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# "Mingling Incantations": Hart Crane's Neo-Symbolist Poetics

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"Mingling Incantations": Hart Crane's Neo-Symbolist Poetics

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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# “Mingling Incantations”: Hart Crane’s Neo-Symbolist Poetics

Christopher A. Tidwell

## ABSTRACT

The largest impediment to appreciating Hart Crane as a symbolist modern American poet derives from the fragmentary critical attention paid to his borrowings from and familiarity with French Symbolists like Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé. Almost equally important, the early career of T. S. Eliot exerted a profound impact on Crane’s poetic development and indeed served as the primary introduction to many nineteenth-century French poets for Crane and many other American poets of his generation.

This dissertation initially examines contemporary critical definitions of the symbolist method and explores the extent to which Hart Crane’s familiarity with the French language helped shape his exposure to writers such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. A reading of Crane’s “Black Tambourine,” a self-professed “Baudelairesque thing,” indicates the dissertation’s general approach by showing how Crane’s poems evolve as “mingling incantations,” as artistic blendings interfused by the aesthetics of the major French Symbolist poets.

After presenting a historical overview and critique of the critical reception given to Crane as a symbolist, the rest of the dissertation interrogates the relationship of Crane to Eliot and their views on literary influence; examines the connections between Crane, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud; and finally explores the theoretical affinities between Mallarmé and Crane’s formulation of a neo-symbolist poetics.

## Introduction: The Symbolist Aesthetic

The initial impetus for my dissertation derives from the first sentence of an essay by Allen Tate written shortly after Hart Crane's death: "The career of Hart Crane will be written by future critics as a chapter in the neo-symbolist movement" ("Hart Crane" 310). Tate's prophesied chapter never materialized, though many subsequent critics have produced scattered and fragmentary accounts of Crane's indebtedness to the French Symbolist poets of the nineteenth century. This dissertation, a prolegomenon to Tate's prophesied chapter, will demonstrate the centrality of French Symbolist poets Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé to Crane's aesthetics and poetic technique, plus examine shifting theories about literary influence between Crane and his chief model, T. S. Eliot.

In the broadest sense, this dissertation will synthesize and extend the corpus of previous critical commentary devoted to examining Crane's stylistic and aesthetic affinities with the symbolists. My primary purpose is to demonstrate how symbolist poetics function as not one of several but rather as *the* primary shaping force on Crane's development--most evident in his first volume, *White Buildings*, published in 1926. In addition, unlike most previous critical analyses, I hope to interrogate the extent to which Crane's adoption and modification of symbolist practices affected his later poem *The Bridge* (1930) and the lyrics collected after his 1932 suicide for a projected volume called *Key West: An Island Sheaf*.

An important obstacle to assessing Hart Crane's evolution as a poet lies in the diversity of critical treatment his work has received. Almost since the inception of Crane's career, literary critics have diverged widely in their attempts to situate his poems and letters within the modernist American canon. Most strikingly, critics have reached nearly no consensus on how to characterize Crane's achievement as an American poet. Conclusions regarding how to categorize Crane range across a wide gamut from an unlettered Midwestern "natural" genius who never finished high school to a willfully obscure metaphysical lyricist torn between conflicting American poetic traditions-- typically grouped around Poe and Whitman as major precursors.

Holding up Poe and Whitman as the "major" roles available to modern American poets remains a holdover from early- and mid-century New Criticism and provides a glimpse of the critical milieu in which Crane was appreciated initially. Critical responses to *The Bridge* in particular have suffered from simplistic readings which overemphasize a supposedly naive Whitmanian affirmation of modern life. T. S. Eliot's 1953 speech "American Literature and Language" traces modern poetry's birth from the exhausted ash-heap of "the tail-end of the Victorian era," and asserts, "In the nineteenth century, Poe and Whitman stand out as solitary international figures" (*To Criticize* 58-59). John Unterecker, Crane's most thorough biographer and one of the poet's most perceptive critics, invokes the same two figures in a discussion of the poetic precursors balanced and invoked in *The Bridge*:

since he is an artist, Crane fits into his poem, too, the oppositions which almost every artist is conscious of: the vision of art that is democratic, open, and objective and which Crane identifies with Whitman; and its

counterpart and opposite, an art that is intensely personal, secret,  
subjective--the art of the symbolist tradition which Crane associates with  
Poe. ("Architecture" 95)

Although many critics position Poe (as godfather or role model of the French Symbolists) and Whitman as Crane's primary artistic forefathers in *The Bridge*, the first to do so prominently was Yvor Winters in a review of *The Bridge*: "[Crane] possesses the greatest genius in the Whitmanian tradition, and . . . strangely enough, he grafts onto the Whitmanian tradition something of the stylistic discipline of the Symbolists" (*Uncollected* 76).

After a review of relevant criticism in chapter one, a fuller discussion of the complex triangulation of Eliot, Crane, and the literary climate of the reception accorded them will occur in chapter two, but at this point one need simply note the absence of Dickinson and Melville from Eliot's list of "international" nineteenth-century American poets despite the rediscovery in the late teens and twenties of these neglected writers. Marginalized today in the modernist canon like these nineteenth-century writers were in the earliest part of the twentieth century, Crane saw fit to write poems honoring Dickinson and Melville, a form of homage never paid by the other significant modern American poets Eliot mentions (he lists Crane with Pound, Williams, Stevens, Moore, Cummings, Ransom, and Tate).

In many ways, the various descriptions of Crane's poetic career seem dazzlingly incongruous and include, in addition to these aforementioned characterizations, identifying him as the misguided heir of Emerson and Whitman (Winters), as a mystic overburdened with religious inclinations (Munson and Hanley), as the last great

Romantic in the Dionysian vein (Spears), as an American Futurist/Cubist valorizing industrial machinery (Paul), as a master of Marlovian blank verse in the grand manner who lacked a suitable theme (Gross), as an overly “personal” lyricist who misguidedly tried to fashion a cultural epic on the idea of “America” (Blackmur), as a prototype of the homosexual artist excluded as perennial outcast from the cultural mainstream (Martin and Yingling), as a belated modernist trapped in the shadow of T.S. Eliot (Tate), or even as the “Cleveland Rimbaud” intent on the *dérèglement de tous les sens* through stimuli such as alcohol, tobacco, and loud music (Cowley and Galpin). The sheer variety of these different approaches toward classifying the poet calls to mind Crane’s own description of Nietzsche at the end of his first published prose review: “think of being so elusive,--so mercurial, as to be first swallowed whole, then coughed up, and still remain a mystery!” (CPSLP 198).

With regard to verse technique, however, many contemporary critics probably would concur with Warner Berthoff in dividing Crane’s career into three major phases: an early Imagist apprenticeship beginning in 1916 and culminating in 1922, a middle phase of full maturity heavily influenced by symbolist sensibilities running from 1923 until early 1926, and a third period spent trying to position himself as the epic bard of America via *The Bridge* lasting from mid-1926 until 1930. The critical lineage of this standard chronology of Crane’s career stretches over almost the whole of Crane’s critical reception, commencing with the early analyses by Munson and Tate. The tripartite scheme is implicit in Tate’s 1926 introduction to *White Buildings* wherein he confides that “To the Imagists Crane doubtless went to school in poetry,” and then anticipates *The Bridge* by claiming “If the energy of Crane’s vision never quite reaches a sustained

maximum, it is because he has not found a suitable theme” (Introduction 52-53).

Subsequent encodings of this imagist-symbolist-epic bard scheme surface repeatedly in the biographies by Horton, Weber, and Unterecker; Unterecker’s *Voyager* (1969) in some ways represents a summary crystallization of this tripartite developmental classification reinscribed in the monographs of Lewis, Hazo, Vincent Quinn, and others in the sixties. Apart from Berthoff, the only other published recent treatments (albeit oblique) of Crane’s developmental evolution are by Barbarese, Norton-Smith, and Ernest Smith.

The present study will reconfigure this conventional chronology by focusing more attention on Hart Crane’s development as a symbolist poet. Adequately understanding French Symbolist aesthetics as *the* primary influence on Crane’s development will lead to a reconsideration of his relationship to the Anglo-American modern poetic tradition. Recent critical analyses by Yingling, Hammer, and Dean have shown how problematic Crane’s relationship remains to the modernist American poetic canon, and this dissertation intends to reconsider and more sharply define Crane’s relationship to modernist poetics.

The similarities between Crane’s verse and the French Symbolists have long been recognized by critics, beginning with one of the first sustained discussions of Crane’s style: Tate’s introduction to Crane’s first volume, *White Buildings*. After discussing the poet’s other influences such as Elizabethan “sonorous rhetoric” and his “spiritual allegiances” to American poets Melville, Whitman and Poe, Tate’s introduction focuses on the stylistic features Crane borrows from Rimbaud:

He shares with Rimbaud the device of the oblique presentation of theme.

The theme never appears in explicit statement. It is formulated through a

series of complex metaphors which defy a paraphrasing of the sense into an equivalent prose. The reader is plunged into a strangely unfamiliar *milieu* of sensation, and the principle of its organization is not immediately grasped. The *logical* meaning can never be derived . . . but the *poetical* meaning is a direct intuition, realized prior to an explicit knowledge of the subject-matter of the poem. The poem does not *convey*; it *presents*; it is not topical, but expressive. (Tate, Introduction 54)

In this passage several salient attributes associated with symbolist techniques coalesce: the emphasis on suggestion and evocation instead of direct statement, a disruption of conventional discursive and rhetorical expectations, and an extreme metaphorical compression which makes the now commonplace New Criticism's "heresy of paraphrase" all but impossible. Before investigating the extent to which Crane's verse exemplifies and adapts these symbolist techniques, a fuller discussion of the qualities associated with symbolist aesthetics is necessary.

