Chapters 2 and 3, for example, offer complementary takes on the “immaturity” of Crane’s verse, one related to the homophobia of the literary establishment (queers are expected to display arrested development) and the second stemming from his masochistic submission to the erotics of the word. These same two chapters, though, also provide divergent approaches to the compression and truncation characteristic of Crane’s versecraft. These formal traits signal either masculinist fear of female excessiveness—or they are integral to the play of general and restricted economies that supercharge his poetry and make its lyricism so distinctive, impressive. Good literary history does not shy away from dissonance in a spurious attempt to force coherence.

Collectively, the first three chapters of this book have sought to demonstrate that the conventional tools of literary history—among them close reading of texts and the elucidation of poetic lineages—have not been rendered antiquated or reactionary by humanities-wide critiques of the nation-state, its associated sex-gender systems, and its ideology of continual social progress. Rhizomatic, eccentric, and transgressive, literary history in the wake of poststructuralism and cultural studies forges and / or brings to light links that inconvenience any and all efforts to reify conceptual categories, solidify disciplinary boundaries, and speak the leveling language of aggregates and statistics. Poetry has an advantageous, if not privileged, role to play in this program of intellectual resistance. The polysemousness of verse spins the reader’s mind ever outward, each encounter launching a new departure. Poetry also rewards scrutiny of the minima of language. Why this word, not that? Why break the line here, not there? Why does the caesura fall between those syllables? Verse provides an inestimable counterweight to the deadening generalities of bureaucratic thinking, mediaspeak, and academic jargonfests.

Part 2 of *Hart Crane: After His Lights*—“Crane Writing”—pushes its inquiry into the particulars of Crane’s poetry a vital step further by challenging its status as a discrete, self-contained, stable object of study. Poems do not intrude into history fully formed and ready to interpret; they, like all cultural artifacts, are the products of human labor. They come into being in time, and as such, have specific, narratable origin stories. And these stories are just as cluttered, contradictory, and surprising as those related to nationalism, sexuality, or *zeitgeist*. Poems are shown to be cobbled together, contingent, and through and through marked by history. They prove to be anything but Gabriel-whispered *sura* testifying to eternal truths. Scrutiny of poets’ compositional strategies and procedures also dispels the mystique of their vocation. Instead of genius quasi-deities—the version of the author that Barthes and Foucault banished to literary-critical hell thirty years ago—they

present themselves as fallible men and women making particular decisions in particular circumstances. In Crane's case, one has to ask: when and how does he cede his "propositional will"? And if the word supposedly takes over, what does that have to do with the process by which ink marks find their way onto the page? In Part 2, Dionysus is brought back down to earth. "Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail / Of earth again— / / Thy face / From charred and riven stakes, O / Dionysus. . . ." (*HCCP* 20).



# Part Two

## Crane Writing



## 4

### How to Write a Lyric

The last chapter, “How Modern,” repositioned Hart Crane’s poetry within a novel literary-historical genealogy en route to an argument about what one, following Immanuel Kant, might call the purposive purposelessness of its excessive, overpowering artifice.<sup>1</sup> In this narrative, Crane’s work appears not as a dead end or a detour within the development of U.S. literature but rather as an important link between a prophetic-operatic strain in British poetics and the late-twentieth-century avant-garde’s delight in nonsemantic, highly patterned uses of language. This chapter, “How to Write a Lyric,” delves further into Crane’s “wasteful” poetics, especially its strangely evasive syntax and referential obliquity.

These traits are, of course, present in such Victorian precursors as Swinburne and Hopkins. They are especially pronounced in moments of rapt transport, as at the conclusion of “The Windhover”:

No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plóugh down síllion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gáll themselves, and gásh göld-vermílion. (Hopkins, *Major Poems* 67)

The enjambment, the interjection (“ah my dear”), the sentence fragment (“No wonder of it”), the spondees (“sheer plod,” “Fall, gall”), and the harshly alliterating monosyllables (“gash gold”) indicate the extremity of the speaker’s emotions. This dramatic frame licenses the syntactical slippage present in the phrase “makes plough down sillion / Shine.” According to the *OED*, a “sillion” (an obsolete form of the word *selion*) is a ridge between two furrows, but the action that the plow takes is unclear.<sup>2</sup> Is it “plowing down” this

ridge, that is, leveling it? Or is the plow moving alongside the “sillion” and hence appearing to travel “down” the field from where the speaker is standing? What is shining—the “sillion” or the “plough”? This kind of syntactical crux has a venerable history in English verse, extending back to the apparent tautology at the conclusion of George Herbert’s “Affliction (I)” (“Let me not love thee, if I love thee not”) and well beyond. It belongs to William Empson’s fourth class of ambiguity, in which it is “natural under the circumstances” for an agitated speaker to abuse linguistic convention (133).

Crane’s use of this device, though, differs from that of Hopkins and Swinburne in its ubiquity and intensification. What in the Victorians usually functions as a crescendo frequently becomes in *White Buildings* and *The Bridge* a frenetic basso continuo. Moreover, throughout his career, Crane’s most oblique, evasive language occurs in poems such as “Legend,” “Paraphrase,” “Recitative,” “Voyages,” “The Dance,” and “Atlantis” that feature non-particularized speakers, in other words, ones who are not easily identifiable either with Hart Crane the man or with the believable, unitary poetic persona that typically appears in dramatic monologues such as Swinburne’s “Hymn to Proserpine” and in nature poems such as Hopkins’s “The Windhover.” In contrast to those nineteenth-century works, the point of view in Crane’s lyrics is too fluid, the setting too variable and vague, and the subtending narrative, if any, too occluded to justify the wayward, broken language Empson-fashion as “natural under the circumstances.” Crane’s poetry forever seems insufficiently “grounded” when held up to standards of logic, consistency, or plausibility.

In order to supplement the literary-historical argument of part 1, this chapter examines Crane’s compositional regimen. By attending closely to the what, when, and how of the poetry’s immediate origins, it seeks to bring out the historical specificity of his contributions to the lineage of radical artificers, as it arcs from Gray to Bernstein. How—concretely and verifiably—does a particular poetic sensibility—the Dionysian—accommodate itself to the socioeconomic and aesthetic pressures of the 1910s and ’20s? How does Crane conceive of poetic agency, and how does he put his ideas into practice? Skepticism about periodization does not prevent a critic from inquiring into literature’s thorough entanglement with the time and place of its production.

## To Sound Deep

Hart Crane had an infuriating way of writing a poem. Typically, after drinking copiously, he would put a 78 on a hand-cranked Victrola and play it “a dozen, two dozen, three dozen times,” while alternately banging away on a

typewriter and loudly declaiming the same line of verse repeatedly (Unterecker 253). To his friends' horror, the Victrola was indispensable—Crane claimed it gave him “intimacy with la Muse”—and he peremptorily refused every polite request to change his habits or at least to confine his cacophonous writing sessions to daylight hours (173). Quite the contrary. He forced those around him to adapt. While a houseguest of Harry Crosby's in France, for instance, he one day greeted his reluctant patron with a ukase. “Columbia, loud!!!” he snapped, presuming that the millionaire Crosby would instantly go fetch him new phonograph needles (584).

Hart Crane's phonograph fetish has received only passing attention from his many critics.<sup>3</sup> This oversight is unsurprising. In his day, Crane was infamous for such antisocial eccentricities as throwing typewriters out of windows and brawling with taxi drivers.<sup>4</sup> The anecdotes about Crane and his Victrola that appear in such places as Harry Crosby's diaries might be vivid, but they vie for a reader's attention with a host of other memorable incidents featuring Crane's wild, dissipated antics.<sup>5</sup> Why should Crane's gramophone obsession matter any more than his other striking but ultimately rather trivial habits, such as Cossack-dancing at parties or cruising waterfront gay bars using the name of the Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton?

Over the last decade, thanks in large part to a number of influential scholarly works dating from the early 1990s, academics have become increasingly aware of the complex relationship between innovative acoustic technologies—such as radio, the telephone, and the phonograph—and gradual but profound shifts in sound's role in modern literature.<sup>6</sup> Specialists in twentieth-century poetry have displayed particular interest in this emergent branch of scholarship because it offers an appealing, historically grounded alternative to the many aridly formalist treatments of sound in poetry currently available. Several recent studies have gone so far as to posit that the “aurality” of a poem is not an ahistorical characteristic that can be adequately or exhaustively described by traditional schemes for scanning verse. Instead, aurality ought to be understood as an attribute that undergoes constant modification in its nature and function from period to period and from writer to writer.<sup>7</sup> In other words, such stock-in-trade formulas as “anapestic,” “alliteration,” and “slant rhyme” should be seen as revealing little about a given poem unless one has first established the precise place that sound occupies in its author's poetics. When viewed in light of these developments in the study of poetry, the fact that Hart Crane, a self-styled “Pindar of our machine age” (*O My* 137), invariably wrote to the accompaniment of a “machine that sings” (*HCCP* 72) suddenly appears much more significant than heretofore appreciated. Indeed, Crane's singing machine, the Victrola, left a profound mark



on all aspects of his poetry, from the microtexture of his verse to its transcendental aspirations.

## Play It Again

Hart Crane did not write poems in a linear fashion. He wrote them piecemeal, “pell-mell” (Unterecker 363). While “intimate with la Muse” he composed individual phrases that, only afterward, when he was sober, would he slowly, with great difficulty, begin to assemble into discrete lyrics.<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Cowley recalls a moment during the gestation period for what would eventually become the opening lines of Crane’s lyric “Passage.” During a Fourth of July party at his friend Slater Brown’s, Crane

sat by the lilacs in the dooryard, meditatively pouring a box of salt on the phonograph . . . One of the wives, pregnant and stark sober, heard him repeating time and time again: ‘Where the cedar leaf divides the sky . . . I was promised an improved infancy.’<sup>9</sup>

Crane would sometimes hang on to a gem of a phrase for months before finding a home for it. Or multiple homes, in the case of a phrase like “The everlasting eyes of Pierrot, / Or, of Gargantua the laughter,” which appears in both “The Bridge of Estador” (HCCP 175) and “Praise for an Urn” (8). Although these particular phrases may have transparently literary origins—Emerson and Rabelais respectively—more often than not, according to Crane’s biographer John Unterecker, the inspiration was the very music Crane listened to while writing (252). Sometimes critics have been alert to this fact, as in the case of Crane’s poem “Virginia,” which reworks the 1920s hit “What Do You Do Sunday, Mary?” from the musical *Poppy*, but no one has systematically tried to unearth possible connections between Crane’s known favorite recordings and his published verse.<sup>10</sup>

What would such an investigation uncover? One would have a better sense of Crane’s indebtedness to particular sources as well as an improved sense of how Crane went about transforming such source material into lyric poetry. Kenneth Rexroth, for instance, reports that while living in the basement at 45 Grove Street, in an apartment immediately below Crane’s, the poet drove him nearly to distraction by playing Bert Williams’s campy Prohibition satire “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine” nonstop (*Autobiographical Novel* 332). The song contrasts a dusty, abandoned brewery to the industrious activity of moonshiners outside of town:

How sad and still tonight,  
 By the old distillery!  
 And how the cobwebs cob  
 In the old machinery!  
 But in the mountaintops,  
 Far from the eyes of cops,  
 Oh! how the moon shines on the moonshine so merrily!<sup>11</sup>

While listening to “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine,” Rexroth indicates, Crane wrote the opening lines of his poem “Lachrymae Christi” (332):

Whitely, while benzine  
 Rinsings from the moon  
 Dissolve all but the windows of the mills  
 (Inside the sure machinery  
 Is still . . . ) (*HCCP* 19)

Crane has reproduced the distillery scene from the song’s chorus, albeit oddly inflected. Knowing that he has reworked Bert Williams’s tune, readers have a valuable opportunity, through a close comparison, to reconstruct Crane’s involuted thought process much more fully than usually possible. (Such opportunities are rare because of Crane’s characteristic compression, intensity, and obliquity. Although Crane once claimed that his poetry operated by a consistent “logic of metaphor” [*HCCPSLP* 235], Lee Edelman has shown that this “logic” in practice results in a thicket of poetic tropes so snarled, so dense that one can despair of ever comprehensively analyzing its purpose and function.<sup>12</sup>)

While listening to Williams, Crane seems to have fixated upon the words “the moon shines on the moonshine.” That line’s wordplay hinges upon breaking one word, “moonshine,” into its components, “moon” and “shine.” Alternatively, one could say that a compound word “dissolves” into its constituent elements—an especially apt metaphor, given that “moonshine,” or distilled alcohol, is itself a solvent (like “benzine”). In his poem, Crane reflects this notion thematically by describing the world outside the “mills” as a world “dissolved” by moonlight. He pursues this train of thought by mimicking the linguistic process of “dissolution” evident in the song. That is, taking his cue from the line “the cobwebs cob” in his source text, he juxtaposes words so as to suggest that the larger ones are decaying into smaller ones: “whitely” loses the *t* and *y* to become “while”; “dissolve” drops its fore and

aft phonemes, leaving simply the word “all”; “machinery” is distilled down to the word “sure.”

One might say that the shining, liquid moonlight that opens “Lachrymae Christi” signals a poetic process of decreation in which words lose their integrity and begin to operate otherwise than “sure machinery.” Words are thereby restored to a kind of virginal purity (a “whiteness”) or rather an uncontaminated, raw materiality subject to the poet’s artful rearrangements or reconstitution.<sup>13</sup> This poetic fantasy of escape from conventional restrictions on language use, figured as standing outside industrial “mills” in a nighttime landscape of word-magic, finds its license and inspiration in Bert Williams’s song. That is, while listening to “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine,” Crane discovered a bundle of age-old poetic topoi deployed in a thought-provoking fashion: inebriation, metamorphosis, escape from regulation (“far from . . . cops”), and the dream of the blank slate. He then elaborated, in Baroque fashion, upon these implicit ideas. Much like Joyce throughout the Sirens episode of *Ulysses*, Crane seizes upon an ephemeral product of mass culture and, sensing beneath its glossy surface a wealth of expressive possibilities, lovingly transforms it to suit his own ends.

This example suggests that if one knew when Crane listened to which 78s and if one could then match that playlist with a detailed chronology of when he was writing which lyrics, the result would undoubtedly be a much better explanation of why he wrote what he did. Would such a large-scale project be feasible, however? One does have a general sense of his musical preferences for his all-night writing frenzies. On the one hand, he favored grand, even bombastic, classical music: excerpts from Richard Wagner, César Franck’s *Variations symphoniques*, and Antonin Dvořák’s *New World Symphony*.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, he listened to popular songs from musicals like *Hit the Deck* or by stars like Sophie Tucker.<sup>15</sup> He was particularly fond of torch songs (Unterecker 388). His supreme vamp-goddess was Marlene Dietrich, who he thought had a voice “straight from Tutankhamen’s tomb.”<sup>16</sup> Apparently, much of the final draft of his long poem and masterpiece *The Bridge* was prepared while listening to her music, and, in his last, most dissolute days in Mexico City, he would play individual records of hers over and over at such volume that visitors were unable to carry on conversations.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, the necessary, precise timelines that would link these various artists, composers, and pieces with particular Crane poems are unavailable. Hard evidence, such as that Rexroth provides, is scarce. Moreover, since Crane wrote only disconnected verses while listening to his Victrola, not entire poems, the prodigious archival work required would likely yield only

scattered insights and further local close readings. There would be cumulative benefits, of course, insofar as one would learn more about the various ways in which Crane's verse operates, but there is no guarantee that one would be able to arrive at global interpretations of complete Crane lyrics, let alone of his poetry in toto. "Lachrymae Christi," for instance, after the lines analyzed above, veers into a macabre description of flowers on a hillside that bears little or no obvious relation to "The Moon Shines on the Moonshine":

swart  
Thorns freshen on the year's  
First blood. From flanks unfended,  
Twanged red perfidies of spring  
Are trillion on the hill. (*HCCP* 19)

One can detect hints here of a musical subtext. The adjective "Twanged" and the possible pun on "trilling" in the awkward phrase "Are trillion" might indicate that Crane is attempting a synaesthetic experiment in which the image of a profusion of red flowers represents a visual equivalent to a vivid, brassy passage in a musical piece. What that piece might be, though, is anyone's guess. Knowing what it was would put readers only a small step closer to understanding one of Crane's most recondite poems. Thirty further lines remain, including such inscrutable statements as "Let sphinxes from the ripe / Borage of death have cleared my tongue" (*HCCP* 19). However fascinating the direct connections between Crane's poems and the specific songs or compositions to which he listened while writing them, a different starting point than the purely inductive is necessary to figure out why recorded music mattered so much to Crane and, in turn, how it affected all, not some, of his verse. Absent the raw data necessary for genetic criticism of the kind that has proved so informative in the study of *Finnegans Wake*, a more roundabout approach will be required.<sup>18</sup>

What does Hart Crane himself have to say on the subject of music and poetry? He not only frequently expressed a desire to model his poetry on the most advanced music of his day (see *O My* 137), he was also given to describing his verse in musical terms. For instance, he labels his early lyric "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" a "pseudo-symphonic construction toward an absolute beauty" (93), his long poem *The Bridge* "a symphony with an epic theme" (*HCCPSLP* 254), "Harbor Dawn" "a legato" (249), and "Cutty Sark" a "fugue" (252). Such tags had real force and knowledge behind them—as Samuel Delany and Michael Sharp have shown, Crane was not merely us-

ing them to pay lip service to the Paterian tenet that all poetry aspires to the condition of music.<sup>19</sup> It is even known where and when he first involved himself seriously in study of the art form. While living in Cleveland after his first stint in New York (1920–23), Crane’s chief connection to the international avant-garde was via the Cleveland Orchestra, then under the direction of the world-famous conductor Ernest Bloch. From Bloch, Crane learned to relish the latest in European music.<sup>20</sup> He became an ardent admirer of such composers as Vincent d’Indy, Erik Satie, Aleksandr Scriabin, and Igor Stravinsky. Later in life, wherever he traveled, Crane continued to seek out innovative music of whatever kind, whether it be Times Square jazz or the microtonal, percussive compositions of Edgar Varèse.<sup>21</sup> From his Cleveland days onward—that is, during his poetic maturity, the years in which he wrote the bulk of the poetry for which he is remembered—modern music remained a constant touchstone for Crane’s achievements in his own medium, verse.

Given this background, one can conclude that Crane had definite reasons for insisting upon writing with a Victrola’s accompaniment. Moreover, those reasons are likely to be found by looking beyond his usual playlist. In the 1920s, recordings of avant-garde music were difficult to purchase commercially. Despite his intense admiration for contemporary experimental composers, when Crane sat down to write poetry, he usually had to settle for less esoteric fare. The repetitive playing of a 78, *any* 78, seems to have been the sine qua non of his writing ritual. If he had to forego the delights of, say, Varèse’s *Ionisation* in favor of “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine,” so be it. (This does not mean that Crane chose 78s indiscriminately. As already seen, he displayed a marked preference for certain genres. Rather, he simply selected the most promising 78s from the pool of available options at a given location.)

To establish why Crane needed a gramophone in order to write poetry, the best procedure might be to hunt for something of a paradox: a 78 by one of Crane’s favorite innovative, contemporary composers that would nonetheless have been readily obtainable during his lifetime. Such a 78 might permit one to appreciate both what Crane saw in modern music and how it could be adapted for his own, writerly purposes. The next section of this chapter concentrates on a unique case that fills this bill, Maurice Ravel’s popular but somewhat bizarre orchestral work *Boléro*. It will examine *Boléro* itself as well as how it would have been altered as Crane “performed” it on his Victrola. This examination will begin to distinguish what attracted Crane to certain kinds of music as well as how he endeavored to isolate and accentuate those qualities. Crane’s madness had a method, and he played selected music in a particular way so as to promote definite poetic ends.

## Bull Horn

Late in Hart Crane's career, Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* seems to have become one of his favorite accompaniments for his poetry-writing marathons.<sup>22</sup> Crane believed that it provided him with the raw stuff of inspiration. "At times dear Gorham," he wrote his friend Gorham Munson, "I feel an enormous power in me—that seems almost supernatural. . . . I can say this now with perfect equanimity because I am notoriously drunk and the Victrola is still going with that glorious 'Bolero'" (*O My* 92).<sup>23</sup>

*Boléro* has an undeserved reputation for being nothing more than an expression of mounting excitement as one nears the climactic moment of orgasm / death. Crane, one might conjecture, loved *Boléro* for no better reason than it conjured up images of lithe toreadors engaged in the kind of life-or-death athletic struggles that he found powerfully erotic. He was, after all, the sort of man who went to boxing matches not because of sport—he considered the game itself often rather "boresome"—but because the spectacle of "sublime machines of human muscle-play" got him "very heated" [*O My* 35]). Ravel, however, is not a simple composer, and Crane had extensive knowledge of contemporary European music.

*Boléro* is a fifteen-minute orchestral piece written in three-four time. It consists of eighteen repetitions of an initial theme and countertheme, gradually and steadily increasing in volume from barely audible to deafening. Two measures of percussion interrupt the melody after every second countertheme. Ravel signals the impending conclusion of the piece by suddenly modulating the tonality. The last countertheme segues into a thunderous, dissonant crescendo.

In his classic analysis of *Boléro*, Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that it attempts to work through a basic opposition between symmetry and asymmetry. The rhythm is ternary, but its melodic structure of theme and countertheme is binary. Lévi-Strauss lays out the intricate, subtle ways in which, over the course of *Boléro*, both its rhythm and melody endeavor to bridge that gap. There is no need to recapitulate Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis here beyond noting that he successfully demonstrates that every strategy intended to camouflage ternaries as binaries (and vice versa) produces further, often higher-order oppositions between asymmetry and symmetry, which must then, in turn, be overcome. Caught in this sand trap, *Boléro* cannot progress but only repeat itself, futilely intensifying its efforts with every iteration. Lévi-Strauss argues that the final modulation and crescendo represent a "mythic" solution to the piece's fundamental self-contradictions. That is, instead of "reconciling" the contraries, they are "cast out" like a scapegoat. The

silence that follows their abrupt banishment only *feels* satisfying to an audience, as if the quiet were “consecrated to a task well done,” when in reality *Boléro* is more or less conceding defeat.<sup>24</sup>

Lévi-Strauss’s account of *Boléro* depends upon one fundamental assumption: that its audience listens to the piece continuously from beginning to end. Hart Crane, however, would not have been able to listen to *Boléro* in this manner while writing. A ten-inch 78 played on a Victrola lasts no more than five minutes. When Decca released *Boléro*, it required two separate disks. To simulate a live performance of Ravel’s piece, Crane would have to have stood over his Victrola poised to flip or switch the 78s as necessary. But he did nothing of the sort. In the heat of composing a poem, he always played “the same record grinding over and over through its five-minute cycles” (Unterecker 253). Crane would, therefore, have listened to *one part* of *Boléro* incessantly, most likely the final third, but not necessarily.

Played in this way, Crane’s *Boléro* would have been very different from the harshly linear work that Lévi-Strauss explicates. Instead, Crane’s suspended, ever-repeated, partial *Boléro* would have approached the condition of such 1960s minimalist works as Philip Glass’s *Music in Fifths* and Terry Riley’s *In C*. That is, the original teleology of *Boléro* would, as in minimalist music, have become degraded or irrelevant. Like Glass and Riley, in his “performance” of *Boléro*, Crane aims not for a single completed musical gesture but a continuous auditory environment. Under these circumstances, *Boléro*’s crescendo would have had much less “mythic” impact than in a concert hall—how could it be otherwise, after three dozen or more repetitions? Crane seems to have sought out, and prolonged indefinitely, the tension, or “oscillation” as Lévi-Strauss puts it, between ternary and binary, asymmetry and symmetry, in Ravel’s work (11).

The resulting variant on *Boléro* was, again like a minimalist work, something of a closed system, or, more grandly, an attempt at instantiating a timeless, utopian space. Within the endless loop of Crane’s *Boléro*, the melody would have remained powerfully expressive and the pronounced martial rhythm viscerally stirring, but these elements also would have remained untainted by the strong narrative impulse subtending earlier romantic uses of such devices in, say, Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* or Beethoven’s *Eroica*. The music thereby marks out a “time” that is “timeless” in the sense that “what next” never becomes an issue. One of the most famous pieces of minimalist music is John Adams’s whimsically titled *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*. Crane, in constructing his *Boléro*-world, seems to have pined after a *Perpetual Ride in a Fast Machine*: symmetry and asymmetry forever in dynamic imbalance; the volume downshifting only to return to the same level, again and again;

a listener caught up in a perpetual driver's high, like driving a Porsche through Nevada on I-80 at night. No Hegelian synthesis possible. No transformative epiphany. A joyride into eternity.<sup>25</sup>

This ride would also have required Crane's active, physical involvement. Victrolas were spring operated. A user had to hand crank them every once in a while to keep the turntable rotating. According to Gorham Munson, Crane periodically had to "race" to wind his up so as to keep constant the musical accompaniment to his writing marathons. Crane's *Boléro*-world was both mechanical and muscle powered, the product of human and machine labor. Moreover, as already pointed out, when not cranking away, Crane would have been sitting at a table pounding away at a manual typewriter or going through "loud trial readings" of a line and all its possible variants (Unterecker 252–53). Poet-with-typewriter and poet-with-gramophone were structural equivalents for Crane. Both brought audible art into being. And those heady sounds, repeated, created the utopian space that sustained the human will and drive required to produce yet more sound—again, a (theoretically) closed system. In his poem "Cutty Sark," Crane writes apocalyptically of a "white machine that sings" (*HCCP* 72). The phrase could be a kenning for typewriter, Victrola, and poet alike.

## War

Before going further, it must again be conceded that *Boléro* is only one of many 78s Crane played when, to quote Robert Browning, "a palace of music [he] reared."<sup>26</sup> Yet all of Crane's preferred 78s—whether Dietrich-style torch songs or bombastic classical music—seem to have shared one fundamental trait. They exhibit eros in its most theatrical guises, ranging from aggressive triumph to jaded melancholy. And, as in the case of *Boléro*, Crane, by playing these emotional roller coasters nonstop, would have stripped the music of implied teleologies, whether narrative, psychological, or otherwise. Crane would have prolonged indefinitely seduction's dramatic tension. At the start of this discussion of *Boléro*, the question of eros was set aside so as not to broach the subject prematurely. Now, however, the issue can be addressed with greater sophistication and used as a launching pad for moving toward a broader understanding of how Crane's verse functions. One begins to discern the particular lineaments of his erotic possession by the word.

Crane's compositional regimen bears all the hallmarks of a libidinal ritual. He insisted that things be just so and that they stay that way. He fantasizes a physical fusion of man and machine that releases a flood of creative energy. An early poem, "Episode of Hands," illustrates the sexual charge that this



fantasy held for Crane. He retells an incident in his father's candy factory.<sup>27</sup> An unnamed machine injures a worker's hand. Amid "factory sounds and factory thoughts," "the factory owner's son" takes the worker's hurt hand into his own and studies it before bandaging it. "The gash was bleeding, and a shaft of sun / That glittered in and out among the wheels, / Fell lightly, warmly, down into the wound" (*HCCP* 173). Significantly, the speaker here so identifies with another man's violated flesh that he imagines that he becomes the other person, able to feel the "warmth" of the sunlight in the "gash." Celestial light washes indifferent across machine and men, transfiguring them, sanctifying their communion, and removing them from time and space.

Crane's later poem, "Cape Hatteras," dispenses with the autobiographical frame of "Episode of Hands" but makes much the same statement.

[F]ast in whirling armatures,  
As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth  
Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined  
In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee  
The bearings glint,—O murmurless and shined  
In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy! (*HCCP* 79)

Crane projects bestial, blind, raw eros onto machinery in a factory. This libidinal energy ("glee") is both constrained ("confined") and permitted, frictionless ("oilrinsed"), to expend itself with abandon ("whirl"). The male bodies left (nominally) integral in "Episode of Hands" here dissolve, like Osiris, into partial objects that pursue their circumscribed yet blissful course. In both of these poems, Crane's symbol for this mechanical, eternal *jouissance* is the turning wheel ("wheels," "whirl," "axle," "oilrinsed circles"). These symbols thematize the very real turning wheel, the Victrola turntable, that preexists them and that as a material precondition for their existence as poetry can even be said to bring them into being. Poems like "Episode of Hands" and "Cape Hatteras" are, forgive the pun, records of a utopian, Dionysian-Bacchic state that Crane induces through a precise blend of repetitious music, alcohol, frenzied physical activity, and noisy machinery.<sup>28</sup>

By inserting machinery into his scene of desire and by insisting upon a mechanized variant of the poet's divinest madness, Crane clearly participates in what Caroline Jones, in *Machine in the Studio*, calls "the technological sublime."<sup>29</sup> Whereas Edmund Burke's classic definition of the sublime emphasizes encounters with the natural world, for many twentieth-century artists, Jones argues, "Machines, not nature . . . provide the terrible forces to

be encountered, engulfed by, and transcended in the studio" (203–4). Yes, "in the studio"—Jones has in mind not poets but postwar visual artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Smithson, and Andy Warhol, who grapple with how to integrate machines, the mechanical, and the mechanistic into their artistic processes. As Jones sees it, that wrestling match puts the artist's very humanity at risk. Crane's writing ritual depended upon the creation of a similar arena, a space of a Jacob-and-the-angel erotic combat between the human and the non- or superhuman.<sup>30</sup>

Jones credits the "technological sublime" to an implicit analogy between an artist's work space and industrial production. The artist encounters, then battles or submits to, the titanic, impersonal forces propelling the march of capitalism. In essence, Jones is extending Fredric Jameson's argument that "euphoria" results when a subject "consumes" a (false, ideological) image of the capitalist market as a totality, omnipresent and omnipotent.<sup>31</sup> Jones builds on Jameson by investigating some of the practical artistic consequences of that "euphoria," or feeling of sublimity. As "Episode of Hands" and the factory passage from "Cape Hatteras" have demonstrated, Crane, like Jones's Warhol and Rauschenberg, finds "euphoria" in contemplating the loss of self as mechanical processes supplant, or rend, the integrity of the individual. While living in Akron—a boomtown in 1919, famous as the birthplace of the rubber tire—Crane told an interviewer, "living as we do in an age of the most violent commercialism the world has ever known, the artist cannot remain aloof from the welters without losing the essential, imminent vitality of his vision."<sup>32</sup> Capitalism, for Crane, is Orphic. In its "violence," its "welters," one beholds raw power. In the factory, not the sanctuary, one undergoes a theophany: "Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined— / Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred / Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars" (*HCCP* 79).

Caroline Jones criticizes Andy Warhol for too readily identifying his artistic procedures with the logic of an assembly line (205–210 and 231–32). One could make a similar statement about Crane. In 1918 Crane worked at a munitions plant in Cleveland. His job was tightening bolts on machine parts. He "watched a seemingly endless procession of objects pass before him on a conveyer belt" (Unterecker 113). His writing utopia would later reproduce the essentials of this wartime labor: repetition, mechanization, timelessness, circularity, the production of interchangeable parts. One could validly claim that Crane shares the industrial capitalist's dream of production by rote, ad infinitum. Moreover, his individual phrases are like parts manufactured in one place—*Boléro*-land—and then shipped elsewhere—Sobriety City—for assembly into functioning wholes. Crane's reliance on the "technological

sublime” in his poetry and his proclivity for references to factories and machines seem to prefigure Warhol’s compromises with the capitalist market.

But Crane enters his “writing factory” for artistic, not economic, reasons. Unlike Warhol, he would never confuse business and art.<sup>33</sup> The sublime in its technological guise remains for him “the highest order of *aesthetic* experience” (Jones 203; emphasis added). How could it have been otherwise? Crane associated capitalism at its crudest with his father, Chester Arthur, the candy magnate who invented LifeSavers yet forced his son to work for his keep as a manual laborer or lowly salesclerk.<sup>34</sup> Crane’s decision to be a poet was a calculated rejection of his father’s world and worldview. He dropped his given name Harold and adopted in its stead his mother’s maiden name, Hart. And he quite proudly wrote his mother that he would have to endure poverty and hardship:

I expect I’ll always have to drudge for my living, and I’m quite willing to always do it, but I am no more fooling myself that the mental bondage and the spiritual bondage of the more remunerative sorts of work is worth the sacrifices inevitably involved. If I can’t continue to create the sort of poetry that is my intensest and deepest component in life—then it all means very little to me, and then I might as well tie myself up to some smug ambition and “success” (the common idol that every Tom Dick and Harry is bowing to everywhere). (*O My* 174)

Given the potent confluence of oedipal and economic protests that these gestures imply, it is hardly surprising that Crane’s conception of the poet-as-writing-machine is no more than a strategic, partial capitulation to the dehumanizing tendencies of capitalism. By singling out one portion of the capitalist mind-set—the open-ended desire to produce—and utterly rejecting another—the desire to reap profit from production—Crane consciously sets himself against the economic “machinery” of his day. He takes technologies devised by big business for use in the office (the Remington) and for passive entertainment (the Victrola) and perversely employs them toward idiosyncratic, noncapitalist ends. Crane is thereby able to liberate and redeploy the raw libidinal energy bound up in the nation’s collective drive to industrialize, to produce.<sup>35</sup> This redirected eros is then free to power Crane’s incomparably high-voltage verse.

A simple observation can draw this section to a close: Hart Crane has begun to sound strangely “prepostmodern” as the ramifications of “his” *Boléro* have been explored. An astute reader is likely to be thinking of a range of

intertexts: J. G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on psychoanalysis and capitalism, Paul Gilroy on hip-hop DJs' manipulations of LPs, N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), and so on.<sup>36</sup> Crane's poetry has never before kept such company. The next section of this chapter will undertake a reading of Crane's poem sequence "Voyages" in order to demonstrate the practical consequences that stem from this new approach to his verse.

## Love Shack

On 21 April 1924, Hart Crane wrote his friend Waldo Frank to crow. He had fallen in love. His new man: a Danish-American sailor named Emil Opffer.

I have seen the Word made Flesh. I mean nothing less, and I know now that there is such a thing as indestructibility. In the deepest sense, where flesh became transformed through intensity of response to counter-response, where sex was beaten out, where a purity of joy was reached that included tears . . . I have been able to give freedom and life which was acknowledged in the ecstasy of walking hand in hand across the most beautiful bridge of the world, the cables enclosing us and pulling us upward in such a dance as I have never walked and never can walk with another. (*O My* 186–87)

The prose is *echt* Crane. He blends mysticism ("Word made Flesh") with sentimentality ("tears"), "ecstasy" with melodrama ("never with another"). He throws out trite phrases ("most beautiful in the world"). He abuses metaphors ("dances I have walked"). He even touches genius: "sex was beaten out," a resonant phrase, summoning thoughts of drumming, annealing, and pummeling. It is, in other words, an appropriately Orphic triad of music, metallurgy, and masochism that complicates the passage's seeming Platonism. Crane speaks of so indulging in "sex" that it becomes something other, its physicality *preserved*, not abandoned, as one moves "upward" on the Platonic ladder. Crane, naturally, consecrates this (un)holy, clunky, glorious love story by setting it smack in the middle of the Machine—here represented by Washington Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge, whose "cables enclos[e]" the lovers and lift them out of themselves into rapture.

Two months later, in June 1924, Crane writes the poet Jean Toomer to tell him, too, about Opffer. To give a sense of his "exaltation," Crane includes a draft of a poem that he tentatively christens "Voyages" (193). He also tries to

explain that his poetry is an “effort to describe God.” “Only the effort,” he hastens to add, “limitless and yet forever incomplete” (192). In the April letter to Frank, Crane was already happily confusing Opffer and Christ. By June, Crane’s gleeful idolatry was producing its own Gospel.

The one poetic “Voyage” that Crane sent Toomer soon grew into a sequence of five. Crane then took an old piece of his, “The Bottom of the Sea Is Cruel” (1921), prefixed it to the others as a kind of proem and declared the set of six lyrics a single work.<sup>37</sup> Crane would later give pride of place to “Voyages” in his first book, *White Buildings* (1926). It delivers the final, knockout punch, coming after two oft-anthologized works, “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” and “At Melville’s Tomb.”

“Voyages” exhibits an eerie blend of the familiar and the strange. There is no doubt after the magnificent *volta* of the “And yet” that opens “Voyages” II that this is love poetry of the most venerable, ornate sort, albeit a somewhat perverse variety.

—And yet this great wink of eternity,  
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,  
Samite sheeted and processioned where  
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,  
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love (*HCCP* 35)

On the one hand, an educated reader immediately recognizes the rolling pentameter, archaic diction, and near-manic use of consonance (“samite sheeted processioned”). These tried-and-true devices announce that “our love” is worthy of the grand style. On the other hand, words such as “wrapt,” “wink,” and “leewardings” fail to yield straightforward sense. “Wrapt inflections”? “Wrapt” as in “wrapped”—if so, by what? “Wrapt” as in “rapt attention”? Or as in “rapture”? In what sense is the ocean a “wink of eternity”? Are readers to imagine the waters of the globe as God’s closed eye? If so, why does Crane almost immediately proceed to speak instead of the ocean’s “vast belly”? “Voyages” II somehow manages to be rhetorically effective, sweeping a reader, giddy, onto glorious terrain, even though (or perhaps because) its semantic meaning remains indeterminate.

Crane’s implicit model for his oddly potent rhetoric is the Elizabethan sonnet sequence. Throughout “Voyages,” Crane’s imagery, like that of Renaissance love poets, is Petrarchan, featuring storms, tropic heat, arctic cold, ships, pirates, and dreams. So, too, is his rhetorical topos, an enamored poet whose tone veers unpredictably between despair and ecstasy as he uses the occasion of his love to express himself in increasingly convoluted figures:

O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,  
 Bequeath us to no earthly shore until  
 Is answered in the vortex of our grave  
 The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise. (35)

Crane's speaker, like Romeo or any of Shakespeare's other lovelorn lads, feels suspended between bliss ("paradise") and exile ("grave"), left to toss and turn and drift ("vortex," "spindrift").

"Voyages" not only resembles Renaissance verse in its subject matter, it also sounds Elizabethan. Like Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Spenser's *Amoretti*, Crane's "Voyages" delights in aureation, hyperbole, stylization, and syntactical compression, traits all well in evidence in a passage such as:

No stream of greater love advancing now  
 Than, singing, this mortality alone  
 Through clay aflow immortally to you. (37)

Here one cannot help but detect distant echoes of resonant Shakespearean lines such as "Oh, if (I say) you look upon this verse / When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay" and "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea / But sad mortality o'ersways their power . . . who his spoil [of] beauty can forbid? / O, none, unless this miracle have might, / That in black ink my love may still shine bright."<sup>38</sup>

Crane's achievement in "Voyages" lies in his having made new the Elizabethan legacy. Many modernist writers, of course, shared similar aims, among them Djuna Barnes, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce. What marks Crane, and "Voyages," as unique is Crane's belief that reviving the Renaissance's rhetorical grandeur would serve musical ends. More precisely, he held that poetry, if it wished to equal or surpass the achievements of contemporary composers, would have to find original ways of deploying the heaviest armaments available in the English literary tradition. In one of his letters he speaks of the need to "ransack the vocabularies of Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster (for theirs were the richest)" if he is to be a "modern artist" on the order of "Strauss, Ravel, Scriabine [*sic*], and Block [*sic*]" (*O My* 137; emphasis in original). "Voyages" is exhibit A of what Crane means by "ransacking." Not only does it echo Renaissance verse, but, as Lee Edelman has shown, it also borrows pell-mell from Renaissance texts. "Voyages" VI, for instance, shamelessly includes phrases lifted from *The Tempest*, *Richard II*, and Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>39</sup> Throughout "Voyages," Crane so packs his verse with Elizabethan-esque diction, tone, and phrasing that, in passages such as the following, one

seems to be reading a reckless cento of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century verse:

Shall they not stem and close in our own steps  
Bright staves of flowers and quills today as I  
Must first be lost in fatal tides to tell? (*HCCP* 37)

~

Where icy and bright dungeons lift  
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,  
And ocean rivers, churning, shift  
Green borders under stranger skies (39)

~

Creation's blithe and petalled word  
To the lounged goddess when she rose  
Conceding dialogue with eyes  
That smile unsearchable repose (39)

In lines such as these, the stylistic anachronisms come so thick and fast that one is left uncertain whether to categorize these lyrics as homage, parody, or pastiche. Crane seems to have in mind now one text, now another, freely "ransacking" their vocabularies to craft his own idiom.

"Voyages" does not aim to bring its Elizabethan crazy quilt into a finished form. Instead, it delights in its half-intelligibility and its inconsistencies. "Voyages" I, V, and VI appear to describe seaside scenes, whereas "Voyages" II-IV seem to describe actions taking place in or under the open sea. The setting for the final two lyrics, however, is too vague, too changeable for a critic confidently to characterize the sequence as a circular narrative of journey out and back. The first lyric, written in 1921, does offer a relatively straightforward Blakean song of experience—it describes innocent children gamboling beside an ocean symbolizing sexuality and death—but the next five "Voyages," all from 1924, are not so easily paraphrased. They recount hermetic anecdotes about a visionary "I" and a sometimes living, sometimes dead "you." This pair journeys among, or to, islands across, or within, a "sceptered" goddess-ocean (35). Along the way, the pair seems to consummate their passion twice ("Voyages" III, IV) as well as quarrel ("Voyages" V). These uncertain actions are submerged beneath a wildly lush, recalcitrant linguistic surface:

All fragrance irrefragably, and claim  
Madly meeting logically in this hour  
And region that is ours to wreath again,

Portending eyes and lips and making told  
 The chancel port and portion of our June (*HCCP* 37)

From “region” to “wreathe,” from “our” to “hour,” from “portending” to “port” to “portion,” Crane’s poetry slides associatively from one aural echo into another. The verse can thus be said to progress “madly . . . logically,” satisfying a reader’s intuition, perhaps, but rarely satisfying her or his rage for order.

Mystified by how to speak in generalities about such a disparate, confusing, yet compelling compendium of lyrics, some critics, such as R. W. B. Lewis, have thrown up their hands. Crane, Lewis writes in a Pyrrhic retreat, provides access to a “poetic utopia,” “some boundless domain of splendid unreason where opposites consort and nameless forces or disembodied pulsations dance out their uninterpretable allegory” (151). A few recent critics, like Lee Edelman and Eric Selinger, have persevered, Edelman undertaking a deconstructive analysis and Selinger a Kristevan reading.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the language of “Voyages” II–VI is so inflated, so quintessentially, so memorably Crane at his best and worst that the poetry does indeed invite readings that focus on the violence and peculiarity of its tropes.

However fascinating the results, the recent theoretically informed readings of “Voyages” have erred in presuming that the lyrics follow a linear progression, that is, that they work toward the solution of a philosophical, rhetorical, or generic problem.<sup>41</sup> If, however, Crane deliberately avoids teleology and favors the creation of a timeless, ecstatic state, then “Voyages” VI should not be given greater weight than any of the other five lyrics. Each “Voyage” presents a window onto eternity. The circumstances, intensities, affect, and means of expression might vary, but the ultimate referent remains constant.

The love story everywhere perceptible in “Voyages,” like that in John Ashbery’s *Three Poems* (1972) or in Roland Barthes’s *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (1977), has been broken up, refigured, and transfigured in such a way that one cannot say “it begins here” or that “it ends here,” let alone who the lovers are. Love is no longer an episode in a biography but an ahistorical state and a way of speaking into which the poet enters at will. He or she utters an “And yet!,” as Crane does to begin “Voyages” II, and escapes into a realm of artifice insulated against the sound of time’s chariot. In the workaday world, Crane did, of course, eventually break with Emil Opffer. That lover’s plot played itself out rather predictably, including a final round of betrayals and angry recriminations.<sup>42</sup> In the poem, however, that love, purified of any specifics, persists, untainted by nostalgia or history, rendered as a procession of intensities that one can reexperience with each perusal. Crane treats his romance with Opffer in the same manner that he treated *Boléro*. He could play



selected bits ad infinitum and never fall prey to the deadening incursions of narrative.

The poem as an escape from time is an old idea. "And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand / Praising thy worth, despite [Time's] cruel hand," Shakespeare concludes his sixtieth sonnet (1854). Also old is the impulse to purify and elevate a particular love into art by ridding it of any historical specificity. "One form shall rise above the wreck / One name, Ianthe, shall not die," Walter Landor writes in "Past Ruined Ilion," lines of verse whose fame and pathos in no way depend upon concrete details about Ianthe's identity or physical form.<sup>43</sup> What marks "Voyages" as new is the way Crane writes, which is recognizably the product of his mechanized / eroticized writing regimen. One can demonstrate this fact by looking closely at the grammar and lyrical texture of the most commented-upon of the "Voyages," the third.

"Voyages" III perceptibly breaks down into fourteen discrete units, which, following the precedent of classical oratory, will be called *cola*. The logical and grammatical connections among Crane's cola vary widely in stability and in coherency. Here one can divide the lyric according to the following scheme:

- (1) Infinite consanguinity it bears—
- (2) This tendered theme of you that light  
Retrieves from sea plains (3) where the sky  
Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones;
- (4) While ribboned water lanes I wind  
Are (5) laved and scattered with no stroke  
Wide from your side, (6) whereto this hour  
The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands.
- (7) And so, admitted through black swollen gates  
That must arrest all distance otherwise,—
- (8) Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,
- (9) Light wrestling there incessantly with light,
- (10) Star kissing star through wave on wave unto  
Your body rocking!
- and (11) where death, if shed,  
Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
- (12) Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
- (13) The silken skilled transmemberment of song;
- (14) Permit me voyage, love, into your hands . . . (HCCP 36)

Other divisions are possible. For instance, one could claim that 2 and 3 or 5 and 6 ought to be considered indissoluble units; what matters here is to make visible the process of suturing that Crane has applied to relatively distinct statements treating a common topic. Consider the second and third verse paragraphs. Cola 7 to 13 are punctuated as if they were part of a cohesive sentence, yet this unity is an illusion. Colon 7 is a participial phrase expressing completed action. Colon 8 is a prepositional phrase giving a location. Cola 9 and 10 are parallel noun absolutes. Eleven is a subordinate clause, and 12, like 7, is a participial phrase. Thirteen is another trailing noun absolute, unless, perhaps, one construes “transmemberment” as the subject of this unwieldy sentence, with an “is” elided. If so, anacoluthon seems to have occurred since colon 7. That is, “admitted” would seem, logically, to require the “I” from colon 4 as its subject, not “transmemberment” in colon 13—although, it must be conceded, one can hardly apply spatial or temporal logic to a neologism like “transmemberment” since a reader can have only a vague, contextual sense of what it means in the first place. Given these mounting ambiguities, one must conclude that Crane has used punctuation marks such as dashes and commas not to indicate cumulative development either of syntax or argument but rather to *substitute* visual stitchery for such progress.<sup>44</sup>

The many gaps in the poem’s syntax coexist with a remarkable degree of self-sufficiency on the part of the individual cola. Colon 9—“Light wrestling there incessantly with light”—is a particularly good example. The phrase is rich in consonance (*l*’s) and assonance (short *e*’s and *i*’s). The caesura occurs naturally between the second and third feet, but it also symmetrically divides the line into two three-word units.

^        /   ^   /        ^   /   ^   /   ^   /  
Light wrestling there || incessantly with light

The same word, “light,” begins and ends the colon, a classic gesture of completion. Moreover, Crane concisely indicates time (“incessantly”), place (“there”), agent (“light”), and action (“wrestle”). Colon 9 of “Voyages” III possesses the inevitability of a hexameter by Racine. Each of the other cola in the lyric likewise, if not so transparently, conveys the impression of a self-contained rhetorical gesture, partly through internal soundplay and partly by establishing enough coordinates (who, what, when, where, why) that one feels confident projecting a context within which the fragmentary utterance could belong. Each colon possesses what R. W. B. Lewis calls Crane’s “quality of encompassing finality” (404, n16).