A major dilemma confronts literary historians who attempt to define *symbolisme* or symbolist poetry. As has become increasingly clear to contemporary literary theorists, just as there are many modernisms, slippery difficulties arise also when attempting to limit definitions of the symbolist method. Many valuable critical texts like those of Balakian and Peyre struggle assiduously to delineate (and thus, to some extent, define by confining) the qualities which distinguish symbolist poetry from other modes or historical schools of verse. For practical purposes, however, this study shall operate with the following distinctions: 1) *symbolisme* derives initially from the conscious theoretical and material productions of French poets in the latter decades of the nineteenth century; 2)

while Edmund Wilson's suggestions in *Axel's Castle* (1931) that *symbolisme's* influence during the modern period encompasses both an aesthetics as well as a method are somewhat justified, his expansive application of the term to prose literature--prefiguring a similar effort by Charles Feidelson in analyzing fiction from the so-called "American Renaissance" of the mid-nineteenth century--needlessly broadens and dilutes the term so as to make it functionally ineffectual in any discussion of poetry; and 3) though *symbolisme* has a more narrow and specific referent in French literary criticism to those poets active in the symbolist movement from roughly 1885-1900, this analysis will be more concerned with the ways in which the techniques of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé were applied, adapted, modified, and interpreted by Crane and other Anglo-American modern poets.

In a further effort to narrow the focus of this inquiry, the following four salient aspects of *symbolisme* will receive the most emphasis: 1) a privileging of suggestion and evocation over declaration and direct statement; 2) the disruption of syntax and conventionally rational discursive referentiality; 3) the stress on words as immanent and polyvalent symbols which accentuate the reader's role in making the poem a system of affects; and 4) the recurrence and reiteration of a constellation or cosmology of symbols within a poet's oeuvre (both between and within poems) which highlight thematic and textual concerns.

In brief, then, this dissertation will focus on Hart Crane's poetics through symbolist lenses and will be the first to do so exclusively and on a comprehensive scale. Many critics have referred to stylistic conjunctions between Crane and the symbolists, yet most of these analyses have been marked by superficiality and brevity with respect to

specifically symbolist concerns. Similar critical approaches which stress Crane's indebtedness to symbolist techniques have been attempted previously and include an article-length analysis by Stanley K. Coffman, Jr., though his treatment limits itself strictly to examining image patterns in *The Bridge* and scarcely proceeds beyond such generalizations as the following:

Clearly this Bridge is not a symbol in the conventional sense, as an object which can, by virtue of certain properties, be translated into terms of an abstraction. Crane has conceived of it rather as the French Symbolists did, working out, for example, correspondences between the object and other phenomena of the natural or civilized world, and between the object and a state of consciousness existing in the poet. (in Clark, *Critical* 142)

However, Coffman's survey dates from the early fifties, and subsequent readings of Crane as a symbolist poet over the next two decades tend to recognize yet minimize or marginalize the importance of a symbolist aesthetic in Crane's work.

The analyses of Frederick Hoffman and Haskell Block are representative examples of critical readings from the late sixties which examine the influence of *symbolisme* on modern American poetry, but both conclude by elevating Wallace Stevens to the status of the premier modern American symbolist and casually diminishing the importance of Crane. Though Hoffman argues that only Stevens and Crane continue to attract attention as modern American symbolists, Stevens "is only sporadically influenced by the *symbolistes*," while Crane

is probably one of the great poets in modern *symboliste* history. . . . Yet, Crane's debt to *symbolisme*, acquired at second hand, does not impress.

His great poetry (and he *is* a great poet) comes only incidentally from the *symbolistes*. He does not make the Verb into a deity, but strings along many allusions to sound out a vocabulary, as well as suggest charismatic intentions. (197-98)

The hesitancy and qualifications in Hoffman's remarks should remind readers how far apart critical viewpoints and poetic productions often diverge; Crane's "second-hand" knowledge of the French symbolists remains disputable, and the claim that he fails to "make the Verb a deity" misrepresents the intentions of both Rimbaud (the source of the allusion) as well as Crane.

In a parallel movement, Block conducts a sustained inquiry into Stevens' relationship to the French Symbolists (foreshadowing in many ways Michel Benamou's 1972 *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination*) but finishes by locating Crane with Rimbaud outside the symbolist mainstream:

We do wrong to both Rimbaud and Crane to view their work as essentially within the symbolist context, in spite of common elements of occultism and mysticism in the case of Rimbaud, and an awareness of the transcendent power of language in the poetry of Crane. In its open assertion of personal feeling and experience, and in its metaphorical fluidity, Crane's poetry represents a turning away from the symbolist tradition. ("Impact" 216).

As for the assertion that Crane lies outside the *symboliste* mainstream, the "personal feeling" and "metaphorical fluidity" of Crane's poetry actually represent an *extension of* rather than a *turning from* the symbolist tradition, and this trend toward innovation holds

true for Rimbaud as well.

The crux of the problem here is one of perspective. The milieu in which Crane wrote, the modernist ferment of the late teens and twenties, can best be considered as the third wave of symbolism. The first wave is the period of French *symbolisme* proper; Anna Balakian's distinction regarding separate national perspectives explains Rimbaud's omission as a symbolist: "French critics consider the label 'symbolist' applicable to poets in the 15-year period of 1885-1900. Non-French critics go back to Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud" ("Symbolism" 1258). Thus in the Anglo-American tradition, the second symbolist wave is really the "first wave" of symbolist influence in English, embodied by the Decadent poets of the nineties and epitomized most fully (at least for succeeding generations) by Arthur Symons whose *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* appeared in 1899. The revised edition of Symons' book in 1908 became the catalyst for the third wave of symbolism, the neo-symbolist strains of modernism exemplified by Eliot, Stevens, Crane, and Yeats. W. B. Yeats, the suitemate to whom Symons' original volume was dedicated, straddles both the second and third waves by refashioning his style in the teens. T. S. Eliot remarked on several occasions the crucial influence of Symons' book on his own development as a poet; the following passage is the most well-known:

I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life. ("Review" 357)

To understand accurately how Crane came to know and learn from the symbolists, one must keep in mind Balakian's caveat: "Actually, much of what was to be known as symbolism abroad was based not on French Symbolism but on a translation or interpretation of French Symbolism that was in fact a mutation of the original. The degree of originality and deviation can be grasped only in relation to the full texture of the original and its intention" (*The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* 9).

In many respects, a dismissive view of Crane's achievement as a symbolist has prevailed since the late sixties, and this dissertation will work to counteract that perspective. In addition, this project will synthesize and extend more recent critical views from the last decade which have begun, however tentatively, to recognize and explore more fully Crane's symbolist connections. Isolated sections of analyses by Irwin, Gelpi, Yingling, and Ernest Smith comment specifically on Crane's symbolist techniques, and the works of Bennett, Norton-Smith, and Ernest Smith explore the same issues at greater length and in more detail. This dissertation will differ from these latter three in that the scope will be narrower in one case and confine itself primarily to poetry (Bennett tries to situate Crane's symbolist inheritance alongside many other modernist movements in various arts) and more expansive in the others (Norton-Smith and Smith examine symbolist borrowings only in Crane's first volume, *White Buildings*, in any detail).

The degree of Crane's competency in French, and thus by implication the extent to which he could have introjected symbolist techniques firsthand, remains an open question. Commentators began addressing Crane's fluency in French toward the end of his career, and out of these discussions a misimpression formed that Crane's competency

in French was substandard and inadequate. This unfortunate misrepresentation has persisted ever since, resurfacing periodically with limited or partial summaries about the influence of French Symbolism on modern American poetry such as, “Even American poets who knew little or no French and were relatively unfamiliar with Baudelaire or Mallarmé, such as Hart Crane, assimilated the poetics of correspondences and made bold enlargements of the planes of poetic language and experience” (Block, “Aspects” 656). No extended examination of Crane’s familiarity with French—even the one that follows—can prove conclusively any particular degree of fluency on his part or measure accurately the extent to which he relied on translations to become familiar with the “first wave” French Symbolists. What remains unmistakable, however, is the legacy of misleading critical exaggerations about Crane’s supposed unfamiliarity with French as well as the clear series of concordances and affinities between Crane’s aesthetic and poetry and those of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé.

One of the first references about Crane’s knowledge of French appeared in René Taupin’s landmark study *The Influence of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry* (1929): “It is significant that one of the most promising American poets of the Twenties, Hart Crane, came very near matching Rimbaud in his use of imagery, but hardly knew enough French to read him in the original” (246). In a characteristically vitriolic review of Taupin’s book, Yvor Winters responded specifically to this point:

Mr. Crane, as Mr. Taupin remarks, does not read French, but he numbers among his friends such men as Allen Tate and Malcolm Cowley, who know Symbolist poetry very well, and he has studied all the available translations. He has the greatest of admiration for Rimbaud, as far as he

knows him, and has beyond a doubt tried to learn from him. But how much *can* he learn from him? There have been some very good translations from Rimbaud's prose and a few very bad translations from his verse. The vocabulary and some of Mr. Crane's work suggests somewhat the vocabulary of Rimbaud's prose and of a very little of his verse, in its quality of intellectual violence, of almost perverse energy; but this quality is more Mallarmean than Rimbaudian (most of Rimbaud's lyrics, even when they are presenting a state of hallucination, or what seems such, present it in a style as limpid as the style of Shakespeare's songs or of Blake's), and the quality is not primarily Mallarmean.

*(Uncollected 105)*

Though prone to his propensity for overstatement, Yvor Winters' remarks about the published quality of verse translations of Rimbaud before 1928 are fairly accurate. Ascribing "intellectual violence" or "perverse energy" to the convoluted yet delicately precise formulations of Mallarmé is comprehensible only from a reductively moralistic and conventionally conservative aesthetic such as Winter's.

Winters met Crane in person only once: during the 1927 Christmas season. Thomas Parkinson's summary of the meeting is based on recollections by Winters' widow, Janet Lewis:

Winters was a natural pedagogue and Crane a grateful audience and interlocutor. Winters went through a considerable body of French poetry with Crane, especially Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Valéry . . . Crane had very little French, so that Winters translated passages. Janet Lewis's clear

impression is that Crane would have had difficulty struggling through a poetic passage with a dictionary and that he must have got all his French through translations. (Parkinson 108-09)

Apart from the passing reference in the review of Taupin's book, Winters himself wrote about Crane's ability in French only one other time, in an essay twenty-seven years after Crane's death: "Crane had almost no French--I spent a couple of hours one evening taking him through various poems by Rimbaud--but his friends had doubtless translated the French poets for him and described them, and he knew the later Americans very thoroughly" ("Significance" 127). In all likelihood, Winters' own defensiveness and insecurity regarding his own literary stature account for his bald claim that "Crane had almost no French" because in an earlier letter from 12 November 1926 Crane told Winters, "I'm not being merely modest when I say my French is weak and my Spanish nil" (*O My Land* 285). Crane's own modesty and sense of deference probably led Winters to presume mistakenly that Crane's fluency in French was severely deficient rather than merely "weak" (Igor Webb confirms Winters' imperiousness as a pedagogue).

However, Winters was only one critic among many who discuss Crane's ability to read French. In the mid-forties, for example, Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska perpetuated the myth that Crane became acquainted with the French symbolists only via the translations of others: "Crane formed a habit of drawing his learning from secondary sources; his knowledge and awareness of French Symbolism came from what he had read of it in translation, and with the aid of a dictionary he painfully translated (in verse) three poems of Laforgue" (471). These translations from Laforgue, "Locutions Des Pierrots," were published in the May 1922 issue of *The Double Dealer*. The suite is erroneously

entitled “Three Locutions of Pierrot” in Simon’s *Complete Poems of Hart Crane* on the grounds that the extant versions in Crane’s ring notebook read this way despite the editor’s admission that “No conclusive evidence suggests that HC intended the title” (247). Crane included an explanatory note: “A strictly literal translation of Laforgue is meaningless. The native implications of his idiosyncratic style have to be recast in English garments” (Weber, *Hart Crane* 389). The note did not appear with the poems in the journal, only in the appendix of Weber’s monograph.

The most persuasive commentary on Crane’s translations of Laforgue (and his early acquaintanceship with French) comes from his friend Alfred Galpin, who knew Crane in Cleveland in 1922:

*The Double Dealer* was published in the most French-speaking city in the United States, New Orleans. I take this fact to be pertinent to the note which Hart attached to his translation . . . I take issue with Mr. Cowley when he remarks [“Laforgue in America” 65] that Hart’s “translations . . . were so far from the original poems that he had to apologize in a footnote.” I consider this note to be in no way a confession of failure, and if it by any chance were so intended, it would simply be another evidence of that tendency toward exaggerated self-deprecation which apparently misled Winters. (9)

Galpin’s essay convincingly demonstrates a certain degree of familiarity Crane possessed regarding French, even as early as 1922. In many respects Galpin’s eyewitness account, “Hart had a good dictionary and used it conscientiously” (8), is meant to counteract assertions in the biographies of Horton and Weber and elsewhere that Crane’s

French was somehow deficient or suffered from overreliance on substandard dictionaries. One such example concerns Crane's response to the anthology of French poems printed by Ezra Pound in the February 1918 issue of *The Little Review*, one of the first exposures (apart from Symons' book) to the French symbolists for poets of Crane's generation: "Unfortunately, for Crane did not know French, the poems were not translated into English" (Weber, *Hart Crane* 145). Another, more telling claim Weber makes will parallel later comments by Allen Tate in Unterecker's 1969 biography, *Voyager*; according to Weber,

Although Crane was familiar with the French poets in translation and in criticism prior to 1920, it is fairly certain that he did not read extensively in the original French until the fall of 1920, when he ordered volumes of the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Vildrac, and Jules Laforgue from a Parisian bookdealer. Thereafter, however, and even after his visit to France in 1929, he was unable to handle the French language with facility. He laboriously translated with the aid of a dictionary, a process which, as Elizabeth [sic] Foster has noted, led to a concentration on words and phrases rather than to the over-all grasp which a more developed knowledge of a foreign language provides. (Weber, *Hart Crane* 107)

Tate's 1962 interview with Unterecker stressed the same dynamic: Crane read French, as he read most other texts, not so much for what is conventionally called comprehension but for what Tate calls "sensibility":

He didn't read, you know, for historical knowledge, from that point of view. He read for shock, for language. It was reading for sensibility.

What he could use. His instinct as a poet led him to that kind of thing.

For example, he more or less identified himself with Rimbaud.

There's some reason for that. . . . But he didn't read all of Rimbaud by any means. Rimbaud's awfully difficult and Hart's French was limited.

(Unterecker, *Voyager* 240)

Tate, of course, also knew Crane personally and could attest to the veracity of Crane's facility in French, but many readers have been misled by Tate's insinuations in his essay on Crane that initially inspired this dissertation. In the first paragraph of that essay, Tate claims,

Like most poets of his age in America, Crane discovered Rimbaud through Eliot and the Imagists; it is certain that long before he had done any of his best work he had come to believe himself the spiritual heir of the French poet. He had an instinctive mastery of the fused metaphor of symbolism, but it is not likely that he ever knew more of the symbolist poets than he got out of Pound's *Pavannes and Divisions*. ("Hart Crane" 310)

To a large extent, Tate is right about the important role Eliot and Pound played in disseminating the ideas of the French Symbolists in the modern period. By "instinctive mastery," Tate probably means that Crane's gift for linguistic compression and what Tate calls the "fused metaphor of symbolism" came naturally rather than through poetic labor and refinement. This claim is an instance where Tate overstates the case; one can trace fairly clearly Crane's evolving technical skills as they develop over the course of his career. Moreover, Tate's memory might be playing tricks on him in the reference to Pound's *Pavannes and Divisions* as that collection of essays makes only passing

references to the symbolists on three isolated, separate occasions: in providing a series of translations from Laforgue's "Pierrots" (43-44), in suggesting a sketch of a useful anthology of French poems (109-10), and in asserting quite unsteadily that as for Remy de Gourmont, "If he is 'grouped' anywhere he must be grouped, as poet, among *les symbolistes*. The litanies are evocation, not statement" (127). Though the chronology would seem to belie such an interpretation, perhaps Tate confuses *Pavannes and Divigations*, the later expanded volume of Pound's which included most of these early essays, with Mallarmé's prose collection from 1896 entitled *Divigations*. In any case, the important point to recognize is that Tate's early disparaging assessment of Crane's familiarity with the symbolists established a dismissive tone which has persisted among Crane scholars ever since and has obscured Crane's real awareness of and indebtedness to the French Symbolist poets.

Crane's fluency in French was probably never particularly strong, however, and for most of his career he relied more heavily on translations than original texts. Nevertheless, such a qualification does not mean Crane remained utterly inept in French; the following analysis should rectify the extent to which critics have exaggerated Crane's supposed lack of familiarity with French and the Symbolists. In the definitive biography of Crane, Unterecker traces the poet's acquaintanceship with the French Symbolists as early as his first extended stay in New York City without his parents. Crane arrived during Christmas week in 1916 and by the end of January 1917 had already established close friendships with the painter Carl Schmitt as well as poet Padraic Colum and his wife Mary. An avuncular friend from Ohio, Schmitt looked after Crane during this initial stay in New York; an "enthusiastic theoretician" familiar with many contemporary art

movements, Schmitt was instrumental in introducing Crane to symbolist concepts: “Readers of Crane's poetry are usually struck by pyrotechnical displays of synesthesia. Crane studied the deliberate confusion of the senses in the French poets he laboriously translated, but a groundwork for the technique was offered in his conversations with Schmitt” (Unterecker, *Voyager* 57). Crane’s friendship with the Colums is just as significant in indicating his early exposure to the Symbolists:

At first they talked of writers the Colums knew, and Crane was encouraged to study Arthur Symons’ book on the Symbolist movement. In time Crane came to use his sessions in the Colums’ kitchen as part of the informal education he was organizing for himself. Delighted that Mary Colum could quote whole poems in French, and entertaining her with what she felt was his “queer pronunciation,” he would put her through her paces on Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. (Unterecker, *Voyager* 59)

While Crane’s lack of formal education is often cited as proof of his supposed fractured ability to read French firsthand, one must remember that his parents intended his first year in New York to be devoted toward tutoring as preparation for entering Columbia University in 1917. While not much came of his study in algebra, Crane’s interest in French stayed keen throughout the fall: “He had already shown some independence by dismissing M. Tardy, his French tutor, and hiring in his place another boarder at Mrs. Walton’s, Madame Eugénie Lebègue” (Unterecker, *Voyager* 93). On Halloween he wrote a letter with a French salutation to his mother: “Yesterday it poured rain all day, and I remained sheltered, studying French” (Weber, *Letters* 10).