Oddly, despite its “bad” grammar and its imperfect suturing of well-

turned phrases, “Voyages” III does not feel disjunctive. One has a general sense of a maritime scene (even if the action seems to oscillate between the surface of the sea and the ocean floor). Barely concealed literary subtexts—Milton’s “Lycidas” and Ariel’s song “Full Fathom Five” from *The Tempest*—provide some narrative purchase, too. One can guess that “you” are undergoing a sea change, a “transmemberment,” through the agency of love and song. One can also conjecture that “I,” like Orpheus or Odysseus, has traveled through chthonic portals (“black swollen gates”) to witness this moment wondrous and strange. Two formal features reinforce these impressions of the setting and dramatic action. First, the constant iambic pentameter works as a catena that cuts across the syntactical ambiguities.<sup>45</sup> Second, the rich soundplay evident in each individual period spills across the sutures dividing them. Colon 9, for example, does not carry on the heavy alliteration of *p*’s in colon 8, but it does seem to echo the stressed short *e* of “pediment,” even as “lithe” reappears in a new guise as “light.” Crane’s second, “sober,” phase of poetry composition, during which he painstakingly revised and knit together isolated phrases written during his “ecstatic” phase, results in verse that does possess linkages and continuities, but these links are haphazard, partial, nonlinear, and unpredictable, only half-obedient to decorum and logic.

Yvor Winters first noted Crane’s uncanny ability to appear to be writing coherent verse that, when inspected, would dissolve into a sequence of unrelated, nonsensical assertions. Winters labeled this feature of Crane’s writing “pseudo-reference.”<sup>46</sup> It merits a less pejorative, more precise label that takes into account the grammatical basis for Crane’s slipperiness. Much poetry criticism since Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era* has explored the fact that the dominant mode of modernist experimentation with syntax is *paratactic*, that is, it investigates the use of “and” or asyndeton to link successive clauses or other linguistic units.<sup>47</sup> By juxtaposing disparate materials without logical or hierarchical connectives, parataxis increases writerly economy, semantic indeterminacy, and textual heterogeneity. Achieving results comparable to collage in the visual arts, the parataxis in works such as the *Cantos*, *Paterson*, and *The Maximus Poems* tends to break down generic distinctions by introducing nonpoetic, even nonliterary, material in a relatively nonprejudicial fashion. Crane’s starkly different mode of syntactical experimentation could more properly be called attenuated hypotaxis. His cola in “Voyages” III are not discrete collage nuggets nor are they items in a catalog strung together by conjunctions. Instead, “Voyages” III is made up of tenuously interconnected clauses (3, 4, 6, 11); participial phrases (5, 7, 12); prepositional phrases

(8); and noun absolutes (9, 10). Here as elsewhere, most everything in a Crane poem can be construed hypotactically, that is, as a series of grammatical units (cola) possessing some relation of subordination to another element. But Crane also blurs those connections and inhibits the formation of clear, neat, larger units. For example, in “Voyages” III the only two grammatically complete sentences (as opposed to ersatz sentences indicated by punctuation) are cola 1 and 14, which serve primarily as bookends for the disorienting grammar-play in between. Crane’s verse explores the wide-open poetic terrain between complete disjunction and crystalline order (or, as Steve McCaffery would put it, between the boundlessness of a general economy and the confined ambit of a restricted one).

The strangely centrifugal, disorderly syntax in “Voyages” was largely unprecedented when *White Buildings* was first published. To such contemporaries as Yvor Winters, Crane understandably appeared error prone and given to thoughtless gush.<sup>48</sup> Experimental poetry since 1970, however, has proved Crane prescient. Among the many writers who have employed Crane-like attenuated hypotaxis are Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Raworth, and Rosmarie Waldrop. Perhaps the poet whose anomalous syntax most resembles Crane’s is John Ashbery. Ashbery habitually writes sentences that, like Crane’s, refuse to add up linearly, even as they convey the impression of concatenation.<sup>49</sup>

(1) The headlines and economy

Would refresh for a moment (2) as you look back over the heap  
 Of rusted box-springs with water under them, (3) and then,  
 Like sliding up to a door or a peephole (4) a tremendous advantage  
 Would burst like a bubble. (5) Toys as solemn and knotted as books  
 Assert themselves first, (6) leading down through a delicate landscape  
 Of reminders to be better next time to a damp place on my hip,  
 (7) And this would spell out a warm business letter urging us  
 All to return to our senses.<sup>50</sup>

Although the verse texture here is somewhat smoother than Crane’s, Ashbery, in this extract from “A Wave,” has employed a noticeably similar process of suturing.<sup>51</sup> The “as” between cola 1 and 2 creates a link that violates the sequence of tenses (“you look” does not agree with “Would refresh”). Cola 3 and 4 contain contradictory adverbial similes (“Like sliding up” and “like a bubble”) modifying the same verb (“burst”). Colon 6 is an ambiguous participle, perhaps a dangling modifier of “Toys,” perhaps a modifier of

“books.” Colon 7 contains a pronominal subject, “this,” with no clear antecedent. Seven also switches to “us / All,” after colon 2 had addressed “you,” and colon 6 had mentioned “my hip.” The cumulative effect of these connected yet disjunct phrases is readerly disorientation. Can I, you, or we all find stability in the swiftly altering landscape? Or do we accept flux itself as the grounds of “our” (non)identity?

Charles Bernstein has provided a name for the general composition strategy evident in Crane and Ashbery: “dysraphism,” the stitching together of disparate “embryonic” elements, Frankenstein-like, in order to see if a viable poem develops.<sup>52</sup> Dysraphic poets are dissatisfied with the limitations imposed by the rigors of collage. They do not wish to constrain their artistic activities to selecting, categorizing, and arranging found texts. They permit themselves to invent, borrow, rework, and suture whatever materials they wish, however they desire. They delight in asymmetry, non sequiturs, and shifts in tone. They are less interested in the global features of a poem than in its local ones: the way specific statements connect (or fail to), the way certain series of sounds hit the ear, the way one feels rough and smooth textures as lines and phrases segue one into the other. Witnessing the procession of words, rent or whole, conveys much of the work’s “meaning.” Referentiality is secondary to the spectacle of what T. S. Eliot, writing about A. C. Swinburne, once called the spectacle of “language, uprooted”:

The world of Swinburne does not depend upon some other world which it simulates; it has the necessary completeness and self-sufficiency for justification and permanence . . . [T]he object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment. . . . Only a man of genius could dwell so exclusively and consistently among words as Swinburne. (*Sacred Wood* 149–60)

Eliot rightly downplays Swinburne’s agency, an insight that applies equally to the poets discussed here. “Language” and “words,” not the writers in question, possess “an independent life” within a “self-sufficient world.” These poets merely “dwell” in this “hallucinatory” linguistic utopia. Poetry, for Swinburne’s dysraphic descendants, opens out into an “independent,” that is, autonomous, realm that the poet, like a reader, inhabits.

Ashbery refers to this exploratory venture into the world of words by using phrases like “just walking around,” “skating,” and, above all else, “flow.”<sup>53</sup> He implies that he, and the reader, must be ready to set aside predetermined goals in order to perceive the actuality and value of the verse as it ebbs and

flows, courses and floods, in accordance with rhythms and laws that far exceed the compass of one person's reason or imagination. Crane, too, speaks of the deliberate cession of control that must precede the creation of poetry, and, like Ashbery, he uses a marine metaphor:

One must be drenched in words, literally soaked with them to have the right ones form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment. When they come . . . they come as things in themselves; it is a matter of felicitous juggling!; and no amount of will or emotion can help the thing a bit. (*O My* 72)

Immersed in the currents of language, the poet is ready to cede "will" and let "words come" and shape themselves "into the proper pattern." About "Voyages," Crane would later write, "the sea has thrown itself upon me and been answered" (*O My* 187). Behind Crane's "sea" stands Swinburne's. In poem after poem, from "The Triumph of Time" to "The Swimmer's Dream," Swinburne speaks of his fervent desire to take a baptismal / suicidal plunge into ocean language. Examples would include Sappho, who in "On the Cliffs" leaps from the Leucadian cliffs and is reborn in "the wide sea's immemorial song" (*SSP* 192) and Thalassius, who "with his heart . . . The tidal throb of all the tides keep[s] rhyme" and becomes "no more a singer, but a song" (184). These poets' persistent urge is to escape from the autonomous self into the free play of language. They drown, so as to undergo "the silken skilled transmemberment of song."

The result is a synecdochal poetry. Its forms and verses are broken, dismembered, unraveling, incomplete. One is to read each poem as a maimed piece of an absent, ungraspable whole. Crane would call that whole God. Swinburne would give it a pagan name, like Hertha or Proserpine. Ashbery, like most contemporary writers, is more circumspect in naming this totality. He has used many words, each tested, then discarded. Among his favorites have been "weather" and "diagram."<sup>54</sup> Regardless, in the variegated, uneven texture of a poem's phrase-suturing, in what Ashbery calls its "architecture of desire,"<sup>55</sup> a reader senses the dynamic gaps, leaps, and twists in grammar that lead not into the mind of a poet but outward, into possibility, into language. "Language has built towers and bridges," Hart Crane writes, "but itself inevitably is as fluid as always" (*HCCPSLP* 223). The "gates," "pillars," and "pediments" that form of and from the sea in "Voyages" III are like Crane's verses, artifice brought forth from the "fluid," indefinable reaches of the non-, in-, and superhuman potentiality of the word.

## The Bridge, That Way

Near the beginning of this chapter it was stated that, as a consequence of the pioneering scholarship of the 1990s, poetry critics would have to be much more careful about discussing the aural dimension of a writer's work. This analysis of Crane permits one to see why this is the case. In his otherwise brilliant piece "Hart Crane and Poetry," for instance, Allen Grossman makes the seemingly reasonable assumption that although Crane's content and diction are insistently up-to-date, his rhetoric and form are patently "antimodernist," indeed, "not fundamentally different from those of Keats, Patmore, and Swinburne" (96). Grossman is surely correct that, at first glance, Crane's form does appear rather conservative for the 1920s. Instead of vers libre, he writes poetry with predictable accentual-syllabic meter, usually iambic tetrameter or pentameter. When not writing blank verse, he turns out orderly stanzas, often complete with end rhymes. One can sit down with a Crane poem and scan it just as one would a poem by Pope or Marlowe.

Simple prosodic analysis cannot begin to account for the role that sound plays in Crane's poetics nor can it be relied upon to judge the "modernity" of his poetic form. Crane's basic aural unit is not so much the foot or line as it is a "colon," an individually composed, lapidary phrase. Regular meter becomes a tool for mechanically stitching together disparate cola, a centripetal force to counter the centrifugal force of the fractured syntax. The result is, as Crane once put it, a "long-scattered score / Of broken intervals" (*HCCP* 160). When held up against the writers that Grossman cites—John Keats, Coventry Patmore, Algernon Charles Swinburne—Crane's "broken" verse does appear qualitatively different. It often reads as if Keats's odes or Swinburne's paeans to the Lady of Pain had been excerpted randomly, pared down, and strung together with little regard to organic wholes or integral gestures. Which is, of course, how Crane would have played Richard Wagner, César Franck, and his other nineteenth-century favorites on his Victrola: the choicest excerpts strung together or repeated at whim.

One does have to confess that Crane's literary aspirations were somewhat *retardataire* in comparison with the goals of such other U.S. poets of the 1920s and '30s as Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams. Crane's quest to reveal God in verse, for instance, deserves to be read in the context of the *longue durée* of the lyric poem, where one can compare him to William Blake, Emily Dickinson, and Henry Vaughan instead of juxtaposing him with his more skeptical contemporaries. Crane's faith that repetitious sound could lead one into mystic and physical transport is positively shamanic, with many analogues in traditional oral poetries practiced around the globe.

The Victrola nonetheless inflected these enduring themes in such a way that Crane's verse is indelibly a product of a particular era, post-Edison but pre-LP.

The poetry is also prescient in several important respects. Crane's preference for perpetual ecstasy over the satisfaction of the lone crescendo anticipates the musical minimalism of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>56</sup> His writing ritual, in fact, could fit seamlessly into the catalog of innovative means of sound production that appears in Michael Nyman's classic 1974 *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Thirty-six repetitions of a five-minute slice of *Boléro*, accompanied by a typewriter's clacking, would certainly qualify as a "composition" in the same vein as Gavin Bryars's twenty-eight-minute tape loop of a man singing one verse from a spiritual (*Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*) or the ostinato C octave of Terry Riley's *In C*, which pulses for up to ninety minutes. The resultant, sutured poetry also anticipates the drift, the jumps, and the jags of John Ashbery's poetry, which in turn has had a tremendous impact on a wide range of younger contemporary poets, among them John Yau, Ann Lauterbach, and Peter Gizzi. (Ashbery, not coincidentally, almost always writes while listening to music on tape or CD. He is apparently partial to the Second Viennese School, a preference made evident in his 1994 poem "On First Listening to Schreker's *Der Schatzgräber*."<sup>57</sup>)

Part 1 of this book emphasized the divide between Crane's poetics and the concurrent, influential Poundian campaign against "sissified fussiness" and "rhapsodistifying." It sought to elucidate how and why Crane chose to dissent, as well as to situate that decision within a broader literary-historical context, synchronic and diachronic. This chapter has continued that task, placing Crane in relation to technological developments, musical traditions, and literary innovations that enrich the reading and interpretation of his aberrantly mannered verse. It also makes it possible to appreciate that Crane, rejecting Pound's poetics, was not, for that reason, to be counted as a participant in the traditionalist backlash, the "rush back to their old respectable deadness," that followed hard on the heels of the first triumphs of Anglo-American high modernism (Williams, "Carl Sandburg" 346). Crane proves differently but no less committedly experimental in his search to find forms adequate to the complexities of twentieth-century life.

Crane, just like Pound, charged his verse by concentrating, jeweler-like, on perfect-polishing its smallest compositional units. The distinction lies in which unit each perceived as smallest. Pound opted for the "image" as his basic building block. He wanted to distill his writing down to *bons mots* capable of providing "direct experience of the thing, whether objective or subjective"—as if, miraculously, language could at one and the same time (1)



enable immediate intimate communion between observer and thing observed and (2) vanish without leaving a trace, remainder or supplement. Regardless of his own poetic practice—the later *Cantos* hardly adhere uniformly to the Three Principles of Imagism—Pound’s repeated polemical talk of images and ideograms nonetheless bequeathed to his acolytes and heirs a troublesome double-sided phenomenological-cum-stylistic dilemma. Properly chiseled, chastened, and ordered verse, they were encouraged to believe, can give a reader unmediated glass-eyeball-like access to things-as-they-are. This principle has underwritten some of the dullest, reportage-style verse of the post-World War II era (passages in 1960s Ginsberg, stretches of Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* [1960–83], pages and pages of Levertov’s anti-Vietnam War long poem “Staying Alive” [1971]).

Of course, post-Poundian rebellions against the naïveté of Imagist phenomenology have also produced some of the most exciting U.S. verse in recent decades: Louis Zukofsky’s *80 Flowers* (1978), Robert Creeley’s *Words* (1967), Lyn Hejinian’s *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* (1991), and Ron Silliman’s *Tjanting* (1981). Crane in contrast (like Ashbery, like Bernstein) never needed to rebel. From the beginning of his career he eschewed the cult of the image. He chose instead the colon as his fundamental unit. He directed his attention squarely to the stuff of language, its sounds and syntax and semantics. Language for him was never transparent, the poet never a camera eye, the poem never a “you are there” testimonial. Lyrics stitched from cola, unlike image montages, *presuppose* the mediated character of linguistic representation. Accordingly, “Voyages,” “The Wine Menagerie,” “At Melville’s Tomb,” “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” “Possessions,” “Passage,” and other oft-anthologized lyrics in *White Buildings* never pretend to novelistic realism. And when history (jazz gardens, World War I, subways) enters the lyrics, it does so via highest operatic artifice. Little could be further from the archival collage in Pound’s *Malatesta Cantos* (1922–23) than the indeterminate, hypotactic itineraries of eternity in Crane’s first collection of verse. Pound simulates immediacy—here are historical documents in all their ragged authenticity—and provokes a reader to wonder, is it true? Crane’s cola lead a reader into the ocean of language unfettered. One asks, is it real?

Pound’s *Cantos* aspired to gather together the clues, documents, and texts that would add up to a vision of a viable global culture and polity. The next chapter considers Crane’s efforts to stitch together a utopian America-Poem. How can a dysraphic poetics that foregrounds language’s obstructive thickness as a medium produce a statement “about” history? Shouldn’t, logically, the messy quiddity of facts, dates, events, and actual events remain external to its linguistic-transcendental immersion in the word? In fact, they are nec-

essary preliminaries to *The Bridge* and its peculiar thinking through of the nexus between historiography, nationality, and spirituality. If *arma virumque cano*, “I sing of arms and the man,” is the sound bite subject of all Western epics, the *Cantos* places emphasis on *arma virumque*, warfare and great men (Sigismundo Malatesta, Benito Mussolini). *The Bridge* emphasizes *cano*, the epic as something . . . sung.

## How to Write an Epic

In “New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text of Hart Crane” (1935), the New Critic R. P. Blackmur attacked *The Bridge’s* “radical confusion” (274). Though in many respects a dated piece, this essay is worth revisiting. It restores the scandalousness of the long poem in the aftermath of its initial publication. Blackmur takes it as an almost personal affront that one of the “most ambitious poems of our time” fails to deliver the “rational art” so desperately needed during the Depression years of “drums beating” and “fanatic politics” (269).

*The Bridge’s* unforgivable flaws, he explains, are formal, or more precisely, generic: “He used the private lyric to write the cultural epic” (274). Crane wished to celebrate the founding, achievements, glorious present, and promising future of the United States. As he put it to Gorham Munson, he sought to write “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (*O My* 131). Such subject matter, Blackmur insists, requires a corresponding style and point of view, “a sweeping, discrete, indicative, anecdotal language” given to “cataloguing” (274). To hone his technique, Crane should have turned to the epic tradition, to the likes of Milton and Dante (275–76).

Instead, Crane fell under “the influence of . . . the school of tortured sensibility.” He studied Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hopkins, and early Eliot (274–75). The resultant style—whose “virtue” is “to accrete, modify, and interrelate moments of emotional vision”—is seriously mismatched to the demands of a “cultural epic.” In *The Bridge* he manages to craft lyrical effusions that convey “rare and valid emotion,” but he also persistently omits the facts, dates, stories, and other material necessary for the “objective embodiment” of a nation’s history. What he writes is “enough for him because he kn[ows] the rest,” whereas his readers, expecting more than “the felt nature of knowledge,” are left mystified and unsatisfied (274).

Seven decades later, literary-critical practice has shifted sufficiently that Blackmur's one-time outrage over *The Bridge's* generic transgressions can seem old-fashioned to the point of quaintness. The present generation of Crane critics generally eschews genre-based questions altogether. Sociopolitical topics take precedence. Most recent scholarship on *The Bridge* seeks, like Christopher Nealon's *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (2001) and Michael Trask's *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (2003), to limn the long poem's historically and culturally specific queer sensibility. Such a framing demotes *The Bridge* to a case study within larger social debates. There is nothing wrong with such an approach; indeed, it is welcome on multiple fronts. Who would deny that the history of sexuality in the U.S. is richer for incorporating poetic discourse or that the study of twentieth-century U.S. culture is advanced by taking seriously queer writers *as queer*? One does, though, have to know how the poem is put together, and how it intends to communicate, before beginning to generalize too quickly or self-confidently about what it says about X or Y. Moreover, Blackmur reminds readers that poetic genre and form circa 1930 had urgently political valences. The apparent tension between "lyric" and "epic" in *The Bridge* is well worth pondering if one desires to sort out Crane's conceptions of poetry, nationality, and history—terrain that is anything but straightforward.

Genre remains a useful starting point in discussing *The Bridge* because, no matter how one approaches the poem, it is a most peculiar "mystical synthesis." Its structure is highly irregular. It offers a "proem"—a prefatory poem—titled "To Brooklyn Bridge," followed by eight sections of variable length and form. The second section, "Powhatan's Daughter," is further divided into five subsections, while the fifth section, "Three Songs," is divided into three. Throughout, *The Bridge* meanders freely through voices, themes, and styles. Dramatic monologues ("Ave Maria," "Indiana") jostle cheek by jowl with apocalyptic prophecy ("The Dance," "Atlantis"), introspective lyricism ("Van Winkle"), and e. e. cummings-like visual gaming (parts of "The River," "Cutty Sark," and "Cape Hatteras").

*The Bridge's* contents are as unruly as its organization. There is no continuous narrative, no recurrent dramatis personae, and no single, stable speaker. While the book does have a definite start and end point—Brooklyn Bridge—in between it pursues a zigzag course between past and present, New York City and the rest of the globe. After overhearing Columbus soliloquizing aboard the Santa Maria ("Ave Maria"), a reader lands in Manhattan watching the sun rise ("The Harbor Dawn"). Then come mysterious flashbacks to a mother smiling and to snakes playing in an ash heap ("Van Winkle"), followed by journeys by road, rail, and boat across the Midwest and down the

Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico ("The River"). Two Native Americans, Maquokeeta and Pocahontas, marry and perish ("The Dance"); a pioneer mother enthuses about her family ("Indiana"); a drunken sailor's life story is interrupted by the arrival of ghostly Yankee clippers making the run to China ("Cutty Sark"); and "Cape Hatteras" then celebrates factory innards, fighter pilots, and Walt Whitman. Next Crane praises with faint damns an assortment of women ("Southern Cross," "National Winter Garden," and "Virginia"), laments the corruption of the simple life in rural New York ("Quaker Hill"), retells an infernal subway ride ("The Tunnel"), and achieves a theophany back on Brooklyn Bridge ("Atlantis").

Given such waywardness, it is hardly surprising that Blackmur, in search of "Light, radiance, and wholeness," found *The Bridge* dumbfounding (269). Chapter 4, however, suggests a different possible response to the epic's oddities. Erratic, recalcitrant, and ill-sutured, *The Bridge* could be expected to replay, on the macrolevel of the book, the dysraphism that distinguishes the syntactical weave of Crane's verse on a microlevel. Indeed, after the last chapter's examination of Crane's lyrical suite "Voyages," it might appear unnecessary to go through the motions of analyzing a later, longer, but similarly centrifugal poem by the same author. *The Bridge* can be presumed to work in comparable ways toward the same end, a pointing outward to transcendental totality that cannot be expressed adequately or fully within human language. If the epic possessed "wholeness," as Blackmur wished, it would, for a dysraphic poet, be counted as a failure, not a success, insofar as its pretense to self-sufficiency would block movement out into the ineffable.

These intuitions, while correct in important, preliminary respects, are insufficient to probe fully what Crane intends in *The Bridge*. "Voyages" opens at seashore, then offers five glorious but only tenuously interrelated lyrics. The other long-ish poem in *White Buildings*, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," has a similarly thrown-together structure. The title refers chiefly to part 1, in which the poet encounters a modern avatar of Helen on a streetcar, whereas parts 2 and 3 concern, respectively, a rooftop jazz performance and an "eternal gunman" from World War I (HCCP 31). Crane even reported to Louis Untermeyer that the lyric's three parts do not suffer fatally from "isolated reading" (*O My* 119). In contrast, *The Bridge*, however absurd it might sound in summary, exhibits much more craft and care in the ordering and arranging of its parts. It begins and ends in the same place; words and images repeat throughout; certain near archetypes manifest persistently but variously from section to section (Queen Isabel / Pocahontas / Eve / Mary Magdalene). Crane took six years, 1924 to 1930, to plan, revise, and rethink *The Bridge* as an integral whole. While he continued to employ throughout

his Victrola-abetted writing ritual, *The Bridge* displays, more than any of the verse collected in either *White Buildings* or the “Key West” folder, the formal consequences of Crane’s second phase of composition, when he soberly soldered his cola into larger units.

This chapter, “How to Write an Epic,” supplements the last by inquiring into what Crane calls the “architecture” of his poetry, that is, the macrolevel of his compositional strategy, as contrasted to the syntactical and phrasal microlevel that chapter 4 considers (HCCPSLP 260). The title “How to Write an Epic” is slightly coy. In assembling *The Bridge*, Crane was actively wrestling with the problem of genre as he worked his way toward a finished text that might or might not be classifiable according to existing taxonomies. As Crane put it to Yvor Winters: “Perhaps any modern equivalent of the old epic form should be called by some other name, for certainly, as I see it, the old definition cannot cover the kind of poem I am trying to write except on certain fundamental points” (*O My* 287). One can observe over the course of the text’s composition the sedimentation of different formal models and analogies, not only literary but also visual and above all musical, as Crane thought and rethought his literary project. This analysis is less concerned with what label a critic eventually affixes to the completed product than it is in recapturing this complex quest-for-genre. Accordingly, this chapter will follow the common albeit contradictory practice of calling *The Bridge* an “epic” while referring to its distinct sections and subsections as “lyrics.” The terminological tension is a reminder of the provisionality of such categories. *The Bridge* dynamically if not always single-mindedly seeks to arrive at a form adequate to its subject (U.S. history) and its day (the era of the Victrola). Elucidating this process exposes anew the interplay of artifice, utopia, excess, and rupture that characterizes Crane’s verse, but this time one observes him addressing these matters in a sustained fashion over several years en route to producing his best known, most influential volume of poetry.

## Résumé

On 12 September 1927, Hart Crane wrote his patron, the New York businessman Otto Kahn (1867–1934), a letter of “inordinate length” providing an update on the progress of *The Bridge* (*O My* 350). (He needed more money—*quel surprise!*—and he clearly believed that he had to give Kahn something tangible before proceeding to beg for “800 or 1,000 dollars.” “I cannot help feeling,” he says in an effort to salvage his dignity, “that a great poem may well be worth at least . . . the cost of an ordinary motor car” [349].) This letter offers a rare opportunity to observe Crane thinking through the long

poem in media res, that is, imagining *The Bridge* as a whole while substantial portions of it remained yet to be written.<sup>1</sup>

Crane begins by telling Kahn that he “feel[s] impelled to mention a few of my deliberate intentions . . . and to give some description of my general construction.” To do justice to his subject matter—“the Myth of America”—he has to reject outright “the purely chronological historic angle—beginning with, say the landing of *The Mayflower*, continuing with a resumé of the Revolution through the conquest of the West, etc.” The method of the “history primer” presents brute fact, not “an assimilation of this experience.” To achieve that loftier end, he needs a different strategy for “assembl[ing] my materials in proper order for a final welding” (345).

Such a strategy, though, is anything but obvious: “each section of the entire poem has represented its own unique problem of form, not alone in relation to the materials embodied within its separate confines, but also in relation to other parts, *in series*, of the major design of the poem” (345; emphasis in original). He faces the problem of form on three distinct but interrelated planes: how to write “each section of the entire poem” so that it is independently successful; how to order these sections such that the movement between them proceeds as desired (“*in series*”); and finally, how to insure the integrity of “the major design” of the total work.

Crane at first attempts to explain his solution to this problem by drawing on the visual arts. He compares “each section of the entire poem” to “a separate canvas,” which can be viewed and appreciated in isolation, “yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others” (345–46). This metaphor implicitly proposes that *The Bridge* in its entirety resembles a museum or gallery, not a work of art in its own right. Crane quickly proposes a better “analogy” for his long poem, “the Sistine Chapel,” an example of an artwork that successfully combines relatively autonomous units (individual frescoes) into a harmonious, organic, narrative totality. (He has in mind, of course, not the chapel as a whole—with its monstrously overlarge altarpiece *The Last Judgment* [1534–41] and its staid, eye-level row of life-of-Christ-and-Moses frescoes by Botticelli and others—but the busy Michelangelo ceiling [1508–12], with its panoply of sibyls, prophets, cavorting *ignudi*, and selected scenes from Genesis.) Casting about for a word to describe this “method” of creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts, Crane settles on “architectural”—which neatly brings together the idea of the Sistine Chapel, his poem’s title, and its recurrent image, the Brooklyn Bridge (346).

Immediately after this declaration, the letter ceases to generalize about *The Bridge* and begins to describe the experience of reading through it, section by section. Significantly, as the point of view on the text changes, so too

do Crane's favored metaphors. He stops referring to the visual arts. Instead, musical analogies come to the fore, most of them intended, as he puts it, to convey a reader's "movement" through the poem. "Ave Maria," he writes, ends with a "sea-swell crescendo," which gives way to the "legato" of "Harbor Dawn." In "Van Winkle" "The rhythm is quickened," and one hears "the music of a hand organ." "The River" opens with "a great conglomeration of noises" whose "rhythm is jazz" (346). "Thenceforward the rhythm," though, "settles down to a steady pedestrian gait," so as to prepare for the "full orchestra" *tutti* of "The Dance" (347). Crane also on occasion introduces musical terms to suggest form and genre: "Cutty Sark," he writes, "is built on the plan of a *fugue*" (348; emphasis in original), and he ends the letter by labeling *The Bridge* "a symphony on an epic theme" (349).

As this overview indicates, Crane's efforts to explain "the major design" of *The Bridge* to Otto Kahn are rather curious (345). He fails to cite any literary precedent for his plan, beyond a stray reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*, which he claims possesses the same "historic and cultural scope" as *The Bridge* (349). He relies almost exclusively on analogies to other art forms. But as G. E. Lessing long ago taught in *Laokoön* (1766), such parallels are at best imprecise, at worst baseless. Consider, for example, Crane's claim that *The Bridge* is a "symphony." What can he possibly have had in mind? As the last chapter demonstrates, he had more than a passing knowledge of the modern concert repertoire and throughout his career he had a proclivity for describing his verse using musical terms; one might hope that such a specific statement about his long poem's genre would yield invaluable formal or thematic insights.

A musicologist would find little support for such a claim. The eighteenth century established the symphony's basic definition: an orchestral piece typically consisting of four movements that progress according to the pattern *allegro* (lively), *andante* (slow), *minuet*, and *presto* (rapid). Additionally, at least one movement must employ sonata form. That is, it must begin by starkly contrasting two themes in different keys that it then proceeds to permute during a development section that eventually leads to a final reconciliation. *The Bridge* simply does not follow these guidelines to any detectable extent. It has many more than four subsections, and its "rhythm," as recounted in Crane's letter, is too unstructured, variable, and intuitive. Finally, one would search in vain for anything in the poem resembling the exigencies of sonata form, let alone, say, a rondo (an A B A C A form favored by Mozart for symphonies' final movements).

A music historian might be somewhat kinder. During the nineteenth century, in the wake of Beethoven, the symphony was elevated to the pinnacle



of musical genres, occupying roughly a comparable position to the epic in poetics. Moreover, composers began to narrow the distance between symphonic and literary expression. Not only did programmatic titles proliferate—references to authors, characters, places, and events—particular symphonies, such as Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) and Liszt's *Symphony to Dante's Divina Commedia* (1856), were even polemically conceived as program music, that is, as matching up explicitly, part by part, to their companion literary texts. Finally, composers began violating virtually every symphonic convention in the name of imaginative freedom. The number of movements became optional, the sonata form became attenuated, and some symphonies—Schumann's Symphony no. 4 in D Minor (1851), for instance—were written to be played straight through without interruption. Crane, a historian might argue, can be forgiven for a somewhat slipshod use of “symphony.” Extrapolating from nineteenth-century uses of the term, he likely means little more than a grand, passionate, pull-out-all-the-stops artistry capable of swift, drastic changes in mood, tone, color, loudness, and speed. He could also be responding to the likes of Berlioz and Liszt, who made music more literary, by downplaying narrative coherence in his poem and exploring instead the affective possibilities of symphony-like abrupt transitions. The truth in his writing, then, would reside not in a story line with a moral but in the rightness of its emotional arc, the “continuous and eloquent span” along which a reader travels (348). Not coincidentally, the concluding section of *The Bridge*, “Atlantis,” was initially titled “Finale” (Delany, *Longer* 244).

“Symphony” taken in this extended sense can probably help explain why Crane might switch from visual to musical metaphors at the moment he moves from talking about *The Bridge* as a whole to a part-by-part discussion of its constituent lyrics. When in the Sistine Chapel, for example, a viewer looks up and is confronted with Michelangelo's ceiling all at once. She must then begin figuring out the relation of parts to whole, during which time she is free to study the individual sections in any desired order. Painting, as Lessing would put it, is an art of space. Poetry, though, like music, is an art of time, which requires one to take it in as it unfolds in a particular, preestablished sequence (“*in series*,” as Crane emphatically puts it).

The comparison between *The Bridge* and a symphony does not, however, ultimately give one much purchase on the original, complex formal problems that the poem posed. Why and how did he write these lyrics in this way? The visual arts metaphors, if pursued in depth, would prove equally unenlightening, insofar as they, too, instruct how to read the final product appreciatively instead of providing insight into Crane's actual decision-making process while crafting, assembling, and welding his materials. He instructs the

reader, in other words, to treat the book as a collection of frescoes—without bothering to explain why and how he painted them or why and how he ordered them as he did. In the end, Crane's battery of visual and musical analogies are less helpful in themselves than they are as indicators of a more fundamental, governing analogy, one so basic that it goes without saying—at least when writing to Otto Kahn.

## Ho Yo To Ho

Only twice in the letter of 12 September 1927 does Crane offer specifics regarding his compositional practices. One of these comes immediately after he calls "Cutty Sark" a fugue:

Two 'voices'—that of the world of Time, and that of the world of eternity—are interwoven in the action. The Atlantis theme (that of Eternity) is the transmuted voice of the nickel-slot pianola, and this voice alternates with that of the derelict sailor and the description of the action (348).

This description strangely fails to support the idea that the lyric is fugue-like. Fugues are quasi-mathematical exercises that take a theme and then subject it to rigorous transformations according to the laws of counterpoint. They generally take the form of multiple voices or instruments entering one by one, each imitating the previous, as if in chase. "Cutty Sark" does have more than one "voice," but these voices are hardly presented as engaged in a game of mimicry, nor does Crane give one any sense of what poetic principle of recombination might be substituting for counterpoint. Instead, he introduces his two "voices"—belonging to a player piano and a "derelict sailor"—as if they were characters in a musical, or better yet, an opera. They take turns singing, with occasional interruption by the equivalent of a recitative, namely "the description of the action." The word "fugue" seems a hyperbolic attempt, using a term drawn from the larger discourse field of musical terminology, to suggest the quality of a very different musical event, the interchange between two singer-soloists on stage. Like "symphony," "fugue" turns out to be an imprecise, potentially misleading designation, but, in this case, one glimpses that another kind of musical genre might be prior and foundational to *The Bridge*, hence providing a basis and license for Crane's other, rather loose uses of musicological jargon.

The second time that Crane specifically addresses the construction of his long poem—an elucidation of the interconnectedness of the five lyrics that

make up the “Powhatan’s Daughter” portion of *The Bridge*—confirms this suspicion. He begins by clarifying the purpose of the italicized marginal comments in the first poem in the sequence, “Harbor Dawn” (“*time / recalls you to your love, there in a waking dream to merge your seed / —with whom?*” [HCCP 53–54]; emphasis in original):

The love-motif (in italics) carries along a symbolism of the life and ages of man (here the sowing of seed) which is further developed in each of the subsequent sections of “Powhatan’s Daughter,” though it is never particularly stressed. In 2 (“Van Winkle”) it is Childhood; in 3 [“The River”] it is Youth; in 4 [“The Dance”], it is Manhood; in 5 [“Indiana”] it is Age. This motif is interwoven and tends to be implicit in the imagery rather than anywhere stressed. (346)

Crane here again draws upon musical terminology. He labels the marginalia in “Harbor Dawn” the first instance of a “motif” that is “further developed” in each of the “subsequent sections.” Achieving unity through a recurrent, developing motif is common in art music after Beethoven; indeed, one could compare Crane’s account of “Powhatan’s Daughter” with Berlioz’s famous use of an *idée fixe*, a theme that recurs in every movement, in his *Symphonie fantastique* (1830). Similarly cyclic strategies recur throughout the nineteenth century, the acme of which is probably the Symphony in D Minor (1888) by one of Crane’s favorite composers, César Franck.

Crane’s initial mention of a “love-motif,” however, hints that he has another of his musical heroes in mind: Richard Wagner (1813–83). Again, as in the case of “Cutty Sark,” opera provides the relevant musical analogy. As any committed operagoer knows well, Wagner’s tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—*Das Rheingold* (1869), *Die Walküre* (1870), *Siegfried* (1876), and *Götterdämmerung* (1876)—makes use of not one but, depending on how one counts, eighty to two hundred or more repeated motifs. The word, of course, generally used in Wagnerian criticism for these reiterated themes is *leitmotif* (from the German *Leitmotiv*, or “leading motif”), which can be defined as “a short musical figure associated with a particular character, event, or mood” (Sabor 136).<sup>2</sup> Each time leitmotifs occur, the instrumentation varies, as do their prominence and their significance. An audience has to interpret them actively, recalling previous occurrences and pondering the meaning of shifts in context and in manner of performance. In the *Ring* cycle, leitmotifs “underpin the action, they comment on it, they help create receptive moods in the listener, they elucidate, they sometimes tell the audience what the characters on stage do not yet know, they prophesy, and they occasionally contra-

dict the evidence before our eyes" (137). Crane's impulse to specify that his recurring motif is a "love-motif" reflects a Wagnerite's habit of noticing a theme's reappearance and then immediately classifying it, that is, tentatively assigning it a label and a connotation so as to distinguish it from the many other motifs in play. (Scholars, incidentally, identify at least four kinds of "love-motif" in the *Ring*: *Liebesbund* [love-bond], *Liebesglück* [love's luck], *Liebesnot* [love-need], and *Liebe-Tragik* [tragedy-love] [244–45].) Crane writes as if "Powhatan's Daughter" is a Wagnerian score, "interwoven" with repeated motifs that serve structural, atmospheric, and other aesthetic purposes (*O My* 345).

Crane's Wagnerian subtext would not have been lost on his correspondent Otto Kahn—quite the contrary. Kahn, a German-Jewish financier who made millions investing in railroads, was an opera addict with the riches to support his habit. From 1908 to 1931, he served as the president and chairman of New York's Metropolitan Opera Company. This was no figurehead philanthropic position. He was responsible for installing Arturo Toscanini as the Met's principal conductor and Giulio Gatti-Casazza as its general manager, thereby inaugurating one of the most storied phases in the institution's history. Kahn also socialized at every opportunity with luminaries of the operatic *monde*. Enrico Caruso, for example, sang at his daughter Maude's debut (Collins, *Otto Kahn* 17). And he gladly shared his enthusiasm for the art form with bohemian writers that took his fancy. In 1930, for instance, he took James Joyce to see Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (1828) (24).

Kahn was especially devoted to Wagner. Indeed, the banker was instrumental in sustaining a Wagnerian tradition in the United States through a period when the composer was unfashionable, to say the least. In April 1916, the United States declared war on Germany in the middle of a Met performance of *Parsifal* (1882). Disregarding intense local anti-German sentiment, Kahn permitted the company to continue staging Wagner, as scheduled, for the remainder of the season. He then argued publicly that Wagner should remain in the repertoire despite the Great War. Translating the libretti into English, he felt, would be a sufficient concession to U.S. philistinism. He lost that battle. The Met presented no opera written originally in German, by Wagner or anyone else, for two seasons (Horowitz 297–98). But the company revived Wagner as soon as seemly. In 1922–23, the Met performed Wagner twenty-three times. The next year, the same year that Crane returned to New York and began planning *The Bridge*, it staged the complete Wagner canon from *Tannhäuser* (1845) to *Parsifal*, including the first full *Ring* cycle on U.S. soil since 1917 (305). No other U.S. opera company dared associate itself so closely with the arch-Teuton until the late 1930s, after live broadcasts of the

Met's Saturday afternoon performances made Kirsten Flagstad's Isolde a national icon (305–6).

Kahn's staunch support of Wagner can seem perplexing at this remove. Why would a German-Jewish immigrant defend the music of one of the most notorious anti-Semites in history? Kahn, born in Mannheim in 1867, seems to have inherited the remarkably widespread, late-nineteenth-century European conviction that Wagner equaled high culture. The later, indelible association between Wagner and the Third Reich has obscured the one-time force of that equation. "It is difficult today," Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe explains,

to form an idea of the shock that Wagner provoked, whether one admires or scorns him. It was, all across Europe, an event; and if Wagnerism—a sort of mass phenomenon in the cultivated bourgeoisie—spread with this vigor and rapidity, it was due not only to the propagandizing talent of the master or the zeal of his fanatics, but also to the sudden appearance of what the century had desperately tried to produce since the beginning of romanticism—a work of "great art" on the scale imputed to works of Greek art, even the scale of great Christian art—here it was finally produced, and the secret of what Hegel had called the "religion of art" had been rediscovered. (xix)

Kahn, according to his biographer Theresa Collins, had a particular weakness for arguments on behalf of culture's decisive advance. He was inclined to overlook or discount irrationalism, tribalism, and other protofascist currents in modern history because "as a monied, cultured citizen, and as a Jew," he was committed to an "optimism of an incomplete Enlightenment." He saw himself as helping usher in a new era of "sweetness and light," of tolerance, nobility, and artistic achievement. So convinced was he of this quintessentially Progressive Era vision that he was tragically blind even to the possibility of "Hitlerism" (24).

Crane's patron—like Baudelaire, Beardsley, D'Annunzio, Huysmans, Kandinsky, Mallarmé, Renoir, Shaw, Wilde, and a host of other influential devotees of Wagnerism—would have considered the composer's operas an invaluable touchstone for subsequent artistic achievement. Kahn would not have needed footnotes to understand the import of such comments as: "Powhatan's daughter, or Pocahontas, is the mythological nature-symbol chosen to represent the physical body of the continent, or the soil. She here takes on much the same rôle as the traditional Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology" (*O My* 345). He would immediately have thought of Wagner's Erda, earth goddess

and mother of Brünnhilde, who in *Das Rheingold* foretells the destruction of Wotan and Walhall. Crane's description of individual lyrics, too, would have conveyed distinctly Wagnerian overtones. "The Dance," he reports, takes place on "pure mythical and smoky soil," and it retells "the conflict between the two races" that culminates in "the extinction of the Indian." His "method" has been "possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor" and then distilling them into "symbols" that he can manipulate (347). Crane's pseudo-anthropological mythopoetics and his vision of racial apocalypse are pure Wagner—as, in fact, is "The Dance" itself. Crane's symbol for the "extinction of the Indian" turns out to be the immolation of a doomed lover (Maquo-keeta) in a scene recalling Brünnhilde's fiery death at the climax of *Götterdämmerung*. Such associations and echoes would have been positive for Kahn, signs that a U.S. poet had achieved sufficient *Bildung* to be taken seriously.

Secondary literature on Crane has rarely if ever considered whether the patron of *The Bridge* left any imprint on its composition. Art historians, taught to attend closely to patron-artist interaction from day one of their undergraduate surveys, would find that lacuna perplexing. Surely Crane's reference to the Sistine Chapel, they would point out, is, whatever its denotative significance, also intended as flattery, a way of placing Kahn on par with Michelangelo's sponsor Pope Julius II, just as the reference to the *Aeneid* suggests a parallel between Kahn and Virgil's illustrious patron, Augustus Caesar. In search of more concrete evidence, one simply has to compare Crane's poetic production before and after his association with the banker. His first, pre-Kahn book, *White Buildings*, consists throughout of freestanding lyrics that hybridize Elizabethan locutions, French symbolist posturing, and British Victorian artifice.<sup>3</sup> It contains few hints that he would soon be writing a racialized, nationalist, *durchkomponiert* epic. In contrast, the "Powhatan's Daughter" section of *The Bridge*, the most racial-mythic stretch in the poem, and the portion united by a "love-motif," was almost wholly written while Crane was living in the Caribbean on Kahn's largesse. *The Bridge*, as outlined for Kahn in 1927, could be said to Americanize Wagner's sacred history, racial mythology, and divine pantheon—and this a mere decade after Kahn had tried to "save" Wagner for the United States by translating him into English.

Although Crane's desire to write *The Bridge* predates his first correspondence with Kahn in December 1925, and although the choice of subject matter was his alone, his turn to Wagnerian rhetoric, themes, and motifs postdates the interview at Kahn's Fifth Avenue home that won him a grant of two thousand dollars. Before that point, as Langdon Hammer puts it, "talking about *The Bridge* took precedence over writing it" (*O My* 142). After

meeting with Kahn, Crane finally began versifying in earnest, turning out “Ave Maria” and “Atlantis,” the beginning and end of the epic proper, within months (219). Whether Kahn first prompted Crane’s turn toward a Wagnerian poetics is moot. As this chapter will explore, there were unrelated, solid literary-historical reasons for Crane to ponder Wagner as he tackled a new, lengthier, more traditionally prestigious poetic genre—not least the example of T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” But Kahn surely encouraged Crane’s nascent *Wagnerism*. Whatever the poet actually said on the august occasion when he met the millionaire, his ambitions nonetheless seem to have translated easily into Wagnerian terms that his prospective patron could respect. And by the time of the 1927 update letter, Crane had learned to pitch his project in those terms.

Soon afterward, in “Cape Hatteras,” an unfinished portion of *The Bridge* that occupied him for much of 1927–28, he chose to hymn Walt Whitman as “Our Meistersinger,” progenitor of “our Myth, whereof I sing” (HCCP 83). Whitman’s epithet is glaring even on a cursory read-through of the lyric. Crane studied German for three years in high school, but he rarely if ever used the language in his verse or correspondence (Fisher 19). His acquaintance with German literature, beyond an ill-defined youthful fancy for Nietzsche, was virtually nil.<sup>4</sup> Without a doubt, he is alluding to Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), a work roughly contemporary with Whitman’s own *Drum Taps* (1865) and *Democratic Vistas* (1871)—the latter a particular favorite of Crane’s (*O My* 433). On one level, in addressing Whitman as “Meistersinger,” Crane is affiliating himself with a U.S. nationalist mythopoeic tradition analogous to Wagner’s in Germany. On another level, he is making a much more ambitious claim. Strictly speaking, he is comparing Whitman not to Wagner but to Walter von Stolzing, the opera’s eponymous protagonist. Crane’s Whitman, after all, is not identical to the in-the-flesh historical figure. He appears as a mastersinger within an artwork, a character introduced into an epic. Crane, then, is implicitly, structurally comparing himself to the author of *Die Meistersinger*, which in turn casts Kahn as a latter-day version of Wagner’s patron Ludwig II, Prince of Bavaria. Kahn would have been delighted.

## Wag the Dog

In the present literary-critical climate, classing *The Bridge* as a Wagnerian epic could be construed as an unfortunate rhetorical move. Because of the composer’s virulent, unrepentant anti-Semitism, invoking Wagner can call attention to precisely those aspects of Crane’s poem that are least pleasant

to contemplate, above all its disquieting, uncritical embrace of U.S. racial myths.<sup>5</sup> Crane does, after all, banish the continent's indigenous peoples to the forgotten, mythic past: "Papooses crying on the wind's long mane / Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain, / —Dead echoes!" (*HCCP* 59). And their fortuitous vanishing seems to have left their lands available for settlement by white Europeans, a miraculous displacement that leaves these settlers with "no Indian blood" on their hands or in their veins (Gardner 25).

Undeniably, *The Bridge*, in addition to the historical trajectories that this book has been tracing, also participates in an arc that includes such low points as Wagner's "Das Judentum in der Musik" (1850) and D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). (The score that accompanies Griffith's silent film instructs an orchestra to play Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyrie" as Klansmen on horses cleanse a town of uppity ex-slaves.) In addition, Crane's other writings are hardly free of prejudice. Although he had no difficulty forming intense friendships that crossed racialized boundaries—his intimate correspondents included the African American poet Jean Toomer and the Jewish critic and novelist Waldo Frank—such close ties did not stop him from writing basely racist limericks (*O My* 317). Nor did they prevent him from making such loathsome boasts as "I am anti-semitic as they make 'em" (35). He was capable of astounding episodes of insensitivity. Once, for example, after reading an article by Frank in *The Menorah Journal* on tradition and assimilation, he told Frank, with complacently, classically racist nonchalance: "I know a number of prosperous jew families in Cleveland, among my best friends there, but they're mostly alike, sadly similar to your categorical disposals" (267).<sup>6</sup>

Later in this chapter, and again in chapter 8, the discussion will return to the issue of Crane's none-too-progressive racial politics. Before that, though, a better understanding of what a "Wagnerian epic" might have meant circa 1927 is necessary so that one can, first, grasp the specifically Wagnerian dimension to Crane's racialized nationalism and, second, anatomize the interimplication of any Wagner-derived compositional strategies informing *The Bridge* and the particularities of its consequent presentation of "the Myth of America."

Let's return for the moment to Crane's statement comparing Pocahontas, "the mythological nature-symbol chosen to represent the physical body of the continent," to "Hertha of traditional Teutonic mythology" (*O My* 345). In context—in a letter full of references to music, moreover, a letter to the president of the Metropolitan Opera Company in which the letter writer begs for employment in the "publicity department" of said company (349)—the association between "Hertha" and Wagner's Erda is clear. In chapter 1,



however, this same passage is quoted in support of the thesis that *The Bridge* owes much to the precedent of Algernon Charles Swinburne, author of the cosmological lyric “Hertha.” There is no contradiction. As in so much else, Swinburne pioneered where Crane followed.