Lest it be misconstrued that Crane's receptivity to French waned after his return to Cleveland in late 1919, Horton's biography also notes the salutary influence on Crane's development of the artist William Lescaze and his Cleveland salon formed in 1921: "Many an evening passed while Crane plied the painter with questions about the French poets, in particular Rimbaud, whose *Illuminations* and *Season in Hell*, as they had appeared in translation in *The Dial* in 1920, had aroused him to intense excitement" (115). Unterecker's *Voyager* characterizes the relationship similarly: "Sometimes, driving into the country in his mother's car, they would for hours wander the back roads, Crane quoting his favorite Elizabethans and Metaphysicals and Lescaze countering by quoting in French and then translating Baudelaire and Mallarmé" (209).

Of the more than twenty references to French writers or the French language in Crane's correspondence, three remain noteworthy for revealing Crane's enduring interest in and appreciation of French. The first dates from 1921 when Crane replies to a letter (apparently written in French) from Gorham Munson in Europe wherein Crane not only avoids mentioning any irritation or difficulty with Munson's non-English prose but actually welcomes the linguistic change: "Your letter in French (which innovation I like) reached me yesterday, a welcome evening stimulant after the day's work" (*O My Land* 73).

The second instance dates from 1929 during Crane's only visit to Europe. He initially planned on traveling to Spain in addition to England and France, but once in France his plans changed: he wrote Malcolm Cowley, "I'm not going to Mallorca--want to learn French and stay here" (*O My Land* 397). By "learn French" I believe Crane meant "learn French better" in a relative way since Cowley, who served in France as a

volunteer during World War I, was more fluent. However, such a perspective probably only provides another glimpse of Crane's characteristic modesty. Even Cowley admits that "most" of those in his circle who experienced a greater exposure to French "read French poems with the help of a dictionary (which we were sometimes too lazy to use), that we were not at the time well versed in the rules of French prosody, and that we often misunderstood what we were reading" ("Laforgue in America" 65).

The third pertinent example from Crane's correspondence that confirms his sustained attentiveness to French poetry--even after the completion of *The Bridge*--occurs in his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930. In the "Plans for Study" section of the application, Crane mentions French literature specifically:

I am interested in characteristics of European culture, classical and romantic, with especial reference to contrasting elements implicit in the emergent features of a distinctive American poetic consciousness.

My one previous visit to Europe, though brief, proved creatively stimulating in this regard, as certain aspects of my long poem, *The Bridge*, may suggest. Modern and medieval French literature and philosophy interest me particularly. I should like the opportunity for a methodical pursuit of these studies in conjunction with my creative projects. (*O My Land* 434)

Just as scholars may never answer the question why Crane relocated to Mexico instead of France once he received the Guggenheim fellowship (Malcolm Cowley's self-aggrandizing reminiscences in *A Second Flowering* notwithstanding), any final conclusion regarding Crane's facility in French must always remain tentative and

speculative. What can be demonstrated, however, is a pattern of clear affinities and resemblances between Crane's writings and those of the French symbolists, in particular Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé.

The title of this dissertation, "Mingling Incantations," derives from a line in an early Crane poem, "Black Tambourine," a discussion of which should illustrate my principal direction and focus. In the original version of the poem, written in February 1921, the dominant figure of "a black man in a cellar" is juxtaposed with gnats and a roach in the first stanza (the concluding image of a fly-infested carcass completes the poem's insect imagery) framed by Aesop, the Greek slave and storyteller, in the second stanza. The second and concluding quatrains of the original version read:

Aesop, driven to pondering, found  
Heaven with the tortoise and the hare:  
Fox brush and sow ear top his grave  
Even though mankind was his care.

The black man, forlorn, in the cellar,  
Sees two ways, too, – with less gay eyes.  
There's a tambourine stuck silent on the wall,  
And in Africa, a carcass quick with flies. (Weber, *Hart Crane* 95)

What is noteworthy about the revisions Crane made between this first version and the one he submitted successfully to *The Double Dealer*, where the poem was published in June 1921, involve the omission of interpretive elements and the heightened evocation granted by having the poem's subject "wander" through instead of "see" around his predicament. "Wandering" implies the possibility of some sort of terminus or conclusion and introduces movement, despite its directionlessness, into the otherwise static picture of the poem. The second version also opts to leave "seeing" and connecting the disparate elements of the poem up to the reader rather than the subject. The revised concluding

lines of the poem's first-published version read,

Fox brush and sow ear top his grave,  
And mingle incantations on the air.

The black man, forlorn, in the cellar,  
Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies  
Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,  
And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.

Crane made only two minor changes to "Black Tambourine" between its appearance in *The Double Dealer* and its eventual inclusion as the second poem of *White Buildings*: line two was altered from "Mark an old judgment on the world" to "Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door" in order to emphasize the imprisoned insularity of the black man as a representative minority figure (the "closed door" reinforces the trapped quality of the first line's setting in the cellar) and to underscore the ongoing quality of disenfranchisement (the presumably condemnatory judgment is now anticipatory and "tardy" instead of merely persistently "old").

The second change, however, introduces a syntactical indeterminacy which brands the poem as unmistakably symbolist, though its oblique presentation of theme, series of sensuously evocative juxtaposed symbols, and *implied* social critique contribute as well. By insisting on "mingling" instead of "mingle"--the shift is actually toward restoration rather than revision as he admits in one letter, "I was very disappointed to find a bad typographical error in 'Black Tambourine.' 'Mingle instead of 'mingling' . . . How foolish it makes me feel that way! It quite destroys the sense of the thing" (Weber, *Letters* 60)--Crane invests the final version of the poem with a sense of mystery and indefiniteness in addition to reinforcing the restless peripatetic energy of "wandering" as opposed to "seeing." Whereas the syntax was unequivocal in the second version with the

funereal symbols of the fox brush and sow ear performing the “incantations,” in the final version line eight’s “mingling incantations on the air” seem to float suspended, disconnected almost from the immediate sensory details throughout the rest of the poem.

More subtly, the speaker has become obliquely inserted into the poem: the “mingling incantations” comprise a mini-eulogy to the deceased storyteller Aesop (chosen ostensibly because the Greek writer of animal fables was also a slave who won his freedom through art). The black man as entertainer and minstrel in the popular cultural mythology of the early twentieth century is proscribed by social prejudices, “stuck” in his place just like the tambourine, and represents one of many neglected surrogate-artist figures in Crane’s work (in *White Buildings*, for instance, these would include William Sommer in “Sunday Morning Apples,” Ernest Nelson in “Praise for an Urn,” Charlie Chaplin’s tramp character in “Chaplinesque” and Herman Melville in “At Melville’s Tomb”).

Crane employs the word “incantations” and implicitly attributes these spells to the speaker in order to acknowledge a poetic genealogy: Crane’s style is powerfully rhythmic and typically aurally driven, its startling imagery, swelling prosody, and unusual vocabulary frequently overwhelming the audience. Crane is the foremost practitioner in modern American poetry of Baudelaire’s “‘evocative bewitchment’ of words to make the symbol open-ended in its power to signify and polyvalent in its reception” (Balakian, “Symbolism” 1256). Crane himself said of “Black Tambourine” after the editors of *The Double Dealer* chose it for publication, “It surprises me to find such a Baudelaireque thing acceptable *anywhere* in U.S. I sent it out as a kind of hopeless protest--not expecting to see it printed at all” (Weber, *Letters* 58). Surprisingly, no one heretofore has

noticed how the poem's concluding image of "a carcass quick with flies" draws directly upon Baudelaire's famous poem "*Une Charogne*" as well as imagery in the first quatrain of Rimbaud's "*Voyelles*." However, Crane's newest biographer, Clive Fisher, suggests that "Black Tambourine" displays a "lapidary elegance" which shows Crane assimilating his poetic influences into a signature voice: "Eliot and Baudelaire may have contributed to the compression and polished assurance which only weeks ago would have been beyond him but the style and authority are the author's" (121).

The dissertation will deal with Crane's mixed feelings toward American culture at greater length in chapter four, but in general I am less concerned with addressing the sociological or ideological implications of Crane's verse and more interested in examining technique and sensibility. In large measure, such an orientation accords with Crane's own intentions. Writing to Gorham Munson about "Episode of Hands," an admittedly autobiographical poem which was not included in *White Buildings*, Crane suggests [I am leaving Crane's prose intact, despite grammatical and spelling issues]:

The poem fails, not because of questions, propagandistic and economic, which you mentioned, but because of that synthetic conviction of form & creation, which it lacks. . . . As it stands, there are only a few fragments scattered thru it to build on,-- but I may make something of it in time. However,--if it does evolve into something,--it will be too elusive for you to attach sociological arguments to, at least in the matter of most of the details. (*O My Land* 40)

Crane proposed a similar emphasis of aesthetics over ideology specifically in regard to "Black Tambourine":

The Word “mid-kingdom” is perhaps the key word to what ideas there are in it. The poem is a description and bundle of insinuations, suggestions bearing on the negro’s place somewhere between man and beast. That is why Aesop is brought in, etc.--the popular conception of negro romance, the tambourine on the wall. The value of the poem is only, to me, in what a painter would call its “tactile” quality,--an entirely aesthetic feature. A propagandist for either side of the negro question could find anything he wanted to in it. My only declaration in it is that I find the negro (in the popular mind) sentimentally or brutally “placed” in this midkingdom. (*O My Land* 64)

What interests me in analyzing Crane’s neo-symbolist poetics is what held the poet’s interest in “Black Tambourine”: the “bundle of insinuations” and “suggestions” evoked by the poem’s incantatory, evocative style.

My hypothesis is two-pronged: first, the best way to appreciate Hart Crane’s poetics is in a symbolist context; analyzing Crane’s evolution as an artist will demonstrate how symbolist techniques and aesthetics remain the most consistent and dominant influence throughout the whole of his career. Second, Crane’s status as one of the premier neo-symbolists in modern American poetry has been obscured and misunderstood by the critical reception he has received, and my analysis intends to overturn this erroneous critical legacy.

The dissertation will proceed as follows: chapter one will present an overview and critique of previous attempts to understand Crane’s method in symbolist terms. Primarily, chapter one will synthesize and evaluate prior critical connections between

Crane's symbolist tendencies and general discussions of the French Symbolists in regard to Crane's own development. It will also chart the evolution of the critical reception accorded Crane as a symbolist poet.

Chapter two will investigate the notion of literary influence by contrasting Crane's poetic approach with that of his nearest symbolist influence, T. S. Eliot. Crane's evolving attitude toward Eliot in some ways responds to the changes in Eliot's theories of poetic influence. This chapter shows how Crane modifies and adapts Eliotic conventions, including a modern aesthetics of surrender developed from Baudelaire, and interrogates the extent to which Crane conspicuously mimics Eliot's techniques while diverging significantly from the older poet's aesthetic and philosophical attitudes.

Chapter three will examine the evidence which confirms Crane's awareness of and indebtedness to the French Symbolists, especially Baudelaire and Rimbaud, not only at the beginning of his career but indeed throughout the whole of his corpus. Readings of "The Hive" and "Passage" indicate Crane's affinities with Baudelaire and Rimbaud, respectively.

Chapter four focuses on the relatively unexplored relationship between Crane and Mallarmé, showing how Crane's prose--ranging from the early essay "General Aims and Theories" to his various correspondences with Harriet Monroe, Yvor Winters, and others to his late essay "Modern Poetry"--represents the nearest body of theoretical writings by any American poet to the aesthetics of the French Symbolists. Discussions of poems such as "At Melville's Tomb" and "Harbor Dawn" will aid in discerning parallels between Crane and Mallarmé regarding the symbolist dream of creating an incantatory "new word," the necessity of a sophisticated readership in appreciating the "shorthand"

methods of *symboliste écriture*, and an avowed emphasis on verse as opposed to the versifier.

To summarize, this dissertation will demonstrate the centrality of symbolist aesthetics and techniques, epitomized most fully by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, to Hart Crane's poetics. Viewing Crane's poetry exclusively through symbolist lenses will lead to a reconsideration of his status in Anglo-American modern poetry and restore him to his rightful place as one of the premier neo-symbolist poets of the modern period.

## Chapter One: Hart Crane and His Literary Critics

“Our poetry and our prose have suffered incalculably whenever we have cut ourselves off from the French”

--Ezra Pound (*Selected Prose* 384).

The largest impediment to appreciating Hart Crane as a symbolist poet derives from the fragmentary critical attention paid to his borrowings from and familiarity with French Symbolists like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. In many ways, Crane's own early development as a poet represents a case in miniature of the French Symbolists' larger cultural influence on modern Anglo-American verse.

Much of Crane's juvenilia undoubtedly resembles a blend of poetic styles drawn from the late nineteenth-century English decadents and modern Imagists. In fact, his first published poem, “C33” (1916), is dedicated to Oscar Wilde, the title an allusion to Wilde's prison cell number. As my focus is primarily textual and historical, let me here briefly qualify Crane's supposed affinities with gay writers such as Wilde, Whitman, and Rimbaud. While Crane probably felt a certain personal sympathy with gay poets of the past, his verse—even in its early stages—is quite far removed from the epigrammatic wit of Wilde or the exuberant catalogues of Whitman, despite the allusions to both these writers in “C33” and “Cape Hatteras.” About Wilde in particular, Crane asserted in a prose piece that “after his bundle of paradoxes has been sorted and conned,--very little evidence of intellect remains” (*CPSLP* 199). Crane's relationship to Rimbaud, however,

is thoroughgoing and profound, not however on account of their similar attitudes toward sexuality *per se* but because of stylistic similarities. The British aesthetes of the late nineteenth century like Wilde, Swinburne, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, and Arthur Symons were the first poets writing in English to begin consciously injecting symbolist elements into their poems, thereby forming the “second wave” of *symbolisme* (the “first wave” being the French Symbolists themselves). The traits which they most conspicuously borrow from the French Symbolists include conventionally non-poetic subjects, an emphasis on musicality, occasionally disrupted syntax closer to the rhythms of spoken English, and urban settings.

In the same article from 1917 which furnishes this chapter’s epigraph, Pound indicates one of the reasons why the English decadent poets were linked so clearly with the French Symbolists by the modernists: “The Eighteen Nineties in England were doing very much what Gautier had been doing in France in the Eighteen Thirties, and there is a fineness in Gautier’s later work for which one will seek in vain among the English poets succeeding” (*Selected Prose* 384). The genealogy here is somewhat wayward: Théophile Gautier is the “impeccable poet” and “perfect magician of French letters” to whom Baudelaire dedicated *Les Fleurs du mal*. A generation later Rimbaud called Baudelaire the “premier visionary, the king of poets, a true god!” In addition, the French Parnassians of the mid-nineteenth century such as Gautier, Théodore de Banville, and Leconte de Lisle favored a “hard” pictorially dominant style and Hellenic subject matter which were revived by the Imagists.

Symons finally initiated a widespread dissemination of the “first wave” French

Symbolists with the first edition of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1899; the second edition in 1908 served in many ways as a catalyst for the most revolutionary aspects of the modernist movement in poetry. Eliot summed up succinctly the importance of the English decadents to his generation of Anglo-American poets:

What the poets of the nineties had bequeathed to us besides the new tone of a few poems by Ernest Dowson, John Davidson and Arthur Symons, was the assurance that there was something to be learned from the French poets of the Symbolist Movement--and [like the English decadents] most of them were dead too. (*To Criticize* 58).

The modernist revolution in poetry had already been underway for several years by the time Crane first started publishing in 1916, yet most of his early work's stylistic mannerisms derive from a blend of the nineties' decadent tradition and Imagist innovations in the 'teens. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Crane's development as a poet is his rapid and accelerated maturation. Crane reached a level of poetic maturity much faster than any of his contemporaries, almost in a more precocious and complete fashion than any poet in the English tradition besides Keats and Shelley. As his letters attest, Crane's critical acumen was always astute, even about his own work, so given his customary modesty it is not surprising that he never alluded to his own accelerated maturation. The only clue which gives some sort of indication of Crane's awareness of his own precocity, at least with respect to previous poets, can be found in his personal copy of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*: "After writing the date of Shelley's birth on the top of the [table of contents] page, he calculated and then noted alongside the

individual poems Shelley's age at the time he wrote each of them. Undoubtedly, Crane was thinking of his own poetic hopes and achievements" (Lohf, "Library" 288-89). Ominously enough, considering Crane's death before the age of thirty-three, the list ends on "Hellas" when Shelley was only twenty-nine.

Even though poems like "C33," "October-November," "Fear" and "Legende" all display what Tate characterized as an apprenticeship, "To the Imagists Crane doubtless went to school in poetry. He learned their structural economy; he followed their rejection of the worn-out poetic phrase; he must have studied the experiments in rhythm of Pound, Aldington, Fletcher" (Introduction 52), these poems also demonstrate an acquaintanceship and familiarity with French poetry. The key consistent element between Crane's juvenilia and his mature verse is its allegiance to symbolist tenets.

Indeed, apart from Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* or Eliot's "The Hippopotamus" or a direct translation, Crane's "Legende" is as near to the sensibility and substance of Gautier as one can find in English (in fact, Crane's poem is nearly contemporaneous with these pieces by Pound and Eliot; the publication of "Legende" in November 1919 actually predates these other, more famous poems). Unlike *Mauberly* or "The Hippopotamus," though, the last line of Crane's "Legende" alludes directly to Gautier's *Émaux et Camées*, the countercurrent remedy Pound claims he and Eliot prescribed to themselves in the late 'teens for their reaction against "the dilution of *vers libre*, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness" (*Letters* 180). Like the central figure in Baudelaire's "*La Beauté*," the central feminine figure of "Legende" is unattainable:

The tossing loneliness of many nights  
Rounds off my memory of her.  
Like a shell surrendered to evening sands,  
Yet called adrift again at every dawn,  
She has become a pathos,--  
Waif of the tides.