Swinburne became a convert to Wagnerism unusually early for a British poet. The proximate cause was his Francophilia. From the early 1860s, he was in close contact with the French symbolists, who, in the wake of Wagner’s controversial concerts at the Théâtre-Italien (January–February 1860), chose to champion the composer’s cause.<sup>7</sup> Baudelaire himself sent Swinburne a copy of his essay about the *scandale*, “Richard Wagner à Paris et *Tannhäuser*,” soon after it appeared in the *Revue Européenne* (P. Henderson 65): “les concerts de Wagner s’annonçaient . . . comme une de ces solennelles crises de l’art, une de ces mêlées où critiques, artistes, et public ont coutume de jeter confusément toutes leurs passions; crises heureuses qui dénotent la santé et la richesse dans la vie intellectuelle d’une nation” (Baudelaire, “Wagner” 672). Instantly won over, Swinburne thereafter displayed a passion for the composer’s work, especially *Lohengrin* (1850) and *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). He long dreamed of making a pilgrimage to Bayreuth, the town where Ludwig II had built a state-of-the-art opera house that could properly stage Wagner’s uniquely demanding music dramas.<sup>8</sup>

Hearing the overture to *Tristan* performed on piano in 1869 made a particularly profound impression on Swinburne. It inspired him to launch into a long verse narrative on the subject of the opera’s doomed lovers (Rooksby 249). In November he wrote the painter Edward Burne-Jones that “The thought of Wagner . . . ought to abash but does stimulate me” as he strives to “make this piece of sung and spoken History” (qtd. in P. Henderson 154–55). Not coincidentally, letters dated October 1869 and January 1870 indicate that composition of his *Tristan* poem was interlaced with work on “Hertha,” “the poem I think which if I were to die tonight I should choose to be represented and judged by.”<sup>9</sup> He sought to match in his verse not only the tragic grandeur but also the religiosity of Wagner’s heady blend of medievalism, pagan mythology, and pseudoscholarly philology. Though he did Anglicize Wagner a bit—preferring the Old English *Hertha* to the Old High German *Erda*, as well as the Middle English *Tristram* and *Iseult* to Middle High German *Tristan* and *Isolde*<sup>10</sup>—Swinburne otherwise remained committed to faithfully imitating the “mastering art” of the man he called the “mage of music” (*SCP* 5:22).

In 1881 he returned to the unfinished *Tristan* project. The resultant book-length poem, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, appeared in 1882 (P. Henderson 207). Unlike his early Pre-Raphaelite *Queen Yseult* (1857–58), which has a spare ra-

pidity cribbed from his then-mentor William Morris, *Tristram* exhibits a “thick impasto and orchestral splendour” that testify to his efforts to transpose Wagnerian instrumentation into English verse (30–32). Sentences can run for pages while rapidly amassing metaphors, paradoxes, antitheses, and other instances of figural language, until argument and narrative seem subordinate to the spectacle of Swinburne’s imaginative and grammatical acrobatics. Here is a typically over-the-top moment, taken from the “Prelude”:

the sun-god which is love,  
A fiery body blood-red from the heart  
Outward, with fire-white wings made wide apart,  
That close not and unclosed not, but upright  
Steered without wind by their own light and might  
Sweep through the flameless fire of air that rings  
From heaven to heaven with thunder of wheels and wings  
And antiphones of motion-moulded rhyme  
Through spaces out of space and timeless time. (*SCP* 4:29)

This fragment rounds off a glorious, single-sentence passage recounting the long procession of mythological and literary lovers (Angelica, Francesca, Guenevere, Thisbe . . . ) whose terrible sufferings the “sun-god” has witnessed during his daily rounds.

The rhetoric here has obvious similarities to Crane’s. In fact, this passage could be an intertext for “Atlantis,” which sings of “Love,” “white choiring wings,” “pyres,” “one tolling star / That bleeds infinity,” and movement “beyond time” to hear “Whispers antiphonal in azure swing” (*HCCP* 105–8). “Atlantis,” of course, is more ruptured and oblique, less fluid and euphonic, but so Crane’s verse always is, as the previous chapter showed. *The Bridge* often sounds like *Tristram of Lyonesse* (or *Atalanta in Calydon* or *Bothwell* or *Marino Filiero* or any of Swinburne’s other major works) run through a food processor.<sup>11</sup> Swinburne’s and Crane’s shared Wagnerism is not to be found on the microlevel—where the similarities in texture, diction, and syntax are due to a common participation in a tradition of radical artifice (see chapter 3)—but on the macrolevel, that is, in the “musical” techniques employed throughout their long poems in order to give them a unity and continuity that their characteristically attenuated hypotaxis otherwise undermines. More specifically, their Wagnerism—traceable back to the first French symbolist encounters with the composer—dictates a leitmotif-derived poetics of repetition, that is, the achievement of unity not by developing themes (transposing, inverting, reversing, and otherwise transforming them according to rigorous

rules of progression) but by reiterating them (restating them, in variable yet nonetheless readily recognizable form, in different contexts over the course of a work). The distinction here is not hair splitting. It speaks to two fundamentally different conceptions of temporality, which in turn have profound aesthetic—and ultimately political—consequences.

## Motivation

Theodor Adorno's *In Search of Wagner* (1952) addresses precisely these questions; moreover, Adorno does so as a commentator antagonistic to Wagner, which lends his analysis an unusually incisive, probing edge in a secondary musicological literature with a pronounced tendency toward hagiography.<sup>12</sup> Adorno begins by asking why the composer disregards two centuries of Western music history by substituting leitmotifs for “genuinely constructed motifs,” that is, themes continuously developed according to the rules of counterpoint (31). Instead of the intellectual sophistication of, say, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Art of the Fugue* (1751), which requires a trained listener to trace its intricate thematic permutations, a Wagner opera provides “endless repetitions” that “hammer its message home” to anyone who happens to be in the audience (32). The individual leitmotifs become akin to “miniature pictures” that, through repeated viewing, acquire an “allegorical character,” that is, conventionalized associations (45).

Wagner composes, Adorno contends, by sorting and re-sorting these pre-fab “thematic cells” and filling in the gaps between them. In the resultant music “[r]epetition poses as development” (41). This imposture robs a work of forward momentum and vitiates the possibility of satisfying closure, since the music no longer has intrinsic developmental tensions to resolve, such as the opposition between tonic and dominant keys in a sonata. A given piece can simply go on and on, providing the listener more and more of the same, more and more leitmotifs, in whatever superficially varying kaleidoscopic combinations. As Adorno puts it, “His music acts as if time had no end, but its effect is merely to negate the hours it fills by leading them back to their starting point,” the leitmotifs’ original articulations (42). Another consequence is a hall of mirrors effect. “The mere fact of repeating something in an identical form involves an element of reflection. When the impulse to express something occurs a second time, it turns into an underscored commentary on itself” (38). In other words, when a leitmotif appears for a second (or third or fourth or fifth . . . ) time, it prompts a recursive process of recollection and reinterpretation, an active remembering that further undermines one’s experience of the music as advancing from moment to moment.

Adorno objects strongly to this music in which “eternal sameness presents itself as the eternally new, the static as the dynamic” (62). He compares the leitmotif to “an advertisement,” a detachable musical fragment “designed to be remembered,” even by “the forgetful” (32). He considers the device a capitulation to a process of commodification that will, by the twentieth century, produce the predictable, vacuous kitsch music adored by Western masses. What specifically horrifies him about the leitmotif—what condemns it to being a harbinger of culture industry banality—is its dependence on repetition to fill time. From his teacher Arnold Schönberg, Adorno inherited a belief that repetition is foreign to the very stuff of music, the making-sensible of the never-ending process by which each moment is differentiated from the next. By definition, no two instants are identical; music, to succeed, must embody and convey that fact. Anything other than a music of ceaseless, protean forward progress is inauthentic, a violation of the medium’s peculiar, particular demands. (Hence, by the way, Adorno’s notorious distaste for jazz, or any other form of music with a pronounced, regular beat. Such music, in his opinion, falsely homogenizes time by offering up the ever-same instead of the endlessly new.) Adorno’s yardstick in condemning Wagner is, as always, Schönberg’s own musical practice, especially his drive to expand development to include every note played while also systematically reducing repetition of all kinds and orders to an absolute minimum. Belittling Wagner, Adorno has in mind the example of such incomparable, stringent pieces as Schönberg’s Third String Quartet, op. 30 (1927) and Piano Concerto, op. 42 (1942).

One does not have to share Adorno’s evaluative scheme—or his stereotypically high modernist abhorrence of violating a medium’s purity—to recognize the value in his conception of music as modeling a particular understanding of being-in-time. Adorno prefers to think of time as resolutely linear and of its future course as essentially unknowable. An important qualification: he also believes that people have the capacity to guess or conjecture what may come and prepare themselves accordingly. This model of being-in-time permits agency—we can build on what we have done, and we can anticipate the future—but it also dictates an openness to and readiness for the unexpected. Not surprisingly, this conception of temporality dovetails with Adorno’s Western Marxism. Revolution is not inevitable (a determinist position he thoroughly rejects), but it is nonetheless always possible, and one can work actively toward its advent.

Wagner’s music proposes a different temporal scheme. As Adorno writes, “Every repetition . . . evades the necessity to create musical time [i.e. ‘musical time’ as Adorno defines it]; they merely order themselves, as it were, in time

and detach themselves from the temporal continuum that they seemingly constituted” (37). In other words, in Wagner there appear to be two orders of temporality. First is time as a “continuum,” the one-damn-thing-after-another version of time that one inhabits moment to moment. But, via repetition, there is also a possibility of escaping (detaching oneself from) that continuum and entering into a second, nonlinear temporality, what Adorno calls the “eternity of Wagnerian music.” Supplanting development with stasis, the composer suggests “a state of immutability that refutes all history,” a vantage point from which all actions are copresent and sequentiality is meaningless. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* drives home the split between continuum / history and eternity / immutability by making it the basis of its plot:

The Rhein maidens [*sic*] who are playing with the gold at the start of the opera and receive it back at the end are the final statement both of Wagner’s wisdom and his music. Nothing is changed; and it is the dynamics of the individual parts that reinstate the amorphous primal condition. The forces that are unleashed end up sustaining the state of immutability. (40)

In other words, Adorno points out that the *Ring* is not only cyclical—Alberich steals the gold from the Rheinmaidens and four operas later Brünnhilde returns it—but that everything that the initial theft sets in motion, the plots and counterplots, the incest and talking birds and dragons and amnesia spells, culminates in and is canceled by the gesture of return. From one perspective, a prodigious number of events have taken place, as anyone knows who has tried to summarize the *Ring* in front of an undergraduate classroom. (“Now which of those ‘Sieg-’ characters kills the dude?”) From another point of view—a valorized and superior point of view—the whole kerfuffle is incidental, in no way affecting the true underlying state of things, their “primal condition.” “The eternity of Wagnerian music, like that of the poem of the *Ring*, is one which proclaims that nothing has happened” (40).

For Adorno, of course, this temporal schema is anathema. It authorizes a retreat into “myth,” a “stratum . . . where all is undifferentiated,” in other words a realm in which historical particularities vanish, rendering distinctions and judgments—and by extension significant political action—no longer possible (115). Devotees of nineteenth-century Wagnerism, however, would have rankled at such an argument. Surveying the period 1880–1900, historian Joseph Horowitz concludes that the core of the Wagner cult was “disillusionment with . . . the industrial revolution and its legacy of science, technology, and allegedly sterile rationality” (1). A Schönberg-like “musical time” that

placed a priority on forward thrust and teleological unfolding would hardly have been consonant with, or expressive of, this collective, affective dissent from Enlightenment narratives of scientific progress and social meliorism. Wagnerian opera offered a more emotionally satisfying option, a depiction of the march of history as bloody, aimless, and pointless that also provides its audience an escape hatch into an immutable, transcendental, hence blissful elsewhere, “une grande rêverie dans une solitude absolue” (Baudelaire, “Wagner” 677). Moreover, Wagnerites could—and did—construe the conclusion of the *Ring* as portending revolution by return.<sup>13</sup> After all, Brünnhilde does burn down Walhall. The Aesir are dead. There is an opportunity, as “primal conditions” again manifest themselves, for things to go better this time around. *Götterdämmerung*, usually translated as “Twilight of the Gods,” in fact is more ambiguous in German and could refer instead to the “Dawn of the Gods.” If and when “sterile rationality,” science, and technology at last self-destruct under the weight of their own mad quest to master the world, new gods will have a chance to walk again.<sup>14</sup>

The French symbolist poets found that Wagner’s two-tier temporality tallied with their own intuition that the phenomenal world is, in Baudelaire’s words, “des forêts de symboles,” merely forests of symbols that, read aright, prove to be “echos qui de loin se confondent / Dans une tenebreuse et profonde unité,” echoes that from afar meld into a dark and profound unity.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, as Jerome McGann has recounted, the symbolists “consciously adapted to their poetic practice” the “Wagnerian principle of leitmotif.” “Indeed,” he goes on to say, “the systems of motif and variation are reproduced so self-consciously and rigorously that the audience is continually being made aware of accumulating ranges of pattern and order.” In other words, readers of such poetry, like Wagner’s audience, become aware of two orders of existence, the flux and fervor of chronological time (one thing after another) and a superior, enframing, continuously present “pattern and order” legible from within the flux and against which one can measure its restless mutability. Swinburne, in turn, adapts the symbolist variant of the leitmotif to suit his own, more expansive style. By the time he writes the tragedy *Erechtheus* (1876), his retooling of the technique is complete and on magnificent exhibit: “he introduces a series of dominating symbols, or motifs, which help to organize the systems of increment and variation.” Moreover, like Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, he makes this “method . . . one of the dominant subjects” of his poetry. Through patterned repetition, his poetry aspires “to stagger” his “audience with a piercingly clear sense of incomprehensible and enormous law,” a *demonstratio* of a universal order that serves as a counterweight to his otherwise entropic verse, with its doublings, ill-suturing, and

wayward syntax, as well as its exaltations of violence, loss, immersion, dispersion, and ecstatic rupture (*Swinburne* 119).

Swinburne's longest nondramatic poem, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, gave the poet a quasi-*Ring*-like, vast formal expanse in which to explore as fully as possible verbal parallels to Wagner's musical techniques. His *Tristram* turns out to be so thoroughly threaded by repeated motifs—and at such length—that it can be difficult to talk about the work in any synoptic fashion. One short but representative example will have to suffice to intimate the large-scale dynamics at play in the poem. In the passage from the "Prelude" excerpted earlier, Swinburne compares love to the sun, a conceit that leads him to compare the sun's corona to Cupid's wings: "the sun-god which is love, / A fiery body blood-red from the heart / Outward, with fire-white wings" (*SCP* 4:29). This complex of images—sun and flight—and its connotation—passionate love—thereafter serve as a Swinburnian leitmotif. The reader can see how it functions by taking a look at two occurrences in the first canto, "The Sailing of the Swallow," which takes place on the boat that sails Iseult from her parents in Ireland to her betrothed, King Marc in Cornwall. *Tristram* is present as a bodyguard and chaperone. The leitmotif appears in the canto's opening lines:

About the middle music of the spring  
Came from the castled shore of Ireland's king  
A fair ship stoutly sailing. . . .  
Above the stern a gilded swallow shone,

Wrought with straight wings and eyes of glittering stone  
As flying sunward oversea. (IV.33)

The mention of a "swallow . . . flying sunward" hints at things to come: this voyage will involve eros at a high pitch. The "glittering" eyes of the swallow, though, are faintly sinister, and the bird's "straight wings" suggest the fixity of the lovers' fate. The canto's end returns to the bird-sun-love image cluster. In the interim, Iseult has mistakenly shared with *Tristram* a love potion that her mother had intended her to drink on her wedding night. They share their first illicit kiss:

each on each  
Hung with strange eyes and hovered as a bird  
Wounded, and each mouth trembled for a world;  
Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn in one,

And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun  
 Far through fine rain shot fire into the south;  
 And their four lips became one burning mouth. (*SCP* 4:57)

On the one hand, Tristram and Iseult here virtually incarnate love, insofar as they are compared to birds and they burn like the “unsunken sun” that shoots “fire.” On the other hand, they are like “a bird / wounded,” and instead of sunlight they see “dark.” Love’s arrival also cues their eventual doom. The leitmotif’s recurrence signals the same connotation—*l’amour fou*—but circumstances color its message differently, and what served in the opening lines of “The Sailing of the Swallow” as foreshadowing now accompanies one of the narrative’s climactic moments.

Recurrent symbols and imagery are hardly news, of course. As Jerome McGann explains, what distinguishes French symbolist and latterly Swinburnian Wagner-inspired repetition is its emphatic foregrounding (*Swinburne* 119). The sun-flight-love complex is only one instance of *Tristram of Lyonesse*’s near-obsessive repetitiousness. The canto under discussion in fact seems at times an oulipian game in which the challenge is to write as long as possible using only a small set of nouns, among them “fame,” “flower,” “foam,” “gold,” “light,” “moon,” “snow,” and “song.” Certain words seem to show up almost every other line: “eyes” (24 occurrences), “face” (31 occurrences), “sea” (22), and “sun” (25). Fully explicating the sun-flight-love motif in this canto would require grappling with at least four other times that the words “bird” and “wings” appear (for instance, “he, / Sweet-hearted as the bird that takes the sun . . . and feels the glad god run / Bright through his blood. . . .” [*SCP* 4:53]).

The multitude of repetitions so retard and interrupt the forward motion of the verse that some readers undoubtedly become irritated. After the umpteenth mention of Iseult’s shining eyes, almost anyone can be excused for secretly longing for a more realistic manner of narration. Swinburne, though, pointedly does not seek to emulate the “reality effect” of the Victorian novel.<sup>16</sup> Forthrightly a work of mannered artifice, *Tristram of Lyonesse* eschews the quotidian and aspires instead to convey Wagner-like sublimity, “a rapture of dark delight . . . a terror and wonder whose core was joy” (*SCP* 5:22). Moreover, the poem does so in the manner of Wagnerian opera, by using repetition to impose a degree of stasis on a genre, the Victorian long narrative poem, whose more usual pattern—as exemplified by such diverse texts as Alfred Tennyson’s *Maud* (1855), Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1859), and Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* (1868)—is to elaborate itself dynamically by introducing such novelties as vivid details, absorbing



digressions, unpredictable actions, and acute psychological insight. Preferring, as Swinburne does, restatement to innovation might initially appear perverse—indeed, even Baudelaire himself was initially bewildered by Wagner’s “répétitions fréquentes des mêmes phrase mélodique, dans des morceaux tirés du même opera” (“Wagner” 678)—yet “spatially defined repetitions,” McGann explains, nevertheless succeed aesthetically in Wagner’s and Swinburne’s cases because they suggest “the circling patterns of interinvolved music” that they believe to constitute “universal order.” Caught up inside these “circling patterns” but leading linear lives, most mortals perceive only constant “change,” not the orderliness of the totality. True artists, Wagner and his acolytes contend, give us a chance to escape our limited temporal perspective and occupy the God’s eye view from which we can perceive the eternity, circularity, and perfection of the design as a whole (Swinburne 45).

## A Gain

Secondary criticism has long recognized that Crane sought to unify *The Bridge* by repeating, and occasionally varying, a number of symbols. Early criticism tended to disparage this strategy—and in so doing echoed Adorno’s critique of Wagner. Howard Moss’s “Disorder as Myth” (1943), for example, complains that “*The Bridge* is constructed around an infinite series of extensions possible to one object, the Brooklyn Bridge” (33). Crane builds the poem by substituting, again and again, anything “used as a connective in any sort of congruence between two polarities” for Brooklyn Bridge: Columbus’s voyage between Europe and North America, intimacy between two lovers, a subway ride, and so forth (33–35). For Moss, this compositional strategy is flawed because it is ultimately “static” and “complete in itself” (32–33). There can be no cumulative argument, no dynamic struggle, in short, no development, when a poem never moves beyond its originating symbol.

In subsequent years, Hart Crane criticism has advanced analytically. M. D. Uroff’s *Hart Crane: The Patterns of His Poetry* (1974) observes that Crane’s *The Bridge* has a proclivity for “patterns recurring with obsessive frequency,” but she does not collapse them into a single category, metaphoric extensions of Brooklyn Bridge. She distinguishes at least four groups of interchangeable symbols that, oft repeated, render Crane’s epic “a work of unusual continuity” (6). She labels these clusters “violation” (6), “possession” (8), “flight” (9), and “stasis” (11). Michael Sharp’s “Theme and Free Variation: The Scoring of Hart Crane’s *The Bridge*” (1981) notes that these repetitions can be further subdivided into particular chains of association. One can, for instance, trace modes of transport through the poem: Spanish caravels in one poem (“Ave

Maria”) become trains in another (“The River”), then become Yankee clip-pers (“Cutty Sark”), then fighter planes (“Cape Hatteras”), and then subways (“The Tunnel”). Furthermore, Sharp argues that these chains of recurrence represent a means of achieving coherence via the musical model of “free variation on a theme” (197).

While Sharp is certainly on the right track, he does not take seriously enough the difference between the verbal and musical arts and the consequent care and specificity required when speaking about interchange between them. In European art music, a composer who varies a theme usually progresses according to the rules of counterpoint. The relevant theme is inverted, transposed, played *cancrizan* (backward), and so forth. Cranean chains of association could be compared to developing themes. But there are so many of them. Indeed, half the fun of reading *The Bridge* is discerning and tracing the diversity of warp-threads woven into its woof. There is, for example, a chain of nineteenth-century U.S. authors—Washington Irving (“Van Winkle”), Walt Whitman (“Cape Hatteras”), Emily Dickinson (“Quaker Hill”), Edgar Allan Poe (“The Tunnel”)—also a chain of rivers—the Ganges (“Ave Maria”), the Mississippi (“The River”), the Somme (“Cape Hatteras”), the East River (“The Tunnel”)—and a chain of birds—seagulls (“Proem”), more seagulls (“Harbor Dawn”), crows (“The River”), buzzards (“The Dance”), condors (“Cape Hatteras”), pigeons (“Virginia”), a whippoorwill (“Quaker Hill”), a penguin (“The Tunnel”), yet more seagulls (“Atlantis”). And, yes, appropriately, there are also an abundance of musical instruments: a harp (“Proem”), gongs (“Harbor Dawn”), a hand organ (“Van Winkle”), drums (“The Dance”), a player piano (“Cutty Sark”), trumpets (“Cape Hatteras”), guitars (“Southern Cross”), a violin (“National Winter Garden”), bells (“Virginia”), more gongs (“The Tunnel”), and an organ (“Atlantis”). If these chains of association—and there are many, many more of them in *The Bridge*—are analogous to “free variations on themes,” then, judged from the standpoint of musicology, Crane is attempting something genuinely foolhardy. No one listening to a piece of music could possibly follow the simultaneous development of twenty or more musical phrases. The enduring popularity of the sonata form, for example, partly stems from the fact that most audiences fail to appreciate more than two themes trotted through their paces.

There is, however, the suggestive example of Wagner’s eighty plus leitmotifs in the *Ring*. Because they are restated instead of developed, they remain distinct and memorable (abetted of course by a liberal helping of contextual, theatrical prompting). While varying a bit more from appearance to appearance than do Wagner’s leitmotifs—a formal feature of *The Bridge* that

this chapter will examine further—Crane’s chains of association clearly function more like reiteration than constant reinvention. That is, these patterns of repetition across the subsections of the poem seem to lead nowhere, just as Moss groused back during World War II. They do not develop dynamically, cumulatively, or syllogistically toward an eventual goal. The East River does not represent a Hegelian synthesis of the Mississippi and the Somme. Condors, pigeons, and whippoorwills do not add up to seagulls. One could perhaps search for hidden logics governing the choice of each term in a series. The mechanicity of the player piano, for example, could account, as the musical instrument chain continues, for the sudden swing to an antithetical, acoustic instrument, the guitar. But why then next mention a violin? Because it, too, has strings? Bells and gongs then follow—because, well, an orchestra needs a percussion section, too. . . . Such item-by-item explanations are possible but lack persuasiveness. In the end one must conclude that Crane’s chains of association primarily serve to link points in the text. They lend an interconnectedness to a poem that could otherwise seem diffuse and centrifugal in its rather arbitrary, limited selection of settings, speakers, and topics drawn from U.S. history.

Not coincidentally, these reiterations-with-a-difference resemble Swinburne’s insistent foregrounding of repetition in *Tristram of Lyonesse*, which likewise promotes an evenness of surface. *The Bridge*, in fact, resembles *Tristram* even more closely, insofar as it likewise recycles a small set of key words, among them “fire,” “frontier,” “hands,” “kiss,” “sea,” “smile,” “snow,” “star,” and “white.” While perhaps not as obtrusive as Swinburne’s eyes, suns, and faces, Crane’s word repetitions serve a similar purpose, threading together images, events, and descriptions, creating associations where otherwise there would be none. The “white rings of tumult” that “The seagull’s wings” shed in “Proem” (*HCCP* 43) become the “crescent ring / Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire” that is the night sky in “Ave Maria” (48). They then become the “snake rings . . . turquoise fakes on tinsel hands” of a burlesque dancer in “National Winter Garden” (89) before becoming the “upward ring” of Brooklyn Bridge’s “humming spars” in “Atlantis” (105). The flames which “foam about” Maquoketa’s neck in “The Dance” (64) become the sea “foam” that “scarf[s]” the clippers in “Cutty Sark” (73) becomes the “radio static” that “foams in our ears” in “Cape Hatteras” (77). These chains of repeated words reinforce the more common, prominent chains of association, lending the verse a surprising unity of texture despite its outrageous diversity of form and content.

Again as in Swinburne’s *Tristram*, the repetition-rich fabric of Crane’s

verse serves as a backdrop to the poem's main action. That action is, in turn, accompanied by more straightforwardly leitmotif-like recurrent image clusters that take on specific connotations. A "Hand of Fire," for example, appears at moments when speakers confront their weakness and vulnerability before God (*HCCP* 50, 101). "I bring you Cathay!" (47)—Columbus's misidentification of North America—reappears as shorthand for failure to name truly the truly new (108). The most significant of these motifs involves a serpent, an eagle, and the concepts of time and space. This motif first appears in "The River," as Crane describes the deified Pocahontas, quite literally the embodiment of U.S. history and geography: "I knew her body there, / Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark, / And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair" (59). It then reappears at the conclusion of "The Dance," after Maquokeeta's immolation and after Pocahontas, his "bride immortal in the maize," becomes so dispersed across the continent and through the centuries that she can only be apprehended abstractly, through her former attributes: "Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms, / The serpent with the eagle in the boughs" (65).

Thereafter, the serpent-eagle motif becomes progressively more entangled in the vision quest that nominally structures the poem. In "Cape Hatteras," Crane provides only a part of the leitmotif—reminiscent of *Götterdämmerung*, in which, after Brünnhilde tosses the Ring back into the Rhein, the curse motif plays only partway through to signal that Alberich's curse has been lifted at long last (Sabor 143). Crane announces, "Now the eagle dominates our days." He proceeds to discuss "Space, instantaneous," that is, the sudden drastic reduction in distance as an obstacle in the era of the radio and airplane (*HCCP* 78). By failing to juxtapose "serpent" with "eagle," he suggests that space's partner, time, has yet to be conquered, a task *The Bridge* ambitiously takes up itself in "Atlantis," poetry rising to a challenge technology has yet to surmount. The tactic Crane chooses is direct, self-abnegating address to the divine. "Sight, sound and flesh Thou ledest from time's realm," the poet proclaims to the "Answerer of all" (107). He awaits an answer—"the orphic strings, / Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge"—he thinks he will at last capture and know utterly Pocahontas-America—"Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring / The serpent with the eagle in the leaves . . . ?"—only to leave his readers in suspense—"Whispers antiphonal in azure swing"—neglecting to pass along what specifically he hears Pocahontas, or the Answerer, whisper, if anything (108). As always in Crane's dysraphic poetics, artifice can asymptotically approach and thus gesture toward while never containing within itself divinity in its fullness.

## Whereof I Sing

The three kinds of repetition in *The Bridge*—word repetition, chains of association, and repeated image clusters—represent Crane’s compositional solution to the formal problems that he outlines in his 1927 letter to Kahn. Image clusters like the “Hand of Fire” and the serpent-eagle highlight important junctures within the arc of the epic. By signposting a clear itinerary through the text, they indicate that the arrangement of lyrics is neither arbitrary nor changeable.

Word repetition and chains of association perform a variety of functions. In some cases—the chain of musical instruments, for example, or the reiterations of “hand” and “eye”—these types of restatement occur periodically throughout the course of the epic, providing a sense of continuity from start to finish. They, like the image clusters, are thus part of the work’s “major design” (*O My* 345). On other occasions, these devices are concentrated more locally. “Cape Hatteras,” for instance, is followed by “Southern Cross,” the first of the “Three Songs.” The transition can be jarring. A reader turns from a long, meandering, ecstatic lyric about factories, airplanes, and Whitman to a short, concentrated lyric of shipboard lust for a nameless “Woman of the South” (*HCCP* 87). Crane uses an abbreviated chain of associations—gods of antiquity—to suggest how one might think about the odd juxtaposition. “Cape Hatteras” declares that after the Wright brothers’ first airplane flight, “The soul . . . Already knows the closer clasp of Mars” (79). In other words, he announces that the lyric’s titular god is war. When “Southern Cross” addresses its inamorata as “Venus,” the reader then learns that in “Three Songs” love will be taking over from Mars, with the expectation that the genre, topic, and setting will shift accordingly (87). This and many similar instances of restatement target Crane’s second formal quandary, how to make the “series” of lyrics proceed naturally and smoothly (*O My* 345).

Finally, chains of association and word repetition address Crane’s third “problem of form,” how to craft his “materials” within the “separate confines” of “each section of the entire poem” (345). “National Winter Garden,” for instance, is chock-full of references to precious stones: ruby, emerald, turquoise, and pearls (*HCCP* 89). “The River” proliferates proper names: Bert Williams, Thomas, Casey Jones, Jesus, Aunt Sally Simpson, John, Jake, Charley, Steamboat Bill, Dan Midland, and De Soto (57–61). In “Atlantis” the word “strings” occurs four times (105–8). The so-called “fugue” in “Cutty Sark” is in fact an interlace of passages, in roman and in italics, that exploit both associative chains and word repetition. The passages in roman type are linked by references to the ocean: “shark,” “whaler,” “coast,” “spiracle,” and “wharf.”

The interspersed passages in italics are linked by six appearances of the word “rose” (71–72).

This chapter began by summarizing the structural peculiarity of *The Bridge*, its unpredictable zags from present to past, from subjective to objective point of view, from identifiable settings to mythic-prophetic terrain. It begins and ends, though, on Brooklyn Bridge. And all the while, Crane’s layered repetitions flatten, draw into relation, and curtail the apparent chaos of the journey between. The telos throughout is an impulse toward stasis, toward a fixity that ultimately involves a return to, and restatement of, origins. The writing of *The Bridge* may have occupied Crane from 1924 to 1930, but during the long process of revising, reordering, and rethinking the poem—“I skip from one section to another now like a skygack or girder-jack” (*O My* 268)—he so successfully weaves the constituent lyrics together via repetitions, and those repetitions in turn work so uniformly to the same end, that, despite the final result’s hodgepodge, creaky outward appearance, one cannot disaggregate the epic into stand-alone lyrics without also depriving them of their roles within a through-composed work and thereby preventing them from fulfilling their intended aesthetic purposes.

Labeling the resultant work an “epic,” as critics consistently have done, is highly suggestive, if one ponders its ramifications. *The Bridge* does not adhere, even in spirit, to the models that one might expect, namely the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, given the poem’s nationalist aspirations. Those works, as a classics professor would put it, repudiate *nostos* (homecoming) in favor of *kleos* (immortal fame). Neither Achilles nor Aeneas can go back to where they started. To fulfill their duty in this world they must forge bullishly ahead, even if that means an early death (Achilles) or cravenly deserting one’s soul mate (Aeneas). *The Bridge* rejects this macho, linear impetus. Beginning and ending on Brooklyn Bridge, it chooses instead—like Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922)—to model itself on the other foundational example of a Western epic, the *Odyssey*, in which *nostos* figures centrally. In this alternative epic plotline, a voyage out is only incidentally a journey of discovery and victory. Primarily it is an ardent quest to return home.

Crane’s preference for the *Odyssey* over the *Iliad* can seem rather peculiar. Conventionally, the *Odyssey* is the story of a lone man’s adventures. Why choose the *Odyssey* as a formal model, however distant, for a retelling of a nation’s history? Crane’s *Odyssey*, though, is filtered through Wagner. As in the *Ring*, time has two modalities, the chronological / historical and the eternal / transcendental. Crane’s goal is not to write a “primer”—to recount, in the manner of Joel Barlow’s *Columbiad* (1807), glorious episodes in the nation’s past—but to body forth “the Myth of America” (*O My* 345). This

myth of course contains Iliadic episodes—the World War I fighter pilots in “Cape Hatteras” are described as having “Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride”—but warfare is also only one aspect of a greater, more greatly valued totality (*HCCP* 79). Crane’s repetitions, like Wagner’s, seek to provide continual, vertical escapes into a mythic-ecstatic point of view from which the “labyrinthine mouths of history” are transmuted magically into “One arc synoptic of all tides” (*HCCP* 105). *The Bridge*, like the *Ring* cycle, ends where it begins not to frustrate its audience but to open their eyes to what has remained throughout fixedly just offstage, the transhistorical real. Crane’s novelty within the Wagnerian-symbolist lineage is to increase the number and kinds of leitmotif-derived repetitions until, as John Irwin has pointed out, by the time a reader returns to Brooklyn Bridge in “Atlantis,” almost every word refers back to multiple moments in the text. One feels caught up in a living “network of associations” that brings the entire poem, and its diversity of settings, characters, themes, and topics, into conjunction, all at once, at a single point (218). Crane intends his readers, at this moment of semiotic supersaturation, to be jolted out of “time’s realm,” and out of the poem, to contemplate “Everpresence” (*HCCP* 107).

*The Bridge*, it must be confessed, does not look like or consistently behave like a Wagnerian libretto. Its Wagnerism, though, does not reside in the direct emulation of a source text. Rather, it represents a bundle of intuitions, aspirations, and devices previously handled by Swinburne, and before him Baudelaire, writers crucially important to Crane’s early development as a poet.<sup>17</sup> Each of these poets labors to transpose musical techniques into verse. In verse, though, only the most extreme examples of Renaissance *poesia artificiosa*—intricate, permutational forms such as the sestina—approximate the rigors of counterpoint. Meter, lineation, and other formal aspects of poetics have long been codified, yes, but sans any generally espoused, counterpoint-like body of rules governing thematic development, modern poetry’s authors and audiences have no innate distaste for straightforward restatement. In fact, refrains, Homeric epithets, anaphora, and a wealth of other terms exist for perfectly acceptable, regularly practiced forms of repetition. To achieve a Wagnerian collapse of sequential time into concurrence, a poet simply cannot rely on repeating the same phrases every time a particular topic, character, or event is mentioned. Baudelaire, Swinburne, and latterly Crane have had to pioneer various, supplemental strategies of reiteration in order to replicate what Wagner accomplishes with much less fanfare. The results might diverge in texture and in structure from the composer’s music, but they nonetheless work toward convergent ends.

*The Bridge*’s lack of a coherent narrative and well-developed characters is

a particularly prominent example of the poem's outward departures from the Wagnerian operatic canon. Crane only intermittently imitates the composer's dramaturgy. Maquoqueeta's immolation in "The Dance" and the Falcon-Ace's wreck in "Cape Hatteras," for example, reek of Wagnerian death bliss, but they occur minus the intricate lies, loves, and power plays that, over the course of four operas, make Siegfried's, Hagen's, and Brünnhilde's deaths in *Götterdämmerung* so intensely moving. It is as if Crane pops the final CD from Georg Solti's *Ring* into his CD player and skips directly to the final tracks.

This metaphor is apt, of course, because it harks back to chapter 4. One could explain *The Bridge's* antinarrative and antitheatrical form by recalling Crane's historically specific experience of Wagner's music. Crane belonged to a generation for which the primary experience of opera had ceased to be live performance. He listened to music, including Wagner, incessantly on a Victrola, but he spent much, much less time in opera houses.<sup>18</sup> Until the record label HMV's famous "Potted" *Ring* cycle was released (1927–32)—which put the whole of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* on 122 sides of 78s—Wagner's music would have been available, like most of Crane's favorite compositions, only in short excerpts of no longer than five minutes in length. Crane would have been used to hearing Wagner's choicest bits, such as the *Tannhäuser* overture, the *Lohengrin* wedding march, and the Isolde *Liebestod*, played in isolation, utterly divorced from their original dramatic context. *The Bridge*, one could argue, registers this changing sense of operatic artifice by paring away exposition, sacrificing scenic continuity, and disregarding character development. It offers instead an ill-sutured assortment of aria-like dramatic monologues and selected, impassioned, relatively short lyrics.

This abandonment of a continuous narrative explains one aspect of Crane's Wagnerian poetics that can superficially appear to retreat from the compulsion to repeat, namely, his chains of association. In a work such as *Tristram of Lyonesse*, which, appropriately enough for a pre-phonograph poet, retells the whole of a Wagner opera, there are two, clearly defined temporal vectors: a linear vector, in which the characters play out their doomed romance, and a transcendental vector, to which repetition grants access. *The Bridge*, though, abandons the splashy melodramatic plot, and what one is left with are the 78-suitable moments of intensity that normally punctuate the expanse of a grand opera.

Here, readers run up against, in perhaps its originating guise, the fundamental generic dilemma that the poem presents: epic in its overall design (an Odyssean *nostos* by way of Wagner) but in its particulars a series of *tour de force* individual performances. It gives readers not the *Ring* spread out over



four nights or nineteen LPs but a rapid shuffling-through of selected highlights. In such a vetted overview, showstopping moments naturally predominate. These, in turn, are more or less thinkable as lyric moments, that is, episodes when individuals break expressively into song. Accordingly, as he adapts the Baudelaire-Swinburne strategies for making long poems cohere to the composition of *The Bridge*, Crane sets aside the model, of continuous chronology interrupted by epiphanies, for relating history and eternity that one finds in step-by-step narratives like *Tristram of Lyonesse* and *Tristan und Isolde*. He concentrates instead on the dilemma of trying to express “the Everpresence, beyond time” from *within time*, that is, not from the omniscient viewpoint of a storyteller external to the action recounted but from the point of view of the individual speaker-singers (HCCP 107).

He begins with two apparently contradictory axioms: (1) the myth is by definition always the same, but (2) equally by definition no two passing moments are alike. How can a human (as opposed to divine) reader be offered reliable access to the myth when there is no assurance that the gateway that enables someone to perceive it at one moment will still be working at another? Crane’s elegant solution: the myth has to shine forth in ever new guises—in other words, in each new lyric—if it is to remain valid and available in the mortal realm of mutability, where all is subject to change. (One way to restate this argument metaphorically: the myth stays put, but the observer is driving by in a car. The observer constantly has to shift his / her body, look in different mirrors, adjust them, and so on, to try to keep the myth in view.) If one pushes this logic further, it becomes apparent that simple repetition, without some degree of variation, has to be avoided. Such repetition threatens to harden into a bad fixity that obstructs efforts to bring into alignment the evanescent present and the now of illumination by mooring observers in obsolete pasts. Crane’s chains of association represent a compromise between restatement—in whose Wagnerian libratory potential he firmly believes—and the worry that the device will degrade into empty cliché. Thus, instead of a Steinian drone (“and one and one and one and one”), he provides multiple, easily traced series of linked but nonidentical elements.<sup>19</sup> The voyage of Columbus in “Ave Maria,” for example, reappears in “The Tunnel” as a subway journey from Times Square to Columbus Circle, and then Crane proceeds to discuss squaring the circle (Messerli 204). As one follows these itineraries through the poem, their individual stages are always new, even as they really just (re)present the same. A viewer twists the kaleidoscope, the colored glass and baubles tumble about, but the essentials of what is viewed remains constant.

The desire here to harmonize movement and stasis, it must be admitted,

on occasion leads Crane to make comments that seem contradictory. In “The Tunnel,” for example, he proclaims that “repetition freezes,” a prospect that the lyric presents as a horrid fate (*HCCP* 98), whereas in his correspondence he declares that he intended “Atlantis” to be “frozen music,” a statement that hardly presents such an outcome as a disastrous result (*O My* 334). Crane’s 1927 letter to Otto Kahn reveals a similar ambivalence. He is split between trying to describe *The Bridge* by analogy to painting, a spatial art, or to music, a temporal art. Can the book be summed up all at once, its repetitions and mirrorings resolving into a vision? Or must a reader follow the Odyssean track from “Proem” to “Atlantis,” with all its variations in setting, subject, and rhythm, in order to understand it truly? Wagner led Crane into confusing terrain, where, to speak myth, to “dance us back to the tribal morn,” poetry verges on betraying itself, that is, abandoning unfolding-through-time in favor of an infinitely, indefinitely same (*HCCP* 64). Adorno would undoubtedly diagnose Crane’s vacillation as stemming from a faulty, inauthentic relation to his medium. Crane would have found Adorno’s taste in music, and hence his theoretical claims, totally mystifying. He relished what Adorno despised, showy music with a good beat, whether Dixieland jazz, *The Rite of Spring*, or “The Ride of the Valkyrie.”

## Shanty Shanty

At long last the time has come to turn to a favorite subject in Crane criticism, the relationship between *The Bridge* and Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” Discussion of Eliot’s poem has been deferred because, as will become apparent, although both poets are working within the same Wagnerian-symbolist tradition of the long poem, Crane does not adopt wholesale Eliot’s particular take on Wagnerism. Crane, after all, began studying Baudelaire and Rimbaud before he read Eliot seriously; his apprenticeship under Swinburne began before he became involved with the *Little Review* and U.S. avant-gardism more generally; and his commitment to modern music was constant, profound, and differently valenced from Eliot’s.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, chapter 1 made clear that Crane’s supposedly “American” rebuttal of “The Waste Land” in *The Bridge* was anything but a straightforward case of one-on-one rivalry. Swinburne and Baudelaire lurked in the wings. Without a doubt, as Crane planned *The Bridge*, he kept “The Waste Land” in mind, but he responded to it less as a disaffected son than as a poet steeped in the writings of the same precursors who nevertheless chose to develop a distinct, dysgraphic-Dionysian aesthetics.

Wagner enters “The Waste Land” explicitly in its first and third parts. The first time, in “The Burial of the Dead,” a speaker quotes lines from *Tristan*

und Isolde that frame an anecdote about frustrated lust for an unnamed “hyacinth girl.” The second time, in “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot borrows the Rheinmaidens from the *Ring* and recasts them as “Thames-daughters” that speak gnomic lines about the sterility of the society and landscape that they survey (*Complete* 51). They also sing a version of the Rheinmaiden leit-motif, lifted from *Götterdämmerung*, which is a lament for their stolen gold (“Weialala leia / Wallala leialala”) (45). These allusive passages, though, are only outcroppings of a much deeper stratum of Wagnerian influence. Eliot kicks off the infamous “Notes” to “The Waste Land” by referring readers to his principle source:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Macmillan). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston’s book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. (50)

Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) is an extended meditation on the Parsifal story, which she breaks down into its constituent elements (the freeing of the waters, the sword dance, and so forth) and then pursues genealogically back into pagan prehistory. *From Ritual to Romance* is an early twentieth-century classic in the vein of James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1911–15) and Jane Harrison’s *Themis* (1912). It also happens to have been inspired by a 1911 visit to Bayreuth, and it represents a follow-up to her earlier study, *The Legends of Wagner Dramas* (1896).<sup>21</sup> In other words, Eliot locates his poem within the broader European highbrow reception and working-through of the Wagner legacy. Moreover, he approaches Wagner not so much under the heading of music as what he calls “anthropology,” the study of ancient myths, rituals, and archetypes that persist unrecognized or occulted into the modern era (50).

Wagnerian anthropology is central to “The Waste Land” because it offers an intellectual and artistic solution to Eliot’s potentially paralyzing, profoundly conservative vision of history and culture. As Richard Halpern’s *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (1997) and other studies of Eliot have shown, the poet believed in an eccentric, Anglicized version of the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’s influential distinction between *gemeinschaft* (traditional, organic community) and *gesellschaft* (modern, anomic society). Once upon a time, cultures were homogenous, rural, and unalienated. They were therefore ca-

pable of producing authentic, tradition-suffused art. In the British case, this golden age roughly coincides with the Elizabethan era. Artists in the contemporary, cosmopolitan, urbanized world, however, have lost the ability to connect with a community in anything other than a haphazard, improvised fashion. For that reason, they are capable only of pastiche, parody, debasement, and animalism. In keeping with this myth of decline, “The Waste Land” repeatedly invokes Renaissance authors such as Marvell, Middleton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Webster to serve as benchmarks against which to measure the intervening degradation of English culture.<sup>22</sup>

Eliot seizes on Wagnerian anthropology as a possible means of turning back the clock. In works such as *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* cycle, Wagner heroically revives and restages the myths that once underpinned, and *in potentia* still underpin, European society. The Wagner craze that swept the West is an index of how deeply his mythopoetics spoke to people suffering through the darkest hours of the Industrial Revolution. Eliot thus imitates the composer—but, alas, finds that he cannot accomplish the same end. He hints, piecemeal and variously, that the Grail legend is a myth capable of making sense of (and therefore perhaps also assuaging) contemporary London’s vacuity, but he produces not a sustained opera but disjointed anecdotes, stuttering song, and a “heap of broken images” (37). The apparently irreversible process of cultural decline that began in the seventeenth century dictates that, half a century after Wagner completed the *Ring*, poets of a more decadent age can no longer hope to reprise his success.

The quotations from Wagner highlight Eliot’s incapacity. Instead of lovers for the ages, there are a “hyacinth girl” and a speaker who, Prufrock-like, dares not press the question. Instead of Rheinmaidens who protect magical gold, there are “Thames-daughters” who guard only “Oil and tar,” “drifting logs,” and tales of sexual humiliation (45–46). Indeed, the poet demonstrates that the mechanized, routinized soundscape of the twentieth century has no place for the synthesizing grandeur of Wagner. Instead of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* or *Parsifal*, phonographs spit out kitschy drivel—“O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag!” (41)—and afterward the jaded, benumbed populace, instead of rising up to demand truth or beauty, yet again “puts a record on the gramophone” with an “automatic hand” (44).

Eliot does not entirely submit to the century’s degeneracy. His belatedness might preclude his writing art on the same order as *Tristan und Isolde*, but imitating Wagner can have other, lesser, but by no means negligible benefits. The composer can provide methods by which the echoes of the past in the present—shards of myth and erstwhile glory—can be provisionally, spectrally revived and passed along. Eliot signals the composer’s value by nesting

between the Thames-daughters' "Weilalalas" a terse, Imagist-like moment of transcendental clarity:

Elizabeth and Leicester  
 Beating oars  
 The stern was formed  
 A gilded shell  
 Red and gold  
 The brisk swell  
 Rippled both shores  
 Southwest wind  
 Carried down stream  
 The peal of bells  
 White towers (45)

Lamenting and repeating that lament, like the Rheinmaidens, a poet can evoke lost beauty. Queen Elizabeth and her favorite Leicester will never sail again this side of death, but through music ("The peal of bells") and imagery ("White towers") one can intimate their passage. A poetry of mourning might be a secondhand rose compared to Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but, when society is in shambles, making moan can represent the only means of preserving the memory of better days.<sup>23</sup> "By the water of Leman I sat down and wept" (42).