The sand and sea have had their way,  
And moons of spring and autumn,--  
All, save I.  
And even my vision will be erased  
As a cameo the waves claim again. (148)

The earliest critical reference to connect Crane with the Symbolists occurred in the first essay ever written about the poet: “Hart Crane: Young Titan in the Sacred Wood” by his friend Gorham Munson. Munson begins the essay by redirecting a suggestion from Maxwell Bodenheim that a critic should write on poets before they publish a first volume; instead, Munson laments, editors refuse to publish criticism on young poets who lack a full book. A parenthetical insertion supposedly documents the date and “late delivery” of Munson’s effort: “I am deliberately letting this essay stand as it was written in the winter of 1925. . . . Of course, I was unable to publish this essay in any of our magazines” (161). The remark was prophetic in many respects, for Crane encountered numerous publishing difficulties throughout his career. Munson’s essay was finally published in the collection of essays *Destinations* in 1928; however, either the authenticity of the claim of no revision or the 1925 date seems suspect.

After debunking Bodenheim’s “superficial legend that he is a ‘contemporary Rimbaud’” in favor of recognizing Crane’s “bold and brilliant contrast” (thus implicitly hailing Crane as an authentic “contemporary Rimbaud”), throughout the rest of the essay Munson refers to Crane as twenty-eight years old, providing the first instance of what

would become a standard critical chronology of Crane's artistic development:

From sixteen to twenty-eight Crane has developed from a rich almost gaudy imagism (see "October-November" in the *Pagan Anthology*) through an elegant derivation from symbolism (see "In Shadow" in the *Little Review*, December, 1917) and then through poems dealing with isolated emotional themes in which he was discovering his own music and idiom to *Faustus and Helen* in *Secession* number seven, his first symphonic and "metaphysical" work. (163-64)

Few critics, though, are as bold in concurring with Munson's stupendous assessment: "at sixteen [Crane] was writing on a level that Amy Lowell never rose from and at twenty-eight he is writing on a level that scarcely any other living American poet ever reaches" (164). Since Crane was born in July 1899 with what he called "a little toe-nail in the last century" (*O My Land* 85) and would have been only twenty-six in 1925, Munson more than likely revised some portion of the earlier essay--at minimum the references to Crane's age--before its final publication in book form in 1928.

The likely composition of the essay can be dated with greater accuracy: when Crane wrote Otto Kahn requesting financial patronage for help writing *The Bridge* on December 3, 1925, the poet included three "Statements on my writings" from Waldo Frank, Allen Tate, and Gorham Munson (these statements must have been personally solicited as none of these writers had yet written--or at least published formally--on Crane). By March 5, 1926, Crane asks Munson to mail along "your comments on Crane" and requests frankness in responding (*O My Land* 231). Crane's lengthy reply is dated

March 17, 1926, so in all likelihood the essay's composition originates within that three-month span (though if Munson's admission about the date of composition is credible, the essay must have been written in the last few weeks of 1925).

Apart from the implicit link with Rimbaud in the essay's introduction, Munson's only direct comparison between Crane and any French Symbolist poet occurs near the conclusion in a discussion of the poet's inability to sustain a high degree of intensity or heightened emotional ecstasy. According to Munson, Crane exhibits a "tendency in his writing to oscillate between a description of his personal wretchedness of life and the moments of supernal beauty he experiences. This sort of psychological game Verlaine played to exhaustion and a young poet might well shudder from repeating it" (176). Crane's epistolary response to this specific objection touches on one of the key critical misprisions which would hamper the criticism of writers who knew him personally:

What I'm objecting to is contained in my suspicion that you have allowed too many extra-literary impressions of me to enter your essay . . . The same is true of your reference to the "psychological *gaming*" (Verlaine) which puts the slur of superficiality and vulgarity on the very aspects of my work which you have previously been at pains to praise.--And all because you arbitrarily propose a goal for me which I have no idea of nor interest in following. . . . Certainly this charge of alternate "gutter sniping" and "angel kissing" is no longer anything more than a meretricious substitute for psychological sincerity in defining the range of an artist's subject matter and psychic explorations. (*O My Land* 234)

Throughout his career, Crane consistently complained against reviewers who permitted “extra-literary” impressions to intrude on their readings of his poems. To this “charge of alternate ‘gutter sniping’ and ‘angel kissing,’” one recent critic frames the issue in terms of the conflict between the poet’s aims and those of modern culture:

Crane rejected the assumption in Munson's letter [sic] that some clearly delineated system of metaphysical belief need inform a modern poet's work, and he suggested that his vision of the modern world rejected systematics. . . . he suggested that the conceptual and linguistic liminality of the modern world ought to solicit from the writer doubtful speculations rather than a simple, programmatic affirmation. (Yingling 159)

Furthermore, Crane also quite frequently resented critics’ proposing mistaken aims to his poems; Crane saved his most bitter retort in this regard for Yvor Winters after a vicious review of *The Bridge* (Vivian Pemberton first published the “missing” letter in 1978):

you ascribe, again and again, quite different objectives on my part than anything said in the text could reasonably warrant. You then, on the same basis, pronounce the performance botched, and end up with a prognosis that is more pretentious and weightier than need be. Thus you can count “nine” as many times in succession as you like. But that doesn’t prove that there was anyone in the ring. People can’t be said to “fail” in matters they never thought of undertaking. (*O My Land* 428)

One of the most ironic aspects of the earliest reviews of Crane lies in this misapplication of exterior aesthetics to an appreciation of his poems. In part, my

emphasis on symbolist aesthetics and techniques means to offset this bias. Just as frequently, Crane's reception also has suffered from an overdependence on "personal" elements in interpreting his poems. The reviews of *The Bridge* in particular suffered from this sort of imbalance; as Unterecker noted in an interview with Karl Piculin, "People who were close to Crane had a hard time keeping up with where the poem was *at*, let alone where it was going. Private knowledge got in the way of detached judgment" (Piculin 185).

The marked formalism in their approach along with the autotelic expectations which the New Critics associated with all literary works of art somehow were abandoned in the most influential contemporaneous reviews of Crane's poems. While such a bias may derive from larger cultural ideologies with regard to sexuality, as Yingling suggests,

those critics we now consider exemplary of New Criticism in America found it virtually impossible truly to separate the literary work from its author. The questions of literary merit and personal character informed one another for them, and, at least in Crane's case, fear, confusion, and misunderstanding of homosexuality accounted for some of the moral and psychological sanction placed on his work, (60)

the same sort of misguided moralistic criticism has been leveled at symbolist poetry for quite a long time. The most glaring nineteenth-century examples of such restrictive and narrowly bourgeois approaches, of course, would be the 1857 prosecution of Baudelaire for obscenity in *Les Fleurs du mal* and Max Nordau's ridiculous *Entartung* (Degeneration, 1892-93) that concluded "the French Symbolists 'had in common all the

signs of degeneracy and imbecility” which was so effectively blasted as nonsense in G. B. Shaw’s “The Sanity of Art” in 1895 (Scott 276).

Nevertheless, a few words are now necessary to explain why Verlaine remains the only one of the “big four” French Symbolists left untreated in my analysis. Though many of Crane’s poems display a mellifluous control of sound and center around heightened moments of ecstatic illumination like the verse of Verlaine (as Munson noticed), very little evidence of any direct influence can be found in Crane’s poems. Partly this lack of immediate confluence is due to Crane’s preference for regular metric structures such as blank verse, ballad stanzas, and end rhyme. Though previously unremarked, many of the free verse experiments by the turn-of-the-century English decadents and early Imagists derive from French models inspired by Verlaine’s experiments in prosody. The only critical instance I know of which addresses this issue occurs in Margaret Foster’s unpublished dissertation: the group of Parnassian poets “in its attempt to revolutionize the somewhat diffuse Romanticism within the narrow limits of a plastic approach corresponds roughly to the part the Imagist movement played in the rejuvenation of American poetic technique” (107-08).

More importantly, however, most of Verlaine’s poems rely heavily on sound effects and echoing rhythmic variations for their lustre, and for this reason very few successful translations of Verlaine have been achieved in English. The relatively sedate moods of most of Verlaine’s poems also would not have appealed enough to Crane’s more vigorous and raucous sensibility to prompt him to read the Frenchman very closely in the original. Thus a difference in temperament and lack of a high degree of fluency in

French (along with the absence of successful translations) impeded Crane's appreciation of Verlaine or at least prevented any long lasting cross-fertilization from one poet to the other.

Still, early Crane poems such as "Annunciations," "Echoes," and "Modern Craft" all reveal a delicate pictorial quality and "decadent" subject matter that remind one of Verlaine, particularly in the imagery of lines such as "The sound of a dove's flight waved over the lawn," "your arms now / Are circles of cool roses," and "Still she sits gestureless and mute, / Drowning cool pearls in alcohol" (*Complete* 139-42).

The nearest example of a direct confluence between Verlaine and Crane occurs in "In Shadow," the earliest published poem (1917) which Crane chose to include in his first volume, *White Buildings* (1926). The last stanza of "In Shadow" shimmers like a transmutation of Verlaine's "*Colloque sentimental*" and reveals a feature of Crane's art whose significance grows as his talent ripens: a dialogic component. Resembling many of Verlaine's early poems, "In Shadow" is a mood piece whose atmosphere cultivates the sensuous air of a man and woman's rendezvous in a garden. Unlike many Imagist poems, however, the superficially static descriptions in the first three quatrains are infused with a sense of restless yet subdued energy and movement:

Out in the late amber afternoon,  
Confused among chrysanthemums,  
Her parasol, a pale balloon,  
Like a waiting moon, in shadow swims.

Her furtive lace and misty hair  
Over the garden dial distill  
The sunlight,—then withdrawing, wear  
Again the shadows at her will.

Gently yet suddenly, the sheen  
Of stars inwraps her parasol.  
She hears my step behind the green  
Twilight, stiller than shadows, fall. (*Complete* 13)

In addition to the pervasive sense of expectant yet repressed sexuality throughout, the imagery in the second stanza in particular borrows from Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange": "Lean on a garden urn--/Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair" [Weber claims the two poems "bear comparison in mood" (*Hart Crane* 45–46)]. The concluding stanza, however, looks like a rearrangement of the conclusion of Verlaine's "*Colloque sentimental*" and imparts a similar sense of mystery and inconclusiveness:

"Come, it is too late,--too late  
To risk alone the light's decline:  
Nor has the evening long to wait,"--  
But her own words are night's and mine. (13)

Compare the concluding lines of Verlaine's poem:

--*Qu'il était bleu, le ciel, et grand, l'espoir!*  
--*L'espoir a fui, vaincu, vers le ciel noir.*

*Tels ils marchaient dans les avoines folles,  
Et la nuit seule entendit leurs paroles.*

[--How blue the sky was then, and hope beat high!  
--But hope fled, vanquished, down the gloomy sky.

Even so they walked through the wild oats, these dead,  
and only the night heard the words they said. (*Selected* 87)]

Both poems conclude with indefinite mysteriousness and uncertain expectations, though "In Shadow" is situated so that the night itself has become an observer or participant in the lovers' encounter. Despite the apparent attitudinal concord between the three "characters" of Crane's poem, the urgency and ominous last line of the woman's

speech leave the poem's conclusion in a suspended state, suffused with an air of desperation and indecision. The dialogic quality of having a speaker interrupt the poem's lyric voice becomes one of Crane's favorite techniques, and as his control grows more assured his use of the device grows subtler and harder to pin down to some easy set of preconceived dialectical forces--even when the intruding speaker is the lyric voice's own "anguished wit" in "The Wine Menagerie" or the speaker turns self-questioning in "My Grandmother's Love Letters" and "Pastorale." J. T. Barbarese calls this dialogic structural principle "an *antiphonal* exchange . . . each a conventionally framed first-person meditation that erupts into punctuated dialogue between Hart Crane and his better or recollected or experimental selves" (424).

Robert Martin is one of the few Crane scholars who connects Verlaine and Crane, arguing that the conclusion of "My Grandmother's Love Letters," ("And the rain continues on the roof/With such a sound of gentle pitying laughter") reveals how "The influence of Verlaine on this poem of 1919 is striking. One hears clear echoes of the fifth 'Ariette oubliée,' with its '*piano que baise une main frêle,*' and, of course, the famous third 'Ariette,' '*Il pleure dans mon coeur/Comme il pleut sur la ville*'" ( Martin 123).

The first critic to frame Crane's poetic achievements in broad symbolist terms is probably his most perspicacious reader: Allen Tate. As my introduction indicated, Tate's foreward to *White Buildings* shrewdly charts Crane's development as fully assimilating and then surpassing early Imagist influences by forging a method which employs Rimbaud's "oblique presentation of theme." Additionally, Tate intimates the degree to which Crane has assimilated some of the French Symbolists: "Although Crane is

probably not a critical and systematic reader of foreign literatures, his French is better than Whitman's; he may have learned something from Laforgue and, particularly, Rimbaud" (Introduction 54). The essay's conclusion further locates Crane in a symbolist genealogy by remarking on his chief poetic fault: "The vision often strains and overreaches the theme. This fault, common among ambitious poets since Baudelaire, is not unique with them. It appears whenever the existing poetic order no longer supports the imagination" (Introduction 55). Tate's introduction to *White Buildings* was so thorough and penetrating that many reviews of the volume merely recapitulate Tate's main observations, or as Clark says, "reviewers grabbed onto it" (*Critical* 6). Even the self-assured Winters admitted in his review of *White Buildings* that "it is irritating to be forestalled by an introduction that is, for once, thoroughly competent" (*Uncollected* 47).

Tate continued to write on Crane for more than thirty years, and in almost every case he sees symbolist techniques as one of the most prominent features of Crane's style. In what became his "standard" treatise on *The Bridge*, which appeared in *Essays of Four Decades* as a combination of the revision of an initial review of the poem in *Hound and Horn* and a response to Horton's biography in the mid-thirties, Tate again links the poet's aims with those of Rimbaud: "Crane instinctively continued the conception of the will that was the deliberate discovery of Rimbaud. A poetry of the will is a poetry of sensation, for the poet surrenders to his sensations of the object in his effort to identify himself with it, and to own it" ("Hart Crane" 321). This notion of surrender remained a key concept for modern American symbolists, one examined in greater detail in chapter two's discussion of Eliot.

Tate's original review of *The Bridge* appeared in *Hound and Horn* in 1930. Near the conclusion, Tate deprecates the lyrical eclecticism of the poem's style (implicitly faulting Crane for failing to produce a historical epic):

Crane's vision is that of the naturalistic, romantic poet, and it vacillates between two poles. A buoyant optimism of the Whitman school and the direst Baudelairean pessimism exist side by side, unfused. The effect of that section of the poem intended as an Inferno, "The Tunnel," is largely nullified by the anti-climactic lapses into an infernal vision in the midst of panegyric. (*Poetry Reviews* 103)

Most of "The Tunnel" is hardly buoyant or optimistic, though the hushed apocalyptic tones of its conclusion hold open the possibility of some sort of collective redemption or salvation as a prelude to the finale of "Atlantis." Moreover, most of the fragmented and horrifically nightmarish subterranean world of the subway in "The Tunnel" is positioned about as far from panegyric as any episode in *The Bridge*, except perhaps for the gestures toward the maternal washerwoman and "some Word that will not die. . . !" at the climax.

The supposedly optimistic impulses of what Tate calls "the Whitman school" are themselves called into doubt in the only section of the poem which alludes to Whitman in any way--"Cape Hatteras"--whose central symbol is an airplane. While a grain of truth lies inside Tate's snide assertion that "the civilization that contains the subway hell of 'The Tunnel' is the same civilization of the airplane that the poet apostrophizes in 'Cape Hatteras.'" There is no reason why the subway should be a fitter symbol of damnation than the airplane: both were produced by the same mentality on the same moral plane"

(“Hart Crane” 319), such a reading misperceives how the airplane functions as a dynamic symbol in “Cape Hatteras”: as the poem progresses, the twinship of the “Wright windwrestlers” from Kitty Hawk becomes perverted into an engine of war and destruction--“New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place/To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apace!” (79). Tate’s assertion implies that any apostrophe contains within it some positively charged value toward the object thus addressed, but the anguished frustration of the speaker in Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” helps remind one how lopsided such a view can be (Paul de Man’s sustained inquiries into the vagaries and boundlessness of *prosopopoeia* lead in the same direction).

The airplane as dominant symbol of “Cape Hatteras” ends not as some object of singular reverence feeding off the excitement of flight--“Seeing himself an atom in a shroud--/Man hears himself an engine in a cloud!” (78)--instead, the plane as an instrument of war ends as “mashed and shapeless debris....the beached heap of high bravery!” (81). Whitman’s role in the poem is important as a portent of America’s future potential; the speaker of “Cape Hatteras” calls to Whitman at the poem’s conclusion to “see! The rainbow’s arch--how shimmeringly stands/Above the Cape’s ghoulish mound” (84). In “Cape Hatteras” the airplane holds only the potential to become a hopeful image of “Easters of speeding light” (83); within the milieu of *The Bridge*’s twentieth-century America, however, the plane’s telos in the poem is a heap of crashed wreckage.

Nevertheless, Tate’s main point in comparing Rimbaud and Crane in his initial review of *The Bridge* is a valid one (an observation which recurs throughout Tate’s criticism): “there is a similarity to the impulse of *Une Saison d’Enfer*; but there is a

difference which is fundamental. Rimbaud achieved the mixed and disordered surface of the poem by means of a process of deliberate dissociation. Crane begins with dissociation and tries to organize his pattern” (*Poetry Reviews* 103). The problem Tate points to is not so much personal as cultural and historical. To skeptical minds at least, the chaotically disparate culture of twentieth-century America seems too fragmented and multifarious, too resistant in its diversity, to be melded into one representative vision.