*The Bridge* could not be less Eliotic in mood or moral. The Elizabethans are present throughout, of course, but, just as with "Voyages" in chapter 4, they are present in the weave of the verse, not as ghostly revenants. The second verse paragraph of "The River," for example, stitches lines from *As You Like It* into a dysraphic welter. The Duke's praise of the Forest of Arden—"this our life, exempt from public haunt / Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, / Sermons in stones and good and everything" (II.1.15-17)—reappears, reworked, as "WITHOUT STONES OR / WIRES OR EVEN RUNNING brooks connecting ears and no more sermons" (HCCP 57; emphasis in original). Similarly, although Crane did read Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* in 1928, he agreed with Yvor Winters that, however "fascinating" it might be, ultimately "half" or more was "imaginative bunk" (*O My* 356). Weston did not inspire Crane, "Waste Land"-like, to imagine the present as strewn with vestiges of ancient cultic practices. Yes, past and present, and their historically specific discourses and literatures, are identifiable and partially separable in Crane's epic, but its "living network" of repeated words, associative chains, and repeated image clusters so thoroughly crisscross the long poem's surface that the transcendental vector, the text's outward projec-

tion, blurs, impedes, discounts, and otherwise confuses the relation between “then” and “now,” thereby rendering any Eliotic narrative of the decay of civilization unsupportable (Irwin 218). In “The Waste Land,” the privileged point of view belongs to Tiresias, whose centuries of unnaturally prolonged life have granted him an opportunity to witness firsthand the ever-increasing futility and fatuousness of human endeavor. His tone is ironic and his attitude contemplative. In contrast, the privileged point of view in *The Bridge* soars above history, “Up the index of night, granite and steel,” “Onward and up the crystal-flooded aisle,” to “The loft of vision,” from which vantage one escapes historicity altogether into mystical transport (HCCP 105).

In one crucial respect, though, *The Bridge* remains discernibly Eliotic: the macrolevel of construction. “The Waste Land” exhibits throughout Wagnerian coherence-via-repetition. Individual words and phrases—such as “clutch,” “death by water,” “jug jug,” “pearls that were his eyes,” “Phoenician,” and “Unreal City”—recur at key junctures. Image clusters such as stone-dryness-rain recur repeatedly. There are even chains of association. For instance, Eliot’s poem assembles references to different rivers: the Thames, Rhein, and Ganges. Then there are the gardens—the “Hofgarten,” the “Hyacinth garden,” Kew Gardens—and the cities—London, Carthage, Jerusalem, Vienna. Eliot’s similarity to Swinburne and Crane on this count is hardly shocking. Like them, he learned much about poetics from reading the French symbolists. Indeed, the “Notes” to “The Waste Land” cite only three nineteenth-century figures other than Wagner: Baudelaire, Nerval, and Verlaine. Crane’s repetitions do not serve the function of lamentation, as do Eliot’s, but the family resemblance is patent.

On 5 January 1923, Crane promised Gorham Munson that he was going to “take Eliot as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction” (*O My* 117):

I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive or . . . ecstatic goal. I should not think of this if a kind of rhythm and ecstasy were not (at odd moments, and rare!) a very real thing to me. I feel that Eliot ignores certain spiritual possibilities as real and powerful now as, say in the time of Blake. Certainly the man has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and direfully as it can ever be done. He has outclassed Baudelaire with a devastating humor that the earlier poet lacked. (117–18).

Before writing *The Bridge* but after having had forty days or so to mull over “The Waste Land,” Crane had already begun differentiating his poetic sensibility from Eliot’s.<sup>24</sup> He rejects Eliot’s irony (“devastating humor”) and pes-

simism (“buried hope”), traits indissociable from his conservative philosophy of history. Crane recognizes, though, their common poetic ancestry (Baudelaire) as well as the possibility of employing Eliot’s “erudition and technique” toward an “ecstatic goal.” *The Bridge*, as published in 1930, faithfully adhered to this program. After Herbert Weinstock’s generally favorable review of the epic appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal*, Crane wrote him to suggest that just as “reading and re-reading Eliot’s *Wasteland* [sic]” will lead one to appreciate its “essential unity,” so too “with more time and familiarity with the [sic] *Bridge* you will come to envisage it more as one poem with a clearer and more integrated unity and developement [sic] than was at first evident” (*O My* 427). Wagnerian-symbolist technique, yes. Eliotic pessimism, no. The latter, he felt, ended in “a stern conviction of death” that “is finally content with twelve hours sleep a day and archeology” (231).

## E Pluribus

“The Waste Land” participates in a rhetoric of high art / low art that, while hardly invented by Wagner, is inseparable from his legacy. Wagnerism, as a “mass phenomenon in the cultivated bourgeoisie,” taught that certain art and artists transcended the vulgarity of science and the marketplace (Lacoue-Labarthe xix). *Der Ring des Nibelungen* modeled the split between the vulgar and the elite as a divide between the subhuman, engineer-ingenuous, gold-obsessed Nibelungs and their opposite numbers, the Volsungs, a quasi-divine family of heroes who disregard earthly law and devote themselves wholly to the sacredness of love. In “The Waste Land” Eliot updates Wagner. By the 1920s, the Nibelungs have come out on top. *Kultur* itself, once the crowning glory of European life and the prized accomplishment of the truly educated and civilized (a.k.a. the Volsungs), has been assaulted and debased, rent into mere “fragments” that one “shore[s] against . . . ruins” (50). Starved for *Bildung*, people behave like beasts. Instead of the defiant, transcendent, incestuous love of the Volsungs, Siegmund and Sieglinde, there is the tryst of a typist and a clerk, so drained of significance that, afterward, the young woman “allows one half-thought to pass: ‘Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over’” (44). How can anyone escape this spiritual sterility? The fifth part of “The Waste Land” gives a depressingly mandarin answer. Eliot turns to the Hindu Upanishads for ethical guidance (“*Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata*” [49–50]), but not because he is looking to God or gods to reenchant the world. He turns for renewal to a *Wissenschaft*, a discipline of knowledge. More specifically, he turns to the rigorous philological study of Sanskrit texts, a South Asian variant of the academic Orientalism famously debunked by

Edward Saïd's 1979 study of that name. By mastering the skills necessary to translate ancient Aryan wisdom into modern vernaculars, Eliot suggests, the embattled remnant of the Volsung elite, currently deprived of all but "fragments" of their birthright, can reconnect to the wellsprings of Western culture so as to eke out bare survival amid the Nibelung desert of the 1920s.

Wagner did not make Eliot into a cultural conservative, but the composer served him readily and well when he sought to versify his ideas and intuitions concerning post-World War I European politics. As a Wagnerian poem, "The Waste Land" manifests just about every suspicious right-wing trait that a post-World War II leftist might expect, including, as Daniel McGee has shown, a covert anti-Semitism (514–19). An antifascist critic might sympathize heartily with Crane's decision to write an epic rebutting Eliot's worldview—but she or he would probably also remain skeptical whether, without fully repudiating Wagner, Crane could ever arrive at an alternative, responsible politics, ethics, or historiography. More likely, he would remain mired in the nineteenth-century rhetoric of *Volk*, *Land*, *Blut*, and *Bund*.

As chapter 2 demonstrated, Crane is not an ideal writer to seek out for a sound or admirable analysis of society or culture. There were grave limitations to his ability to think around or outside the prejudices common among men of his time, class, race, nationality, and religious background. He did develop a ruptured, queer-inflected poetics in which utopia and history interrupt each other, the pressure of (homophobic) reality perpetually in dynamic tension with the dream of "the ecstasy of walking hand in hand" fearlessly with a male beloved in public (*O My* 187). The Wagnerian-symbolist repetitions in *The Bridge* are arguably yet another expression of Crane's queer aversion to the "link-by-link" telling of history, which, in his experience, habitually omitted the stories and possibilities that mattered most to him (*O My* 287).

The Wagnerism of *The Bridge* is, though, not limited to technique. The *Odyssey*, as an epic of *nostos*, established a pattern by which a male protagonist would travel widely and return home at last to his female partner. Crane's Wagnerian twist on this plot is to organize his epic around a quest-like pursuit of archetypal woman in her guises of virgin, mother, and whore. She surfaces as Mary ("Ave Maria," "Virginia"), Eve ("Southern Cross"), and the Magdalene ("National Winter Garden"). She appears as a nameless pioneer woman ("Indiana"), as the *Mayflower* pilgrim Priscilla Alden ("Van Winkle"), and as Pocahontas ("The Dance"). This chain of association culminates in the closing octaves of "Atlantis," in which Brooklyn Bridge becomes a feminized beloved, "whitest Flower" and "Anemone," whose "petals spend the suns about us" (*HCCP* 107). Along the way, woman becomes inseparably



identified with the land possessed by a chosen people: "She is the torrent and the singing tree; / And she is virgin to the last of men" (65). No specialist in U.S. literature to attend graduate school since Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers 1630–1860* (1984) could encounter this nationalist mythopoetics without raising the alert level to red.

What distinguishes Crane's "synthetic vision" from pure propaganda is its omnivorous zest for linking. As this chapter attests, the end of *The Bridge* attempts to make *all* of its repetitions converge toward its final confrontation with the divine. The Mary-Eve-Magdalene chain stands for the United States as a mythic-organic-messianic entity, the divine personification of the nation in its imagined glory. Other chains are intended to enrich this one-dimensional portrait of the country. One can follow, for example, the chain of explorers—Columbus ("Ave Maria"); Pizarro, Cortez, John Smith ("Van Winkle"); and De Soto ("The River")—that opened the body of Pocahontas to conquest and settling. This chain reappears in "Atlantis" via such epithets for the "whitest Flower" as "Tall-Vision-of-the-Voyage" (106) and "Cathay" (108). Mary-Eve-Magdalene exists in both an eternal modality and as a land discovered by adventurers.

One particularly prominent chain participating in this process of representational enrichment concerns working-class men and women, in addition to others on the margins of U.S. life: a "bedlamite" ("Proem"); a stevedore ("Harbor Dawn"); a road gang, rail riders, and a brakeman ("The River"); prospectors, a "homeless squaw— / Perhaps a half-breed," and dirt farmers ("Indiana"); a drunken sailor ("Cutty Sark"); soldiers ("Cape Hatteras"); a burlesque dancer ("National Winter Garden"); a postman ("Quaker Hill"); a "Wop washerwoman" ("The Tunnel"); and, finally, a bridge worker "aloft," held by a "harness," whom Crane gives the heroic moniker "Jason" ("Atlantis"). Crane might have intended this chain to serve as no more than an indicator of the capaciousness of the nation, its willingness to take in a diversity of peoples and unite them within its (ideological) myth. But the chain's emphatic visibility insures that the population of the United States, as manifested in *The Bridge*, is not solely represented by the rich, famous, or powerful, "the Czars / Of golf . . . with sticks abristle and cigars" (HCCP 93).

*The Bridge's* chain of outsider citizens does not easily fit the Nibelung-Volsung split in Wagnerian aesthetics. That is, Crane does not limit the redeemed citizenry of the United States to the educated, cultured few. His "mystical synthesis of America" also joyfully gathers in outcasts, outlaws, and the oppressed. Moreover, as he spins out this particular associative chain, Crane hints at a particular understanding of how this coming-together occurs. Most of the outsiders are described as in movement: on the railroad, on

the road, on the frontier, on the subway, aboard ship, across a bridge. These ambiguously public spaces are places of unexpected and unusual encounters, whether interracial (“Indiana”), cross-class (the commuters of “The Tunnel”), or between sexes (“National Winter Garden”). Oftentimes the encounters in these migratory or interstitial spaces take on a covert queerness.<sup>25</sup> For example, an enigmatic line in “The Tunnel”—“love / A burnt match skating in a urinal”—has long been understood as a reference to tearoom trade, that is, sex in public restrooms (98–99). The tête-à-tête between the sailor and speaker in “Cutty Sark” is readily legible as a gay bar vignette (“rum was Plato in our heads. . . . he shot a finger out the door . . . / O life’s a geyser!” [71–72]). In “The River,” the all-male “Hobo-trekkers,” with whom the speaker wishes to travel, are coyly labeled “wifeless” (58). Even a moment that today’s readers might consider forthrightly coded as male heterosexual—the striptease in “National Winter Garden” by a woman whose “Outspoken buttocks . . . Invite the necessary cloudy clinch / Of bandy eyes” (89)—takes on a more ambiguous cast when one discovers that in New York from the 1890s onward burlesque theaters served as popular gathering places for gay men, who found that the “atmosphere of unconventional sexuality” permitted them an unusual latitude in public, sexual self-expression. Gordon Tapper reports that by the time Crane was attending burlesques in New York and Havana in the 1920s, “gay skits” had even become a regular feature of the evening’s entertainment (94).

In other words, *The Bridge* envisions, albeit in an inchoate and under-articulated fashion, a queer community of the interstices, where those whose bodies are regulated by an unjust economic and sex-gender system can discover common cause. The fact that this imagined community becomes subsumed into a greater, organic mythos vitiates its value, of course. Worse, one of the many names that Crane offers for his deified Bridge-America-Pocahontas is “white, pervasive Paradigm” (*HCCP* 106), and though “white” has powerfully symbolic, nonracial resonance for Crane (as chapter 4’s analysis of the opening lines of “Lachrymae Christi” indicates), one cannot help but detect, in a “mystical synthesis of ‘America,’” something gone horribly awry when the color of the purified, final myth is “white” (*O My* 131). The only African Americans to appear in the final text of *The Bridge* are Bert Williams, the singer of “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine,” and “floating niggers” who “swell” a “liquid theme” (57, 61). The latter line probably refers to jazz musicians on Mississippi riverboats, but it could also refer to, say, lynched corpses tossed in the river. Tellingly, Crane does not linger long enough for the conceit to become clear. No one will ever place Crane alongside W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, or Rosa Luxemburg as a visionary political thinker.

That does not prevent, however, later readers taking inspiration from

Crane's gallery of outsiders, as part 3 of *Hart Crane: After His Lights* discovers. His Wagnerian epic will turn out to offer, almost in spite of itself, an idealized other America in which bohemian poets of the immediate post-World War II years could find their own community-building efforts mirrored. Moreover, Crane's multiple, running chains of association will also prove separable from their original, Wagnerian context, capable of sustaining artistry positively allergic to grand, mythopoetic gestures. The story, though, will not be one of modernist hubris and postmodern breakthrough. Crane's "mystical synthesis" contains too many unresolved tensions and leaves too many loose ends. How does sexuality, especially nonnormative sexuality, relate to community formation on the margins? Can race really be so neatly sidelined en route to a pleasing paradigm? Finally—something Crane surely did not foresee in 1930—how can one separate the psychology and biography of Crane the suicide from his utopian dreaming?

One final word on the politics of *The Bridge*: it sought to be a definitive statement on the United States, an epic that, like Dante Alighieri's *La comedia divina* (1321), Luís de Camões's *Os Lusíadas* (1572), and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835), would lucidly sum up a people's past and launch a grand future. Just as chapter 1 explains, however, Crane borrows heavily from nineteenth-century European models to produce an "American" poetics. This poetics, moreover, devalues history in favor of transcendental bliss, a dynamic, as chapter 2 demonstrates, traceable to Crane's early, sexuality-related struggles with decadent precedent. A nation is imagined so that it can then be superseded in the name of *jouissance*. The America that takes shape in *The Bridge* is thus a shaky, collapsible construct—a construct, moreover, hymned in passionate, mannerist verse, not in a fake folksy Thomas Hart Benton-ish vernacular mode. Crane, after a fashion, reveals "America" as *artifice*, more specifically, fractured, willful artifice predicated on displacement, concealment, and jerryrigging. In decrying Crane's failure to deliver a rational nationalist epic, R. P. Blackmur was in effect calling, not for an antidote to fascism, but a better, slicker, European-free updating of nationalist rhetoric, in other words, a seemingly homegrown patriotism that U.S. intellectuals could endorse without reservations. The failure of *The Bridge* to deliver a convincing myth of America might in fact turn out, in the final analysis, to save the text from the full brunt of the moral condemnation that it might otherwise elicit. If nothing else, the creakiness of its universalism made it possible for the next generation of U.S. poets to read it not as America *über alles* but rather as a resource for building dissident countercultures.

# Part Three

## Reading Crane



## Paul Blackburn's Crane

Nebulous declarations of “influence” have long been a regular feature of the canon formation game, a means of sorting writers into camps, clans, and traditions. For many critics—Harold Bloom most notably—authorial influence is analogous to parental authority. As chapter 1 indicates, Bloom and his followers believe that the literary field is generationally divided and oedipally organized. A writer's greatness is measured by his or her ability to reinvent “transumptively” the poetry of a chosen precursor. This logic reduces literary history to a connect-the-dots parent-child family tree: Bloom's favorite run is Wordsworth-Emerson-Whitman-Stevens-Ashbery. In turn, these descent lines define the scope and character of literary scholarship. One need study only these heroic individuals and their intergenerational conflict in order to contribute to the larger field.

This reductive deployment of “influence” depends on an impoverished sense of how and why poets write. Poets rarely if ever limit themselves to extended, insistent *imitatio* of a single precursor. In the course of learning their art, apprentice poets tend to read widely and deeply. They are also likely to explore their interests forward and backward in time. Why not read Jonson, Marlowe, Webster, and Donne—as Crane did—in addition to or in place of work by one's immediate poetic elders? Why not, too, prize the work of one's contemporaries—as Crane did Allen Tate's, Laura Riding's, Gertrude Stein's, and James Joyce's? “Influence” is not a slow stream with easy stages. It more closely resembles the U.S. telephone system: a web of ephemeral far-flung connections that take place via legacy equipment, new hardware, multiple operating systems, and improvised software patches.

Poststructuralism did literary history a great service by replacing “influence” with “intertextuality” as a foundational concept.<sup>1</sup> Intertextuality as the

preferred term refocuses critical attention on the diversity, multiplicity, and unpredictability of relations between texts. It does not prejudge the course, limits, or character of such relations, nor does it evoke generational metaphors, Freudian or otherwise. Finally, it indicates nothing about the stature of the relevant texts and authors. An intertext for a given passage in *Finnegans Wake* could just as easily be an anonymous 1930s pornographic broadside as Giambattista Vico's *New Science*. Intertextuality can exist among Japanese films of the occupation era, or among U.S. Supreme Court cases, or Renaissance medical textbooks. Once "influence" is safely exiled to the outer dark, the cult of the genius author gives way to an expanded field for historical, sociological, and cultural inquiry.

Part 3 of this book does not quarrel with the demise of the pass-the-torch genius pageant as a paradigm for humanistic study. It will seek to demonstrate, however, that "influence," as a special case of intertextuality, can still prove a useful academic rubric. Like nationality and period, influence simply needs to be rethought as variably constituted, variegated in its results, and variously intersecting other narratives. It must be seen as shorthand for a shifting array of intense demands and ardent desires, the parsing of which can lead a critic far afield from old-style allusion hunts. Encounters between writers, after all, occur against an incredibly busy backdrop of texts, events, discourses, structures, and institutions. The stray, occasional linkups between authors A and B can serve as *points de repère* in a potential myriad of forays into and outside their respective writings. The point of such analysis, though, is not to understand cultures, societies, or history in toto—that level of abstraction is the domain of other methodologies—but rather to generate an illustrative blend of microhistory, micropolitics, poetics, and ethics. One witnesses why and how particular writers employ particular formal strategies and devices as they do. Such knowledge cannot license grandly inductive claims about traditions, cultures, or "main currents." One can nonetheless amass sufficiently numerous cases to begin comparing and contrasting them and in the process succeed in sketching a historically specific map of possible, if divergent, literary options and outcomes. This map can, in turn, be used to challenge or reinforce generalizations yielded by other, more statistical or theory-driven approaches.

In line with this revised and narrowed sense of influence, the next three chapters investigate Hart Crane's reception within a particular poetic community, the loosely affiliated, mid-twentieth-century U.S. bohemian circles retrospectively known as the New American Poetry. (The name derives from Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry*, which revealed that the already notorious Beat Poets were no isolated phenomenon but rather

participants in an extensive, bicoastal dissident poetic subculture.<sup>2</sup>) Instead of pretending to offer a comprehensive survey of Crane's influence on post-World War II U.S. verse—the kind of falsely synoptic approach that encourages airy talk of “traditions” while lumping together unhelpfully heterogeneous close readings—the goal will be to accumulate narratives about how literary colleagues differently navigated comparable situations with reference to the same predecessor. After an initial overview, the argument will concentrate on three principal New Americans—Paul Blackburn, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Kaufman—in order to demonstrate the intricacy, specificity, and ambivalence that render influence a slippery, frustrating object of study while also suggesting the richness of the lessons, aesthetic and social, that such study makes possible.<sup>3</sup>

## Fight Club

Poets, according to stereotype, labor in obscurity, die in poverty, and receive recognition, if at all, decades after their deaths. Crane had money troubles, agreed, but he hardly suffered from neglect. In fact, during Crane's very short life, besides winning him three millionaire patrons and a Guggenheim, his poetry garnered public attention from a number of well-connected U.S. intellectuals, among them Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, Waldo Frank, Mark Van Doren, Matthew Josephson, Gorham Munson, Allen Tate, Edmund Wilson, and Yvor Winters. Few twentysomething writers of the time (indeed, of any time!) could boast such early, favorable notice from his or her nation's glitterati. Louise Bogan, for one, felt free to begin her 1933 essay “Hart Crane” by announcing that “at the time of his death he was revered by many of his contemporaries as the greatest American poet since Whitman” (81)—a statement that rather dizzyingly elevates Crane above the likes of T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and Ezra Pound.

There were already signs, though, that Crane's reputation was poised for a swift decline. His decision not to attend college had left him acutely vulnerable to the smug snobbery of the academically credentialed. Lincoln Kirstein, for instance, recalls rejecting a poem of Crane's for *Hound and Horn* because the editorial board, engaged in “competitive vanity,” judged its author “shockingly ill-lettered,” in other words, well below Harvard *summa cum laude* standards (8–10). In the early criticism, this classism translated into wince-inducing, patronizing comments about Crane's intellectual capacities. Munson's generally favorable 1928 review of *White Buildings* announced that “to say it bluntly, [Crane] does not know enough” (172). He lacks, Munson opined, an intellectual “system” that could elevate his murky



“mysticism” above “furtive Peeping Tom glimpses through a smutted windowpane at the universe” (175). Max Eastman’s *The Literary Mind* (1931) further refined this picture of Crane as an inspired idiot, an exponent of “the Cult of Unintelligibility” (57) who writes poems so “willfully pure of purport” that they “abjure even grammar and logic as bondage” (90). Although possessed of “a genuine and rare poetic mind and feeling” he perversely settles for the “art of talking to himself in public” instead of aspiring to meaningful communication (96).

The spate of admiring elegies and tributes in the wake of Crane’s suicide delayed but did not prevent the coalescence of a 1930s academic consensus that the poet’s verse was, at root, unwholesome and misguided.<sup>4</sup> His ignorance, and by extension his incapacity for tackling profound questions, remained a recurrent topic. Crane was “not a learned man,” readers are told, and “what learning he did possess was used, with no great subtlety, in his poems” (Blake 193). The incoherent structure and language of *The Bridge* was proof positive that he was “not equipped intellectually” to overcome the “confusion” of his environment and distill from it lucid verse (Zabel 38). “Intuitively he knew that there existed forces that could bring about the triumph of all that he cherished in American life; but what those forces were he could not tell” (Hicks 291).

Crane’s suicide also encouraged critics to condemn him and his verse for his erratic, unconventional behavior, above all his homosexual promiscuity. Though the critics’ language was initially somewhat circumspect—he was accused of such nebulous faults as lacking “personal integrity” (Zabel 37) and falling prey to “neuroses such as are often the product of extreme individualism” (Hicks 291–92)—Philip Horton’s *Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet* (1937) made a grand show of outing the poet, after which the open-secret school of innuendo was superseded by outright condemnation. Horton used clinical language, too, testing a “psychoanalytic explanation” while speculating about “the causes of his homosexuality,” thereby paving the way for later critics to ruminate condescendingly and at length about the poet’s “sexual pathology” (80). An example of Horton’s lay analysis: he assures nervous readers that Crane’s “sensibility, far from showing itself in effeminacy or any other apparent extremity, was an interior matter concealed from all but his intimate friends by the conventional clothes and the rank smoke from his Cinco cigars” (78–79).

During the 1930s, former advocates of Crane—among them Allen Tate and Yvor Winters—also began to participate in this critical reassessment of the poet on intellectual and moral grounds. (Crane didn’t help his own cause.

In his later years he had disastrous fallings-out with both poet-critics, which left them with the dilemma of continuing to evaluate verse by a man whose rash, rude, threatening behavior toward them was memorable, to say the least.<sup>5</sup>) Tate and Winters argued that his lack of mental and spiritual discipline adversely affected his writerly talents. Moreover, they claimed that, through careful reading of the poetry, one could discern precisely which personal failings prompted Crane to produce particular, weak passages of verse. According to this pseudo-psychoanalytic logic, aberrant style suddenly becomes a symptom of a poet's questionable sanity. Crane's ill-sutured verse *de iure* bespeaks a disintegrating mind.<sup>6</sup> This argument was disseminated far and wide because Tate and Winters, along with R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren, were instrumental in revolutionizing literary study in the United States. Collectively, they ushered in the era of the New Criticism, which advocated disciplined, near-exegetical close reading of the "great works" of literature.<sup>7</sup> And Crane's "failure" became a rote feature of New Critical pedagogy—in effect resulting in his paradoxical canonization *as a bad poet*.<sup>8</sup> The Ohio-born self-taught writer became the inevitable, monitory example of prodigious talent gone awry. "If we were all to emulate Hart Crane," Yvor Winters thundered, "the result would be disastrous to literature and civilization" (*Defense* 12).

By the 1940s, an article such as Howard Moss's "Disorder as Myth" could state as received wisdom that "Hart Crane's 'magnificent failure' in attempting to create a contemporary American myth in *The Bridge* has become a legend and platitude" (32). Typical of the decade was Hyatt Howe Waggoner's "Hart Crane's Bridge to Cathay" (1944), an essay that condemns Crane's poetry of "falsity," "antirationalism," "chaos," "vague and confused rhetoric," "the deliberate cultivation of unintelligibility," "solipsism," and "sentimentality" (115). Textbooks and anthologies could be equally merciless. The second volume of the 1948 *Literary History of the United States* (Spiller et al.) spends two pages mixing faint praise of individual lyrics with armchair psychoanalysis ("his early emotional insecurity," the book explains, made him a "homosexual") and a litany of by now cliché slurs ("tortured sensibility," "nothing to sustain him," "the disintegration that can result from modern rootlessness") (1344–45). Amid such mandarin pompousness, one is almost thankful to encounter terseness. In *The Oxford Book of American Verse* (1950), the eminent Harvard literary critic F. O. Matthiessen delivers a three-sentence ex cathedra judgment in lieu of an informative or sympathetic introduction: "Crane made the major effort of our day to span the world of Whitman and our own. He wanted to celebrate again the splendors and the brute forces of

Manhattan. But his vision broke, and destroyed him” (xxviii). (An index of how important Matthiessen considered this “major effort”: he did not teach Crane in his undergraduate classes on modern verse.<sup>9</sup>)

This uniformly low academic opinion contrasts markedly with the near-veneration accorded Crane among the New Americans, many of whom attended elite universities in the 1940s and all of whom came of age during the height of New Critical dominance of literary education.<sup>10</sup> The roll call of New Americans who displayed an intense interest in Crane includes Paul Blackburn, Robert Creeley, William Everson, Frank O’Hara, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman, Weldon Kees, Michael McClure, Charles Olson, Gilbert Sorrentino, Jack Spicer, Philip Whalen, and John Wieners (all men, significantly—more about this later).<sup>11</sup> Crane’s name appears respectfully and frequently in the little magazines affiliated with the New American Poetry, journals such as *Big Table*, *Black Mountain Review*, *Floating Bear*, *Kulchur*, *Origin*, and *Yügen*.<sup>12</sup> And he turns out to have played a significant role in many of the New Americans’ key works. Ginsberg, for instance, cites “Atlantis” as a “model text precursor inspiration” for *Howl*.<sup>13</sup> Olson discusses Crane in his influential manifesto “Projective Verse” (617–18). Creeley’s elegy “Hart Crane” is the first poem in his early masterpiece *For Love*. The “Love Poems” section of Spicer’s late masterpiece *Language* ends by rewriting the closing lines of Crane’s “Cape Hatteras” (*Collected* 229).

The routine professorial castigation of Crane in the 1930s and ’40s without a doubt contributed to his renewed popularity among U.S. writers of the 1950s and 60s.<sup>14</sup> As the novelist John Clellon Holmes recalls, the various interconnected circles that made up the midcentury literary avant-garde—the Beats, the Black Mountain Poets, the New York School, and the San Francisco Renaissance—were in agreement on only one fact: that a handful of modern writers generally disparaged by the New Critics, namely Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Hart Crane, “held out more hope for a new and vital American poetry than T. S. Eliot or W. B. Yeats,” the writers usually proffered as role models in university settings (6).

What remains to be elucidated, however, is how and why young poets turned to Crane to help further their rebellion against institutional and disciplinary orthodoxy. The New Americans’ interest in Pound and Williams has been well documented, but, as parts 1 and 2 show, Crane had fundamental aesthetic disagreements with both men, and generalizations concerning the midcentury Pound-Williams revival would not apply without qualification to Crane’s case.<sup>15</sup> In short, why rally around *him* as opposed to any other New Critic-scorned early-twentieth-century poet? There were other candidates, indeed several that did attract partisans among the New Americans—

most notably H.D., George Oppen, and Louis Zukofsky—but only Crane seems to have enjoyed prominence akin to Pound and Williams. Why? What particular needs or desires did he fulfill?

### Come, Unity

New Americans who were drawn to Crane tended to form intensely personal attachments that then served as occasions for bonding with other like-minded writers. Robert Creeley recalls that discovering another poet who admired Hart Crane was like discovering that you shared a “fragile and vulnerable possession” (“Autobiography” 134). Initiation into Crane’s verse was almost a rite of passage. Ginsberg told Neal Cassady to read Crane in 1947, and, two years later, having not seen Cassady in the interim, he greeted his friend by insisting that they discuss Crane’s verse (McNally 93, 113). Signaling interest in Crane appears to have been particularly significant as a means of forging ties between the previous and present generations of the literary avant-garde. Charles Olson, for instance, wrote an elegy for Crane that he read to Marsden Hartley in a bid to befriend the painter, and William Burroughs gave Ginsberg a copy of Crane to solemnize the occasion of Ginsberg’s first visit.<sup>16</sup> Pound’s and Williams’s publisher James Laughlin corresponded with Gregory Corso regarding Crane (Corso 188)—whom Corso, it turns out, considered a “star screwer” and “poete [*sic*] excelsior” (192).

One little magazine—Cid Corman’s *Origin*—can be used to illustrate the New Americans’ hyperbolic rhetoric and highly personalized stake in “defending” Crane. The first issue of *Origin* (Spring 1951), which features the work of Charles Olson and opens with his ringing “I, Maximus,” also includes Creeley’s wistful, elliptical elegy “Hart Crane” (the same lyric that later kicked off *For Love*). “Hart Crane” represents a manifesto in germ, one that recapitulates but inverts the 1940s academic caricature of Crane and makes him the occasion for articulating a poetics of community.<sup>17</sup> Dedicated to and directly addressing Crane’s erstwhile and Creeley’s current friend Slater Brown, the poem at once establishes its interpersonal, intergenerational ties to the poet. It then praises Crane for precisely the reasons that 1930s and ’40s literary critics had condemned him, namely his inability to make the “words, several” to cease “stuttering” and achieve transcendental clarity. Creeley characterizes Crane’s verse as propelled by “The push / beyond and / into,” that is, a drive to exceed his human limits, a movement toward the ineffable that necessarily shatters discourse (*Collected Poems* 109).

“Hart Crane” proceeds to lament, not the poet’s lack of learning, but the opposite, the overbearing ego of “the / ones with the learning . . . Waldo



wisdom of the "ones with the learning," namely, professorial sorts and stuffy literary critics overly proud of their erudition and obligations.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent issues of *Origin* restate Creeley's ardent identification with Crane while also showing that there was, indeed, a response to Creeley's call for a "visionary company." The second issue of *Origin*, devoted largely to Creeley's work, contains a second poem by him titled "Hart Crane," this time devoted to extolling his aural artistry (the word "sound" appears in it six times).<sup>19</sup> In *Origin* 8, Olson replies to Creeley and Crane alike with "La Torre." Declaring itself in dialogue with, yes, Crane's "Broken Tower," Olson's poem opens, "The tower is broken, the house . . . It is broken!" Olson goes on, however, to assert that "The end of something has a satisfaction. / When the structures go, light / comes through / / To begin again." "It will take new stone, new tufa, to finish off this rising tower," he concludes.<sup>20</sup> What Crane began may lie in ruins, he implies, but, with the benefit of hindsight, one can build more securely and lastingly upon its foundations.<sup>21</sup> *Origin* 9 then contains an announcement of the publication of *The Letters of Hart Crane 1916–1932*—"Moving testimony to Crane's genius for poetry and trouble" ("Books Received" 7)—and Harold Dicker's "The Seventh Voyage," a three-part elegy for Crane that describes itself as a "ritual offering" (64). *Origin* 13 contains another bit of Crane propaganda, a feisty, unsigned review (by Creeley) of *Crane's Letters 1916–1932* that takes on the critics ("We know, we know, we know, etc., that *The Bridge* was a 'failure'—though why, and how, we are not at all quite so sure of") and extravagantly lauds individual lyrics such as "At Melville's Tomb" ("This is the GREATEST summation of Melville I have ever read") (60).<sup>22</sup>

*Origin* facilitated the elevation of Crane to tragic-hero status while also re-presenting him as a New American *avant la lettre*, in other words, as an earlier writer nonetheless committed to similar goals and suffering similar indignities. This pattern repeated itself numerous times in U.S. avant-garde circles during the 1950s and '60s. Regardless of their specific takes on Crane, and regardless of the uses to which they put his poetry, the New Americans tended to read Crane as a "saint of exposure" (Paul, *Olson's* 59), that is, an outlaw poet willing to sacrifice everything, even his life, to express his vision. Moreover, abetted by the newly published *Letters* (1952) and the newly reissued Horton biography (1957), they often saw themselves reflected in his proto-Beat life and antics. How could they not? Crane rejected the bourgeois security of his comfortable upbringing; he fled midwestern stagnation for New York thrills; he disregarded the puritanical sexual mores of his elders; he consorted with sailors, soldiers, and other working-class types; he bummed around Paris and Mexico City; he loved jazz, wild parties, and William Blake.

Downwardly mobile, sexually adventurous, drunken, unmarried, unbalanced, and consecrated unswervingly to art, Crane could fit into the cast of *On the Road* or *The Subterraneans* with barely a nip here and a tuck there. (Indeed, *On the Road*'s Carlo Marx compares himself to Crane after returning to New York from Dakar [119].)

Literary politics, too, surely accentuated this sense of parallels between then and now. Langdon Hammer's *Hart Crane and Allen Tate* recounts its eponymous poets' remarkably distinct career paths. Crane advanced himself through close personal ties and through oracular posturing. He sought no lasting institutional support for his writing, and he never succeeded in making a regular living from his poetry. He remained largely dependent, as Blanche DuBois says, on the kindness of strangers (Otto Kahn, Harry Crosby, Peggy Guggenheim, Herbert Wise) for what little income he did receive. Tate, in contrast, gradually made himself over as an institutionally embedded poet-critic. Universities paid his salary, and his literary market became scholarly presses and university journals. All of the other prominent New Critics followed this path to job security, and by the mid-twentieth century, it was a well-signposted route for ambitious young poets to tread. The New Americans, as one might expect, despised the formal conservatism and tweedy careerism of the 1940s crop of poet-critics, among them Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, and Richard Wilbur. These establishment-beloved newcomers appeared to represent New Criticism, round two, a further decline into inauthenticity. Accordingly, the Greenwich Village and North Beach avant-garde poetry scenes styled themselves as antiacademic and antiprofessional through and through.<sup>23</sup> Crane, the anti-Tate, could serve as a synecdoche for the avant-garde's efforts to forge an alternative, anarchic poetic community. The intensity with which individual New Americans such as Creeley and Ginsberg identified with Crane reflects the extent to which he represented not simply a stylistic model for an oppositional group of writers, but their very way of life itself, that is, the subculture that they were building in reaction to 1950s middle-class conformism.

The urge to identify with Crane was so strong, in fact, that on occasion it could shade into obsession. Weldon Kees, for instance, identified so strongly with Crane that he seems to have committed suicide in a deliberately Crane-like fashion, by jumping off Golden Gate Bridge (Kees 191–93). Kees's gesture helps explain a curious feature of the New Americans' Crane idolatry. Expressions of fervent identification with Crane are sometimes followed by attempts at curtailing or even disavowing that connection—as if the poets scented danger in *too* close an identification with the dead man. His suicide, in particular, is often invoked, explicitly or implicitly, as a warning that the

New Americans, too, might find themselves driven to equally self-destructive behavior in their defiance of mainstream U.S. culture. Crane's self-inflicted death was a reminder of such unhappy aspects of Bohemian life as isolation ("He slowed . . . without those friends to keep going, to keep up . . . [he] stopped / dead"—Creeley, *Collected Poems* 109) and the all too common sense that one's actions may ultimately prove misguided or futile ("Hart Crane distinguished Platonist committed suicide to cave in the wrong America"—Ginsberg, *Collected* 167). These pessimistic moments frequently involve attempts to take back or deny previously stated connections between past and present. In Jack Kerouac's 1959 improvised voice-over for the movie *Pull My Daisy*, for example, he describes two of his buddies bursting into the painter Alfred Leslie's New York loft studio:

Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg there, laying their beer cans out on the table, bringing up all the wine, wearing hoods and parkas, falling on the couch, all bursting with poetry. . . . [Ginsberg says to Corso] health to you this morning Mr. Hart Crane. No bridge. . . . And they're sitting there talking about Empire State Building [*sic*] and dooms of bridges. (22)

Crane's 1952 selected letters provide the subtext for Kerouac's stream of free association. In 1924 Crane had an apartment with a spectacular view of Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline, a vista that he described minutely and lovingly to his friends and family (for example, *O My* 187, 190). In contrast, the view shown from Leslie's loft during this sequence of *Pull My Daisy* is a nondescript slice of Fourth Avenue. Kerouac sees two Beats next to a window and immediately makes an equation between his friends' situation and a notable episode in Crane's life. Once this analogy has been made, however, the inability to see Brooklyn Bridge from Leslie's loft ("No bridge") suddenly acquires an apocalyptic significance ("dooms of bridges"). Kerouac's memory of Crane's unhappy end immediately colors the present with the melancholy tint of past tragedy.

The moments in New American writing when identification with Crane gives way to pessimism, aversion, or critique are worthy of careful scrutiny. If, as already discussed, Crane mattered as much or more as a communal ego ideal than as writer of particular texts, then instances when Crane idolatry goes sour indicate that one is touching upon limits to or aporia within the literary subculture of the time. The remainder of this chapter will investigate one specific relationship between Crane and a New American Poet, namely Paul Blackburn, in order to explore this dynamic with the sensi-



tivity and specificity that it merits. Several important issues that have so far been deferred will take center stage: the incompatibility of Cranean and Poundian poetics, the gendering of Crane's reception among the New Americans, and the role that Crane's much-publicized homosexuality played in his (non)acceptance among midcentury U.S. avant-garde writers. Just as Crane sought out shifting cliques of friends instead of durable institutions as the milieu for poetry production, so too did his New American heirs struggle to maintain fluid, improvised social networks as their own proper domain.<sup>24</sup> Crane became the occasion for celebrations of and complaints about this mode of living and writing; as one details what different, individual New Americans had to say about Crane, one gathers unique but complementary viewpoints on their collective rebellion against the panoptical, managerial culture of the United States in the early cold war years.

### Take Flight

After moving to New York's East Village in 1957, Paul Blackburn became known for such colloquial, taut lyrics as "The Stone," "The Once-Over," and "Good Morning, Love!" He typically portrays people who smoke, drink coffee, take public transport, go for walks in the park, or otherwise engage in simple, mundane behaviors that, when he is at his best, take on a heroic or tragicomic cast. In these urban vignettes, Blackburn repeatedly turns to *The Bridge* as a source for imagery and tableaux. He looks to Crane as a precursor New Yorker, an ambitious bohemian writer who struggled to find viable lyrical strategies for conveying life in the crowding, thriving, noisy metropolis. This attraction to Crane, however, coexists with an uneasy awareness that the earlier author could ultimately prove as imperiling as he was enabling. Blackburn is chary of too close an association with a doomed gay writer known for mannered, Wagnerian bombast.

"Brooklyn Narcissus" vividly stages this conflict. Its general conception and rhetoric owes much to part 7 of *The Bridge*. Just as "The Tunnel" uneasily conjoins vivid observation ("The gongs recur: / Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door . . . The car / Wheels off") and ecstatic effusion ("O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam, / Kiss of our agony thou gatherest"—HCCP 100), so too "Brooklyn Narcissus" blends impressionistic notation ("Midnite / / Drops on the train window wobble . stream") with visionary fervor:

between us is  
our span our bridge our  
naked eyes

open here  
 see  
 bridging whatever impossibility . . . PACE!

PACE O MIO DIO (*Selected* 76–77)

Blackburn drops several hints that indicate his source text. His gnomic statement “The rain . . . sweeps the *river* as the bridges *sweep*” (*Selected* 76) echoes Crane’s prayer to Brooklyn Bridge, “O Sleepless as the *river* under thee . . . Unto us lowliest sometime *sweep*, descend” (*HCCP* 44; emphasis added). Likewise, the poem’s reference to “Harbor beginnings” evokes *The Bridge’s* “Harbor Dawn,” and its opening line—“Straight rye whiskey, 100 proof” (75)—recalls another section of Crane’s epic, “Cutty Sark”. The most prominent allusion to Crane is not textual, however, but biographical: “I hear / the waves lap against the piles, a pier / from which ships go / to Mexico” (76). Blackburn recalls the *Orizaba*, the ship that transported Crane from New York to Mexico for his Guggenheim year and then took him north on his ill-fated return voyage.

These clues prepare knowledgeable readers to interpret the poem’s closing lines—“We enter the tunnel. / / The dirty window gives me back my face”—as an assertion of uncanny identification with Crane. Though on the literal level the speaker is singling out his self-absorption as a reason for a failed romance, on another level the speaker (as always in Blackburn) is a thinly veiled authorial alter ego. Entering into “the tunnel” / “The Tunnel,” he confronts a distorted (“dirty”) version of himself, a man who was also a Greenwich Villager, hard drinker, and singer of the modern polis. Blackburn verges on asking, Will I come to the same, unfortunate end? The poem’s tone is not hopeful. “Nemesis is thumping down the line,” the speaker intones, and immediately before entering “the tunnel,” he glimpses a “spur” that goes nowhere, merely terminates onto “the rusty dead/pan ends / of space / of grease” (76–77).<sup>25</sup>

In other poems, Blackburn strives to derail (as it were) his attraction to Crane’s writings before he reaches the point of complicity in their presumed death wish. One cluster of lyrics, for example, reprises the first lines of *The Bridge’s* proem while also exploring an implicit critique of their poetics. Crane’s epic begins with a lone gull soaring and wheeling off Manhattan, a symbol of the imagination taking flight:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest,  
 The seagull’s wings shall dip and pivot him,



folding against it  
                   not soaring, no  
                   ecstasy, that hold, so  
 slow he moves in the glide, tension of wing strut,  
                   those bones  
 holding suddenly, suddenly  
  
 doing a b a r r e l r o l l   not losing altitude .

the control . (149)

The “One” who performs the “barrel roll” does so without “losing altitude.” His “control” excludes “soaring” and “ecstasy.” Crane’s “white rings of tumult” give way to disciplined motion, a deliberate, deliberated advance “as slowly as possible” that depends on “tension” and restraint (“holding”). Implicitly, this aesthetic resists the evanescence of Crane’s free flight, which is quickly spent (“forsakes our eyes”) and leaves nothing but its afterimage-like “inviolable curve,” a merest trace (*HCCP* 43). Blackburn’s gulls strive instead for a more enduring “circle” as they “ride the wind above the bridge.”

Like Marilyn Hacker or Robert Lowell, whose relationships to Crane are considered in chapter 3, Blackburn finds Crane’s pyrotechnics engrossing yet excessive. If one is to avoid insanity and self-destruction, he suggests, all “dips and pivots” must be executed soberly, even when, as in the opening lines of “The Watchers,” the resulting verse reads as parodic, deflated Crane (Rosenthal vii):

Across the avenue a crane  
 whose name is  
                   CIVETTA LINK-BELT  
 dips, rises and turns in a  
                   graceless geometry

But grace is slowness / as  
 ecstasy is some kind of speed or madness /  
 The crane moves slowly, that  
 much it is graceful (*Selected* 141)

In the slowness and awkwardness of this mechanized “crane” the reader encounters an aerial ballet that, paradoxically, models a humane groundedness.

One can only trust Hart Crane so far, Blackburn implies. However inspired his subject matter, his manner of presentation is dubious.

There is something peculiar, even overstated, in this position. The salvific power of restraint is not a priori obvious. As also demonstrated in chapter 3, Crane belongs to a long lineage of potlatch poets, extending from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. In choosing “slowness” over “ecstasy,” Blackburn is making a value judgment. The basis for that judgment, however, remains uncertain, beyond an aesthetic preference for an ill-defined “grace.” Moreover, Blackburn’s endorsing “slowness” rings strangely, given his close association with and patent formal debts to Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School. In his manifesto “Projective Verse” (1950) Olson famously orders poets to

get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. . . . USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER! (614)

In practice, Blackburn usually adheres to Olson’s injunctions. His memorable, pointillist portraits of East Village life—such lyrics as “Good Morning, Love!,” “Hot Afternoons Have Been in West 15th Street,” “The Café Filtre,” and “Sunflower Rock”—typically progress projectivist-style, that is, in discrete, typographically variable phrasal units scattered across the page such that a reader must hopscotch back and forth and down across sizeable patches of white space in pursuit of the next observation or comment. Such poems move rapidly and tersely, rarely lingering over objects, events, or sensations. The Crane-revisionist passages in “The Purse-Seine” and “Barrel Roll” behave similarly. They transform linear sentences into complex, two-dimensional itineraries for the eye. Words “dip and pivot” in an effort to craft the “high-energy construct” that Olson defines as the goal of projectivist poetics (“Projective” 614).

When Blackburn expresses a preference for “slowness” over “speed,” then, it is hard to take him fully at his word. Fears of “madness” and suicide appear to motivate this counterintuitive, even self-contradictory aesthetic decision, but it remains murky why Crane’s particular kind of “speed” seems so threatening—beyond a sense that Crane’s poetics are somehow responsible for his 1932 death. The New Critics linked Crane’s style with his suicide—but why would a Black Mountain School product repeat this dubious claim?

## Heaven Must Be Heaven

The fifth part of Blackburn's long poem *Selection of Heaven* (1963), titled "March 3, 1 A.M. / Kyoto," can help one unravel the curious interpenetration of biography, psychology, and stylistics in his relationship to the earlier poet:

the walls . wood and rock  
 surround you  
 your sleeping woman, that  
 softness . *The Harbor Dawn*  
 not preceded by Te Deum. . . . Hand of Fire  
 not followed by macadam gun-grey as  
 your own dawn comes

/

Buzz

of the plane, hark  
 Hart, high, small, and distinct  
 The heart of clay is shared, baked and  
 brittle tho it may not break.

That day does break..My  
 gulls were never further away  
 than this . The sun  
 coming and  
 coming (*Selected* 129)

The setting—poet awake, beloved asleep, both of them secure and alone in a bedroom ("wood and rock / surround you")—likely prompts Blackburn to remember Crane's New York City aubade, "Harbor Dawn." Other parallels, though, are not immediately evident. Crane's lyric opens with the speaker half-awake ("wavering slumber") not at "1 A.M." but at sunrise while his lover's "cool arms murmurously about [him] lay." He listens, despite himself, to the early morning city:

Insistently, through sleep—a tide of voices—  
 They meet you listening midway in your dream,  
 The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:  
 Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,  
 Far strum of fog horns . . . signals dispersed in veils.

These “signals”—which include a “truck,” “winch engines,” “a drunken stevedore’s howl,” and “distant chiming buoys”—stir the speaker enough to begin describing the room’s interior: “the window, the half-covered chair” (HCCP 53). As the “window goes blond slowly” and “Frostily clears,” the reader glimpses “Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters” and “The sun, released—aloft with cold gulls hither” (54). Only a handful of these details resurface in Blackburn’s poem, namely the “Buzz / of the plane,” which echoes the motif of outside noises impinging on the lovers’ bower, and the references to “my gulls” and the “sun” at the passage’s close. As an intertext, “Harbor Dawn” is probably more important for its un- or understated connections to *Selection of Heaven*. Crane’s lyric is forthrightly, tenderly erotic. Its lovers couple in dawn’s light:

*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!* (54; emphasis in original)

Mentioning “Harbor Dawn,” Blackburn lends additional erotic intensity to a phrase like “that / softness,” without having to ruin its delicacy. Moreover, he establishes “dawn” as a limit or culmination of his Kyoto intimacy. For a reader familiar with Crane he raises expectations that this lyrical passage, too, will reach an ecstatic close, “shudders” following fast on “drink[ing]” the new day. Instead as “That day does break” so too, it seems, does the lovers’ “shared, baked” heart. He hints that the “brittle” fragility of this stolen night ends badly: “My gulls / were never further away / than this.” He writes, readers discover, in anticipation of a tragic end—a dramatic reversal of Crane’s celebration of the now of textual and sexual *jouissance* (“my tongue upon your throat—singing”). When, at the end of the passage, Blackburn writes, “The sun / coming and / coming,” he bluntly highlights the distance between Crane’s ecstatic erotics (“come” as to ejaculate) and his own fatalistic sense of Nemesis always “thumping down the line.”

This change of tone, from ecstatic to stoic, deserves further attention. Not only does Blackburn provide a twist on Crane’s plot, his chain of metaphors oddly implicates Crane himself in that change. He deliberately addresses Crane as “Hart” before launching into a fanciful hybrid of the clichés “day breaks” and “broken heart.” Implicitly, he superadds the mythic plot of Crane’s ascent and fall to the aubade narrative borrowed from his source

poem. In "March 3, 1 A.M. / Kyoto," Blackburn revises the mood and moral of "Harbor Dawn" in the light of Crane's tragic death, willing, as it were, a death wish into a poem where it is patently absent. This fact makes his resistance to Crane's style more, not less, confusing, insofar as it establishes that his death has to be imposed on the verse extrinsically, at the moment of its reception, not discovered as somehow pre-extant in the poetics itself.

How to unravel this? In essence, Blackburn is opting for one kind of context (biographical) over another (textual) to frame his interpretation of Crane's verse. He specifies that *his* version of "Harbor Dawn" is "not preceded by Te Deum. . . . Hand of Fire / not followed by macadam gun-grey as / your own dawn comes" (*Selected* 129; ellipses in original). In other words, he quotes both the end of the preceding and the start of the succeeding lyrics in *The Bridge*. "Ave Maria" does indeed conclude, "kingdoms / naked in the / trembling heart— / Te Deum laudamus / O Thou Hand of Fire" (*HCCP* 50) and "Van Winkle" does open "Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt, / Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate" (55). Blackburn deliberately excises "Harbor Dawn" from the architecture of Crane's epic, in which its sexual encounter is implicated in the larger structure of repetitions, in this case the running chains of association emphasizing the ecstasy of the divine ("O Thou Hand of Fire") and the vertiginous speed and space of travel in sprawling America ("from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate"). One could offer a formal motivation for this "surgical" gesture. *Selection of Heaven* is a long poem that advances erratically, anecdotally, and fitfully. Its looseness, laxness, and aleatory structure designedly negate the Wagnerian-symbolist coherence of *The Bridge*. This structural explanation, however, does not account adequately for the violence of Blackburn's wrenched rereading of "Harbor Dawn." He dramatizes his ability to recast, even alter, the precursor poet's writings. Moreover, he does so via a double reframing. First he forces the poetry to serve as commentary on its author's life. Then he reads the verses prejudicially, that is, through the filter of his own beliefs about the course and value of that life.

In "Barrel Roll," Blackburn establishes "control" as the point at which he diverges from Crane. Now control returns in a different register, in terms of despotic authority over one's source texts (and, by extension, their author). At stake in Blackburn's espousing a "controlled" aesthetic is not so much a worry that Crane will literally drive him to suicide as a fear that Crane might end up "controlling" his actions (and, by extension, authoring his verse, too). There are grounds for such an anxiety. As chapter 3 made clear, a basic tenet of Crane's aesthetic is indeed benign possession by the word, that is, to allow the superfluity that is language to speak through and across the self. Ceding



“control” to Crane would mean opening oneself, not to oedipal dominance à la Harold Bloom, but to something less bounded and certainly less masterable, a superhuman torrent of excessive signification.

## Sing Straight

Why should a work such as *Selection of Heaven* raise this anxiety more forcefully, articulately, and directly than, say, “Brooklyn Narcissus” or “The Purse-Seine,” lyrics also forthright about their indebtedness to Crane? Unlike “The Tunnel” or “To Brooklyn Bridge,” “Harbor Dawn” pushes a reader to the point of grappling with Crane’s sexuality. As Samuel Delany has observed, “Harbor Dawn” was readily identifiable at midcentury (to those on the lookout for such things) as a homosexual love poem (*Longer* 201). While never as explicit as, say, Allen Ginsberg’s “Please Master,” “Harbor Dawn” nonetheless engages in a series of omissions and deferrals that hint at a queer subtext. It abstains from gendered pronouns and mentions only gender-ambiguous body parts (eyes, arms, hands, and throat). A sly marginal comment—“Who is the woman with us in the dawn?”—suggests that neither of “us” is female. Finally, the line—“A forest shudders in your hair”—makes only partial sense if the beloved is female (why would the hair on her head “shudder”? is she shaking her head back and forth?) whereas it is entirely apt if referring to the movement of a man’s chest hair as he breathes in and out (as witnessed from the point of view of a lover nestled beside him). While, as Delany comments, Crane does make available a blissfully blinkered “heterosexual reading” of “Harbor Dawn,” its sexual ambiguity likely would not have escaped a poet like Blackburn, who lived in the East Village and moved in the same circles as Ginsberg and Frank O’Hara (206).

As chapter 2 discussed, writerly style has a long tradition of serving as an index of an author’s sexuality. Fin de siècle poets such as Oscar Wilde exploited their freedom to use the absence of signs explicitly denoting heterosexuality to create a discursive space for the expression of queer desire. Chapter 2 also examined how later writers such as Hart Crane and Djuna Barnes wrestled with the aftermath of Wilde’s conviction for sodomy. By the 1920s a mannered, evasive style had become dangerously vulnerable to legibility as a signifier of sexual dissidence. Much like Crane’s earlier lyric “C 33,” “Harbor Dawn” recapitulates Wildean moves that had, since the 1890s, lost their ability to convey queer eros safely and discreetly. And again like “C 33,” “Harbor Dawn” registers the creakiness of its rhetorical strategies through internal rupture. Its ambiguous eros appears fleetingly in *The Bridge*, between a

dramatic monologue by Columbus and a discussion of Cortez, Pizarro, and Captain John Smith. Sex is thereby situated historically, and Crane quietly suggests that this sexual encounter is as pioneering, as exploratory, as European encroachment into the New World. He also, though, invokes the specter of colonization and its attendant wastage, abuses of power, and sexual violence. *The Bridge* posits that homosexuality and its expressions, verbal and somatic, are never innocent. They are imbricated in far larger struggles and institutions, and, viewed from different vantages, what might initially appear to be progress can suddenly look like a stunning defeat (and vice versa).

Blackburn's anxieties about "controlling" Crane reflect 1950s U.S. sexual politics. As Michael Davidson has ably demonstrated, many New American Poets responded to the cold war ideal of "the organization man" by celebrating an alternative brand of masculinity ("Compulsory" 199–201). Central to this self-image was autonomy, that is, the freedom to think, speak, and behave however one wished. Corporate, familial, and other institutional obligations were devalued in favor of what, writing about the 1960s Lower East Side poetry community, Daniel Kane has called a "cowboy" aesthetic (17–23). Blackburn's rhetoric of self-control reflects the milieu's definition of a "real poet" as a man on a mission, a radical individualist whose self-worth in no way correlates to his income, possessions, or family connections.

The erotics of *The Bridge*—its masochistic delight in the fracture and dissolution of the speaking subject—represent a threat to the integrity of this cowboy persona.<sup>26</sup> For a 1950s male poet to give way to Cranean "fine collapses" would suggest that radical individualism was not a masculine life script sustainable 24-7 (*HCCP* 11). And, in the zero-sum logic of the early cold war era, any lapse in masculinity was a sign of effeminacy, in other words, an admission of powerlessness. Another of Blackburn's aubades, "The One-Night Stand: An Approach to the Bridge," makes this baleful logic, and its relation to Crane, crudely overt. Like "March 3, 1 A.M. / Kyoto," it rewrites "Harbor Dawn":

Migod, a picture window  
both of us sitting there  
on the too-narrow couch  
variously unclothed  
watching the sky lighten over the city (*Collected* 172)

Again like "March 3," "The One-Night Stand" is forthright about its derivative, "reflected" status vis-à-vis its source text:

New day's sun  
 doubles itself in the river  
 A double string of blue lights  
 glares to mark the bridge, the  
 city huddles under a yellow light (173)

This time, however, the reassertion of (heterosexual male) control is immediate and crass:

I wake  
 ready, make my move.  
 "You'll make me pregnant" you murmur  
 and barely audible, "I'll die"  
 neither will stop me  
 your legs are open  
 I am there at the wet edge  
 of life, the moist living lips (173)

The poet-speaker's "approach" to *The Bridge* turns out to be a violent refiguration of a potentially homoerotic, collaborative relationship (Blackburn-Crane). Robert Creeley recollects that Crane's invitation to Whitman at the close of "Cape Hatteras" ("never to let go / My hand / in yours"—HCCP 84) had acquired notoriety by the 1950s as an avowal of homosexuality; Blackburn repudiates even the possibility of a like connection between himself and Crane by presenting his "double" in "One-Night Stand" as an unloved, female, submissive vehicle for his phallic satisfaction.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, this creative act (this poem) will be (re)productive ("You'll make me pregnant"), not non(re)productive, like the queer poetics of Wilde, Barnes, and Crane.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the poet-speaker is so potent that this bringing forth of new life will coincide with the vanquishing ("I'll die") of the "double" who served as its occasion.

One could label this solution to Blackburn's authorial anxieties homophobic, though it would be more accurate to recognize it as founded in misogyny. He projects onto Crane his own desperate fear of appearing womanly. As Michael Davidson has noted, the U.S. avant-garde poetry circles of the 1950s and '60s were surprisingly open to self-identified gay men.<sup>29</sup> Among those to find acceptance were such figures as John Ashbery, Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, Jack Spicer, Stephen Jonas, John Wieners, and Jonathan Williams. Bisexual behavior, too, was tolerated (Neil Cassady, Fielding Dawson, Jack Kerouac, Larry Rivers). This in-

clusiveness, alas, carried a price, what Michael Davidson calls "compulsory homosociality." Male poets, straight and queer, tended to affirm each other's masculinity (and by extension power and status) by rigorously excluding or belittling anything smacking of effeminacy. This hypermacho environment was, of course, far from congenial to women writers. Those who did manage to force their way into the club were usually allotted peripheral, second-class roles such as girlfriend (Joanne Kyger), muse (Denise Levertov), and witchy eccentric (Helen Adam).<sup>30</sup> Even the New York School—whose two principal figures, John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara, were gay men who delighted in camp and exhibited far from '50s-normative masculine behavior<sup>31</sup>—nonetheless exhibited a proclivity to cast women writers and painters as muses (V. R. Lang, Jane Freilicher, Grace Hartigan).

Blackburn's ambivalent relation to Crane is marked through and through by the compulsory homosociality of his literary milieu. On the one hand, Crane's poetry dovetails extraordinarily well with the masculinist ethics typical of the (male) New Americans. His speakers are almost all isolated visionaries and voyagers. *The Bridge* is positively Village People-like in its stagy presentation of butch men. He sings of sailors ("Cutty Sark"), fighter pilots ("Cape Hatteras"), boisterous road gangs ("The River"), and sod-busting prairie pioneers ("Indiana"). He also hymns men and moments at cross-purposes with the expectations and rhythms of big business. The epic opens with the close of a downtown working day ("elevators drop us from our day"—*HCCP* 43) and is populated with hoboes, Rip Van Winkles, and profit-scorning prophet-poets (Whitman, Poe, Blake). Blackburn, like Ginsberg, Creeley, and other contemporaries, surely saw Crane's America as one to which he, too, could belong, an imagined nation in which male prowess, vatic witness, and unapologetic genius guaranteed full citizenship. Moreover, Crane's poetry almost uniformly treats women as objects of spectacle ("National Winter Garden"), ethereal muses ("Faustus and Helen"), or obstacles to full (male) self-actualization ("My Grandmother's Love Letters"). Other than a few exceptional women—above all Emily Dickinson, whom Crane venerated fulsomely, without qualification<sup>32</sup>—his lyrics vigorously celebrate, indeed sacralize, men and male-male interaction, "genitalized or not," as Davidson puts it ("Compulsory" 198). One particularly damning fact: it appears that not a single female poet affiliated with the New American Poetry—among them Helen Adam, Carol Bergé, Diane Di Prima, Kathleen Fraser, Barbara Guest, Joanne Kyger, V. R. Lang, and Denise Levertov—ever cites Crane as an important influence or engages in the intertextual play observable in Ginsberg's "Howl," Olson's "La Torre," or Blackburn's "The Purse-Seine."

Crane's ready adaptability to midcentury normative homosociality had

intrinsic limits, however. Just like the gay men who participated avidly in New American venues, Crane was permitted a privileged entrée as long as he reconfirmed (or at least tolerated) the boundaries between “us” (men) and “them” (women). This gendered distinction served as much to police male behavior as to exclude biological women. And the value-laden binary masculine / feminine could prove volatile when applied to the relationship between two men. As Eve Sedgwick has taught, in Western cultures the continuum between heterosexual male friendship and homosexual erotic entanglement is far from uninterrupted (2–3). In the United States in the twentieth century, male-male relationships, in fact, have often had painfully sharp albeit unpredictable boundaries between acceptable affection (“I love you guys”) and its perversion (“we’re lovers”). The “compulsory homosociality” of 1950s U.S. avant-garde poetry communities might have dramatically shifted the location and the contours of the line between acceptable and unspeakable male-male interaction, but it did not do away with that line altogether. To become “like a woman” when dealing with another man was to step across it.<sup>33</sup>

Under such circumstances, the tender, private, quiet domesticity of “Harbor Dawn” rendered it a dangerous poem. It feminized sex and song, and in so doing accentuated, brought to light, Crane’s fundamentally masochistic erotics. Gay lust in itself offered no such danger. Jack Spicer could write whatever he wished about the “groins” of the “boys above the swimming pool” (Spicer, *Collected Books* 336), and he could recount a “wet dream” about “men wrestling naked” (349), without thereby threatening the integrity of his own cowboy persona.<sup>34</sup> He remained the desiring, controlling subject. The vulnerability and intimacy of “Harbor Dawn,” however, were traits indissociable from the effeminate sins of submission and passivity. Such qualities could survive only if projected onto, incarnated as, a woman’s body. A (male) speaker could then demonstrate his untainted manliness by exerting control over this (imagined) other, a mere, manipulable, sexualized object.

Clearly, a poet such as Blackburn—a straight-identified male, a student of the infamously misogynist Charles Olson, and a prime exemplar of the period’s “cowboy” aesthetic—had to proceed with care when recycling aspects of Crane’s work.<sup>35</sup> If not handled properly, Crane’s ability to affirm masculine self-importance threatened to transform (invert) into a display of forbidden (feminine) desires. And because these desires were inseparable from his vocation as a poet—Crane seeking to be “ravished” by language—the threat was not only psychological but also occupational.<sup>36</sup> The New Americans’ strategic promotion of “cowboy poet” as an alternative masculinity could implode, conceding (disastrously!) that verse as a vocation is closed to

manly men. Blackburn might aspire to "Sing / straight as I can" (*Selected* 98), and Crane as a Pindar of butch New York can help him achieve that end, but Blackburn also has to be constantly aware that a less than violently heterosexual reading of a lyric such as "Harbor Dawn" could ruin the whole project. Crane's proto-Beat biography necessarily serves as the frame within which Blackburn reads his poetry. To set aside the New American re-visioning of Crane's life and to attend instead carefully and minutely to the specifics of his poetry and poetics would be, so to speak, suicidal.

## Trouble

Blackburn's anxieties about Crane's influence belong to a particular place and time. They cannot readily license an ahistorical, global critique of heterosexual male pigheadedness. Davidson rightly construes his analysis of compulsory homosociality among the New American Poets as primarily a statement concerning "a structure of subject production" (Davidson, "Compulsory Homosociality" 214). That is, he elucidates the conditions and circumstances that helped create the body of work that contemporary readers now possess. Though it might sound paradoxical, Blackburn's fears were productive insofar as they shaped and motivated his writing. One cannot separate or insulate the glories of his verse—his deft lineation, his reticence, his attentiveness to the everyday, his untroubled inhabitation of the urban—from the less admirable impulses bound up in his poetic decision making.

Significantly, Blackburn himself might not have minded this chapter's sociobiographical "tainting" of his verse. Such an argument speaks to the groundedness toward which he always strove, in which versecraft freely concedes its human flaws and limits. As he sees it, poets err, like everyone else. To pretend otherwise is to prefer juvenile fantasy to adult reality. For Blackburn, to rise too far above the complications of life is to violate the sincerity necessarily at the heart of the pact between poet and reader.

Stoic sincerity, of course, is not a self-presentation with much resonance in the wake of poststructuralism. Tone, affect, and persona, just like form and subject matter, are susceptible to change over time. The micropolitics of Blackburn's Lower East Side poetry community demonstrate just how time-bound his ambiguous embrace of *White Buildings* and *The Bridge* ultimately proved to be. Despite Blackburn's many, selfless years of hard work promoting experimental verse—poetry critics owe him an incalculable historical debt for his ceaseless recording of poetry readings from the mid-1950s onward—in 1966 he was passed over in favor of his fellow Black Mountain protégé, Joel Oppenheimer, for the new and relatively lucrative position of head of St.

Mark's Poetry Project. Shortly thereafter, in 1968, a forthrightly feminist poet, Anne Waldman, took over from Oppenheimer, and New York's avant-garde poetry scene reorganized itself around reverence for the recently martyred, not terribly macho Frank O'Hara.<sup>37</sup> Yes, O'Hara's high priest, Ted Berigan, might have been straight-identified, but under his and Waldman's aegis, the hypermasculinity of the New American years gave way to the gender-fuck, indeterminacy, and sprawling flow characteristic of so-called second-generation New York School writing (Joe Brainard, Joe Ceravolo, Clark Coolidge, Kenward Elmslie, Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett). Significantly, Crane accompanied Blackburn into eclipse. No second-generation New York Schooler has ever displayed much attraction to his verse. The burst of interest in Crane among the (male) New American Poets of the 1950s and '60s seems to have so thoroughly interpellated him into their compulsory homosociality that he became a synecdoche for it. As its heyday passed, so too did his momentary revival.

Crane, unlike Blackburn, would have been very displeased, if not horrified, at the too-ready mixture of his life and verse in his reception history among the New Americans. It is one thing to be allowed to speak queer desire publicly—a constant, though sometimes subterranean, goal of Crane's verse. It is quite another thing to discover oneself held up as representative of (doomed) queers in general. Friend to Allen Tate and avid reader of T. S. Eliot, he would have held with the New Critics that such biographically dictated reading amounts to misreading, insofar as the details of the actual poetry are consigned to irrelevance. The biographical myth, in other words, is permitted to overshadow the compositional method. Not all midcentury poets would have disagreed with Crane about the balefulness of such a situation. The next chapter explores further the intricacies and contradictions of Crane's "influence" on the New American Poetry by retelling the story of one poet's—Frank O'Hara's—careful, half-covert negotiation of Crane's legacy. O'Hara arrives at a brilliant series of poetic insights via his reading of Crane, yet he also obfuscates that debt because he rejects the "mythic" Crane that so intrigued his contemporaries—not for him the poet of male bonding and romantic self-destruction. Crane, rather, serves as a pioneering writer whose technical innovations goad O'Hara toward both his grandest verse (the odes) and his best-known lyrics (the "I do this, I do that" poems). In one of literary history's many ironies, O'Hara, the patron saint of St. Mark's, turns out to have bequeathed a retooled Cranean poetics to a generation of imitators who then employed them largely in ignorance of their origins. Influence does not flow straight. Its ripples, crosscurrents, and eddies produce a moiré pattern of contradictory, interfering effects.

## Frank O'Hara's Crane

Massachusetts-raised and Harvard-educated, Frank O'Hara (1926–66) came into his own after moving to New York City in autumn 1951. Like one of Hart Crane's golden boys "who step / The legend of their youth into the noon" (*HCCP* 3), O'Hara, through a manic whirl of writing, partying, talking, and drinking, quickly established himself as arbiter elegantiarum for the New York avant-garde. Publishing little verse during his lifetime—a mere five, slim small press volumes<sup>1</sup>—he seems to have concentrated primarily on creating, maintaining, and promoting an "intimate community" of men and women who excel in the arts.<sup>2</sup> He cultivated personal ties with abstract expressionist painters (Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline); experimental composers (John Cage, Morton Feldman); up-and-coming visual artists (Jasper Johns, Joan Mitchell, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers); luminaries in the world of dance (Merce Cunningham, Edwin Denby); and young, equally urbane poets (John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, LeRoi Jones, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler). No general inquiry into mid-twentieth-century U.S. avant-garde verse can ignore the charismatic, ubiquitous O'Hara. Like Olson and like Ginsberg, he was a larger-than-life figure who brought others together and catalyzed the production of extraordinary new work.

Recent criticism on O'Hara has highlighted the relationship between O'Hara's fixation on community, his sexual identity, and his poetics.<sup>3</sup> Most notably, Lytle Shaw has argued that O'Hara is a "coterie" poet, one who actively displaces naturalized forms of kinship—the family, the literary canon—with "appropriated, superimposed, chosen and seemingly 'arbitrary' structures of relationship" such as intense friendship, romantic love, and casual acquaintanceship. The consequence, according to Shaw, is a forthrightly artificial "family" that is invented and reinvented in the process of writing. Re-



vealing kinship to be a human construct, not an innate or “natural” ordering of the world, he prompts his readers to question both the normatively heterosexual kinship structure of the United States and the Bloom-style genius genealogies that long dominated literary histories.<sup>4</sup> Shaw’s argument helps clarify important aspects of O’Hara’s poetics, especially his rampant use of proper names. Moreover, he demonstrates that, decades before queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Michael Warner took up the subject, indeed at the height of McCarthyite homosexual panic, gay writers were already actively deconstructing “the family” and proposing other, improvised modes of community.<sup>5</sup>

Shaw’s argument, however, must ultimately be judged too narrowly focused. O’Hara’s “coterie” poetics bear more than a family resemblance to the processes of community formation pursued by other New Americans, as anatomized by such scholars as Maria Damon, Michael Davidson, and Libbie Rifkin. Daniel Kane has illustrated, for instance, that New York’s Lower East Side in the later 1950s and early ’60s—Paul Blackburn’s immediate milieu—had its own array of intense relationships, hermetic lore, improvised institutions, and inside jokes. There is nothing unique (or uniquely queer) about O’Hara’s alternative conception of kinship. Rather, it echoes efforts, throughout 1950s and ’60s U.S. counterculture, to challenge the conservative cold war ideological centrality of the perfect, perfectly behaved suburban nuclear family.

O’Hara’s “intimate community” must be understood not only in a comparative context but also in its interactions with those other social networks. As Shaw himself points out, O’Hara was fascinated by the effects generated as his lyrics left his immediate circle of friends and, “decontextualized,” began to circulate more broadly. His clique was a possible but by no means the only intended audience. Richard Bozorth’s recent study, *Auden’s Games of Knowledge*, illustrates how divergent this attitude is from more stereotypically “coterie” behavior. Bozorth recounts the history of a defiantly self-enclosed clique, the so-called “Auden group,” which included W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Stephen Spender. Through coded allusions, strategic silences, and impenetrably private references, members of this 1920s and ’30s homosexual coterie communicated with each other in print while deliberately leaving the general public utterly mystified (23–30). O’Hara’s “intimate community” did not possess, and did not aspire to, the Auden group’s privileged isolation. On the contrary—as Donald Allen’s *New American Poetry* makes abundantly clear—it was one of several overlapping, mutually respectful, but stubbornly competitive U.S. poetic avant-gardes in the 1950s. O’Hara’s *Col-*

*lected Poems*—unlike Auden's opaquely coterie publication *Poems 1929*—openly comments on literary rivals (Allen Ginsberg, Jack Spicer) as well as literary allies (Gregory Corso, John Wieners). O'Hara was acutely sensitive to the multiple, divisive audiences that his poetry might reach, a virtue that rendered him a skilled player in the “public relations” game by which New Americans attained and maintained prestige among their peers (Rifkin 125).

Community, in short, is an extremely complicated topic to pursue in relation to O'Hara's poetics. He makes and remakes it as he goes in such a way that “there's a sense that the rules might change at any moment” (Rifkin 26). To put it differently: There is always a danger, when grouping O'Hara with any other writer or artist, that he has anticipated such a rhetorical move and, in fact, is laughing at a critic's limited imagination, his or her philistine urge to delimit and categorize through spurious attributions of “kinship.” To get around this problem, one has to find a way of catching O'Hara off guard, as it were. This chapter chooses to approach O'Hara in just such an unexpected, against-the-grain manner. The last chapter presented Hart Crane as a volatile figure within New American communities, representing, on the one hand, a blissful coming-together of like-minded outsider poets while, on the other hand, serving as a monitory figure, that is, a marker of the perilous limits to communal identification. O'Hara, too, found himself attracted to some aspects of Crane yet repulsed by others. His many but underappreciated intertextual ties to Crane are, in fact, a particularly productive point at which to place literary-critical pressure. One discerns behind O'Hara the cheerleader, enabler, and whimsical courtier a poet of prodigious ambition, one willing—unlike Blackburn, who feared too close an association with the poet—to engage Crane fully, carefully, and extensively while also—again unlike Blackburn, who was too sincere to conceal his debts—feeling compelled to obfuscate that connection so as to protect his chosen persona among his peers and his readers.

## After Grace

In his introduction to O'Hara's *Collected Poems*, John Ashbery writes that “Hart Crane in his vatic moments” was one of O'Hara's most important role models during his early years as a writer, but it is difficult to ascertain exactly when O'Hara first read Crane's poetry (viii). As the last chapter indicated, by the time O'Hara attended Harvard University in the late 1940s, Crane's verse was rarely considered worthy of academic study. The eminent Harvard literary critic F. O. Matthiessen, for example, omitted Crane entirely from his

courses on twentieth-century U.S. poetry.<sup>6</sup> One should not be too surprised, then, that no references to Crane appear in O'Hara's undergraduate journals nor in the volume *Early Writing*.

O'Hara almost certainly first encountered the poet specifically in the context of the New Americans' Crane idolatry. He published frequently in the little magazines associated with the New American Poetry, and his occasional references to Crane in his nonpoetic, polemical work are largely indistinguishable from the stray comments made by his comrades-in-arms.<sup>7</sup> O'Hara's 1959 manifesto "Personism," for instance, ranks Crane alongside two other New American favorites, William Carlos Williams and Walt Whitman, as the best poets that the United States has produced (*FOHCP* 498). In other significant passages, he scoffs at the "very odd" academic commonplace that Crane was "over-ambitious" (*Standing* 78), and he praises Crane for disregarding the "comportment of diction" that New Criticism preached (12). Such commentary on Crane is largely indistinguishable from the praise that appeared in journals such as *Origin*.

Given only these scattered remarks, though, one would never guess at the nature, extent, or profundity of O'Hara's literary debts to Crane. For these, one must turn to his poetry, where the well-defined, self-protective public persona of the bohemian poet (cigarette, martini, and crooked grin) gives way to greater openness. There, O'Hara presents his relationship with Crane as close, even physical. "Yes / like . . . a slightly over-gold edition of Hart Crane," he writes in "L'Amour avait passé par là," "they have painted the ceiling of my heart" (*FOHCP* 333). Crane takes on attributes of a lover and a muse. "[W]hat of Hart Crane . . . you are of me, that's what / and that's the meaning of fertility / hard and moist and moaning" (387). Ever self-aware, O'Hara even concedes that his fascination with Crane may verge on excess—or embarrassment. "[C]ut it out," he chides himself midway through "Poem (For Mario Schifano)," "this / is getting to be another poem about Hart Crane" (477).

In his verse, O'Hara seems to have felt free to voice a powerful, deeply personal sense of connection to Crane that he was less willing to discuss in prose or in conversation. This split is unusual. As already demonstrated, Robert Creeley did not hesitate to laud Crane in multiple genres. Perhaps O'Hara felt his connection to Crane was so intimate that he could only broach the subject poetically. O'Hara's life certainly parallels Crane's closely enough to suggest that O'Hara may have seen himself in Crane the man. Both Hart Crane and Frank O'Hara were born in provincial backwaters—respectively, Garrettsville, Ohio, and Grafton, Massachusetts—and both escaped to New York to become bohemian poets. Both poets drank too much, had difficult

mothers, and adored Charlie Chaplin films. They regularly genuflected at Whitman's altar.<sup>8</sup> They were avid fans of modern music, Crane favoring Satie, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Copland, and Varèse (Sharp 198–9), O'Hara preferring Satie, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Poulenc, and Hindemith (Gooch 28, 47, 74). They were also both devoted readers of French symbolist poetry, an enthusiasm that, in both cases, culminated in Rimbaud-inspired prose poems, namely Crane's "Mango Tree" and O'Hara's "Oranges." Moreover, Crane, like O'Hara, took a partisan interest in the visual arts of his era. Crane was an avid proponent of such contemporaries as Walker Evans, David Siqueiros, Joseph Stella, and Alfred Stieglitz, and Dickran Tashjian's chapter on Crane in *Skyscraper Primitives* (1975) recounts his involvement in the controversy between Matthew Josephson and Gorham Munson over Dada and the future of U.S. art.

As the last chapter illustrated, however, biographical parallels were fundamental to Crane's reception history among all male New Americans. O'Hara might have identified with Crane personally—but so did his friends, which meant that he would never be able to parade the poet's name—as he did Mayakovsky's and Rachmaninoff's—as signifiers of his independent thought and taste. In fact, O'Hara's comparative reticence about Crane in "public" venues (interviews, reviews, catalogs) as opposed to "private" venues (mostly love poetry) may have stemmed from an aversion to having any biographical resemblance between the two writers pointed out. If O'Hara's affinity for Crane were common knowledge, it would have permitted others to project onto him the popular 1950s and '60s perception of Crane as a *poète maudit*, just as Kerouac links Ginsberg to Crane and "doom of bridges" in *Pull My Daisy*.

O'Hara, a poet with a tenaciously optimistic bent, would have resented anyone jumping to similar conclusions about him. He would not have wanted others to construe him as yet another Rimbaud wannabe or to anticipate that he, too, might suffer an untimely, unfortunate demise. (The fact that he did die such a death—run over by a beach buggy on Fire Island in 1966—is beside the point.) The posthumous collection *Homage to Frank O'Hara* makes clear the interpretive dangers to which O'Hara exposed himself by letting it be known that he looked to Crane as a favored precursor. Philip Whalen ends "Inside Stuff," an elegy for O'Hara, with the line, "Frank has Hart Crane's eyes" (Berkson and LeSueur 67).<sup>9</sup> O'Hara would have winced at the clumsy metaphor. One could imagine him responding, "Where, in my pocket?" Whether or not he sought to be a visionary like Crane, O'Hara would have been chary of anyone stating that fact so baldly or so reductively. Similarly, John Wieners recounts a conversation with O'Hara concerning Crane that

O'Hara would have preferred to render in verse, if at all, where he could have included more nuance and qualification:

The hard, wooden planks of seats below deck, choppy waves as we sailed through Boston Harbor . . . so forced [us?] to change our mind [sic] often we roamed listlessly above deck fore and aft in search of surcease from the throbbing motors of the boat.

We both thought of suicide as the final resolution of our desire as we stood again below deck by the hectic Atlantic cutting at our feet, speaking of Hart Crane and the last words we would have in our mouths at that moment of surrender. Only chains saved us from its vengeful force. Masses of seagulls followed us down the coast and dark clouds forbade our entry into Provincetown Harbor. (Berkson and LeSueur 65)

Here are unrequited lust, suicide, and a dark and stormy sea: the kind of flat, melodramatic Hollywood scenario that O'Hara would have relished, as long as he was not its befuddled star.

The only tribute in *Homage to Frank O'Hara* that approaches the Crane-O'Hara connection with the delicacy and sophistication that O'Hara would have appreciated is John Cage's—as one might have intuited, given Cage's notorious disdain for biographical interpretations of art. In the second of Cage's elegiac mesostics, the apostrophe in the vertical intext "O'HARA" intersects the horizontal line "hart's tongue":

kOlomna  
 hart's tongue  
 Ho chi minh  
 huelvA  
 fancieRs  
 eusebio frAncisco kino ("Two" 182)

In English, an apostrophe can signify possession ("of Hart"), filiation ("son of Hara"), or omission ("can't"). It cannot be pronounced in isolation, but it can make its presence heard—"wont," for example, sounds differently from "won't." An apostrophe also marks the genitive case—"genitive," from Latin *genus*, meaning race, stock, family, descendant, child, class, species, kind, or breed. In his mesostic, Cage proposes that the unspoken / the unspeakable about "O'HARA" is a set of related terms: heart, Hart, of Hart, son of Hart, son of Hara, O'Hara. And at issue is the possession, or loss, of a tongue, with all the connotations that the word evokes, from the linguistic to the

sexual. Cage suggests filiation between Crane and O'Hara, as well as a powerful, erotically tinged intimacy—or, as O'Hara put it, "Hart Crane . . . you are of me . . . that's the meaning of fertility / hard and moist and moaning" (*FOHCP* 387)—but Cage does so specifically in relation to poetic performance (the "tongue"), not in relation to Crane's vision of America (Whalen's "eyes") nor in relation to Crane's sad fate (Wiener's "surrender").

O'Hara did not read Crane in the same melancholy fashion as such contemporaries as Robert Creeley and Allen Ginsberg did. Nowhere in O'Hara's verse or prose does he dwell specifically upon Crane's decline or death. Rather, as Cage suggests and as the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, O'Hara felt drawn specifically to Crane's *poetry*, which he studied, imitated, and parodied with an ingenuity, wit, and insight unequalled by other writers of his generation, for whom Crane the legend tended to overshadow Crane the craftsman. Midway through O'Hara's "Ode to Michael Goldberg ('s Birth and Other Births)" the lyric abruptly switches locale from Asia to the American Great Plains. It is, O'Hara writes,

eight o'clock in the dining car  
of the  
20th Century Limited (express)  
and its noisy blast passing buttes to be  
Atchison-Topeka-Santa Fé, Baltimore and Ohio (Cumberland),  
leaving  
beds in Long Beach for beds in Boston (*FOHCP* 295)

O'Hara places his reader squarely back onto the terrain of Hart Crane's "The River":

whistling down the tracks  
a headlight rushing with sound—can you  
imagine—while an EXpress makes time like  
SCIENCE . . .  
So the 20th Century—so  
whizzed the Limited—roared by. (*HCCP* 57)

Thirty years after *The Bridge*, O'Hara points out, the "20th Century Limited" continues to make its run. He also hints that the "roar" and "whistle" that it generated in Crane's day—in other words, Crane's verse itself—has its counterpart in O'Hara's own, new "noisy blast."

On the surface of it, community and coterie have little or nothing to do

with such a declaration of vocation. O'Hara announces himself as an ode writer, Whitmanian yawper, and author of epic vistas. Recovering the Cranean side to O'Hara, one rediscovers the individualism, passion, ambition, and unswerving commitment to art that he shared with his hero Jackson Pollock but that has been obscured by his posthumous reputation as a dilettantish, campy, puckish poet of light occasional verse. The remainder of this chapter will sketch O'Hara's career-long engagement with Crane's writings to bring out more fully their points of contact—as well as, ultimately, their disagreements. The intuition that O'Hara cannot have much in common with Pollock and Crane's retro-romantic posturing does have an important basis in fact. In the end, this chapter will be able to return to the problem of community, but in a different register altogether.

## Memories

John Ashbery credits "Hart Crane in his vatic moments" with helping teach O'Hara the "freedom of expression" that he needed in his early years, from 1947–52. In this period, that "freedom" most obviously manifests itself in hyperbolic or whimsical imitation of Crane. O'Hara delights in lampooning Crane's penchant for arcane apostrophes such as "O terraced echoes" (*HCCP* 160), "O Thou / Whose fresh canticle chemistry assigns" (107), and "O thou Dirigible, enormous Lounger / Of pendulous auroral beaches" (80). O'Hara responds with lines such as "O sweet neurosis of a may jump" (*FOHCP* 43), "O piano! hire a moving van!" (26), and "O panic of drying mushrooms!" (147). O'Hara likewise explores the humorous possibilities of stringing together Crane-like exclamations: "light bulb! Holy Ghost!" (8), "maelstroms of rhododendrons! / full flowers! round eyes! rush upward! rapture! space!" (69), "God! love! sun!" (29).

Such imitative play is more than superficial. In poems such as "Atlantis" and "Cape Hatteras," Crane pushes traditional Anglo-American poetic language to an extreme that verges on absurdity. In his effort to express the intensity of his emotion and the novelty of his insights, Crane sometimes deforms the ecstatic rhetoric of Keats and Shelley to the point where he hovers between the sublime and the ridiculous, as he does in this description of aerial warfare.

Low, shadowed of the Cape,  
 Regard the moving turrets! From grey decks  
 See scouting griffons rise through gaseous crepe  
 Hung long . . . until a conch of thunder answers

Cloud-belfries, banging, while searchlights, like fencers,  
 Slit the sky's pancreas of foaming anthracite  
 Toward thee, O Corsair of the typhoon,—pilot, hear! (*HCCP* 81)

This “vatic” style taught O'Hara a “new freedom of expression” because he perceived the possibility of exploiting the occasional tastelessness or absurdity of Crane's oracular swagger as a poetic device. In other words, Crane's almost-but-not-quite parodies inspired O'Hara early on to play original, sophisticated, disorienting games with tone. As when reading “Cape Hatteras,” one forever has to ask whether O'Hara is being serious or silly.

Voyagers, here is the map our dear dead king left us: Here the rosary  
 he last spat upon: here his score of *Seraglio*: here his empty purse. Let  
 us pray and meditate always on deep things.

Rhinestones and chancres, twins of our bosoms, Christian constel-  
 lations, resplendent pins, fly on! Dredge for the gold dust in the snow!  
 The blood beneath the ice! A mad mud-junket! (*FOHCP* 8)

In this extract from “Oranges,” O'Hara puckishly mimes yet subverts the grandiloquent prophetic pose of Rimbaud and much subsequent French avant-garde poetry. Notice, though, that the first word “Voyagers” alludes both to Rimbaud's voyager-seer and to the Crane of the poem “Voyages”; both are “dead kings” for O'Hara.<sup>10</sup> Crane often serves as an intermediary between O'Hara and the French tradition in this way, licensing O'Hara to employ French models but also to suspend himself between sincerity and camp. In the middle of a hilarious poem such as “A Terrestrial Cuckoo,” for instance, which owes much to *Le bateau ivre* and surrealism, almost by necessity one finds a send-up of Crane: “Oh Jane, is there no more frontier?” (*FOHCP* 62), which plays off Crane's “are there frontiers” in “Cutty Sark” (*HCCP* 72). Crane's mediation saves O'Hara from becoming one of the “pale Surrealists” that Ashbery belittles in his introduction to O'Hara's poems (viii). Instead, via Crane, who stands as an earlier U.S. reader of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, early O'Hara finds the distance necessary to react creatively to French literature and thus avoid sounding derivative, provincial, or like a Parisian manqué.

As O'Hara worked to craft his own distinctive poetic voice, Crane proved useful in myriad other ways. O'Hara discovered that the earlier poet's writings were an invaluable sourcebook of language and imagery. To this limited extent, their remarkably similar biographies were indubitably an asset to O'Hara, since Crane had already treated many of the urban and erotic themes



that O'Hara wished to explore. For example, his 1954 poem "In the Movies" relies heavily on Crane as a literary precursor to render lyrical his presentation of an anonymous homosexual encounter:

This stranger collects me like a sea-story  
and now I am part of his marine slang.  
Waves break in the theatre  
and flame finds a passage through the stormy straits of my lips.  
(*FOHCP* 208)

O'Hara here alludes to the tale-spinning sailor from Crane's "Cutty Sark." The "I" of that poem meets a drunken sailor in a New York bar in a passage full of homoerotic innuendo ("the rum was Plato in our heads") and ejaculatory imagery (geysers, spiracles, turrets, lava, fingers "shooting," foam). Interwoven with the sailor's wandering reminiscences are the sounds of a jukebox, a "white machine that sings" (*HCCP* 71–72).

For O'Hara, too, a singing machine—a movie projector—provides accompaniment for acts and emotions that keep shading into purely verbal pleasure. Just as the sailor's story in "Cutty Sark" grows in prominence until, in the second half of the poem, the narrative frame falls away entirely in favor of nautical yarns, in "In the Movies" the "sea-story" and the "marine slang" "collect" and absorb the lovers. So, too, the clippers of "Cutty Sark" that "wink round the Horn" become for O'Hara the "passage" of "flame" through the "stormy straits of my lips." In addition, these lines contain any number of other echoes of Crane's poetry: "Passage" from *White Buildings*; the love poem "Voyages," in which the sea encompasses "the wrapt inflections of our love" (*HCCP* 35); "Ave Maria" where the boundless "turning rondure whole" of the oceans are "sun-cusped and zone with modulated fire" (48). Crane's sea, symbol of eros and thanatos, sign of the dissolution of the limits of the self, lends a sublime frame to O'Hara's illicit lovemaking.

One could consider such connections a little far-fetched, since, after all, the ocean has been a favorite topos of writers, romantic or otherwise, since classical times. Why should O'Hara have Crane in mind instead of, say, Coleridge? Yet later in "In the Movies," O'Hara describes oral sex in terms derived wholly from Crane: "the repose of rivers, / the source of warriors, / warriors of the stars which are my sighs" (*FOHCP* 209). In rapid succession he alludes to Crane's "The Repose of Rivers," the mythic Mississippi of "The River," the Indian braves of "The Dance," and the traffic headlights of "Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge" ("immaculate sigh of stars"—*HCCP* 44).

Such quick, compressed references to the earlier poet's work are not un-

usual in O'Hara's *Collected Poems*. For instance, in "To the Mountains in New York," O'Hara concisely writes, "The subway shoots onto a ramp / overlooking the East River, the towers! / the minarets! The bridge" (*FOHCP* 199). In part, he retells the end of "The Tunnel," in which the speaker walks down to "the River that is East" after a subway journey (*HCCP* 112). He also studs his verse with Crane's characteristic exclamation points, includes a Crane-like exotizing touch ("minarets!"), and, in case the reader has missed the point, mentions the title of the earlier poet's book. For O'Hara, Crane's oeuvre becomes almost a lyrical shorthand for certain moods or ideas.

The more one carefully reads O'Hara and Crane in tandem, the more one discovers such moments. Some are so quick and so compressed that an inattentive reader might pass over them without recognizing their import. For instance, in the 1954 lyric "Death," as O'Hara muses on ultimate things, he witnesses "The wind that smiles through the wires" but turns away, declaring, "it's not for me . . . I'm not dead" (*FOHCP* 187). O'Hara here rewrites the famous last line of Crane's "Atlantis," "Whispers antiphonal in azure swing." At the end of that poem, Crane observes wind blowing through the cables of Brooklyn Bridge and rewrites the scene as "swing[ing]" "orphan strings" that produce "Whispers antiphonal" (*HCCP* 108). In "Death," using a characteristic Cranean device—synaesthesia—O'Hara replaces Crane's "orphan" "whispers" (something heard) with another of Crane's favorite eschatological symbols, the "smile" (something seen), which, in such Crane poems as "Lachrymae Christae" and "Voyages" VI, stands for divine recognition of the speaker's searching gaze (20, 39).<sup>11</sup> Vision thus displaces sound in O'Hara's revision of Crane's "Atlantis," but the moral nonetheless remains the same. A poet can have partial access to the eternal but to experience it truly he or she would have to exit time altogether, in other words, would have to die. The living poet ("I'm not dead," as O'Hara bluntly reminds the reader) can do no more than report the bare, uninformative fact of having experienced things transcendent (heard a whisper, glimpsed a smile).

In other poems, O'Hara recycles not so much Crane's symbols as his characteristic diction. The last stanza of the early poem "A Note to Harold Fonden" contains too many hints of Crane for coincidence:

it lingers

just above us and scents everything  
like the spoor of a brave animal. We seed  
the land and its art without being prodigal  
and are ourselves its necessity and flower. (*FOHCP* 34)

O'Hara apparently has in mind lines from "Cape Hatteras" such as "spouting pillars spoor the evening sky" (*HCCP* 78) and "With vast eternity, [thou] dost wield the rebound seed" (82) as well as famous lines from "Voyages" II: "as bells off San Salvador / Salute the crocus lustre of the stars . . . Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal" (35). The underlying erotic metaphor of re-seeding the land perhaps brought Crane to mind; in essence O'Hara is rewriting the mythic-sacrificial ritual of "The Dance."

Although this brand of condensed, frequently obscure allusion to Crane occurs mostly in O'Hara's early work, he never completely ceased using the device. The late, minor lyric "You at the Pump," for example, revisits the same terrain (literally) as "A Note to Harold Fondren." O'Hara observes a "tall man" watering a public garden ("spread[ing] water everywhere for the flowers to drink and enjoy us"). Moved, O'Hara proclaims, "I love you, Pocahontas / where his feet are." He alludes again to "The Dance"'s mythic tale of marriage between the Indian brave Maquokeeta and Pocahontas, the embodiment of the American landscape (*FOHCP* 386). He thereby lends his seemingly casual New York scene an archetypal frame.

O'Hara also includes comparable Cranean moments in his better-known lyrics. For example, in "Ode to Michael Goldberg('s Birth and Other Births)," O'Hara injects the line "being high in the sky / opening fire on Corsairs" (*FOHCP* 295), which revises Crane's ecstatic apostrophe "O Corsair of the typhoon!—pilot, hear!" to a doomed fighter pilot in "Cape Hatteras" (*HCCP* 80). This seeming non sequitur in the ode makes perfect sense if one realizes that O'Hara has placed it between an allusion to Melville ("seeing a (pearl) white whale") and a Gide title ("*The Counterfeiters*"). O'Hara is constructing an implicit genealogy of homoerotic adventure stories. Similarly, Crane's "Ave Maria," a dramatic monologue and prayer by Columbus addressed to the Virgin, is a fitting subtext for O'Hara's witty "Ave Maria," a plea to the "Mothers of America" to let their children embark on their own voyages of discovery, that is, go to the movies and have their first sexual experiences.

Perhaps O'Hara's most profound instance of sustained, direct dialogue with Crane occurs in his oft-commented-upon early masterpiece "In Memory of My Feelings" (1956). "In Memory of My Feelings" compulsively, playfully speeds through snatches of autobiography, pure fancy, and old movies. At times it accelerates into a carousel whirl in which the speaker adopts and tosses off masks at a frenzied pace:

I am a girl walking downstairs  
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall  
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist  
in which a face appears

and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a banana  
 I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a child  
 and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a mountain  
 I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian  
 sleeping on a scalp

and my pony is stamping in the birches,  
 and I've just caught sight of the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*.  
 What land is this, so free? (FOHCP 256)

As Fred Orton has commented, throughout "In Memory of My Feelings" one senses Crane's presence (76). The inclusion here, for instance, of the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria* and the statements slyly evoke "Ave Maria" and *The Bridge* more generally. Moreover, the ecstatic, variable tone of the piece, swinging from the introspective calm of the opening into paranoid fantasies, metaphysical speculation, and absurd lists resembles in a curious way Crane's grab-bag poems like "The River" and "Cape Hatteras," which also (if more tamely) veer across landscape, in and out of different identities, and jump from the beginning of time to its end.<sup>12</sup>

Above all else, O'Hara is indebted to Crane for the controlling metaphor of the poem, the serpent. In lyrics such as "Atlantis," "The River," "The Dance," and "The Wine Menagerie" Crane uses a serpent as a symbol of time ("the serpent . . . Whose skin, facsimile of time unskains" [HCCP 23], "Time like a serpent" [59], and so on). In "Passage," Crane compares a snake's oblique course through a desert to poetry's tragic inability to preserve a moment of mystical insight.

A serpent swam a vertex to the sun  
 —On unpaced beaches leaned its tongue and drummed.  
 What fountains did I hear? what icy speeches?  
 Memory, committed to the page, had broke (22).

As the serpent moves away from the sun, so too does "Memory, committed to the page" lose contact with the source of illumination and inspiration ("fountains"). Crane later revises this image of despair in *The Bridge*, where the union of the serpent and the eagle becomes a recurrent image cluster suggesting the ecstatic collapse of boundaries in the moment of true vision (108), when divisions such as male / female, past / present, subject / object fall away, while "sound and flesh" are led "from time's realm" (107). Time is thus transfigured when the seer is able to "condense eternity" in a moment of insight (44). The role of the true poet, Crane suggests, is to fuse the flight



communion with another. "To live as variously as possible," as O'Hara's poem enjoins, is the route to this transcendence: "to move is to love."

Unlike Crane, O'Hara does not assert his transcendental lesson with the self-confidence of a prophet. Instead, a line break emphatically interrupts the formulation of his "central figure" and sets off "heart" by itself at the end of a line. Why the rupture here, at the "heart" of O'Hara's epiphany? Why, too, the bubbling ghosts? They provide an unexpected third element in O'Hara's poetic marriage of love and time. Do they stand for the memories that "haunt" this primal scene? Although it may seem absurd at first, one of these ghosts may very well be Crane himself. That is, "heart" could refer to Hart. O'Hara often plays games with people's proper names in his poems, whether in acrostics such as "You Are Gorgeous and I'm Coming" or in straightforward puns, as when the sun announces to O'Hara in "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island" that "Frankly, I wanted to tell you / I like your poetry" (306). "In Memory of My Feelings" itself, dedicated to Grace Hartigan, contains the line "Grace / to be born and live as variously as possible" (256), and "Grace," like "heart" later, appears prominently at the end of a line, after a white space. Moreover, Hart Crane, as chapter 1 shows, provides precedent for this sort of a game. For instance, in "Royal Palm, for Grace Hart Crane" Crane puns three times on his mother's first and last names: "the sun's most gracious anchorite," "It grazes the horizon," and "a crown in view" (*HCCP* 122). Crane also puns frequently on his own first name, both in his verse—as in lines such as "seldom was their faith in the heart's right kindness" (196)—and in his letters, where on occasion he signed off with a stylized heart (for example, *O My* 63).

The "central figure" of "In Memory of My Feelings" thus curiously vacillates between symbol and allusion. Is O'Hara reaching out toward transcendence or toward a precursor text? Are the "red ghosts" memories of passionate affairs or are they Maquoqueta and Pocahontas, the Indian spirits of Crane's "The Dance," who act out the mythic union of serpent and eagle? Recycling Crane's "serpent . . . the facsimile of time," O'Hara also finds himself reiterating Hart Crane's language and ideas rather than conveying unmediated experience of a higher order. Here, where O'Hara is most seriously trying to emulate Crane's mythopoesis, his symbolism threatens to come across as more borrowed than novel. His habit of using Crane's language as shorthand in lyrics such as "In the Movies" and "You at the Pump" here nears its logical culmination: barren, obstructive repetition. Too much further in this direction and O'Hara would have begun to employ the "speech in a dead language" that Fredric Jameson has claimed characterizes postmodernism at its most depthless and pastiche-prone (*Postmodernism* 17).

## Just a Second

O'Hara himself appears to have recognized that "In Memory of My Feelings" had led him into something of a literary cul-de-sac. Afterward he avoided centering a poem on one of Crane's characteristic symbols. (Indeed, he tended to avoid symbols altogether, symbols, that is, of the kind beloved by the New Critics, metaphors or conceits subject to extended exegesis. Marjorie Perloff's "New Thresholds, Old Anatomies" undertakes a sustained analysis of O'Hara's 1961 lyric "Essay on Style" in order to illustrate this component of his poetics.) O'Hara never, however, abandoned Crane's themes. Time's passage and its relation to art remains an *idée fixe* for O'Hara,<sup>13</sup> and he turns again and again to Crane's poetry to learn how to express his twin fears of stasis and death. He comes to see *The Bridge* not as a paradigmatic quest for God's love but as a model for how to capture in words the vertigo of living moment to moment in the uncertain whirl of the modern world.

To understand how O'Hara learns to go beyond the poetics of "In Memory of My Feelings," it is necessary to backtrack to 1952–53, years in which some of his writings began to investigate an alternative solution to the problem of time, one that centers on methods of composition rather than symbols. He writes three long, wildly experimental poems—"Easter," "Hatred," and "Second Avenue"—in a search to develop a poetics of process comparable to the action painting of the abstract expressionists. They are painterly attempts to make "the poem . . . *be* the subject," to make words and their arrangement the subject matter of verse (*FOHCP* 497; emphasis in original). Reminiscent of Pollock's desire to be "in" the painting, O'Hara experiments with how to make process itself paramount, not completion or coherence. He types "Hatred" on one long roll of paper (527); in "Easter" he imitates the ever-expanding catalog poems of the surrealists and Dadaists (Gooch 226); and he composes "Second Avenue" in competition with Kenneth Koch's writing of *When the Sun Tried to Go On* to see who could sustain a single poem for more lines (Koch 204–5). Just as he seeks to "save the serpent" in "In Memory of My Feelings," in these earlier works he strives to reproduce in art the moving, changing instability of experience.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, just as Crane stands behind "In Memory of My Feelings," so too is he a presence in O'Hara's "action" poems. *The Bridge* offers O'Hara examples of how to explode the contained lyric of New Criticism and reach for a new, more capacious style. The last word of the first stanza of "Hatred" is "cranes" (*FOHCP* 117), and the poem is full of references to Indians, America, "new myths" (120), Christ, and other favorite Crane topics. Individual lines could have been written by Crane himself—for instance, "a coronet of rene-

gades dangling gold in the sky / like fountains and arenas on which feasts the cruel azure" (120). In such language one hears the influence of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and "Voyages."

"Easter" also touches on many of Crane's themes, such as ships and sailors, and as a whole perhaps owes much to "Cape Hatteras," in addition to the French poems such as "Zone" that more obviously inspire it. Crane's poem, like O'Hara's, takes shape around a litany of crazy names. In just two pages occur at least eleven metaphors for a squadron of airplanes, ranging from "Tellurian wind-sleuths" to (this author's personal favorite) "moon-ferrets" (*HCCP* 79–80). When Kenneth Koch praised the "curious new American" expressions in "Easter" such as "roses of Pennsylvania" (*FOHCP* 526), he should have been aware that Hart Crane had already sung of "Potomac lilies," "Pontiac rose," and "Klondike edelweiss" in "Cape Hatteras" (*HCCP* 82). Crane's verbal richness underlies O'Hara's. So, too, O'Hara's overt campiness, whether expressed through the slang of gay culture in lines like "the night like I love it all cruisy and nelly" (*FOHCP* 97) or through silly juxtaposition in a line like "O the glassy towns are fucked by yaks" (96), may derive ultimately from Crane's olio of elation and self-parody in his late poem: "O thou Dirigible, enormous Lounger / Of pendulous auroral beaches,—satellited wide / By convoy planes" (*HCCP* 80).

Crane may again be serving as an intermediary between O'Hara and the French because "Cape Hatteras" more nearly approximates O'Hara's sensibility than the psychoanalytically informed agenda of surrealism.<sup>15</sup> Like many gay men in the '50s, O'Hara distrusted the contemporary Freudianism that considered homosexuality a mental illness and justified the passage of many new laws against sodomy during the decade.<sup>16</sup> In "The Critic," for example, O'Hara wittily (if more than a tad misogynistically) dismisses "Eve's first / confusion between penises and snakes" (*FOHCP* 48). Crane's "Cape Hatteras" presents an image of liberation and resurrection independent of the Freudian id, hence a vision with which O'Hara could more readily identify.

And now, launched in abysmal cupolas of space,  
Toward endless terminals, Easters of speeding light—  
Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace . . .  
To course that span of consciousness thou'st named  
The Open Road (*HCCP* 83)

As if in response, O'Hara makes his own poem "The Open Road," representative of the "abysmal," "speeding," infinitely variable "span of consciousness," not the unconscious. In an October 1948 journal entry, O'Hara had



written “one must not be stifled in a closed social or artistic railway station waiting for the train; I’ve a long long way to go, and I’m late already” (qtd. in Kikel 337). *The Bridge*, Crane’s self-declared “epic of the modern consciousness” (*HCCPSLP* 252) points the way toward the freedom he desires, linguistic, sexual, and psychological. The earlier gay poet’s writing helped free O’Hara from “stifling” convention—programmatically psychoanalysis and surrealism included—and it hinted at acceptable new approaches toward the self and temporality.

“Second Avenue” is a critical transitional poem in O’Hara’s continuing search for “The Open Road.” It is an avalanche of disconnected, often ludicrous statements that stubbornly refuse to present any coherent narrative or description:

He vaporously nags down the quoits. I might have to suffer  
for another year. I might severally dismiss my trysts, la!  
as the fire-eaters collide. See, lumbering dimly: the quest  
for Japanese deer, lazy, mean, truncated. See not the ray.  
Jealousy bans raffles, lumia advances, ditto March’s amber,  
pending quietly Negro lariat tumbling derailed ‘de’ whores.  
Jumping ripples pour forth Rienzi. A present: community, Alp,  
a jiffy immune piping in a boat of vice about dumbness.  
My villain accommodates a Chinese scent to jar the bone-on,  
maybe jetting beasts parse what we hesitantly choose,  
nipping oval appetites changing and quieting in a Paris  
of voluptuary chases, lays, choices, what we know and savor. (*FOHCP* 149)

“Second Avenue” offers twelve more clotted, outrageous pages in this same vein. Although extremely difficult to follow or to parse, it is not as random as one might at first think, nor is it as exceptional a work within O’Hara’s oeuvre as one might at first imagine. In several respects, it resembles his earlier Crane-influenced work. Its first three lines, in fact, establish this connection, since, as Marjorie Perloff points out, they possess a “bardic intensity and aureate diction that recall Hart Crane” (*Frank O’Hara* 70): “Quips and players, seeming to vend astringency off-hours, / celebrate diced excesses and sardonics, mixing pleasure, / as if proximity were staring at the margin of a plea” (*FOHCP* 139). In his opening, O’Hara could almost be writing a pastiche of the outlandish language used in Crane’s “The Wine Menagerie” to describe patrons at a bar:

Each chamber, transept, coins some squint,  
Remorseless lines, minting their separate wills—

Poor streaked bodies wreathing up and out,  
Unwitting the stigma that each turn repeals. (*HCCP* 23)

Throughout the remainder of "Second Avenue," as in much of his early poetry, O'Hara intermittently, gleefully parodies Crane's distinctive style, especially his habitual exclamations, bizarre rhetorical questions, and apostrophes (for instance, "Cantankerous month! have you ever moved more slowly into surf? / Oh Bismarck! Fortitude! . . . Oh March!"—*FOHCP* 147). Moreover, the eleven-part poem returns continually to "Cape Hatteras" as an intertext. Like Crane, O'Hara addresses Whitman: "Oh Leaves of Grass! o Sylvette! oh Basket Weaver's Conference!" (149). O'Hara also includes a number of unusual words that appear at striking moments in that Crane poem, among them "abysmal," "cumulus," "pillars," and "Sanskrit."<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the airplanes of "Cape Hatteras" become the pivotal unifying element in "Second Avenue." The first mention appears at the end of the first section—"the man crashes, a crater, / from the heavens" (150)—a line reminiscent of the wreck of Crane's Falcon Ace. Thereafter, airplanes recur prominently in the third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eleventh parts of O'Hara's poem.

Unlike "In Memory of My Feelings," however, "Second Avenue" does not rely on an image of Crane's within a consistent symbolic order. "Lindy Has Made It!" (145) does not have much to do with the "tubby little planes flopping / competitively into the wind sleeve" (143) or the "airlines provocateur" (145) or "my airplanes known as 'Banana Line Incorporeality'" (150). Rather, the periodic reappearance of an airplane plays the role of something familiar and hence stabilizing in the midst of the poem's cornucopia of the absurd, what Perloff calls a "fantasy landscape" in which "one cannot distinguish subject from object, interior from exterior, past from present or future, time from space" (*Frank O'Hara* 71). In a very different way from "In Memory of my Feelings," then, "Second Avenue" achieves a solution to the problem of time. It strives to collapse all time into a "surface," a here and now of the artwork. It thereby makes the poem less linear and more spatial, less a sequence of acts or observations than an allover work like, perhaps, Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* (1950), its muddle and its wild pyrotechnics drawn into a pattern by a lattice of recurrent gestures. "Second Avenue" succeeds in Crane's quest to "condense eternity" insofar as it succeeds in establishing a "fantasy landscape" wherein things reappear without notice, without time advancing or receding.

This spatial metaphor, though, can be misleading—"less linear, more spatial" does not imply that "Second Avenue" escapes linearity as such. It remains a poem, and to that extent, the proper analogy must be to a time-bound art. In "Second Avenue" O'Hara has, in essence, applied to his own

poem one of the prime compositional strategies of *The Bridge*. As chapter 5 has elucidated, Crane builds his epic out of chains of association. The Virgin becomes Pocahontas becomes Eve becomes Magdalene. Boats become trains become subways. *The Bridge* uses this mode of repetition not only as an architectonic principle but also as an attempted solution to a philosophical dilemma, namely the conflict between poetry as a time-bound, linear art and its aspirations to give access to the eternal. Divine truth never changes; it transcends mutability. Poets have the difficult task of providing readers with access to that unalterable, ineffable realm from within time. And since each passing moment is necessarily unique—for Crane, as for O'Hara, change never ceases—to remain valid the transcendental, too, has to manifest in ever-new guises. Simple repetition, without some degree of external variation, implies fixity and thus also the failure to capture the living, evolving myth in art.

Given both O'Hara's abiding interest in music—he entered Harvard intending to study for a B.A. in music, and in New York he regularly wrote reviews of avant-garde pieces by such composers as Morton Feldman and John Cage—and given his fear of stasis, it was perhaps inevitable that he would begin to perceive the possibilities in Crane's technique. By the time of "Good Friday Noon" (1958), O'Hara seems to recognize the distinction between Crane's helpful, musically inspired formal experiments and his potentially backward-looking *symbolisme*:

It's as good a day as any  
to decide whether you like  
myth or Minuit. Is myth  
drag-assed and scarred or  
is it lip-to-lip with Manhattan?  
I don't know, I just like  
Wagner, that's all, I'd put  
up with anything if the  
orchestra's big enough. (*FOHCP* 299)

Surely in response to Crane—notice the mixture of Wagner, New York, and grade-school U.S. history (Peter Minuit)—O'Hara endorses music, not myth. How the music is performed ("the orchestra"), not its message, matters, not Valhalla but the leitmotif. He refuses to speculate whether myth and Manhattan can coexist. He abandons *The Bridge's* grand gamble as irrelevant to experiencing or expressing the vitality of the here and now.

Instead, he sets about experimenting with verse based on Crane-like chains

of associations. "A Step Away from Them," which follows "In Memory of My Feelings" in the *Collected Poems*, returns to the ideas of time, the self, and death but treats these subjects through a series of carefully ordered metonymic links. Just as "Second Avenue" depends for coherence on the reappearance of airplanes, in this much sparer poem references to time organize and control what otherwise appears casual and random: "lunch hour," "wrist-watches," "Times Square," "12:40 of / a Thursday," "daylight." The mentions of Pollock's and Bunny's deaths and the demolition of the "Manhattan Storage Warehouse" fit naturally within such a meticulously framed itinerary (257–58). Each moment follows naturally from the previous and points to the next, none the same, but they all cohere via repetition with variation. O'Hara's "I do this, I do that" poems, which one would assume have nothing in common with Crane, turn out to have profound formal similarities.

O'Hara reinvents this strategy, however, and raises it to a new level. The "Ode (to Joseph LeSueur) on the Arrow that Flieth by Day" is a virtuoso instance of composition through Crane-like metonymic linkages. The prospect of sending a telegram via "Western Union" to his mother leads O'Hara by word association to think of NATO and the Soviets. Shaping the resultant narrative is a sequence of allusions to the cold war: "Russia," "czar," "inter-continental ballistics missile," "Prague," "death of a nation," "Mare nostrum" (this last via the idea of imperial power). Many other associative chains join or depart from this one. One could trace the language of cold war U.S. morality: "Sunday," "Mother," "God," "moral issues." The "party" in the first line perhaps suggests Communists but also prepares one for such entertainment references as "DREAM TRIP" and "PIANO FANTASY" and the movie title encrypted in "death of a nation." "Mare nostrum," possibly a buried pun on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, may suggest by way of the cold war and the classics the idea of "hubris," with the consequent juxtaposition of an ocean and a term from Greek tragedy leading naturally to the final image of "leaning on the prow," which could have been lifted from the *Odyssey* or the *Argonautica*. A poem that may seem inconsequential is anything but. It consists of a "network of associations" every bit as densely textured as Crane's "Atlantis," even if O'Hara's language is more colloquial and his structure less forthrightly poetic (Irwin 218).

By the time of O'Hara's late poem "Biotherm" (1962) he is able to meditate on Crane's influence from the point of view of a writer who has moved beyond apprenticeship. "Biotherm"'s sprawl is another attempt at being "in" the poem, like "Second Avenue," and like those early poems, as it moves toward "epic" length it reverts to a consideration of O'Hara's predecessor. In the work's concluding page, O'Hara writes

endlessly unraveling itself before the Christopher Columbus Tavern  
 quite a series was born as where I am going is to  
 Quo Vadis for lunch  
 out there in the blabbing wind and glass c'est l'azur (FOHCP 448)

Just as in *The Bridge* the Christopher Columbus of "Ave Maria" reappears as "Columbus Circle" in "The Tunnel," here he becomes "Christopher Columbus Tavern." For O'Hara, whether the name of "the Great Navigator" recurs as a street intersection or a pub, the symbolic, historical significance of the name is emptied out in favor of its musicality, its value as a unifying motif. In the process of creating such linguistic, metonymic linkages, "quite a series" is "born": concepts, symbols, and myths "endlessly unravel" as words are redeployed, made new. Within this sensibility, "Quo Vadis" need not signify Peter's encounter with Christ on the road to Rome; it could just as well be the name of a tavern, like Columbus's. Here, of course, O'Hara differs from Crane, who fully in the romantic tradition aspired to capture in his verse the sacred and the ineffable. In direct contrast to his more respectful treatment of the same line in his early poem "Death," in "Biotherm" O'Hara quite consciously reduces the mysterious "whispers antiphonal" of *The Bridge's* final line to "Biotherm"'s "blabbing wind."

And yet "Out there in the blabbing wind" there is still "l'azur," in some fashion "whispers antiphonal" yet "in azure swing." In his subtle revision of *The Bridge's* final line, O'Hara both acknowledges his debt to his precursor and distinguishes their poetic projects. Whereas "In Memory of My Feelings" hesitates over whether it expresses an epiphany or merely recirculates "The Dance," in this later poem O'Hara boldly signals a move from Crane's aesthetic to one closer to Mallarmé's by translating "azure" into French. He shifts the emphasis from revelatory vision to the purity of artifice. For O'Hara Art itself is "out there" and somehow provides the answers. O'Hara carefully, selectively identifies with one aspect of Crane's poetics, his passionate devotion to the stuff of art. For O'Hara, such Cranean virtues as honed technique, an attention to process, and unfettered creativity—not Crane's neo-Platonic mysticism—offer a measure of transcendence.

## Building Tone

"Art itself provides the answers"—this last point requires further emphasis and elaboration before this chapter draws to a close, as it is critical to Frank O'Hara's contribution to U.S. letters. Michael Davidson has recently argued that O'Hara has a proclivity for "verbal drag," that is, the energetic

adornment of the everyday and the ephemeral with showy rhetoric; he further contends that this aspect of O'Hara's poetry differentiates him from favored precursors, such as Walt Whitman, who displayed marked distaste for such "dandified" and "effeminate" extravagance ("When the World" 233–35). Davidson misses the crucial intermediary here between Whitman and O'Hara—Hart Crane—the poet who taught O'Hara the virtues and powers of high artifice.<sup>18</sup>

As part 1 illustrated, "verbal drag" is a prime principle of Crane's poetics. Unlike Whitman (and unlike W. C. Williams, another influence on O'Hara),<sup>19</sup> whether Crane is writing about a burlesque show ("National Winter Garden"), a Chaplin film ("Chaplinesque"), a Times Square jazz club ("For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," part 2), or the Wright brothers ("Cape Hatteras"), he lets fly poetic diction in all its glory. He insists upon poetry's capacity to elevate the real and the commonplace into highest artifice. He risks apostrophizing machine parts ("O murmurless and shined / In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy"—HCCP 79) and apotheosizing the Mississippi Delta ("The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow, / Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below"—61) in language once reserved for Madonnas, kings, and nature.

O'Hara's genius is to recognize that this kind of unquestioning belief in the transfigurative power of unabashed artifice has important consequences for a poem's tone. That is, if a poet shares Crane's "lavish heart" (HCCP 32) and happily tarts up any and all subject matters (producing "verbal drag"), then he or she will undoubtedly bewilder his or her readers. (As O'Hara did his friend John Button one evening after a Judy Garland show at the Palace Theater, when, in a matter-of-fact manner, he declared Garland "*better* than Picasso" [Berkson and LeSueur 42; emphasis in original].) Judged according to any rules of decorum or standards of evaluation whatsoever, poetry of the "lavish heart" will seem to exhibit a wide range of matches between the level of diction and the thing, person, or event described. Hence, most readers will feel a desire to discriminate among these different poems, assigning them to different categories ranging from "brilliant" to "apropos" to "tacky" to "sick." In the process, these readers will probably come to possess grave doubts about the poet's taste. Alternatively, given the evident enthusiasm that went into crafting these poems, and given that in many cases this enthusiasm will seem misplaced or incomprehensible, some readers might begin trying to separate out the "sincere" poems, where diction matches subject, and the "parodic" poems, where style and content seem patently at odds.

R. W. B. Lewis's otherwise brilliant study of Crane's poetry is exemplary in this regard. He valiantly endeavors to read *The Bridge* as falling into sincere

and parodic halves. He contends that the sacrificial ritual of “The Dance” is a kind of *ne plus ultra*. He maintains that after “The Dance,” after truth has been revealed in its fullness, *The Bridge* can only muster unstable ironies and debased parodies (320). Lewis’s schema would assign the riotously over-the-top dramatic monologue “Ave Maria” to the sincere first half, in which Crane is searching for truth, and “Atlantis” to the parodic second half. Such a division makes little sense. Compare these two passages, the former describing the Atlantic Ocean and the latter the Brooklyn Bridge:

This turning rondure whole, this crescent ring  
 Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire  
 Like pearls that whisper through the Doge’s hands (*HCCP* 48)

~

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. (105)

In both cases, Crane is intoxicated with song. In both cases the tropes are forced or awkward. The diction is aureate, the pose ecstatic, the attention to glittery surfaces equal. Who is to say which “whisper” is more sincere? *The Bridge* is structured according to principles of reiteration. The second passage, from “Atlantis,” repeats and reshuffles the first, in “Ave Maria.” Any distinction in tone is in the eye of the beholder, not the language or the poem, which pursues its constant quest to capture eternity in extravagant language.

O’Hara at his best shares with Crane a faith in poetic artifice’s indiscriminately redemptive power.<sup>20</sup> He chooses to write in such a way that the following paradoxical maxim holds true: O’Hara is always serious, even, or especially, at his silliest.<sup>21</sup> That is, whether writing about Billie Holiday, Nikita Khrushchev, “a dyke bar” (*FOHCP* 286), or “jumbies” (15), he sees himself as rescuing a stray bit of the world from time’s flux and weaving it into his web of metonymic linkage. “I am needed by things as the sky must be by the earth,” he writes in the poem “Meditations in an Emergency” (197). In *Robert Motherwell*, he further specifies what he sees as the artist’s essential vocation and why “emergency” is the proper word to describe the situation that confronts him or her:

Underlying, and indeed burgeoning within, every great work of the abstract expressionists . . . exists the traumatic consciousness of emergency and crisis experienced as personal event, the artist assuming responsibility for being, however accidentally, alive here and now. (8)

In O'Hara's view, the artist is "responsible" for the "here and now" as he or she experiences it, regardless of what that "here and now" might be—whether it includes jujubies, porcelain tigers, or Willem de Kooning. The nature and character of a given moment is unpredictable ("accidental"), but that fact, the fact of contingency, does not obviate the artist's duty to distill art from each passing moment. Note that O'Hara does not enjoin the artist to record each passing moment. The passing moment "underlies" and "burgeons within" the "great work." The upshot of this aesthetic dictate is a "traumatic consciousness." That is, the artist wants to redeem time by making it the subject of art. He or she wishes to weave each moment, as it passes, into a corresponding, ever-lengthening skein of poetry. Yet, tragically, each present inevitably gives way to the next instant, and the labor of producing art must occupy some duration, even if, like O'Hara, one writes poems with extreme rapidity while also eating lunch or carrying on conversations on the telephone. Not every instant, then, can be redeemed. Some must be lost as the artist makes art. Indeed, given the infinitesimal length of each "present," the proportion of lost to saved moments must make the total of the latter seem paltry at best. O'Hara's "traumatic consciousness" is conscious above all of the futility of its appointed task. No wonder O'Hara titled at least eighty-two lyrics simply "Poem."<sup>22</sup> The title is, on one hand, a palm of victory—here is a moment won for art—and, on the other hand, a concession of the limited scale of the victory—for every isolated, enumerable poem, so many *other* things come into being and pass away. The number eighty-two would have to be multiplied to infinity before O'Hara could claim absolute victory.

The thoroughness with which O'Hara assimilated and revised Crane's poetics, and the consequences that this process had for his form and his characteristic tone, sharply distinguish his engagement with Crane from that of his contemporaries, who, as discussed in chapter 6, often found Crane the myth more inspirational than Crane the poet. A brief comparison between O'Hara and another gay poet and ardent Crane aficionado, Allen Ginsberg, can concisely illustrate this point. When Crane enters Ginsberg's verse, he does so on occasions like the following, in verse that is too blunt, too frankly autobiographical, and too roughened by political outrage for one ever to confuse the results with O'Hara's brand of Cranean poetry:

Entering Minetta's soft yellow chrome, to the acrid bathroom  
 22 years ago a gold kid wrote "human-kindness" contrasting  
 "humankind-ness" on enamel urinal where Crane's match skated—  
 Christmas subway, lesbian slacks, friend bit someone's earlobe off  
 tore gold ring from queer ear, weeping, vomited—  
 My first drunk nite flashed here, Joe Gould's beard gray



(“a professional bore” said Bill cruelly)—but as I was less than twenty,  
 New scene rayed eternal—caricatures of ancient comedians  
 framed over checkertabled booths, first love struck my heart heavy  
 prophecy of *THIS MOMENT* I looked in the urinal mirror returning decades  
 late same heavy honey in heart—bearded hairy bald with age (*Collected* 425)

These lines from “The Old Village Before I Die” allude to a vivid but cryptic passage in Hart Crane’s “The Tunnel” concerning anonymous sex in public rest rooms (“love / A burnt match skating in a urinal”—*HCCP* 98–99). For Ginsberg, then, as for O’Hara in “In the Movies,” Crane is a Virgil of the urban homosexual underworld. But whereas O’Hara in “In the Movies” talks dreamily about “repose of rivers” and “sigh of stars,” Ginsberg recounts a horrific, garbled anecdote about gay bashing. Whereas O’Hara dwells upon the sweet moment of embrace, Ginsberg’s “THIS MOMENT” is one of utter disillusionment. He sees that he is “hairy bald with age” and that the “heavy honey” of love no longer provokes a “New scene rayed eternal.”

The difference between “The Old Village Before I Die” and “In the Movies” hinges on these writers’ attitude toward time. O’Hara’s poetry tends to “exist in a continuous present that engulfs the reader” (Porter 122). He sweeps a reader up into the now of his artifice. Ginsberg has a more conventional sense of history as an always-onrushing force, to which a poet can respond variously but decisively, whether by chronicling its consequences (*Fall of America*), lamenting its brutality (*Kaddish*), or posing utopian, visionary alternatives (“Howl” part 3; the end of “Wichita Vortex Sutra”). In O’Hara’s “continuous present” a scene like Ginsberg’s would be impossible to stage. A poem like “In Memory of My Feelings” flits through O’Hara’s past selves with too much rapidity to settle into a sustained, conventional *senex* topos.

O’Hara would also never dwell upon an act like biting someone’s earlobe off—an act so violent, so definitive, and so base that it would likely arrest the movement of his verse. When ugly actions do enter his poetry, he sometimes manages to incorporate them into the weave of his metonymic linkages, as he does with the lines “Miles Davis was clubbed 12 / times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop” in “Personal Poem” (*FOHCP* 335). In such cases, the victim of the violence takes on a heroic cast. “Personal Poem” thus succeeds in portraying Miles Davis as a martyr to mundane hate. In other poems, however, the violence violates the push-and-pull that keeps the surface moving. One much-commented-upon passage in “Biotherm,” for instance, includes statements like “better a faggot than a farthead” and “if I thought you were queer I’d kill you” (*FOHCP* 441–42). Some poets—Allen Ginsberg, for one, but latterly also Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein—effortlessly

make use of such language for aesthetic and political ends. In O'Hara's case, the tone is all wrong. The hate and the profanity act like bricks thrown on a bedsheet. They weight down and distort the fabric of the writing.

The same would be true of a line like “tore gold ring from queer ear”—not that the line lacks artistry. The thudding monosyllables, the newspaper headline-like syntactical compression, and the insistent rhyme (tore / queer / ear) are admirably effective. But it is the wrong kind of artistry, a brutal mismatch of art and subject matter calculated to induce nausea. O’Hara’s leanings are toward the high style, toward reverie and ecstasy, toward operatic tragedy and the Pindaric ode. “Tore gold ring from queer ear”—O’Hara’s tenet that “there is no aspect (or for that matter artifact) of modern life which can *not* become art” (*Standing* 149, emphasis in original) may hold true, but O’Hara on his own was probably not capable of transforming every “aspect of modern life” into art. Jeremiahs are necessary complements to Pindars and Petronius Arbiters. Ginsbergs need O’Haras, and vice versa.

Even when they fail to understand each other. Ginsberg's elegy for O'Hara, "City Midnight Junk Strains," is a strangely insensitive, leaden piece, summing up his dead friend as "The gaudy poet," "Chatty prophet," and "Curator of funny emotions to the mob" (*Collected* 457-59). Ginsberg and O'Hara simply could not have read Crane in the same way. Ginsberg's sense of historical, political mission meant that his Crane was a national prophet:

Johnson was angry with Fulbright  
for criticizing his war.  
And Hart Crane's myth and Whitman's—  
What'll happen to that?

The Karma

accumulated bombing Vietnam  
The Karma bodies napalm-burned (451–52)

In contrast, O'Hara's Crane is about risk and about the simultaneous journey into and out of the self that is the essence of writing poetry. O'Hara's admiration for Crane was so personal, so powerful, that it could, paradoxically, even threaten the very gift that Crane had given him: the ability to exalt the things of the world indiscriminately, quickly. That is, in his love for Crane, O'Hara could be tempted toward an idolatry that, like horror or hate, might "freeze" the poem and impede its forward progress:

I to you and you to me the endless oceans of  
dilapidated crossing



etching, collage, comic strip, statement for a symposium, an exchange of letters in which the correspondents assumed imaginary personae, simply being the subject of a painting, sculpture, photograph, drawing, or sketch. (172–73)

(LeSueur also remembers how O'Hara successfully pushed him, despite his egregious lack of talent, into writing a forgettable TV drama and a "sex-obsessed penny-dreadful" titled *Always Love a Stranger* [173].) The cumulative results of O'Hara's advocacy are extraordinary. Russell Ferguson's 1999 exhibition "In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, revealed just how *much* art O'Hara's ceaseless activity created, abetted, accompanied, or inspired. By no means limited to the artists most often affiliated with O'Hara in the secondary criticism—Joe Brainard, Norman Bluhm, Jane Freilicher, Michael Goldberg, Grace Hartigan, Alfred Leslie, Fairfield Porter, and Larry Rivers—the show was a veritable who's who of the New York art world of the time, also featuring Elaine de Kooning, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Claes Oldenburg, and Jackson Pollock.

Lytle Shaw, in his on-line essay "On Coterie: Frank O'Hara," rightly cautions against reading O'Hara's concern with intimate community as "an attempt to freeze time, to repress temporality and loss by filling these voids imaginatively with the would-be presence of a secure identity within a coterie." It had nothing to do with "freez[ing] time" or "repress[ing] temporality." On the contrary, he prodded himself and others into offsetting the "voids" of the lost past "imaginatively" (and not "securely") by whatever means available. A futile, impossible struggle, one might object. Surely so. It is designedly an agon terminable only by death. But as chapter 3 reveals, improvisation, incandescence, and irrational exuberance are the defining attributes of a Cranean aesthetic. One could deem it a death wish. One can, however, alternatively consider it a mode of living, and living as fully, or, as O'Hara preferred it, "as variously as possible" (*FOHCP* 256). O'Hara's struggle as a poet to keep things moving ("to move is to love" [256]) impelled him, and any others whom he could persuade to accompany him, beyond the safe boundaries of restricted economies into the gloriously wasteful logic of a dispersive general economy.<sup>23</sup> As Crane puts it in "Voyages" II, "Bequeath us to no earthly shore until / Is answered in the vortex of our grave / The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise" (*HCCP* 35).

O'Hara's ethos of community does not, in the end, align well with the practicalities of community among the New Americans that have been ana-

lyzed by Maria Damon, Michael Davidson, Daniel Kane, and Libbie Rifkin. Gender, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, and sexuality—the rubrics favored by contemporary cultural critics—are rather beside the point, since the dilemma that funds communal action is not social but existential, that is, a “traumatic consciousness” based on a personal confrontation with mortality. Anyone, in theory at least, could join O’Hara’s cohort of incandescence. But in practice, O’Hara was stuck negotiating the cliques and countercliques of a competitive poetry scene whose identity politics were prominent, troubling, and unavoidable. In that context, Hart Crane was an embarrassment, ambivalently a signifier of macho togetherness and of castration anxiety. O’Hara responded by being “Cranean” in his artistry and in his utopian dreaming while avoiding the albatross of the label “Hart Crane.”

## Bob Kaufman's Crane

The last two chapters have investigated Hart Crane's influence on the New American Poetry in general and on Paul Blackburn and Frank O'Hara specifically. The inquiry has emphasized community formation—in theory, in rhetoric, and in practice—in order to highlight the instability, mutability, and resilience of an author's life and works through time, as well as their dependency on local, particular discourses, conditions, and personalities for their shape, character, and consequences. To speak of “strong” or “weak” readings of earlier poets, as Harold Bloom does, makes little sense when so much more is at stake in, and implicated in, an encounter between two writers than mere oedipal confrontation. O'Hara's relative reticence about Crane in his public pronouncements, for example, could be compared to Wallace Stevens's caginess about writers who had influenced him—a sign for Bloom of Stevens's “strong,” transumptive process of absorbing and reinventing his precursors.<sup>1</sup> But such an argument would have to overlook O'Hara's difficulties in squaring his Cranean poetics with a social network in which “Crane” signified things other than a bundle of technical stratagems, aesthetic standards, and ethical-philosophical principles.

While thus departing from traditional, genealogical “influence” studies in certain respects, the last two chapters still, however, have at their core a series of analyses illustrating indebtedness of later poets to an earlier one. Indebtedness, though, is only one possible relationship between two writers. To speak of a debt is to imply an obligation. Blackburn and O'Hara, for example, could be presumed to owe Crane some degree of gratitude, good will, or recognition because he provides them with formal and thematic models that they choose to imitate, echo, or update. Can one, though, speak of a “debt” when later writers reject what earlier ones advocate, when they choose to

write otherwise? Intertextual encounters can, in fact, proceed in any number of ways, founded in affects ranging from curiosity to indifference to hostility, and can take place under many possible circumstances, literary apprenticeship perhaps being among the least likely or common.

This chapter furthers part 3's interrogation of "influence" by pushing it onto the terrain of negative modeling and miscommunication. Like the previous two chapters, it recounts how a midcentury U.S. avant-garde poet—Bob Kaufman (1925–86)—interpreted the life and works of Hart Crane, with the focus remaining on Crane's reception within the milieu of the New American Poetry. Kaufman, though, exhibits a more ambiguous relationship to both Crane and the New American Poetry than either O'Hara or Blackburn. He was omitted from Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* anthology, for instance, just as he has been omitted (until recently) from most popular and academic accounts of his immediate literary context, the 1950s and '60s North Beach, San Francisco, Beat poetry scene. An African American writer, he stood (and continues to stand) at a remove from the white colleagues (Burroughs, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Kerouac) that, for most contemporary Beat enthusiasts, define the literary movement. It is clear that Hart Crane served the New Americans as a signifier both of community and its limits; Kaufman, already highly sensitive to the politics of difference in the North Beach scene, was well positioned to appreciate, and to critique, Crane's role as a badge of membership.

By introducing the problem of race, this chapter harks back to part 1 and its demonstration of author-centered literary criticism's capacity to resist normative or stabilizing deployments of rubrics such as nation, sexuality, and periodization. Scholars such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Aldon Lynn Nielsen, and Michael North have argued that the failure-prone, fitful, and circuitous (non)conversations that U.S. poets have attempted across racial lines rank among the most important subjects in twentieth-century literary history.<sup>2</sup> Reconstructing such exchanges helps chart the many intimate ways in which race shapes and is shaped by literary activity. Moreover, by directing attention to particular texts, people, and events, such inquiry highlights the contingency, multiplicity, and mutability of race, its manifestation in and through myriad (social / intertextual / interpersonal / political / poetic) connections, misconnections, resistances, and silencings. Lastly, such a literary-historical enterprise provides an opportunity to investigate the temporality of race, its never-innocent shifts to and from the fore, from one register to another, as people interact. This chapter, as it works toward these goals, will proceed differently from the previous two. Before discussing Kaufman's

approach to Crane, it will begin by sketching out Crane's own (non)contributions to understanding the relationship between race, community, and poetics.

## Low Road

Sometime in 1928, Hart Crane assembled a forty-five page typescript draft of *The Bridge*. It contains in toto all the individual lyrics completed by that date, as well as entries describing the unfinished pieces that would round out the collection. Brom Weber speculates that Crane sent this manuscript to his patron Otto Kahn as an interim report on the book's progress.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, it offers the clearest available statement on Crane's intended final design for his epic before Harry and Caresse Crosby coaxed him into publishing a somewhat rushed, truncated version.

The 1928 table of contents divides the book into ten sections: "Ave Maria," "Powhatan's Daughter," "Cutty Sark," "Cape Hatteras," "Three Songs," "The Cyder Cask," "The Calgary Express," "1927 Whistles," "The Tunnel," and "Atlantis." Four of these sections, though, had yet to be written: "Cape Hatteras," "The Cyder Cask," "The Calgary Express," and "1927 Whistles." By the 1930 Black Sun Press edition of *The Bridge*, Crane had managed to polish off "Cape Hatteras" and "The Cyder Cask" (retitled "Quaker Hill"). "The Calgary Express" and "1927 Whistles," however, were dropped entirely. No draft of either lyric survives.

What would *The Bridge* have looked like if Crane had possessed the time, resolve, health, and inspiration to fulfill his 1928 scheme? He explains that "1927 Whistles" would have been "a phantasy in which the News Years [*sic*] whistles lead a dweller of the tenements into a dream-world in which the Great Chan presides, full of all manner of strange inventions, music, etc." He offers, too, its future epigraph, a line he credits to Marco Polo: "And there was such a beating of the cymbals and drums, / and such singing, that it was wonderful to hear" (*The Bridge* 33). As described, this lyric would have fit smoothly into several of the running chains of association in *The Bridge*: skewed cityscapes, brash sounds, and Orientalist longings for Cathay. "1927 Whistles" would also have changed the epic's trajectory and pacing. The demonic subway ride of "The Tunnel" would have been bookended by dreamy, heady portraits of New York instead of conveying readers from the upstate anti-idyll "Quaker Hill" to its urban inversion, the apocalyptic lyric "Atlantis." The originally envisioned A-B-A presentation of New York (above ground / below / above) and the corresponding emotional arc (heaven / hell / heaven)



is thus, in the long poem's final version, replaced by a jolting, linear A-B-C thrust (countryside / subway / bridge) and a last-minute affective reversal, A-A-B (hell / hell / heaven).

The loss of "The Calgary Express" is more momentous. Its absence drastically impoverishes the book's salvific vision by omitting an entire people from its sacred history of the United States. Crane's précis of the poem reveals that he originally planned to introduce into his epic the story of the African diaspora in America:

### THE CALGARY EXPRESS

Well, don't you know it's mournin' time?  
 Wheel in middle of wheel;  
 He'll hear yo' prayers an' sanctify,  
 Wheel in de middle of wheel.  
 —OLD NEGRO SONG

(It is difficult to achieve a sufficiently brief synopsis of my plans for this section. The 'scene' is a pullman sleeper, Chicago to Calgary. The main theme is the story of John Brown, which predominates over interwoven 'personal, biographical details' as it runs through the mind of a negro porter, shining shoes and humming to himself. In a way it takes in the whole racial history of the negro in America. The form will be highly original, and I shall use dialect. I hope to achieve a word-rhythm of pure jazz movement which will suggest not only the dance of the negro but also the speed-dance of the engine over the rails.)  
 ("The Bridge" 32)<sup>4</sup>

In many respects, Crane's plan for "The Calgary Express" is remarkably progressive. He casts a working-class African American man, a "negro porter," as the poem's center of consciousness. The porter's wandering thoughts do not dwell passively, impotently on the evils of slavery or the reality of present-day oppression—a man-of-sorrows perspective that had marred Crane's early, clumsy lyric "Black Tambourine" ("The interests of the black man in a cellar / Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door. . . ."—*HCCP* 4). Instead, the porter ponders "the story of John Brown," that is, the biography of the

antislavery activist responsible for the seizure of the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Moreover, Crane demonstrates sympathy with many of the key elements of the African American literary tradition, as it has taken shape since the Civil War: a grounding in vernacular speech ("I shall use dialect"); a penchant for formal borrowings from Black popular culture ("pure jazz movement," "the dance of the negro"); and a reliance on spirituals and folk songs as a vehicle for group memory (the "OLD NEGRO SONG" quoted as an epigraph). These same aesthetic principles have proved foundational for several generations of innovative Black poets, from Langston Hughes in the 1920s to Jayne Cortez and Kevin Young in the 1990s.

There is no guaranteeing, though, that "The Calgary Express" would have been worthy of setting alongside such Harlem Renaissance works as Hughes's "The Weary Blues" and Countee Cullen's "Heritage." Other portions of *The Bridge*, most notably "Powhatan's Daughter," in fact suggest just the opposite. As Walter Benn Michaels and Jared Gardner have pointed out, the epic exhibits a disquieting, uncritical embrace of U.S. racial myths. Crane willfully consigns the continent's indigenous peoples to the forgotten, mythic past: "Papooses crying on the wind's long mane / Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain, / —Dead echoes!" (*HCCP* 59). Other than the occasional "homeless . . . halfbreed" wandering the countryside, the First Nations have vanished utterly, effectively ceding their erstwhile lands to their successors and self-appointed heirs, European settlers (67). Crane elevates this self-serving faux history into an Ovid-like tale of transformation. Pocahontas first enters *The Bridge* in an extract from William Strachey's *Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia* (1612)—"a well-featured but wanton yong girle . . . of the age of eleven or twelve years"—but she quickly loses this historical specificity (51). After a murky mystical marriage to the Indian brave Maquokeeta, she metamorphoses into a quasi-divine personification of North America, its "virgin," fertile fields awaiting possession and cultivation:

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free  
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,  
She is the torrent and the singing tree;  
And she is virgin to the last of men . . .

West, west, and south! winds over Cumberland  
And winds across the llano grass resume  
Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned  
O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom! (65)

This irresponsible exercise in mythopoesis does not give one confidence in Crane's ability to retell "the whole racial history of the negro in America." He was entirely capable of writing a mélange of hoary minstrel show clichés, an updated "Mumbo Jumbo" for the jazz age.<sup>5</sup> Vachel Lindsay's notorious piece is, after all, vernacular, syncopated, and thoroughly indebted to oral poetics. His echoes of African American artistry do nothing to prevent him from engaging in grossest caricature. From a certain standpoint, today's literary critics might be grateful that "Calgary Express" never got off the drawing board. Who would want another racist blot on an already begrimed national tradition?

From another point of view, however, Crane's failure to write "Calgary Express" represents a crucial missed opportunity. As chapter 5 shows, Crane populates *The Bridge* with a gallery of holy outcasts, among them "Rai-squatters," "Hobo-trekkers," burlesque dancers, drunken sailors, "Wop" washerwomen, and visionary writers.<sup>6</sup> The "nomad railery" (HCCP 58) and fleeting exchanges between these outcasts take place in ambiguously public spaces—in subway stations, under or on bridges, near railroad tracks, on steamships, in bars, on the street—that are also overtly or covertly presented as possible venues for sexual congress ("love / A burnt match skating in a urinal" [98–99]). The negro porter of "Calgary Express" would have joined this traveling cohort, and "the story of John Brown" could, just possibly, have given a welcome revolutionary edge and precedent to the book's inchoate presentation of a community of men and women marked as queer or circulating in queer-marked interstitial spaces. Although a literary critic risks anachronism in reading a contemporary politics of position into *The Bridge*, the rudiments are indubitably there, and one cannot help but feel that a nudge, or two, could push Crane into the role of a queer-theoretical John the Baptist. Alas, such nudging verges on fudging. It overvalues the implicit and the almost articulated. Crane's fervent transcendentalism and occasional naive nativism vitiated his ability to deliver incisive social commentary. "Calgary Express" was a next step in a reimagining of America across sexual, racial, class, and ethnic boundaries that could have, but tragically did not, take place.<sup>7</sup> For whatever reason—whether disinterest, alcoholism, or the press of new projects such as *Cortez: An Enactment*—Crane put off writing the lyric until too late.<sup>8</sup> The dream, as Hughes puts it, was again deferred.

This tale of might-have-beens represents more than an experiment in counterfactual literary history. Likewise, it serves a better purpose than rear-guard rehabilitation of a long-dead white son of privilege. The unwritten "Calgary Express" was a fumbling effort at a dialogue that properly began only after World War II, a muted call whose responses, slow in coming, are

no less valuable for the intervening delay. Over the last few decades, a number of works by African American writers have talked back to Crane, among them Melvin Tolson's *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953), Jay Wright's *Soothsayers and Omens* (1976), and Samuel Delany's "Atlantis: Model 1924" (1995).<sup>9</sup> Although there are traces of stylistic influence in such works—Tolson's dense sonorities, Wright's lyrical approach to a national epic, Delany's mannered, antivernacular style—such points of commonalty are secondary to attempts at transhistorical dialogue on subjects such as nationality, race, sexuality, U.S. history, and aesthetic value. The remainder of this chapter will examine one particular instance of this ongoing (non)conversation, which continues down to the present day in works such as Reginald Shepherd's collection of verse *Otherhood* (2003): Bob Kaufman's qualified participation in the Crane idolatry of his fellow (white) New American Poets.<sup>10</sup>

## Heart Beat

Bob Kaufman's poem "Hart. . . . Crane" (1965) portrays an unnamed, present-tense "They" harried and haunted by, yet obsessively drawn to, the poet of the title. It opens:

They fear you, Crane. . . . you whispered aloft, pains they  
     buried forever. . . .  
 They hate you, Crane. . . . your sur-real eclipses blot out their  
     muted sun. . . .  
 They miss you, Crane. . . . your footprints are on their rotting  
     teeth. . . .  
 They need you, Crane. . . . their walking minds are worn to  
     the bony core. . . .  
 They want you, Crane. . . . stay hidden beneath shadowed  
     bookstore tables. . . . (*Solitudes* 16)

The lyric continues for seventeen more lines, depending throughout on the same modular unit: "They [verb] you, Crane. . . . [sentence, clause, or phrase]. . . ." After the initial lines swerve from aversion ("fear," "hate") to desire ("miss," "need," "want"), "They" gradually move from a quest for Crane ("seek," "call," "buy") to a direct experience of him ("know," "hear," "see," "read") to possible means of putting him back in circulation ("paint," "teach," "sell"). Throughout, "Their" urge to honor Crane ("worship," "celebrate") coexists with an impulse to harm him ("beat," "kill"). The poem ends, almost St. Peter-like, with a denial of the Blessed Martyr ("They deny

you, Crane”) followed quickly by an assumption of his mantle (“They live you, Crane. . . . ON THE BRIDGE”) (16–17).

Other than the final reference to Crane’s epic, “Hart. . . . Crane” relies remarkably little on a reader’s knowledge of Crane’s actual verse. True, in “whispered aloft,” one can hear an echo of the final line of the Brooklyn Bridge ode “Atlantis”—“whispers antiphonal in azure swing” (*HCCP* 108)—and “sur-real [*sic*] eclipses blot out their muted sun” distantly recalls the closing lines of “O Carib Isle!,” Crane’s lyric most obviously indebted to his Parisian sojourn among the surrealists—“You have given me the shell, Satan,—carbonic amulet / Sere of the sun exploded in the sea” (112). Such intertextual moments, though, are secondary to the poem’s hyperbolic presentation of Crane as a Beat saint “enshrined on suicide altars of pain.” He has left behind bodily relics (“your petrified sperm is treasured by marble lovers”; “your eyebrows are on their glossy calendars”), and his followers honor him clandestinely, privately (“they shout your name in deserted phone-booths”; “your face is on secret stamps pinned to hidden envelopes”; “They teach you . . . in secret huddles beneath football stadiums”). And like Christ, Crane is served up to his faithful in an anthropophagic ritual of communion: “you are spreadeagled on grills of poetic eating places” (*Solitudes* 16–17).

“Hart. . . . Crane” belongs squarely to the poetic milieu described in chapter 6. Its exclamation-point enthusiasm for Crane, its exaltation of him as a Beat *avant la lettre*, and its decidedly un-Swinburnian anaphoric free verse align Kaufman’s poem with such other lyrics as Creeley’s “Hart Crane” and Ginsberg’s “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear.” Moreover, it contains the bluntly sexual language (“petrified sperm”) and stray campy touches (“you are a sequined float”) characteristic of the New Americans. (One has only to contrast “Hart. . . . Crane” to Robert Lowell’s “Words for Hart Crane” [1959] to see that, for all Lowell’s slumming recourse to James Cagney-ish diction, the New Americans could effortlessly trump their cooked contemporaries in tackiness.) Kaufman seems, like Blackburn et al., to approach Crane as a precursor who is also a distorted mirror, reflecting back Kaufman’s own preoccupations, social situation, and poetic ambitions.

The thesis that “Hart. . . . Crane” expresses this group ethos is complicated, though, by its insistent recourse to “They.” Kaufman’s speaker does not indicate what “I” think about Crane. While the distance between “They” and the speaker thins over the course of the lyric—the enumeration of Crane’s traits and fate is too exuberant to maintain a uniformly ironic remove—the “I” / “They” separation does persist, grammatically at least, through the lyric’s close. The *pas de deux* here between identity and difference parallels Kaufman’s own ambivalent positioning vis-à-vis the mid-twentieth-century

U.S. poetic avant-garde. As his biography and his reception history illustrate, he both was and was not a Beat. Marked as "other," he was and was not a part of "them."

Born in 1925 in New Orleans, Bob Kaufman was the son of a half-Jewish, half-African American father and a mother of West Indian ancestry. After leaving home, he became a merchant seaman, based out of New York and San Francisco. Ashore he pursued two interests. First, he involved himself in leftist politics. He worked as a labor organizer on behalf of the National Maritime Union, and he served as an area director for Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign. Second, he became an ardent jazz aficionado. He haunted clubs on both coasts and befriended the likes of Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. Then he married Eileen Singe, left behind his life as a seaman, and settled in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood. By the mid-1950s he had reinvented himself as a bohemian poet, drawing inspiration and material from both his political and musical commitments. He became notorious for his loud spontaneous public recitations, his drunken bouts, and his perpetual run-ins with the police. The *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen coined the term "beatnik" as a disparaging epithet for the local celebrity. Kaufman, however, like his comrades Ginsberg and Kerouac, two other recent arrivals in the city, embraced the epithet "Beat" and remade it as a label for a new, dissident movement in the arts.

Kaufman took to editing the influential little magazine *Beatitude*, and his *Abomunist Manifesto*, circulated 1956–57, initially rivaled *Howl* in popularity among the San Francisco bagel and espresso set. Indeed, a photo accompanying the article in *Life* that made Ginsberg a household name shows a young man reading not *Howl* but Kaufman's puckish pamphlet ("ABOMUNISTS JOIN NOTHING BUT THEIR HANDS OR LEGS. . . . ABOMUNISTS SPIT ANTI-POETRY FOR POETIC REASONS AND FRINK"—*Cranial* 117). Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books put out two further broadsides, *Second April* (1959) and *Does the Secret Mind Whisper?* (1960), and Kaufman was able to publish his first full-length book, *Solititudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965), with the established New York avant-garde press New Directions. In subsequent years, Kaufman continued his involvement with Beat poetics, regularly participating in all-night jazz-poetry-philosophy sessions in San Francisco, New York's Lower East Side, and the East Village.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these accomplishments and despite his long-term, on-the-ground participation in the Beat movement, Kaufman has been almost entirely omitted from the Beat canon, as it has taken shape in the academies and in the popular imagination. His exclusion from Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960) presaged nearly four decades of critical neglect, whereas Gins-

berg, Kerouac, Corso, Burroughs, Ferlinghetti, Snyder, and others affiliated with the Beats ascended to countercultural heaven and today are read avidly in the United States and abroad. This charmed group of writers is far from stereotypically Middle American—indeed, for the 1950s it is pronouncedly “ethnic,” including men of Jewish, Italian American, and French Canadian background—and several were from working-class families—but it is also uniformly white. In most accounts of the movement, the Beats might dig bebop and spend time on the “negro streets” (Ginsberg, *Collected* 126), but they do so solely as sympathetic outsiders. While one might expect this kind of whitewash from the likes of *Life* and *The Dobie Gillis Show* (1959–63), early popularizers (and sanitizers) of the San Francisco phenomenon, it is less obvious why literary critics, too, perpetuated the distortion into the 1990s, with only a few exceptions.<sup>12</sup> Kaufman, true, is hardly the only male African American avant-garde poet of the 1950s and ’60s to suffer neglect. Ted Joans, Stephen Jonas, David Henderson, Calvin Hernton, Clarence Major, A. B. Spellman, Lorenzo Thomas, and other talented writers have likewise largely vanished from scholarly accounts of the period. Recent recovery efforts by specialists in African American literature—especially Aldon Lynn Nielsen’s *Black Chant: The Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1997)—lead one to suspect that LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka, the only Black writer to appear in Allen’s anthology, has far too long continued to serve (through no fault of his own!) as the token race man in surveys of the midcentury U.S. poetry scene. Paul Hoover’s *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (1994), for instance, makes it appear that Baraka was the only African American to publish experimental verse between World War II and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Racial bias alone, though, does not fully explain Kaufman’s absence from today’s Beat pantheon. In the 1990s, as Nielsen, Maria Damon, Kathryne Lindberg, and others began the process of recovering, interpreting, and publicizing Kaufman’s writings, it became increasingly clear that Kaufman does not fit, indeed resists, the Beat image as typified by Kerouac and Ginsberg. He disagreed profoundly with his white colleagues on a number of important issues. His antiestablishment politics were more radical, direct, and personal. He had so many confrontations with North Beach police that they arrested him thirty-six times in one year. Once, after pissing on an officer, he was “iceboxed” for “about a month”: continually shuffled from jail to jail in the city, so no one could find him and bail him out (D. Henderson 13). He had comparable, thorough disdain for the publishing world, universities, prizes, and other bourgeois institutions. He composed orally and spontaneously, or, if typing or handwriting, cared nothing about preserving the manu-

script. Readers owe what publications do exist to the ingenuity of his friends and lovers, who transcribed particular lyrics, saved ephemera, or even, in one case, rescued a notebook from a hotel fire.<sup>13</sup>

Kaufman's anarchism stems from his central project, one he did not share with the currently better-known poets on the North Beach scene: an active, creative negation of U.S. racism. As he wrote in a 1963 letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle*,

Arriving back in San Francisco to be greeted by a blacklist and eviction, I am writing these lines to the responsible non-people. One thing is certain I am not white. Thank God for that. It makes everything else bearable. (*Cranial* 96)

He refuses the racial categorizations that the "non-people" seek to enforce. They might call themselves "white," and they might try to put him on a "blacklist," that is, interpellate him as a "black" and hence someone excluded ("evicted") from privilege, but he denies their taxonomy, stating simply that he is "not white." In the following paragraphs, he goes on to clarify his position. Since "all blacklists" are "white"—in other words, the strict, inflexible racial hierarchy that "non-people" impose is always and ever a product of "white" power, never "black" choice—it is necessary to find another way of thinking altogether. Kaufman proposes "the Ellington scale" of "black, brown & beige," on which "colors" are "sweet thunder" (96). This move might sound like a recourse to the ebony-and-ivory school of trivializing racial conflict, but refiguring race in the vocabulary of jazz leads Kaufman to emphasize not chordal harmony but difference itself, or more precisely, the act of differentiation that enables one to distinguish A from B from C. As he puts it, "there is a silent beat between the drums," and "[t]hat silent beat makes the drum-beat, it makes the drum, it makes the beat." What enables rhythm to be rhythm, music to be music, is the unheard, the unplayed, in short, the spaces between that make it possible for people to perceive divisions in and among phenomena. These productive, constitutive absences are his domain and métier: the "silent beat . . . comes before and after every beat, you hear it in between, its sound is / Bob Kaufman, Poet" (96–97). In this letter-manifesto, reprinted in his 1967 City Lights volume *Golden Sardine*, Kaufman re-presents race not as a regulable fixed essence but as a product of timed, timely interventions in an ongoing performance. Moreover, he arrogates for the "Poet" a discursive mastery and inhabitation of race as an act.<sup>14</sup>

Kaufman's theorization of race and its intimate implication in his poetics prevented him from being "just another Beat" on the North Beach scene.



Maria Damon, analyzing Kaufman's poem "Bagel Shop Jazz," has elucidated Kaufman's sharp sense of the North Beach poetry community as working in accordance with several triangulations of desire, in which he, as an African American man, was expected to occupy the sadly stereotypically role of an oversexed noble savage. It did not matter, of course, whether he was oversexed, noble, or savage. He found himself, again, "blacklisted" into a racial script. He was accordingly subjected to white hetero- and homoerotic Negrophiliac obsession, most notably Russell Fitzgerald's prolonged, won't-take-no-for-an-answer courtship.<sup>15</sup> No wonder, then, that his poems declaring solidarity with other Beats, such as "Ginsberg (for Allen)," are balanced by others, such as "West Coast Sounds—1956," that bitterly complain about the "San Fran, hipster land" that he dreams of fleeing ("Canneries closing. / Sardines splitting / for Mexico. / Me too"—*Solitudes* 11). Venues such as the Co-Existence Bagel Shop and Malvina's Coffeehouse might have given him an audience warmly and outwardly supportive of his art, but this audience also tended stubbornly to misread his anarchism as half-civilized misbehavior and his talk of jazz as expressions of primal sensuousness.

"Hart. . . . Crane" registers Kaufman's qualified participation in the utopian bohemia of the New Americans. Denotatively, he celebrates Crane as a proto-Beat—a message little different from Creeley's "Hart Crane." Kaufman, however, repeatedly breaks up his poem with ellipses. He graphically introduces ruptures into the party line, so to speak, by breaking up the long fluid free verse line of Ginsberg's "Howl" and Corso's "Marriage." His "silent beat" intervenes in, repunctuates, the Beats' distinctive, communal poetic style, in effect, re-marking it as Kaufman's own. This signature, if you will, superadds, through silences, a demonstration of differencing, its play of (non)identity.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, this demonstration extends to commentary on literary history and literature in history. Kaufman's title performs Crane's name on "the Ellington scale." The inserted ellipses "beat" the name out, thereby giving it a temporality, an extension through time. Names, he reminds the reader, have histories, indeed, histories that include gaps and other incommensurabilities. (Hart Crane was born Harold Crane. After his parents' protracted, unpleasant divorce, he replaced Harold with his mother's maiden name. He inscribed on himself the record of bitter sex-gender conflict. Hart. . . . Crane.) Moreover, he calls to mind the fact that poets' names are uniquely divided against themselves, referring to a person and to a body of work. Dead author, living work. Hart. . . . Crane.

Kaufman contrasts his "beating" of Crane, which exposes temporal breaks and slippages, to the kind of physical, violent beating that the unnamed "They" give Crane in line 7 of the elegy. Kaufman does not wrestle, as "They"

do, to force Crane to fit their preconceptions. He understands that urge—he concedes through his sympathetic tone that he, too, feels the attraction of its will to power—but the separation between “They” and “I” persists until the poem’s end, differentiating himself from “Their” behavior. This act of differencing also implicitly preserves a separation between the speaker and its addressee, “you, Crane.” At the poem’s end, “They live you, Crane”—in other words, experience a collapse of identification into identity—whereas, by implication, “I” do not. Kaufman’s (racialized) “silent beats” distance him from the folly of his fellow New Americans’ Crane idolatry. He (silently) asserts that “They” overvalue the “Beat” in “proto-Beat,” reading similarity where, in fact, a temporal divide intervenes. Then . . . now. “They call you, Crane,” but they mistakenly look for an immediate reply in the present moment: “they shout your name in deserted phonebooths.” “They” fail to grasp the ontology of the situation. An interval, a silent beat, what Heidegger would call the *Riss*, enables a call and response insofar as it brings two discrete things into a relation, but a coming-into-relation is also, at one and the same time, an acknowledging of separation (that is, these *two* things stand in relation to each *other*). Any call and its ensuing response are, therefore, by necessity separated by distance / delay / deferral. In Kaufman’s poem, failing to understand that any declaration of similarity is always already an act of differencing, “They” fall into delusion.

The lesson here is Cranean, as reprised by a jazz master. As chapter 5 explains, *The Bridge* teaches that repetition with variation can achieve a paradoxical unity of the eternal and the ephemeral. In other words, Crane seeks what Amiri Baraka, discussing the ontology and history of Black music, has called the “changing same.”<sup>17</sup> In “Hart. . . Crane” Kaufman transposes Crane’s lesson about the way a work unfolds through time to literary history, more specifically literary genealogy. He teaches that, strictly speaking, one poet’s “beat” can never be the same as another’s. Even if one performer imitates another as closely as possible, note for note, a difference, even if only the passage of time since the previous performance, intrudes. First time. . . . second time. The impossibility of an exact replica does not, however, prevent a given performer (or poet) from riffing on an earlier one, copying certain aspects of a performance but not others, establishing a (non)relation of difference in similarity.

One could imagine Kaufman turning to other authors and pursuing a roughly similar deconstructive strategy. Why not “Langston. . . Hughes,” “Aimé. . . Césaire,” or “Ezra. . . Pound”? “Hart. . . Crane,” though, is not an arbitrary or once-off homage. Its lessons concerning literary historiography stem from a prolonged engagement with the earlier poet. Although

Kathryne Lindberg might overstate the case when she claims that Crane was “the poet and poethood most cited by Kaufman”—Federico García Lorca probably enjoys that honor<sup>18</sup>—he is, nevertheless, a frequent touchstone, featuring by name in some poems (“The Ancient Rain,” “Like Father, Like Sun,” “Oregon,” “The Celebrated White-Cap Spelling Bee”) and entering by allusion in an array of others (among them “All Those Ships That Never Sailed,” “East Fifth Street,” “My Mysteries Created for Me,” “Plea,” “The Secret Life of Robert Frost,” and “Voyagers”). How does one account for this insistent intertextuality? Lindberg explains Kaufman’s attraction to Crane as an aspect of his more general fascination with “Romantic suicides or self-annihilating victims of society” (171). She further explains this fascination not as a death wish but quite the reverse, a recognition that “according to racist and authoritarian prejudices” he was “predisposed to self-destructive sexuality—and textuality” (168). Via Crane, he could “speak the living hell” that drives one to suicide only then to doff that mask, thereby “escap[ing] and surviv[ing]” a discursive subject position that, if occupied *propria persona*, might cost him his life (171).

This argument underestimates Kaufman’s poetics of difference. It much too quickly erases the distinctions between the 1950s “blacklist” that attributed him with “self-destructive sexuality” and the homophobia that Crane experienced in the 1920s. Such erasure speaks to recent literary-critical efforts to ascribe, if not homosexuality or bisexuality, at least a transgressively non-heterosexual self-conception to Kaufman, thereby making him available for studies predicated on identity politics.<sup>19</sup> The biographical evidence for this approach remains scanty.<sup>20</sup> And the textual evidence? The poetry does have richly homoerotic moments. Kaufman seems to have been drawn to the biker and leather subculture centered in San Francisco’s South of Market neighborhood, where he lived for long stretches in transient hotels:

Black leather angels of  
Pop-bopping stallions searching  
In the corners of peace  
For violence (*Solitudes* 36)



pop-bopping black leather angels, fathered fathers,  
good daddy doctors . . . a thing, daddies . . . they watch, belly  
paroles, bareskin eagles (68)



do we know we live or have lived living among endless processions of coc-  
teaus gauchos on bucking motorcycles (*Cranial* 147)

(This last example is particularly vivid—Kaufman refers to Cocteau's film *Orphée* [1950] in which Death's Outriders are dished up as homoerotic eye candy.) He was also entirely capable of a campy send-up of gay pornography, such as "Matriculation," which describes:

- "Big naked professors" who are "weary" after a "whip festival"
- "Brawny swimming instructors quivering on canvas"
- "Kilted piano players playing suggestive minuets" (their "music should build to the climax then explode like overloaded creampuffs")
- "Skinny porters dusting off the heaving bodies" (*Solitudes* 41)

None of these homoerotic passages, however, falls outside the ambit of the compulsory homosociality that characterized the New Americans. Except for the "skinny porters" with dusters, a stray comic touch, Kaufman's men are all brawny, big, kilted, heaving stallions—in such verse the threat of effeminacy remains contained and peripheral.

Kaufman's sexual preferences, actual or attributed, have only secondary, if any, importance as one puzzles through his repeated invocations of Hart Crane. What *does* matter is the ready intelligibility of Crane's life and verse within this midcentury, masculinist discursive community. He was "one of the guys." His (homo)eroticized (white) sailors, hobos, prisoners, factory workers, and soldiers were unproblematically idealized types that his admiring (mostly male) Beat readers could either desire or desire to become. *The Bridge*, too, had obvious utopian appeal. It refigured the United States from the point of view of a sacred brotherhood of mobile, noncorporate, unmarried men. As Kaufman puts it: "They live you, Crane . . . ON THE BRIDGE." The earlier poet served Kaufman as a metonym for the white-dominated, intensely homosocial Beat community in which he wrote and lived.

But Crane is also a flawed metonym. As Lindberg suggests, Crane's suicide is integral to Kaufman's interest in him, but the suicide signifies less thematically than temporally, insofar as it introduces a near-deafening "silent beat" into his career. It bars Crane from participating in any direct way in the Beat utopian community that he dimly foresaw, unlike other, longer-lived poets of his era, such as Williams and Pound, whom Ginsberg and the others pestered into honorary membership in their men's club. If "They" mistakenly consider Crane to be a part of "Them"—as the lyric "Hart. . . . Crane" indicates—then "They" knowingly or unknowingly have introduced a division internal to "Themselves," a split between the living and the dead. "They" cannot, then, present a solidly united "white" front in opposition to Kaufman's "not white" "I." This (temporal) fragmentation of "Them" might

sound self-evident or trivial, but, on the contrary, it is crucial for Kaufman's positioning of himself vis-à-vis the other Beats. It prevents the relation between "I" and "They" from devolving into the stark "black" versus "white" binary that Kaufman so firmly rejects in his 1963 letter-manifesto. For Kaufman, Crane's suicide obstructs the free circulation of homosocial desire that defines the Beat community. This intrusion of time's arrow provides him a departure point for exploring racial (non)identity without resorting to the rigid, hierarchical logic of "blacklisting." That said, death and racial difference are not equivalents for Kaufman, but he recognizes in both of them the potential to interrupt, reroute, and otherwise violate hegemonic communal fictions. The "Ellington scale" of "black, brown & beige," as he puts it, are "the colors of an earthquake" (*Cranial* 96).

## Quake

The San Francisco Beat community that Kaufman queasily considered his own did not last. As the 1960s proceeded, its principal figures dispersed. Ginsberg left to globe-trot, for instance, while Kerouac retreated to Florida to live out alcoholism's ugly denouement. Though still nationally famous for its poetry scene, North Beach itself also became too pricey for any but week-end bohemians to inhabit. Kaufman followed a local migration of artists and poets to the Mission District, a traditionally Hispanic neighborhood where rents were cheaper and there was "an endless array of joints and venues" for readings, happenings, and gallery shows (D. Henderson 22). The scene that took shape in the Mission was more fluid and less exclusive than North Beach's. There were fewer Ivy grads, fewer East Coast transplants, and many more poets of color. In this environment, Kaufman was considered less an outsider than an exemplary poet and pioneer, "the REAL Beat," as Raúl Salinas once labeled him (qtd. in Hernandez 191). In a recent essay in *Cal-laloo*, Rod Hernandez recounts the central importance of Kaufman's activist, improvisational, jazz "ethos and aesthetic" to the members of the 1970s Mission-based Latino literary collective Pocho-Che (190–91).

Kaufman's participation in this multicultural arts community might help explain why, in contrast to LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka, his sometimes demeaning involvement in a white-dominated avant-garde did not lead to a subsequent Black nationalist phase. During the 1960s and '70s Kaufman neither joined the Black Arts movement nor adopted its separatist rhetoric (Smethurst 146). His late, long apocalyptic poem "The Ancient Rain"—written in response to the 1976 U.S. bicentennial—offers a markedly different, forthrightly multiracial, but no less revolutionary vision of U.S. society and lit-

erature than the one that Jones / Baraka had propounded in *Black Magic* (1966). Hart Crane, almost by necessity, makes an appearance in "The Ancient Rain"; *The Bridge* and the Beat generation are defective but admirable utopian visions of the United States with which Kaufman grapples as he shifts from his earlier, chiefly diagnostic and deconstructive understanding of race to a prescriptive vision of the future. "Hart. . . . Crane" describes a community and its flaws. "The Ancient Rain" explains how to create a better society.

The seven pages of "The Ancient Rain" proceed via repetition. The first four and a half pages include approximately eighty occurrences of the phrase "the Ancient Rain," most often appearing at the beginning of sentences ("The Ancient Rain falls . . . The Ancient Rain is supreme . . . The Ancient Rain shall be brilliant . . . The Ancient Rain is the source . . . The Ancient Rain shall kill" [*Cranial* 133]). "Crispus Attucks" then takes over for a page (ten appearances), and, after an interpolated translation of a verse passage by García Lorca, the poem finishes with "crackling blueness" as its refrain (eight recurrences). Though written almost entirely in poetic prose, not free verse, "The Ancient Rain" nonetheless distinctly recalls Ginsberg's *Howl*, which is likewise (1) a jeremiad against the evils of U.S. history, (2) a work divided into three sections, the first much longer than the second or third, and (3) a text built out of anaphoric repetition ("who . . . who . . . who" [*Collected* 126–30]; "Moloch . . . Moloch . . . Moloch" [131–32]; "I'm with you in Rockland . . . I'm with you in Rockland" [132–33]). Kaufman revisits and revises the ur-text of the Beat movement at a distance of twenty years from its original composition.

The first part of *Howl* presents an overview of the United States in the mid-1950s, emphasizing the horrors, and occasional ecstasies, suffered by "the best minds of my generation," that is, Ginsberg's friends, family, and fellow Beats (126). Kaufman chooses instead to survey U.S. history in toto, touching upon such high (or low) points as the Boston Tea Party, the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress, the Civil War, the Battle of Little Bighorn, World War II, the cold war, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. He is concerned less with defining a present-day clique than historicizing a nation. He "beats out" this history, as he did in "Hart. . . . Crane," by introducing repeated interruptions. This time, however, he employs an intrusive phrase—"the Ancient Rain"—instead of strategic silences. These words intervene incessantly, a word patter akin to rain on a tin roof, re-marking the language of the history textbook as Kaufman's own. Again as in "Hart . . . Crane," this imposed rhythm is also a making-different, a portioning out of time and space. Here, though, that

making-different is described in cataclysmic terms, as if it were the engine powering the march of history: “The Ancient Rain splits nations . . . The Ancient Rain cured the plague . . . The Ancient Rain fell on the Confederacy and it was no more” (134). The focus remains on the act of differencing, but its “earthquake” potential, the disruptive transformative changes that it can produce, moves to the fore. Kaufman thereby identifies his mastery of linguistic difference—his ability to portion out words, to give them order and heft—with a command over the “differencing” that is history itself. He becomes history’s “author,” insofar as history, as a discourse, achieves what it does in and through the agency of one who writes it.

This demonstration of the power of the Ancient Rain is not a solipsistic wishing-away of the facts of the past in favor of the unfettered power of the poetic imagination. Rather, it is an awakening to the contested course and character of a nation’s history and a recognition that such a history can be re-marked and altered by its tellers.<sup>21</sup> Kaufman’s demonstration of his ability to “beat” history into shape is the dialectical other side of the coin of history’s ability to “beat,” that is force, individuals into particular categories. The first page of “The Ancient Rain” names the rain as the source of the spectrum of racial types recognized in U.S. law and culture: “the Ancient Rain . . . will be white”; “It shall be red”; “It shall be black”; “It shall be the brown”; “The Ancient Rain shall be brilliant yellow” (133). The poem’s greater assertiveness regarding the poet’s ability to “beat” back against history’s tide prepares the reader for the “Crispus Attucks” section, which, unlike “Hart. . . . Crane” or Kaufman’s letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, does not hesitate to state, and state emphatically, the poet’s racial identification:

Crispus Attucks died first for the American Revolution, on the opening day of American glory. Crispus Attucks does not want a white mother. Crispus Attucks is the Blackstone of the American Revolution that is known to God. Crispus Attucks is not the son of the South, not the son of Lee, not the son of Jefferson Davis. The South cannot have Attucks for a son. Crispus Attucks is my son, my father, my brother, I am Black. (137–38)

Attucks, a freeman of African descent who died in the Boston Massacre of 1770, provides Kaufman with a way to imagine himself, and members of the African Diaspora more broadly, not as subject to the rule of a hostile government, but as revolutionary founders of the nation, moreover, founders of the nation in its “glory.” “The South” and all it symbolizes—slavery, segregation, humiliation—are excluded from this genealogy, are reduced to an un-

wanted excrescence on the true national tale ("The South cannot have Attucks for a son"). Kaufman acknowledges that this new, liberating narrative is something he has created (this Attucks is *his* "son") but it is a narrative that in turn gives him a sense of origins (Attucks is simultaneously his "father") and a sense of fraternity (he now has a "brother"). And—in a wickedly wonderful play of words—the old, tyrannical law of the colonizer ("Blackstone" is shorthand for one of the most important British legal reference texts) is displaced by a new "Blackstone," the imponderable weightiness of a Black man's sacrifice, which will serve as a touchstone for service to the utopian republic. If before Kaufman was only willing to label himself as "not white," now, having usurped authority over historical narrative, he can define his terms in such a way as to state proudly "I am Black" without feeling blacklisted into that declaration.

This moment of self-nomination does not precede, as one might expect, a declaration of solidarity with other Blacks, whether those in the United States, in other New World countries, or in decolonized Africa. Instead, Kaufman announces, "Let the voice out of the whirlwind speak." And—expecting God—the reader gets, of all things, a translation of a poem by García Lorca advising the "Black Man" to "Seek out the great sun / Of the center."<sup>22</sup> Kaufman expresses a vision of solidarity, but not one predicated on racial identity. One witnesses an exchange between a slain white gay Spanish leftist poet and a living African American anarchist poet concerning the quest for the highest good, "The sun that undoes / all the numbers" (138). The remainder of the poem concerns Kaufman's efforts to inhabit the "crackling blueness" of the "Federico Garcia [*sic*] Lorca sky, immaculate scoured sky" (139). "The Ancient Rain" thus ends with a vision of cross-racial identification that binds the living and the dead in a quest for transcendental perfection, "the Sun of the Center" (139).

In opting to hymn García Lorca, Kaufman is pointedly deciding not to sing the praises of the only other writer whose name appears in the entire piece, Hart Crane. Indeed, he accentuates that decision by referring to García Lorca as "Poet in New York"—referring, of course, to his famous volume *Poeta en Nueva York* (1940)—although Crane, too, merits the appellation. Additionally, the "crackling blue" of "Lorca sky" harks back to the divine "azure" of the sky at the end of *The Bridge* ("Whispers antiphonal in azure swing"—HCCP 108). One can hear, in fact, echoes of *The Bridge* when Kaufman writes, "My first day in crackling blueness, I walked off my ship and rode the subway to Manhattan to visit Grant's Tomb"—shades of "Ave Maria," "Cutty Sark," and "The Tunnel"!—only then to have Crane banished—"and I thought because Lorca said he would let his hair grow long someday



crackling blueness would cause my hair to grow long" (139). In "The Ancient Rain" Kaufman deliberately consigns Crane to the past:

The Ancient Rain does what it wants. It does not explain to anyone. The Ancient Rain fell on Hart Crane. He committed suicide in the Gulf of Mexico. Now the Washington Monument is bathed in the celestial lights of the Ancient Rain. The Ancient Rain is falling in America, and all the nations that gather on the East River to try to prevent a star prophecy of 37 million deaths in World War III. (135)

Crane's suicide is stated bluntly, a *fait accompli*. The preceding sentences suggest that his death was a consequence of summary judgment ("does what it wants . . . does not explain"), and the near doggerel rather belittles it ("Ancient Rain fell on Hart Crane"). "Now," these many years later, one is not concerned with such a trivial event. Instead "all the nations . . . gather on the East River to try to prevent . . . World War III." Kaufman's unusual circumlocution for the United Nations—who thinks of it as located "on the East River"?—is likely a trace of a comparably apocalyptic moment in *The Bridge*, also concerning a "star" and a prophecy, that comes at the end of "The Tunnel":

Here by the River that is East—  
Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;  
Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.  
How far away the star has pooled the sea—  
Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,  
O Hand of Fire  
gatherest—(*HCCP* 101)

Kaufman, of course, has substituted for Crane's divine purifying flame the threat of atomic war and replaced the "unaccounting" memories and Hamlet-thoughts of mortality with the prospect of "37 million deaths." Also, "nations gather," not a poet sit and make moan. In comparison to "Hart. . . . Crane," an elegy that authentically if complexly praises Crane, Kaufman's "The Ancient Rain" strives to depict him as a narcissistic historical irrelevancy, caught up in his own doubts and traumas.

Crane's poetry had not changed in the intervening decade plus. But Kaufman's immediate poetic community had. As the Beat countercultural experi-

ment faded into the past, so too did Kaufman's compulsion to treat its sacred cows respectfully. Although Lorca and Crane in fact share many qualities—a love for Whitman, an attraction to surrealism, a distaste for effeminacy, a passion for jazz, an interest in the Harlem Renaissance, a fixation on Brooklyn Bridge, a fervent search for the sublime—the choice between them, for Kaufman in the late 1970s, was nonetheless obvious. Crane was a reminder that in the United States the push to create oppositional communities has all too often resulted in a suppression, sidelining, or simplification of the fundamental problem of differencing itself. In such cases, existing social differences are codified, even rigidified, instead of analyzed and challenged. In this respect, Hart Crane's unwritten "Calgary Express" is emblematic of a century's missteps. Good intentions have remained that, mere intentions, and dissident communities, imagined and actual, have reconfirmed, by commission or omission, the nation's blacklist. García Lorca stood for a possible, untested future: a transnational, multiracial, multilingual coalition of avant-garde writers united in common cause.

One would like to think that the Hart Crane who befriended French surrealists and Mexican muralists, who mailed drafts of "Voyages" to Jean Toomer to seek his advice, and who planned a play in celebration of Montezuma would have appreciated this vision of a writerly utopia. Kaufman, though, could not see it, and he had cause. Despite chance after chance, Crane never quite put all the pieces together. José Quiroga recounts the strange, one-off encounter that Federico de Onís arranged between García Lorca, whom he considered "the foremost poet in the Spanish language," and Crane, whom he rated as "the most interesting American poet of the moment." It could have been an epochal event. Alas for world literature, it was not:

[De Onís] takes Lorca to a party in Brooklyn and introduces him to Crane. A while later, the most circumspect de Onís decides to retire from the occasion, no doubt because of the obvious homosexual tenor of the scene. But before leaving, de Onís could not help but remark on the fact that Crane and Lorca took no obvious interest in each other; rather, each commanded the attention of his own circle of sailors at opposite ends of the room. (45)

If only Kaufman had been able to end "The Ancient Rain" with an ecstatic moment of communion with Crane . . . but, like Crane and García Lorca's missed opportunity, theirs was a conversation that never fully got off the ground, and that failure, while regrettable, cannot be ignored. Miscommunication can be as instructive as dialogue. Literary history must not limit itself

to “successful” cases of influence if it is to parse the manifold messiness of what an author can teach.

Future studies of Hart Crane—and there will be many more—will have to allow for dissonance, odd key shifts, and the occasional sour note. European art music abandoned the imperatives of euphony, harmony, and resolution almost one hundred years ago; future author-centered studies will also have to dispense with these formal conventions if contemporary literary critics are to remain true, like Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern circa 1909, to the intrinsic trajectory of their discipline’s development. To put it differently: as the cobbled-together author-anthology displaces the Author-God, the requisite mode of writing must also necessarily shift from the old, restricted economy to a general one. There is no end to the articulations, re-articulations, transvaluations, and reassembly that an author-anthology undergoes over the decades. Only a programmatically open-ended inquiry can avoid falsifying or misconstruing that continual process of reinvention. As Crane once wrote to Jean Toomer, “the effort to describe” is “limitless yet forever incomplete” (*O My* 192).

# Notes

## Introduction

1. See, e.g., *O My* 365–66.
2. For the Montezuma project, see *O My* 459–60 and 494. Crane's letters from his time in Mexico offer numerous examples of his amateur research, first- and second-hand, into Mexican history and traditional culture. See, e.g., *O My* 480–82, 491–92, 495–96, and 499.
3. See box 9 of the Hart Crane Papers at the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
4. "Suicide" is by Walter Lowenfels 18–24; "Fish Food" by John Wheelwright 45–46. For other examples see Agee 49–50; Hartley 119–27; Rexroth, *Collected Shorter Poems* 122–25; and Winters, *Collected* 140, and 142. Hartley also painted an elegy for Crane, *Eight Bell Folly*, that depicts the *Orizaba* amid an expressionist seascape. See Weinberg 163–70.
5. After completing this book, I discovered that Gordon Tapper's *Machine That Sings: Modernism, Hart Crane, and the Culture of the Body* is soon to be published by Routledge. I look forward to what will surely be a major addition to the secondary literature on Crane.
6. See R. Martin for an earlier, pioneering discussion of Crane's poetry in relation to his sexuality. Martin's mode is primarily hagiographic, however, and its aims are primarily identitarian. That is, he crafts a genealogy of gay male U.S. poets from Walt Whitman to the present without dwelling on the mutability of sexual identity categories over the last 150 years. Yingling examines Crane in the wake of poststructuralism, and his central concerns, such as the relationship in Crane's verse between sexuality, claims to universality, and nationhood, prefigure later culture studies pre-occupations.
7. See Yingling, ch. 1 ("Critical Indifference; or, Tradition and the Homosexual Talent in American Poetry"), esp. 17–18, and 20–23.

8. See the *PMLA* forum on “The Crisis on Scholarly Publishing” (2003) by Richard M. Berrong et al. on the “antimonographic tyranny” that prevails in contemporary graduate student training and in university press decision making (1339).

9. The bibliography on each of these three subjects is lengthy. For a few of the foundational works necessary for understanding the relationship between poetic innovation and advances in communications technology, see Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*; Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds., *Wireless Imagination*; Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*; Adalaide Morris, ed., *Sound States*; and Daniel Tiffany, *Radio Corpse*. For a few of the important studies illustrating the increasing prominence of avant-garde and experimental U.S. poetics within the study of twentieth-century poetics, see Charles Bernstein, *My Way*; Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations*; Craig Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible*; Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*; Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*; Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion*; Hank Lazer, *Opposing Poetries*, vols. 1–2; Steve McCaffery, *Prior to Meaning*; Jerome McGann, *Black Riders*; Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice*; Jed Rasula, *The American Poetry Wax Museum*; Juliana Spahr, *Everybody’s Autonomy*; and Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment*. For provocative studies that have moved community formation to the fore of the study of U.S. avant-garde and experimental poetics, see Christopher Beach, *Poetic Culture*; Maria Damon, *The Dark End of the Street*; Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance*; Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome*; Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant*; Libbie Rifkin, *Career Moves*; Susan Vanderborg, *Paratextual Communities*; and Ann Vickery, *Leaving Lines of Gender*.

10. See the first four chapters of Rowe for a sustained presentation of the New American Studies in relation to other contemporary disciplinary formations.

11. For classic, influential statements undermining or dismissing a modern / postmodern divide, see the studies by Néstor García Canclini, Jürgen Habermas, Andreas Huyssen, and Niklas Luhmann in the Works Cited. See, too, the preface to Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* regarding the current ubiquity of debates concerning “the concept of modernity as such”: “it is in fact back in business all over the world, and virtually inescapable in political discussion from Latin America to China, not to speak of the former Second World itself” (6). For an example drawn from the field of poetics, see Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism* for its critique of the “tired dichotomy” between modernism / postmodernism, which “has governed our discussion of twentieth-century poetics for much too long” (1–2).

## Chapter 1

1. In this article Winters collects, refines, and elaborates upon arguments that he and Allen Tate had been making since the initial publication of *The Bridge*. The essay appears in his collection *In Defense of Reason* (575–603).

2. See Bloom, *Agon* 160, 182, 192–94; *Map* 13, 90; *Ringers* 311; *Wallace* 139; and *Western* 11, 165, 284, and 287. See esp. Bloom’s essay “The Central Man: Emerson, Whitman, Wallace Stevens” (*Ringers* 217–34), wherein he concludes that Hart Crane

possesses “the last word in this tradition” (232). Bloom’s introduction to the “centennial” edition of Hart Crane’s *Complete Poems* (2000) both restates the link to Whitman and strangely complicates the plot. He claims that Crane’s express antagonist in *The Bridge*, T. S. Eliot, is in fact more Whitmanian than Crane himself, which means that, if he wishes to “win[] autonomy,” he has to look elsewhere, namely, to “Emily Dickinson as prime American ancestor” (xiv).

3. See esp. ch. 4 of Edelman, in which he analyzes *The Bridge* primarily as a transumptive rewriting of *Leaves of Grass*.

4. For Crane’s praise of Whitman while writing *The Bridge*, see *O My* 137, 259, and 283–84.

5. Compare Crane’s similarly heated reply to Yvor Winters following Winters’s equally negative statements about Crane and Whitman in his review of *The Bridge* (*O My* 429–30).

6. Hopkins’s name does not even appear in the indices of the three most important recent book-length studies of Crane—those by Lee Edelman, Langdon Hammer, and Thomas Yingling—and the best pre-1980 study of the poet, R. W. B. Lewis’s *The Poetry of Hart Crane*, mentions Hopkins only once, in passing (156). The one article treating the two authors in tandem—Thomas Parkinson’s “Hopkins and Crane”—explicitly brings them together in order to prove that their “similarities” are “accidental rather than essential” and should be disregarded (59).

7. See Watten, “Missing ‘X’” 172–75 for a significant exception. He builds his interpretation of Crane around the late poem “Royal Palm.”

8. Lewis counts twelve separate Whitman lyrics quoted or audibly echoed in the course of “Cape Hatteras.” See Lewis 243 and 328 for lists.

9. See Edelman 225 on the “Elizabethanness” of this passage.

10. Compare Edelman 203–4 on Crane’s “pattern of revising Whitman’s figures by bringing to bear upon them the rhetorical force of a British romantic poet.” Edelman predictably characterizes Crane’s “British romantic” form as a means of wrestling with his literary forebear.

11. See *HCCPSLP* 263 for one exception, where Crane writes much like a Victorian poet, criticizing Whitman’s “faults as a technician.”

12. Hopkins, as his poetry and journals amply illustrate, had an abiding love for rural life and natural beauty, whereas Crane, apart from a few lyrics like “Quaker Hill,” felt a much greater attraction to urban landscapes or those purely of the imagination. The two poets also disagreed sharply over the utility of archaisms in poetry. Hopkins sternly disapproves of archaism (*Selected Letters* 129 and 168), especially Elizabethan diction (281–82), whereas Crane was a self-declared “Elizabethan fanatic” (*O My* 71) who adored Donne, Drayton, Jonson, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Vaughan, and Webster. See, e.g., *O My* 26, 30, 69–72, 86, and 102.

13. I recognize that according to some definitions Swinburne is not a fin de siècle poet. *Ballads and Poems*, First Series was published in 1866, and for many poets of the 1890s, such as Wilde and Dowson, Swinburne was more often a troublesome precursor than a contemporary rival (Dowling 176–77). Swinburne, though, continued

to publish throughout the 1890s, and most Anglo-American poets then and subsequently seem to have considered his work representative, poetically and morally, of the Yellow Nineties aesthetic. Hart Crane certainly thought so, and he also accepted wholeheartedly the early-twentieth-century revisionary rereading of the Victorian *fin de siècle* that excluded its leftist and / or imperialist aspects (Shaw, the Fabians, Kipling, Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*). (See Stokes xvii for details about this process of erasure.) Throughout this chapter I use "*fin de siècle*" in the loose, somewhat stereotypical sense in which Crane would have understood the term.

14. For the Lord Alfred Douglas connection, see Barnes, *Interviews* 383–84. For more general information about Guido Bruno, see A. Field, "Malicious Zeal."

15. For Crane's involvement with the *Pagan*, see Unterecker 88, 107–8, and 112–14. For Crane's involvement with the *Little Review*, see Unterecker 88–89 and 129–32; see also Anderson 153. See Hammer 18–21 for an account and analysis of Crane's work for little magazines as a failed paradigm for creating a viable career as a modernist poet (as contrasted to Eliot's more successful strategy).

16. See Charlesworth 32–33 for a summary of this early-twentieth-century reaction against Swinburne. For figures such as Yeats and Eliot, she argues, "Swinburne" stood in for the entirety of the decadent aesthetic, as it had been perfected by Swinburne's heirs Wilde, Dowson, and Symons.

17. Pound defines "melopoeia" in his 1929 essay "How to Read, or Why": "MELO-POEIA, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning" (114).

18. T. S. Eliot habitually deprecated the larger portion of his early poetry that remained in manuscript. "Unpublished and unpublishable," he called it in a letter of 1963 (*Inventions* xii). Its derivative and backward-looking character seems to have been one of Eliot's chief reasons for esteeming the verse so little. (A poet of less genius would have been proud to have written such fine poetry so early in his career.) Christopher Ricks's annotations in *Inventions of the March Hare* reveal the degree to which Eliot, during 1909–17, depended upon the British *fin de siècle*, especially Symons and Swinburne. See Eliot, *Inventions* 269–72 for Ricks's analysis of Eliot's debts in "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" to Swinburne's "The Leper."

19. See Perkins 329–47 for the history of the Imagist movement from its founding in 1912 through Amy Lowell's stewardship in the late 1910s and '20s. He gives the Three Principles in their first printed form and details their initial publication history.

20. See Unterecker 89–90 for further details about this incident.

21. See, e.g., *O My* 25 and 30.

22. The oddities in punctuation are all Crane's. He has a maddening habit of not using commas before and after parenthetical material.

23. I owe this insight to the poet Susan Howe. In conversation, she asserted a link between Swinburne and Crane as if it were an established, well-known fact. When I looked at her blankly, she began from memory to reel off passages from Swinburne's

“Triumph of Life” and compare them to lines from “At Melville’s Tomb,” “Voyages,” and other Crane poems.

24. For classic readings of Crane’s “The Dance,” see Brunner 151–60; Gardner; Lewis, *Poetry* 307–16; and Paul, *Hart’s Bridge* 216–22. For discussions of “The Dance” as the climax of *The Bridge*, see Lewis, *Poetry* 307 and Yingling 219–20. For the importance of the fusion of the poem’s speaker with Maquokeeta and Pocahontas, see first Crane, *O My* 347 and then see Lewis 312–13; Paul, *Hart’s Bridge* 220; Sundquist 383; and Winters, *Defense* 44–45.

25. See Yingling 220 for treatment of this passage from “The Dance” as a homo-erotic, masochistic replay of the St. Sebastian topos.

26. For a much more detailed analysis of this crucial document, see ch. 5.

27. The special “American” issue of *transition* (Summer 1928)—which published work by Burke, Cowley, Josephson, and Slater Brown—best exemplifies this collective stand. Josephson’s manifesto, “Open Letter to Mr. Ezra Pound, and the Other ‘Exiles,’” accuses literary expatriates of “malaise” and “insecurity” (101) whereas his clique, which prefers New York to Paris, is striding confidently toward the new millennium (99). See *Pound / Williams* 86–94 for Ezra Pound’s and William Carlos Williams’s responses to Josephson’s “Open Letter.” Although Crane himself does not appear in the Summer 1928 issue of *transition*, the older poets rightly recognize him as the true poetic talent in the circle, so their comments focus on his threat to their authority. Williams, for example, calls “the Crane school” a bunch of “cock suckers” (93) and declares “to hell with them all” (91).

28. For the role “Faustus and Helen” played in Crane’s career, see Unterecker 241–42, 244, 246, 248–49, 252–54, 256–59, 266–67, 278–81, and 312–14. For the pivotal role “Faustus and Helen” played in Crane’s one and only public poetry reading, see *O My* 200 and Unterecker 294. (In attendance were Alfred Stieglitz, Edmund Wilson, Marianne Moore, Van Wyck Brooks, and a host of other New York luminaries.)

29. See *O My* 236 and 346 for two of Crane’s statements about how jazz and jazz rhythms become incorporated into his own poetry.

30. See Crane’s letter to Harris of 8 July 1923 in box 1, folder 3 of the Hart Crane Papers, I; Department of Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University Libraries and Media Services.

31. See, e.g., Edelman 187–93; R. Martin 155–56; Paul, *Hart’s Bridge* 167–68; and Yingling 192–94.

32. For examples of critics interpreting the conclusion of “Cape Hatteras” as an intertextual reference to such lines by Whitman as these, see Edelman 226–28; Hammer 175–76; R. Martin 161–62; Paul, *Hart’s Bridge* 241–42; and Yingling 210–14.

33. I have borrowed the word “rhapsodistify” from an undated letter from Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson, reprinted in her autobiography *My Thirty Years’ War*. Pound writes: “I desire . . . to resurrect the art of the lyric, I means words to be sung, for Yeats’ [*sic*] only wail and submit to keening and chaunting (with a *u*) and Swinburne’s only rhapsodistify” (169; emphasis in original).



34. For an example of an American Renaissance writer's involvement with British culture, see Tamarkin on Frederick Douglass. See also Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* for an extended elucidation of Dickinson's poetic dialogue with such contemporary British writers as Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, and George Eliot.

## Chapter 2

1. For "sissified fussiness," see Pound, *Cantos* 725.

2. One prominent exception is the fourth chapter of John Vincent's *Queer Lyric*, which pairs Crane and Marianne Moore in order to elucidate "issues of desire and identification" (62). Vincent recounts the famous incident of Moore's taking it on herself to revise Crane's "The Wine Menagerie" before accepting it for publication.

3. See, e.g., Benstock, "Expatriate" 116–17n8 for her oddly flat, footnoted concession that *écriture féminine* can be written by men, too, if they rediscover the "femininity" that they have had to disavow in order to become "masculine." See, too, Carlston's chapter on Marguerite Yourcenar: she argues that Yourcenar's recurrent interest in male homosexuality and its political overtones qualifies her for consideration as a Sapphic modernist, despite the fact that her "references to female homosexuality are rare" (88).

4. One work that takes this next step is Terry Castle's *Noël Coward and Radclyffe Hall* (1996), which examines the relationship between the two eponymous figures. She places them fully into their biographical context and freely uses "sapphic" and "gay" to designate literary circles and writings. She seeks out the overlaps and parallels between the male and female homosexual arts communities.

5. On occasion Crane cited Stein as an influence on his poetry (e.g., *O My* 176) and, after meeting her, esteemed her and her salon most highly (401, 406). For the story of Crane's involvement with the "engrossing female" Laura Riding Gottschalk (*O My* 206), see Fisher 260 and 392–4. Riding wrote a review of *White Buildings*, titled "The Telling," that Crane found inscrutable (*O My* 358), but he greatly appreciated the praise included in Riding and Robert Graves's *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, which he warmly recommended to e. e. cummings (357), and he kept up with her other writings, such as the "damned suggestive" and "really remarkable" *Contemporaries & Snobs* (377).

6. For his condescending comments about Millay, see esp. *O My* 69. In the "bucket of feminine lushness that forms a kind of milky way in the poetic firmament of the time," she ranks above Sara Teasdale and on par with "Mme. Browning," for whom he "do[es] not greatly care." For misogynist comments about Moore, see *O My* 325 and 376.

7. These biographical details are drawn from Andrew Field's "Malicious Zeal" 433–41; Djuna Barnes, *Interviews* 383–84; and Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders* 307–10.

8. See Lewis, *Poetry* 16 for a summary dismissal of “C 33,” “Annunciations,” and Crane’s other early work for its derivative, decadent aspects.

9. See Gilbert and Gubar, *Sexchanges* 226–30.

10. There are several pairs of lines that have six stresses altogether. Most of these hexameters—such as “See you sagging down with bulging / Hair to sip”—would have to be scanned either as acephalic iambic or catalectic trochaic, since they begin and end on stressed syllables, clipping one unstressed syllable at either the start or end. This anomalous meter would seem to be an expansion of the catalectic tetrameter common in ballads and other popular forms.

11. For Pound’s aversion to Crane, see ch. 1. See Benstock, *Women* 232 for Pound’s aversion to Djuna Barnes, who he once said “wrote rather like a baboon.”

12. For the history of Greenwich Village as a queer community, see Chauncey, ch. 9 (“Building Neighborhood Enclaves: The Village and Harlem”), esp. 228–32.

13. See Benstock, *Women* 245 for this dynamic as revisited in Barnes’s writings.

14. For details about its publication history, see Steven Moore’s afterword to the Dalkey Archive edition of *Ladies Almanack* as well as Benstock, *Women* 249–50. See Herring, *Djuna* 151–54 for more about this period of Barnes’s life, esp. for a “skeleton key” that itemizes how the characters in *Ladies Almanack* match up with specific women in the Barney circle (154).

15. See Benstock, *Women* 246. In the preface to the 1972 Harper Row edition of *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes declares the work to be “Neap-tide to the Proustian chronicle” (3).

16. Excerpts from Joyce’s “Work in Progress” surfaced as early as 1924 in the journal *Transatlantic Review*, but publication began in earnest in 1927 in *transition*. From April to November of that year, Joyce published serially what would become the eight parts of the first book of *Finnegans Wake*.

17. Although *Finnegans Wake* was not the working title of Joyce’s final novel in 1928, there is a moment in *Ladies Almanack* that leads one to suspect that Barnes already identified “Finnegan’s Wake” with Joyce’s work. In a section headed “Spring Fevers, Love Philters, and Winter Feasts,” she provides yet another genealogy for homosexuality, and she tells how, over the aeons, there emerged “Queen-Man and King-Woman under the Bells of the Bride’s Wake, and Corpse Sleep” (69). In her “Bride’s Wake,” Barnes substitutes homoerotic love for the heterosexual, incestual family romance (HCE / ALP / Izzy) at the center of Joyce’s *Wake*.

18. Compare Crane’s statement, “I find my imagination more sufficient all the time. The work of the workaday world is what I dislike” (*O My* 134).

19. See Jane Marcus, “Laughing at Leviticus” 228. See also Benstock, “Expatriate” 99–104; and Alan Singer, “The Horse Who Knew Too Much” 71ff.

## Chapter 3

1. See M. Brown for an eloquent summary of the arguments against periodization, as well as a defense of periods as necessary evils: “Periods trouble our quiet so

as to bring history to life" (311). See Mellor for another recent statement on the question. She argues that "our literary periodizations" for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "are conceptually useless for, perhaps even counterproductive in, illuminating women's literary history" (393).

2. See Chauncey and the third chapter of Faderman.

3. For examples of Crane's predisposition to become an avid proponent of literature that he deemed homoerotic, see Hammer 126–29 and 135–37.

4. See, e.g., *O My* 72, 92, 117, and 119.

5. Hopkins's prose writings are full of speculations about sound's role in poetry. See esp. *Selected Letters* 86–87; 89–91; 107–9; 118–20; 142–49; 184–86; and 218–21, as well as *Journals* 11 and 267ff (Hopkins's notes for a lecture on rhyme and rhythm in poetry). For especially illuminating moments of self-reflection on Swinburne's poetics of "elemental sound" (Dowling 178), see Swinburne, *SCP* 11:6 and 14:150–51.

6. Although Perloff does not do so, one could, of course, trace the prehistory of this rhetoric back to Chaucer, to Dante, and well beyond.

7. See Weinfeld 168–71. Weinfeld also pinpoints many subtleties involved in Wordsworth's stance toward Gray—primarily having to do with Wordsworth's vexed relation to Milton—that I do not have space here to recapitulate.

8. The third chapter of Stewart's *Lyric Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002) extensively reworks and expands the article "Lyric Possession," but the version of the argument that appeared in the original piece is more pertinent in the present context.

9. See Sigworth 149 for a comparison between Pope's, Wordsworth's, and Collins's sense of the term "nature." Sigworth argues that Collins's "nature" is utterly unlike that of the other two writers. It is "a world of ideal forms made real by the divine act of imagination."

10. Compare Crane's address to the poet in "The Dance": "Medicine-man, relent, restore— / *Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn!*" (*HCCP* 64; emphasis added).

11. Compare T. S. Eliot's "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," in which he writes that "an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me . . . to be an affair of adolescence: for most of us, Shelley has marked an intense period before maturity, but for how many does Shelley remain the companion of age?" (*Selected Prose* 81). Shelley, of course, was a favorite writer of both Swinburne and Crane. See, e.g., *O My* 69.

12. See McCormick, "Falling Asleep over Grillparzer" for a 1953 article on Lowell that recounts a brilliant lecture that Lowell had given on Crane and Lowell's reaction to the already current argument that *Lord Weary's Castle* is indebted to Crane (26–27). In a 1961 *Paris Review* interview that appears in the same volume (Frederick Seidel, "The Art of Poetry: Robert Lowell"), Lowell says that he was indeed reading Crane while writing his first book (51), and he praises Crane as "the great poet" of his day, although he also states that "his style never worked for me" because imitating him resulted in "merely verbal" poetry (68–69). See W. Doeski 37–39 for a recent statement on Crane's importance as a model for *Lord Weary's Castle* as well as for comments on Lowell's subsequent move away from Crane.

13. See also Witek 11–12, in which she locates "Words for Hart Crane" among

those poems Lowell wrote in the early 1950s in a period when he was struggling to move out of the “‘highly metrical’ (and rigid in other ways) form against which he [felt that he] must rebel.”

14. See Hammer 229–32 for Lowell’s turn to Crane as an alternative to Eliotic modernism. See his second chapter, “The Realism of *The Waste Land*,” for Allen Tate’s dawning recognition that Eliot and Crane offered alternative paths. See, too, Yingling 18–20.

15. See Tate 315 and 318.

16. I borrow the phrase “lines of escape” from Christian Bök and Darren Wershler-Henry’s unpublished paper on Steve McCaffery’s *Carnival* given at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, conference Eye-Rhymes in June 1997.

17. Compare the argument in this paragraph to Laura Riding and Robert Graves’s contention in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) that “Much of the intensity of his poetry—intensity often protracted into strain—is due to the conflict between discipline and originality” (289–90). What I have characterized as the general and restricted economies of poetry correlates roughly with what they label “romanticism” and “classicism.”

18. See, e.g., Bernstein, Interview 11; *My Way* 127; and *The Sophist* 37.

19. Compare this argument to Robert Creeley’s contention that Crane let his “sense of purpose” limit his achievements: “had he let it move on impulse and trusted that impulse, he would have had an extraordinary thing” (qtd. in Entwistle 97).

## Chapter 4

This chapter is a revised and expanded version of my article “Hart Crane’s Victrola,” *Modernism / Modernity* 7.1 (January 2000): 99–125.

1. See De Duve 442–44 for a recent explication (and exemplary application) of Kant’s concept of the aesthetic as consisting in “purposiveness without a purpose.”

2. The *OED* actually gives a second definition for “selion”: “a furrow turned over by the plough.” This is listed as a “nonce-use” appearing precisely once in the language: in this poem, Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “The Windhover.” I can understand the lexicographers’ confusion over how to read “sillion” here given the immediate context, but I can see no good reason, other than wishing to impose an unambiguous meaning on the poem, for formulating a new definition and declaring it a “nonce-use.”

3. See, e.g., Grossman 102 and Sharp 199.

4. For a few well-told recollections of Crane’s boisterousness, see Cowley 191–92, 278, and 290.

5. See Crosby 262 (the entry for 12 July 1929) and compare 236–40 and 260–62.

6. See especially Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, *Wireless Imagination* (1992); Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice* (1991); Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices* (1990); and Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900* (the 1990 English translation of *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 / 1900* [München: Fink, 1985]). For treatments of radio and literature, see, e.g., James Connor, “RADIO free JOYCE”; Adalaide Morris, “Sound

Technologies”; Daniel Tiffany, *Radio Corpse*; and Allen Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*. For an informative, invaluable general history of the phonograph that pays special attention to its effects on the literature of the twentieth century, see the “gramophone” third of Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. For a fascinating theoretical treatment of the gramophone’s significance in literary history, see Charles Grivel, “The Phonograph’s Horned Mouth.” For another case study of a single author’s interaction with the phonograph, see Douglas Kahn, “Death in the Light of the Phonograph.”

7. See the essays collected in Morris, *Sound States* (1997) and Bernstein, *Close Listening* (1998).

8. For a textual example of this compositional process in action, see the fragmentary drafts of “Atlantis” dated ca. 1926 and the “worksheet” for “Atlantis” dated ca. 1926 in box 9 of the Hart Crane Papers at the Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. The line “Sheerly the eyes are spilled in avenues” appears, with small variations (“and” replaces “are,” “poured” substitutes for “spilled”), fourteen times over four sheets of paper. Crane has typed on the front and back of three of these sheets. One of these three sheets has, additionally, been pulled from the typewriter, inverted, reloaded into the paper carriage, and typed on again, so that the text on the page proceeds both from top to bottom and bottom to top. In most cases the line “Sheerly the eyes are spilled in avenues” kicks off a short run of lines in which Crane tests out various permutations of a small set of repeated phrases and words (e.g., “tendon,” “blade,” “shuttle,” “press,” “bitingly,” “spear,” “loom,” “winnowing,” “cipher”). The eventual result of this frenzied repetition would be the fourth stanza of “Atlantis” as it appears in *The Bridge* (“Sheerly the eyes, like seagulls stung with rime— / Slit and propelled by glistening fins of light. . . .” [HCCP 105]).

9. Quoted in, not cited by, Unterecker 404.

10. See Paul, *Hart’s Bridge* 249 and Lewis, *Poetry* 347n7. See also S. Brown 110–11.

11. Francis De Witt, lyricist, and Robert Hood Bowers, composer, “The Moon Shines on the Moonshine,” Columbia A-2849. Vocals by Bert Williams. Recorded 1 December 1919. Rereleased as track 1, side 1 of *Follies, Scandals, and Other Diversions: From Ziegfeld to the Schuberts*, New World Records NW215. I have taken the lyrics from *Follies’* liner notes, modified slightly to reflect Williams’s departures from De Witt’s words during performance.

12. See Edelman 8–22. For very early but still highly perceptive commentary on this same problem, see Eastman 93–97.

13. See Edelman 63 for the significance of the color white in Crane’s work.

14. For Wagner, see Unterecker 140. For Franck, see Unterecker 628. For Dvořák, see Unterecker 547.

15. For *Hit the Deck*, see Unterecker 363. For Sophie Tucker, see Unterecker 628.

16. Quoted in, not cited by, Unterecker 649.

17. See Unterecker 628 and 663.

18. See, e.g., David Hayman, “Reading Joyce’s Notebooks?!” and Claude Jacquet, “In the Buginning Is the Woid: James Joyce and Genetic Criticism.”

19. See Delany, *Longer Views* 187 and Sharp.
20. See *O My* 51, 60, 80, and 154. See also Sharp 197–99 and Unterecker 208 and 226.
21. For Crane's statements about jazz, see *O My* 88 and *HCCPSLP* 250. See also the second part of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" (*HCCP* 29–30). For Crane's friendship with Varèse while living in France, see *O My* 395, 401, 406, and 410.
22. See Unterecker 388 and 594. See also *O My* 113 and 157 for Crane's general praise of Ravel.
23. Crane wrote this letter in 1922. Ravel's *Boléro* is from 1928. (Crane is most likely referring to a 78 with a band performing a traditional bolero, a Spanish dance tune in 3/4 time.) I would justify my use of Crane's quote despite this anachronism (1) because of its aptness (I believe, given his enthusiasm for Ravel's *Boléro*, that he would not protest) and (2) because my analysis of "Crane's *Boléro*" is intended to typify his relation to *all* recorded music.
24. My translation of Lévi-Strauss 13–14.
25. My thanks to Robert Fink for helping me hash out my ideas regarding Crane, *Boléro*, and American minimalist music.
26. See R. Browning, "Abt Vogler" 170.
27. For the biographical basis of "Episode of Hands," see *O My* 38 and 40; see also Unterecker 167–68.
28. Compare Tim Dean's argument that Crane's poetry records the experience of sublimity without specifying an identity for the one undergoing the experience. See Dean 88–89.
29. Caroline Jones employs the concept of the "technological sublime" throughout *Machine in the Studio*. She did not coin the term, of course. It has had wide currency in discussions of the relationship between technology and postmodern literature and art. Her ultimate source, as her title indicates, is Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964).
30. One anecdotal bit of support for this equation between these artists' "studios" and Crane's working environment: in the early 1960s Andy Warhol hit upon a painting regimen reminiscent of Crane's Victrola sessions. "I had this routine of painting with rock and roll blasting the same song, a 45rpm, over and over all day long—songs like . . . 'I Saw Linda Yesterday' by Dickie Lee. The music blasting cleared my head out and left me working on instinct alone" (Warhol and Hackett 7).
31. See Jameson, *Postmodernism* 32–33, 276.
32. Quoted in Unterecker 156. Original source is Alice Chamberlain, "Millionaire's Son Is Clerk In An Akron Drug Store," *Akron Sunday Times* 21 Dec. 1919.
33. For Warhol's deliberate confusion of "Business" and "Art," see C. Jones 202–3.
34. See Unterecker 34 and 156.
35. In thinking about the "energy" coursing through America's industrial heartland in these years, contemplate the fact that Akron, in the year before Crane moved there, had increased industrial output by 25 percent. Crane's Ohio years coincide with

one of the biggest industrial expansions in world history—the kind of regional transformation that would have made Soviet planners in the 1930s giddy to contemplate. See Unterecker 150.

36. Crane, significantly, anticipates by six decades the DJ revolt of the 1980s and 1990s that Paul Gilroy analyzes in *The Black Atlantic*. Like a hip-hop DJ, Crane takes “the basic units of commercial consumption in which music is fast frozen,” and, through “supplementary creative input,” “transfigures” them, reasserting individual aesthetic agency in the age of mechanical reproduction. See Gilroy 105.

37. See *O My* 66 for the 1921 first draft of “The Bottom of the Sea Is Cruel.” For the poem’s subsequent textual history, see Brunner 48–50.

38. These lines are taken, respectively, from Sonnets 71 and 65. See Shakespeare 1856 and 1855 (brackets in original).

39. See, respectively, Edelman 165, 170, and 174.

40. Edelman 126–78 and Selinger 85–118.

41. See, e.g., Edelman 178: “‘Voyages’ thus ends with his reduction of pathos to the synchronic workings of figure, but that reduction intends his poetic survival through a strategy alert to the diachronic dimension of any figural practice.” See, too, Selinger 86 for his summary of the “drama” and “plot” of “Voyages,” which, as he sees it, culminates in a turn away from addressing a particularized beloved (“you,” the ideal reader) toward a more general romance with “poetry itself,” “the imaged Word.”

42. For the sad end to Crane and Opffer’s romance, see Delany, *Longer Views* 182–84.

43. See Walter Landor, “Past Ruined Ilion” (Auden and Pearson 239).

44. See Hammer 182 for more commentary on Crane’s punctuation practice. Crane’s punctuation in his mature poetry bears obvious resemblances to that of one of his favorite writers, Emily Dickinson. Nevertheless, writing well before the famous 1955 Thomas Johnson edition of Dickinson’s poems, Crane would have known nothing about Dickinson’s characteristic dash.

45. See Hammer 153–54 for Crane’s use of meter to offset his anomalous grammar.

46. “Pseudo-Reference” is the fourth type of “defect” in experimental poetry that Yvor Winters outlines in his essay “The Experimental School in American Poetry.” See Winters, *Defense* 30–74. For Winters specifically on Crane’s “pseudo-referentiality,” see 40–46, 51–52, and 56.

47. For several exemplary uses of “parataxis” in the explication of modernist and postmodernist literature, see David Hayman, “James Joyce, Paratactician”; N. Katherine Hayles, “Postmodern Parataxis”; Bob Perelman, “Parataxis and Narrative”; and Peter Quartermain, “Parataxis in Basil Bunting and Louis Zukofsky.”

48. The paramount exception would have been Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose notoriously loose and wayward syntax commits many solecisms, especially anacoluthon. For an analysis of Swinburne’s “difficult grammar,” see Brisman 584 and 595. For modernist condemnation of Swinburne’s grammatical vagaries, see T. S. Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 148–49 and Empson 163–66.

49. For an analysis of Ashbery's attenuated but unbroken syntax, see Jody Norton, "Whispers Out of Time": The Syntax of Being in the Poetry of John Ashbery."
50. See Ashbery, *Selected Poems* 326. Numbers and division markers added.
51. For a comparison between Crane's rough and Ashbery's smooth textures, see Selinger 112.
52. For Bernstein's definition of "dysraphism" by way of contrasting it to collage, juxtaposition, montage, organic form, and parataxis, see Bernstein, *Content's* 358–59. See also the poem titled "Dysraphism" in Bernstein, *The Sophist* 44–50.
53. For "just walking around," see Ashbery, *Selected Poems* 306; for "skating," see 71; for "flow," see Ashbery, *Flow Chart* passim.
54. For "weather," see, e.g., Ashbery, *Selected* 66 and 221; *Flow Chart* 147, 169, 175, 181, 203, 209, and 212. For "diagram," see *Selected* 68; *As We Know* 5; and *Flow Chart* 136.
55. This phrase is taken from Ashbery's poem "Clepsydra." See *Selected Poems* 68.
56. Robert Fink's forthcoming book on American musical minimalism (*Repeating Ourselves*, University of California Press) details the evolution from the nineteenth-century erotics of the "peak" (exemplified by the Schubert crescendo) to the eroticization of the "plateau" by Steve Reich and other contemporary composers.
57. I owe this information to Mark Maslan. Personal correspondence dated 14 Jan. 2000. He recalls being "tormented" while being driven around by Ashbery's then-secretary, who insisted on playing one of Ashbery's "cast-off" tapes in the car (namely a piece by Alfred Schnittke, the Soviet composer).

## Chapter 5

1. Of the lyrics that appear in the 1930 version of *The Bridge*, he had yet to complete "Indiana," "Cape Hatteras," and "Quaker Hill." See chapter 8 for details concerning two more, never-written, lyrics that could have made it into the completed volume, namely "1927 Whistles" and "The Calgary Express."
2. Wagner himself, though he knew the term "leitmotif," preferred to use phrases such as "ground themes," "ground motifs," and "musical moments of intuition." "Leitmotif" was popularized by the early Wagner scholar Hans von Wolzogen (Sabor 147).
3. *White Buildings* was published in 1926, after Crane met Kahn face-to-face, but Crane wrote or revised no more than three of the twenty-three lyrics in the book after that interview (Dec. 1925). Of those three, "The Wine Menagerie" has an uncertain date of composition (between Oct. 1925 and Apr. 1926), and "Voyages," which Crane began writing in March 1921, was completed at an indeterminate point before Apr. 1926. Only one lyric, "Repose of Rivers," ascertainably postdates Dec. 1925 (it was written sometime in spring 1926) (*HCCP* 230–33).
4. See *HCCPSLP* 197–98 for Crane's short 1918 essay "The Case Against Nietzsche," in which he defends Nietzsche from Great War-era prejudice against all things German. He purports to have read *Human, All too Human*, which he claims repudiates Prussianism without ever naming it as such (197). Nietzsche does not seem to have



left a lasting impression on Crane, however. The philosopher's name does not appear in his selected letters. If Nietzsche did influence Crane, he likely did so secondhand, via such writers as Fyodor Dostoevsky, whom Crane did read avidly. See, e.g., *O My* 45, 55–56, and 58.

5. For a thorough, recent account of Wagner's anti-Semitism as manifested both in his theoretical writings and in his music dramas, see Weiner.

6. See the second chapter ("Immanence and Diaspora") of Fredman for an account of *The Menorah Journal* and its complex efforts to articulate an interstitial identity, neither immigrant-ethnic-traditional nor American-assimilationist-modern.

7. For Swinburne's 1861 review of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, see SCP 13:417–27. For Baudelaire's letter to Swinburne thanking him for the review and initiating a correspondence, see Swinburne, *Letters* I.87–88. For Swinburne's letters to Mallarmé, see *Letters* III.114–15, 132–34, 142–43, and 193–94 as well as VI.276–77. Swinburne was fluent in French, and, through James McNeill Whistler, he became acquainted with Édouard Manet, who became his entrée to the Parisian avant-garde (III.42).

8. For *Lohengrin* see P. Henderson 136. For *Tristan und Isolde* see 33, 175, and 176. For Bayreuth see 136–37. Swinburne apparently had heard rumors in 1867 that Wagner would shortly be staging "the whole of the Nibelungen" over "four nights" (136). The complete *Ring* would not debut until a decade later, however.

9. See SCP 2:45 and 85. The quotation is from 85.

10. Wagner derived the spellings "Tristan" and "Isolde" from Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, the early-thirteenth-century romance that was his opera's chief source. The usual spelling of the names in Victorian Britain, "Tristram" and "Iseult," derived ultimately from the Middle English romance *Tristrem*. Sir Walter Scott had edited and published a new edition of *Tristrem* in 1804, and subsequently both Matthew Arnold (in *Tristram and Iseult* [1852]) and Alfred Tennyson (in *Idylls of the King* [1859]) used the "Tristram" spelling. Variants of "Iseult" were possible, though, such as Tennyson's "Isolt" and Swinburne's "Yseult" in *Queen Yseult* (1857–58).

11. I have borrowed this metaphor from Marjorie Perloff, who, writing about Language Poetry in *Dance of the Intellect* (1985), claimed that "the immediate impression likely to be produced by a Bernstein or a Silliman poem is that Swinburne or Crane have somehow been put through the Cuisinart: what finds its way into the bowl looks, at first sight, like so many chopped and hence unrecognizable vegetables" (218).

12. See Herzog for the longtime evasion of sociopolitical questions among "staunch Wagnerites." Not until the 1990s did professional music critics—most notably Marc Weiner—dare address "adequately . . . the thorny problem of examining racism in Wagner's music production." The usual strategy was to posit an insuperable divide between his essays and their failings, on the one hand, and his music, on the other (985–86).

13. For the most famous "revolutionary" reading of the *Ring*, see George Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898). Samuel Delany discusses its "socialist awareness" in his essay "Wagner / Artaud" (*Longer* 43).

14. This dissent from Enlightenment rationality can sound remarkably like a

simplified account of Martin Heidegger's later philosophy. This family resemblance is no coincidence: Heidegger, via Friedrich Nietzsche, continued the Wagnerian rebellion against rationalist philosophy. See Lacoue-Labarthe for a highly suggestive, Hegelian-inflected reading of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Adorno in relation to Wagner's legacy.

15. These lines are from Baudelaire's lyric "Correspondances," which appears in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) (193). Baudelaire also quotes these lines in his essay "Richard Wagner à Paris et *Tannhäuser*" (676).

16. For the concept of the "reality effect," see Roland Barthes, "Reality Effect."

17. For Swinburne, see ch. 1. For Baudelaire see Fisher 70; *O My* 118, 271.

18. For occasions when Crane visited an opera house, see Fisher 45. Compare his declaration that without "my Victrola . . . [and] Wagner records—I am desolate" (*O My* 113).

19. This example of "Steinian drone" is drawn from the final paragraph of her novella *Many Many Women*. See Stein 222.

20. See ch. 1 for Crane's pre-*Little Review* involvement with Swinburne. See Fisher 46 for Crane's 1917 introduction to Symons, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire through the poet Padraic Colum. Crane first seriously begins to read Eliot in 1919 (see, e.g., *O My* 25). See McGee 514–15 for Eliot's tendency to interpret modern European art music as a defensive or decadent response to the "barbaric noises of modern life." (Compare Bucknell 119–25.) Crane in contrast embraced this barbarism and sought, through study of "men like Strauss, Ravel, Scriabine [*sic*]" to achieve "new *timbres*" and thereby make himself over as "a suitable *Pindar* for the machine age" (*O My* 137; emphasis in original).

21. See Weston's preface for her anecdote about the book's 1911 origins in Bayreuth. See Delany, *Longer* 72 for commentary on Weston's Wagnerism.

22. See Halpern 2–4 and 26–27 concerning Eliot's celebration of Elizabethan England's "organic community" and his habit of juxtaposing it with modern times as a means of evaluating past and present cultural accomplishment. See too Ricks 40–54 (on Eliot's *After Strange Gods* and his enduring investment in racially and religiously "homogenous" culture) and Bucknell 119–25. The invocation in this passage of Tönnies's distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* is purely my own means of summarizing such arguments concisely.

23. Compare McGee 517–18. He holds that Eliot's reduction of the Rheinmaiden leitmotif to onomatopoeic verse "compounds the original leitmotif's sense of cultural loss by transforming the absent music of the Rhinedaughter's lament into an object of cultural desire . . . thereby repeating and further displacing that song's longing for the prior, lost origin of the gold. . . . [T]he loss of the embodiment or performance of the melody actually serves to idealize and universalize the Rhinedaughters' leitmotif as the essence of music. . . . The effect is to render the particular melody more absent still and yet to represent the paradigm of song as such."

24. Crane wrote Munson on 20 November 1922 to ask his opinion about "The Waste Land." Crane's initial reaction was negative: "What do you think of Eliot's *The*

*Wastelands* [sic]? I was rather disappointed. It was good, of course, but so damned dead. Neither does it, in my opinion, add anything important to Eliot's achievement" (108).

25. See Trask 123–41 for an extended treatment of movement, social mixing, and perverse sexuality in *The Bridge*.

## Chapter 6

1. In ch. 2 of *The Future of Theory* Jean-Michel Rabaté recounts the emergence of "intertextuality" as a theoretical concept. He locates its origins in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, details its post-WWII revival and revision by Julia Kristeva, and explains its subsequent importance for Roland Barthes (see esp. 71 and 88).

2. For an account of the publication and significance of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* anthology, see Golding 3–41.

3. Following a common, convenient British practice, I will be referring to the U.S. poets affiliated with Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960) as "New Americans."

4. Among those who wrote elegies were James Agee (49–50), Paul Engle (50–51), Marsden Hartley (119–27), Kenneth Rexroth (*Collected Shorter Poems* 122–25), John Wheelwright (45–45), and Yvor Winters (*Collected Poems* 140 and 142). Later elegies by Crane's contemporaries include ones by Walter Lowenfels (18–24) and Marianne Moore (205). See Parry 357–58 for how one contemporary account of the American avant-garde concludes by using Crane's suicide to stand for the fate of the entire collective enterprise. Granville Hicks's influential *The Great Tradition* (1935) makes a similar argument (291–92).

5. For Crane's troubles with Tate, see Fisher 289–91, 431, and 504. For Crane's break with Winters, see Fisher 429–30.

6. See Tate, *Essays* 310–23 and 324–28; and Winters, *In Defense of Reason* 12, 22, 26–28, 40–46, 56, 88, 91–92, 94, 101, 155, and 577–603.

7. See the third chapter of Golding ("The New Criticism and American Poetry in the Academy") for an overview of the history, pedagogy, and institutional politics of this cohort of U.S. literary critics.

8. See Blackmur for an exemplary New Critical dismantling of Crane's poetry. See Golding 141–42 for commentary on the perversity of New Critical canonizing of Crane as a failed poet.

9. See Creeley, *Collected Essays* 4–5. See also Creeley, "Autobiography" 130–32. See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* 500 and 592 for further examples of Matthiessen's relative disinterest in Crane.

10. A shortlist of the premier New Americans who attended elite universities in the 1940s: John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Frank O'Hara, and Charles Olson were Harvard men; Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan, and Jack Spicer were Berkeley students;

Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac matriculated at Columbia. For the anti-academic bias of the New Americans, see Rasula 231–47.

11. Detailing the relation between Blackburn and Crane occupies the second half of this chapter. For Creeley and Crane, see Creeley, “Autobiography” 132, 134, 137, and 144; Creeley, *Collected Poems* 23 and 109–10; Creeley, *Quick Graph* 75–91; Creeley, *Tales Out of School* 7, 62, 68, 74, and 124; Olson and Creeley, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1 (42, 102–5, 112, 132), vol. 2 (18–21, 60, 68), and vol. 3 (143). For Everson and Crane, see Everson, *Naked Heart* 48–49, 157; Everson and Powell 17–18, 77; Gelpi, “Everson / Antoninus” 42. For Ferlinghetti and Crane, see Wisker 79. For Ginsberg and Crane, see Ellingham and Killian 276; Ginsberg, *Collected Poems* 167–69, 425, 429, 433, 436, 452, and 476; Ginsberg, “Interview” 244–45; Ginsberg, *Journals* 138, 222, 235–36, 248, and 430; Kerouac, *Pull My Daisy* 22; Muckle 12 and 20. For Kaufman and Crane, see Damon, *Dark End* 43, 56, 63, 65–66 and 75; Hirschman 11, 19, 54, 68, and 87; Lindberg 174–75. For Kees and Crane, see Kees 31, 85, 186, 189, and 191–93. For McClure and Crane, see McClure 48–49 and 173. For Olson and Crane, see Olson, *Collected Poems* 4–5, 36, and 240 (a rewriting of “At Melville’s Tomb”); Olson, *Maximus* 37; Olson and Creeley, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1 (136, 144–46), vol. 2 (9–13), vol. 5 (112), and vol. 6 (33–34); see also Beach, *ABC* 114; Paul, *Olson’s Push* 61, 128, 147, 151, 153, 177–78, 240, 248, and 260n23. For Sorrentino and Crane, see Sorrentino, *White Sail* 13 and 24. For Spicer and Crane, see Damon, *Dark End* 148, 155, 157, and 170; Ellingham and Killian 309; Fabian 50; Oakner 9; Spicer, *Collected Books* 129, 224, and 229; Spicer, *One Night Stand* xiv–v, xv–vi, xviii–ix, and 3. For Philip Whalen and Crane, see Whalen, *Overtime* 88 and 292. For John Wieners and Crane, see Wieners, “Interview” 292.

12. See, e.g., Beard 22; C[orman] 52; Ginsberg, “Notes on Young Poets” 125; Sorrentino, “Review of *Life Studies*” 7 and “*Signal: A New Magazine*”; and Tallman 15.

13. For Crane’s “Atlantis” as a “model text precursor inspiration” for *Howl*, see Ginsberg, *Howl* 175–76 and 186–87. See Ginsberg’s *Journals* 138 for the poet’s musings on another Crane poem, “Praise for an Urn,” in June 1955, two months before the composition of *Howl*. See *Howl* 126 and 135 for Ginsberg’s 1986 annotations of specific allusions to Crane in the first part of *Howl*. (He writes that the line “who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love” refers to Crane’s biography [126] and that the three lines beginning “who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard,” “who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars,” and “who jumped in limousines with the Chinamen of Oklahoma” all allude to a particular passage in Crane’s “The River” [135]—for the relevant passage see lines 51–71 of “The River” as they appear in *HCCP* [58–59].) For Ginsberg’s intense identification with Crane while working on the second part of *Howl*, see Ginsberg, *Journals* 222 and 235.

14. For anecdotal evidence of this contention see Ginsberg qtd. in Breslin 83; Creeley, *Quick Graph* 42 and 76.

15. The best source is Christopher Beach’s *ABC of Influence*. The first three chapters lay out the trajectories of influence, including W. C. Williams with the “expanded

Poundian field.” The fourth through ninth chapters address the cases of particular, significant New American Poets: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, and Ed Dorn. Crane hardly features in Beach’s study—he appears largely in his guise as one of Harold Bloom’s favored poets (46, 53).

16. For Olson and Hartley, see Clark, *Charles Olson* 69–70. For Burroughs and Ginsberg, see Miles, *Ginsberg* 47–48 and Burroughs 21.

17. Compare my reading of Creeley’s “Hart Crane” to Alice Entwistle’s in “Creeley and Crane” (88–93). Entwistle concentrates much less on the question of community than on craft: “Words draw Creeley to Crane. Resonant diction, ‘consonantal shadings’ and emotional intensity compel the eye along, and the ear through, an intricate mesh of sounds, into and ultimately beyond the dimensions of paraphrasable meaning” (89).

18. See ch. 2 of Libbie Rifkin’s *Career Moves* for an examination of Creeley’s developing vision of a “company of love” as the basis for community formation among U.S. avant-garde poets. See esp. her reading of the closing lines of “For Love”—“Into the company of love / it all returns”—and their echo of Crane’s “visionary company of love” in “The Broken Tower” as Creeley’s “professional affirmation” (69).

19. See *Origin* 2 (Summer 1951): 100. “Hart Crane (2)” is reprinted as “Hart Crane 2” in Creeley’s *Collected Poems* 23. See Entwistle 93–97 for an extended, sympathetic reading of the lyric.

20. *Origin* 8 (Winter 1952) is unpaginated. For the quotations that I have used, see Olson, *Collected Poems* 189–90.

21. Note that in “The Broken Tower” Crane had claimed that “Not stone shall jacket heaven” but a tower “within” that “swells” (*HCCP* 161). Thus, Olson’s “new stone, new tufa, to finish off this rising tower” also implies a critique of Crane, an assertion that Crane’s late symbolist aesthetic is too subjective and insufficiently materialist. I do not have the space here to do justice to Olson’s tumultuous relationship with Crane’s poetry. See the sources that I list above in n. 11 for the full range, from endorsements to summary dismissals. See, too, Paul, *Olson’s Push* 260n23 for a specific discussion of “La Torre” as marking a swerve away from Crane.

22. Creeley reprinted the review of Hart Crane’s *Letters* in *Quick Graph* (89–91).

23. See Rifkin’s *Career Moves* for an extended inquiry into the “conflictual and unstable” means of community formation that the New Americans developed in conscious repudiation of mainstream literary production and consumption. See esp. 32–37 on the problem of “professionalism.”

24. See Rifkin 26 and 29–30 for discussions of the “openness” prized by New Americans in interpersonal relations and the consequent “conflictual” and “unstable” social network.

25. The virgule in “dead/pan” appears in the original. The others have been added at line breaks.

26. See Davidson, “Compulsory” 213–14 for an analysis of Spicer’s and Olson’s poetics, which depend on “separat[ing] ‘inside’ from ‘outside,’” in terms of “gender border control.”

27. See Creeley, *Collected Essays* 4–5. See also Creeley, “Autobiography” 130–32.
28. For “non(re)productiveness,” see Carlston 51. See also my ch. 2.
29. See Davidson, “Compulsory” 197–98 and 214 for his general statement of this fact. He more specifically discusses homosexuality in the Beat, Black Mountain, and San Francisco Renaissance poetry circles (see, respectively, 199, 202–3, and 208–10).
30. See Rifkin 7–8 for an illuminating statement on the institutionality of this process of exclusion.
31. See Kane 23–26 for a subtle account of first-generation New York School poetry both as designedly negating Black Mountain machismo and as sharing sufficient aesthetic and social values so as to constitute not an entrenched enemy but instead a loyal opposition.
32. See Crane’s eloquent tribute, the sonnet “To Emily Dickinson” (*HCCP* 128). He recycles the medieval tradition of the *blason*, anatomizing, however, not Dickinson’s physical self but the virtues of her poetry, concluding that even “remotest mind” might be inadequate to plumbing her all. It is a remarkably humble and prescient homage, presaging the late-twentieth-century recognition of Dickinson as one of the greatest poets in the language. See also his lyric “Quaker Hill” (*HCCP* 91 and 94).
33. See Rifkin 8–9 for a complementary discussion about the “persistent and vexed” role of sexuality in New American community formation, as inflected through Sedgwick’s theory of homosocial desire.
34. In Spicer’s case, “cowboy aesthetic” is more than metaphorical. See his poem-cycle “Billy the Kid” for an example of Hollywood conventions of the western recast as a homoerotic idyll.
35. For Olson’s misogyny, see Davidson, “Compulsory” 202–5, esp. 204–5, which focuses on the “difficulties” that “Olson’s Ahab-like authority” presented to his female students at Black Mountain College. See also Susan Howe’s essay, “Since a Dialogue We Are,” which critiques Olson’s gender politics from the standpoint of a woman writer influenced by his poetics (“I know that Charles Olson’s writing encouraged me to be a radical poet. . . . Had he been my teacher in real life, I know he would have stopped my voice” [166]). For Blackburn both as a “cowboy” poet and as an inheritor of Olson’s masculinist poetics, see Kane 19 and 24. For a feminist critique of Blackburn’s treatment of women, see Perloff, “On the Other Side of the Field” 200–205.
36. Compare Rifkin on Berrigan, Olson, and Zukofsky: “certain figures of sexual ambiguity appear to undermine the precise version of self-legitimizing authorial identity whose value they worked to institutionalize; homosexuality gets registered as threat at moments when the boundaries of poetic authority are particularly vulnerable” (134).
37. See chapters 4 and 5 of Kane for the history and micropolitics of the founding of the St. Marks Poetry Project. See esp. 134–37 and 159–61 for the passing-over of Blackburn and the subsequent ascendancy of the second-generation New York School. See also 140–41 for Waldman’s conscious resolution, as head of the Poetry Project, to combat the “machismo sexual politics” of the New Americans.

## Chapter 7

1. O'Hara published *A City Winter, and Other Poems* (Tibor de Nagy, 1952); *Meditations in an Emergency* (Grove Press, 1957); *Odes* (Tiber Press, 1960); *Lunch Poems* (City Lights, 1964); and *Love Poems (Tentative Title)* (Tibor de Nagy, 1965). He also published two single-poem chapbooks, *Oranges* (Tibor de Nagy, 1953) and *Second Avenue* (Totem / Corinth Press, 1960).

2. The term "intimate community" derives from Paul Goodman's "Advance-Guard Writing, 1900–1950" (1951), where he uses it to describe the post-WWII avant-garde's efforts to overcome alienation through intense, immediate personal ties between artists. Terrence Diggory takes up and refines Goodman's argument (17–21).

3. See, e.g., Diggory; Ward 61–62; Perloff, *Frank O'Hara* xvii–xx.

4. Shaw's article "On Coterie: Frank O'Hara" is unpaginated.

5. See Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" See also Warner ch. 3, esp. 88–90, 101–4, and 117–26, for a critique of the marriage tie as a heteronormative institution funded by state authority.

6. See Creeley, *Collected Essays* 4–5. See also Creeley, "Autobiography" 130–32. See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* 500 and 592 for examples of Matthiessen's relative disinterest in Crane.

7. Although O'Hara generally published in nationally recognized journals such as *Poetry* and the *Partisan Review* or in clique ventures like *C*, *Folder*, and *Locus Solus*, he also frequently published in such venues as *Big Table*, *Evergreen Review*, *Floating Bear*, and *Yügen*.

8. See my first chapter for an extended discussion of Crane's professed admiration of Walt Whitman. For O'Hara's interest in Whitman, see, e.g., *Standing* 12 and 110; *FOHCP* 305 ("like Whitman my great predecessor"). See, too, Davidson, "When the World" 227–35.

9. Whalen probably has in mind the opening of Charles Olson's "Letter 7" in *The Maximus Poems*—"Marsden Hartley's / eyes—as Stein's / eyes" (34). "Letter 7" retells, obliquely, Olson's attempt to impress Hartley with a Hart Crane elegy he had written.

10. Another "dead king" here is W. H. Auden. In this passage, O'Hara is also parodying the second part of the Rimbaud-inspired volume *Orators* (1932). A fuller account of early O'Hara would have to examine Auden's influence as well—something particularly germane in the present context, since Auden offered O'Hara another example of a gay poet who also possessed a proclivity for shifting and varying his tone. See Perloff, *Frank O'Hara* 33, 34, 49–50, and 61.

11. See Edelman 154–59 for a discussion of Crane's use of the symbol of the smile in "Voyages."

12. Compare Eberly 79.

13. See the section "O'Hara's Timekeeping" in Geoff Ward's chapter on O'Hara (60–68).

14. See Ginsberg, “Abstraction in Poetry” for illuminating contemporary commentary on this phase in O’Hara’s and Kenneth Koch’s careers.

15. See Koch 205–6 for a rejection of any similarity between O’Hara and the French surrealists on the grounds that O’Hara was uninterested in surrealism’s Freudianism. See, too, O’Hara’s careful dissociation of Pollock from surrealism on the grounds that his paintings conceal no Freudian allegory—in this passage, O’Hara is clearly projecting his own distaste (*Jackson* 17).

16. For confirmation that O’Hara “never went to a shrink,” see LeSueur 216. Other gay poets of the time shared O’Hara’s distrust, among them Allen Ginsberg and Jack Spicer. See Kostelanetz 138 for John Cage’s 1961 statement that Eastern religion represented his escape from psychoanalysis. See Bérubé chapters 1, 5, and 6 for the carefully coordinated efforts of psychiatrists, the U.S. military, and the U.S. government to pathologize and criminalize homosexuality during WWII and the McCarthy era.

17. For “abysmal,” see *FOHCP* 149 and *HCCP* 83; for “cumulus” see *FOHCP* 145 and *HCCP* 80; for “pillars” see *FOHCP* 145 and *HCCP* 78; and for “Sanskrit” see *FOHCP* 147 and *HCCP* 81.

18. See O’Hara, *Standing* 12 for comments on Crane as an intermediary between himself and Whitman.

19. On this point, see Ward, who argues that O’Hara inherits but also critiques as naive Williams’s “aesthetic of inclusion” (53–60).

20. For an exception to this generalization, see Perloff, *Frank O’Hara* 165–68 on O’Hara’s “dark poems,” late lyrics such as “The Clouds Go Soft” in which O’Hara concedes and laments the limits on the power of the aesthetic imagination.

21. See Auslander 47–48 and Equi 149 for differently nuanced meditations on the mix of sincerity and insincerity in an O’Hara lyric.

22. I count fifty-six in the *Collected Poems*, three in *Early Writing*, and twenty-two in *Poems Retrieved*.

23. Compare Diggory’s argument, which draws upon Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of the “inoperative community” (*la communauté désouverée*), that the New York School of poets, as a collectivity, is best understood as “founded on an encounter with death experienced as bliss” (21–26).

## Chapter 8

1. See Bloom, *Wallace Stevens* 227–28 for this dynamic as it relates to Stevens and T. S. Eliot.

2. See, e.g., DuPlessis’s “Darken Your Speech”; Nielsen’s *Writing Between the Lines*; and North’s *Dialect of Modernism* (esp. chs. 6–7).

3. See the note prefixed to Crane, “*The Bridge*,” as reproduced in reel 3 of the microfilm copies of boxes 1–10 of the Hart Crane Papers at the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

4. I have reproduced as far as possible the layout of this page as it appears in



"*The Bridge*." I have omitted, however, the word "the" in the phrase "which predominates over the interwoven 'personal, biographical details.'" Someone, presumably Crane, has drawn a line through it.

5. For a partially corroborating example in Crane's earlier poetry, see the second part of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," a mannerist presentation of a rooftop jazz club in Manhattan (*HCCP* 29–30). While no "Mumbo Jumbo," it does repeat an equation between Blackness, raw sexuality, and jazz performance ("we are breathless / While nigger cupids scour the stars!"—29).

6. For the "Rail-squatters" and "Hobo-trekkers," see *HCCP* 58. For the burlesque dancer, see 89. For the drunken sailor, see 71–73. For the "Wop washerwoman," see 100. For Edgar Allan Poe, see 99. For Emily Dickinson, see 94.

7. See North 127–229. North believes that the failure of Harlem Renaissance writers and "their white compatriots in modernist avant-garde" (127) to achieve meaningful dialogue "remains one of the most significant facts about American literature of the twentieth century" (129).

8. Samuel Delany speculates that Stephen Vincent Benét's publication of *John Brown's Body* (1927) might have dissuaded Crane from attempting a poem on a similar topic (*Longer* 224).

9. For Tolson's *Liberia* and Crane's *Bridge*, see Nielsen, *Writing* 55. For Crane's presence in Wright's *Soothsayers and Omens*, see C. K. Doreski 186, 187, 189, 191, and 199. Delany's novella "Atlantis: Model 1924" stages a fictional meeting between Crane and a young Black man from Harlem on Brooklyn Bridge.

10. For Shepherd's comments on Crane's influence on his recent volume *Otherhood*, see his 1998 interview in *Callaloo* (305–6). See also his poem "At Hart Crane's Grave."

11. I have drawn the biographical facts in these two paragraphs from two sources: Lindberg 178n1 (for the anecdote concerning Caen) and David Henderson's introduction to Kaufman's *Cranial Guitar* (for everything else). Since solid biographical data is lacking, *faute de mieux* these accounts draw heavily on oral history and secondhand reports. Hence, there is a chance that they include unintentional errors in detail. See Damon, "Triangulated" 143.

12. See Barbara Christian's "What Ever Happened to Bob Kaufman?" (1972) for one of the very few academic treatments of Kaufman's work to predate the 1990s. Ann Charters's *Portable Beat Reader* (1992)—assembled just before Maria Damon, Kathyne Lindberg, and Lorenzo Thomas initiated the current process of rediscovering Kaufman's works—includes only four poems by the poet in its 688 pages.

13. See Nicosia, "Editor's Note" for an account of the editorial difficulties in assembling a book of Kaufman's verse. See D. Henderson 19–20 for the story of the hotel fire and the rescue of the poems that became the core of the volume *The Ancient Rain* (1981).

14. Compare Kathyne Lindberg's earlier reading of Kaufman's 1963 letter-manifesto (173).

15. For Fitzgerald's courtship of Kaufman, see Ellingham and Killian 118–21 and 137–39; Damon, "Triangulated" 143–44 and 152–56.

16. The ellipses in "Hart. . . Crane" are, of course, a verbal variant of syncopation in music, and syncopation is, equally obviously, fundamental to jazz. As Amor Kohli puts it, "Kaufman's vehicle for interrogating those structures of racial normativity existing in the midst of a subculture dedicated to nonconformity was jazz" (166).

17. See Baraka's essay "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" in the *LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* 186–209.

18. See Nielsen, "'A Hard Rain': Looking to Bob Kaufman," *passim*.

19. See, e.g., Smethurst 162n17 ("Though most accounts of Kaufman take as a given his heterosexuality, or elide the issue of sexuality, Kaufman's use of the word 'queer' here and elsewhere as well as his invocations of Hart Crane and Lorca render this aspect of Kaufman's life . . . quite murky").

20. Maria Damon and Kevin Killian both report that Russell Fitzgerald's long-term sexual obsession with Kaufman was consummated only once, on a night when Kaufman was very drunk (Damon, "Triangulated" 153–54; Ellingham and Killian 137–38). Though Kaufman clearly enjoyed flirting with sexually interested men on occasion, no other biographical information has yet been made available to suggest that he actively sought sexual intercourse with other men.

21. See Nielsen's argument that the rain in "The Ancient Rain" is "a rain that re-directs the course and discourse of history" ("Hard" 141).

22. See Nielsen, "Hard" 135–36 and 138–39 for a discussion of this lyric, especially the changes that Kaufman made during the process of translating it from the original.



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