Crane himself was quite aware of this difficulty, as he confessed while plagued with doubts in the weeks before most of *The Bridge* was written:

The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in “action” (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith) . . . I had what I thought were authentic materials that would have been a pleasurable-agony of wrestling, eventuating or not in perfection--at least being worthy of the most supreme efforts I could muster. . . . however great their subjective significance to me is concerned--these forms, materials, dynamics are simply non-existent in the world. I may amuse and delight and flatter myself as much as I please--but I am only evading a recognition and playing Don Quixote in an immorally conscious way. The form of my poem rises out a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I’m at a loss to explain my delusion that there exist any real links between that past and a future worthy of it. (*O My Land* 258-59)

In several discussions of Crane's poetics Tate cites the lack of a stable, unified cultural system as a chief impediment to any epically conceived conceptual artistic production in the modern world. His introduction to *White Buildings* characterizes the difficulty modern poets face by comparing their tasks to Dante's: "The important contemporary poet has the rapidly diminishing privilege of reorganizing the subjects of the past. He must construct and assimilate his own subjects. Dante had only to assimilate his" (Introduction 53). Tate returns to the Dante comparison in his composite review of *The Bridge*:

In the great epic and philosophical works of the past, notably *The Divine Comedy*, the intellectual groundwork is not only simple philosophically . . . we are given also the complete articulation of the idea down to the slightest detail, and we are given it objectively apart from anything that the poet is going to say about it. When the poet extends his perception, there is a further extension of the groundwork ready to meet it and discipline it, and to compel the sensibility of the poet to stick to the subject. It is a game of chess; neither side can move without consulting the other. Crane's difficulty is that of modern poets generally: they play the game with half of the men, the men of sensibility, and because sensibility can make any move, the significance of all moves is obscure. ("Hart Crane" 315-16)

Tate's position on this question of cultural fragmentation and the obstacle it poses for modern poets stayed consistent throughout his career, perhaps most evident in his

contributions to *The Fugitive* and as a member of the Agrarian movement.

Nonetheless, while his early reviews of Crane hold up the poet as an exemplar of this artistic difficulty (and implicitly fault Crane for not working harder to overcome this impediment), Tate's 1952 essay "Crane: The Poet as Hero," subtitled "An Encomium Twenty Years Later," returns to a comparison of Rimbaud and Crane within the context of cultural disunity. In the intervening decades, Tate has come to recognize that Crane's attempt to achieve the impossible--what is characterized in the earlier essay as "Perhaps this disunity of the intellect is responsible for Crane's unphilosophical belief that the poet, unaided and isolated from the people, can create a myth" ("Hart Crane" 317)--represents a significant achievement by striving to overturn the ubiquitous sense of alienation among modern artists: "*The Bridge* is not in intention a poem of 'rejection,' in the tradition of Rimbaud, but of 'acceptance,' an attempt to assimilate a central tradition" ("Crane: The Poet as Hero" 327). By 1956 when Tate co-edits an anthology of American poetry from 1900-1950, his view has evolved so that he interprets the essentially symbolist approach of poets like Crane and Stevens as the most innovative means for trying to come to grips with the cultural disorder of modernity:

The best American poets (Crane is one of a handful) . . . have used a certain mode of perception . . . a hyperaesthesia that began with Poe and Baudelaire and that produced in our generation catachreses like Crane's "O thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits/The agile precincts of the lark's return" . . . This controlled disorder of perception has been the means of rendering a direct impression of the poets' historical situation

(“Reflections” 66-67).

Most of Crane’s early, academically oriented readers maintain this earlier position of Tate’s, summarized most succinctly perhaps in R. P. Blackmur’s disapproving contention that Crane “used the private lyric to write the cultural epic” (126). Blackmur’s 1935 analysis became a New Critical touchstone of Crane criticism for many years; he too argues, if only implicitly, that the poet’s symbolist techniques were misapplied in the “epic” construction of *The Bridge*: “Crane had the sensibility typical of Baudelaire and so misunderstood himself that he attempted to write *The Bridge* as if he had the sensibility of Whitman. . . . Baudelaire had at his back a well-articulated version of the Catholic Church to control the moral aspect of his meanings, where Whitman had merely an inarticulate pantheism” (124). To the extent that readers consider *The Bridge* falling short of being a complete “success” (and Blackmur first famously called Crane’s achievement “the distraught but exciting splendour of a great failure” [140], an epithet and evaluation which still persist), Blackmur’s assessment still stands as one of the most representative views of how to interpret Crane’s symbolist approach as being at odds with his supposed aesthetic goals:

In Crane's case, the nature of the influences to which he submitted himself remained similar from the beginning to the end and were the dominant ones of his generation. It was the influence of what we may call, with little exaggeration, the school of tortured sensibility--a school of which we perhaps first became aware in Baudelaire's misapprehension of Poe, and later, in the hardly less misapprehending resurrection of Donne. Crane

benefited, and was deformed by, this influence both directly and by an assortment of indirection; but he never surmounted it. He read the modern French poets who are the result of Baudelaire, but he did not read Racine of whom Baudelaire was himself a product. (127)

Undoubtedly, Blackmur's comments on Crane's actual use of symbolist techniques are some of the most astute anywhere and will be addressed in chapter three.

As for the case of Crane's "imperfect" knowledge of literary history, this charge is yet another example of academic prejudice marring an appreciation of Crane's poetry. Crane's first critical readers like Munson and Tate made similar comments; Munson's essay, the earliest organized critique, bluntly admitted that Crane "does not know enough" (172). Such criticism, especially given the poet's lack of formal education, has dogged Crane's reputation. In fact, he addresses this issue--within a specifically French context even--in the first letter he ever wrote to Tate:

Certain educated friends of mine have lamented my scant education, not in the academic sense, but as regards my acceptance and enthusiasm about some modern french work without having placed it in relation to most of the older "classics," which I haven't read. . . . Nevertheless, my affection for Laforgue is none the less genuine for being led to him through Pound and T. S. Eliot than it would have been through Baudelaire. (*O My Land* 85)

Crane's reply, of course, involves a bit of gamesmanship as he was already quite familiar with Baudelaire, though certainly less so with the French classical writers of the

seventeenth and eighteenth century such as Molière, Racine, and Voltaire.

Strangely enough, one of the earliest discussions of Crane's debts to symbolist poets comes from a Frenchman: René Taupin's *L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine* (1929) examines Crane's relationship to the Symbolists in its concluding discussion of young American poets in the twenties: "The more active younger poets, such as E. E. Cummings, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, and Malcolm Cowley, became skilled at adapting French techniques to suit their own purposes" (246). For Taupin, Crane's style is "the most important of all in that period":

The most prominent French influences to be seen in Crane's work were those of Laforgue and Rimbaud in the moments of vision and "illumination". . . . Crane did not push the "rational disordering of the senses" to the extreme point, as Rimbaud did; his images were kept under the control of his will; but there is no question that he saw in Rimbaud's *Season in Hell* and *Illuminations* the models which best suited his own talent. (248-49)

By and large, Taupin's analysis is sound in citing Rimbaldian-flavored passages in "Repose of Rivers," "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen II," and "Voyages II," as well as in his conclusion:

The best of [Hart Crane's] poetry possessed all the qualities of the new style; he had profited from the example of Eliot and from that of the best French Symbolists, and in this practice the poetic phrase had become almost a solid object, the image a brilliant splash of color, the form a free

and harmonious fluency, the whole poem a durable creation. (250)

Despite Henri Peyre's qualifications concerning Taupin's assertions of symbolist influence in modern American poetry,

It is too easy to affirm influences, and even imitation, while there were at most affinities, and it is a bit unfair to take advantage of this or that overly generous declaration by American poets, taken with France or preferring its literature to their own, long less polished, to enlarge their "debt" to the France of symbolism. This is somewhat what has been done by René Taupin's intelligent but too hasty book on the subject, which today needs to be rendered more precise and better balanced, (149)

Taupin's analysis still seems valid, at least in the main with respect to Crane's symbolist techniques. However, Taupin's assertion that Crane "came very near matching Rimbaud in his use of imagery, but hardly knew enough French to read him in the original" (246) is infected by the general myth of Crane's supposed ignorance of French.

Yvor Winters pounced on Crane's "deficient" French in a contemporaneous review of Taupin's book (see pages 12-14); Winters' gasping analysis lampoons what he labels "automatic writing": "[Mallarmé] used the method, but with greater circumspection than Mr. Crane or Mr. Joyce. His logic can almost always be discovered; what seems an evasion of logic into pure obliquity, often turns out to be mere periphrasis" (*Uncollected Essays* 107). Winters' views remain askew from his own stubborn insistence that the modernists' use of non-discursive techniques--by poets like Eliot and Crane--owes its origin to a method adapted from the disreputable characters

from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*! Winters pursues this track more than likely due to Crane's epigraph to "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," and in some ways such an orientation accounts partially for the hyperrational vagaries of Winters' misreading: "their [i.e., modernists like Eliot, Joyce, and Crane] tortuous efforts to raise the [Jonsonian] conventions adopted to the level of universal morality have been an interesting but also a distressing spectacle" (142).

The connotative slurs surrounding the word "spectacle" become one of the chief ordinances in Winters' attack on modernist poets like Crane. Winters employs similar phrases to conclude his rigidly moralistic and unsympathetic review of *The Bridge*: "one thing he has demonstrated, the impossibility of getting anywhere with the Whitmanian inspiration. No writer of comparable ability has struggled with it before, and, with Mr. Crane's wreckage in view, it seems unlikely that any writer of comparable genius will struggle with it again" (*Uncollected Essays* 82). Earlier in the same review, Winters paid Crane a left-handed compliment, saluting the poet's ability while nastily denigrating his particular performance: "we are analyzing the flaws in a genius of a high order . . . But the flaws in Mr. Crane's genius are, I believe, so great as to partake, if they persist, almost of the nature of a public catastrophe" (*Uncollected Essays* 77-78).

As for Taupin's mistaken view that Crane relied only on translations in his exposure to the French Symbolists, Babette Deutsch noted more soberly in the mid-thirties that "There are several passages in *The Bridge* which read like a fulfillment of the extravagant prophecies of Rimbaud, whom Crane professed himself unable to read in the original (a piece of mockery which one is at liberty to doubt)" (143). Though Deutsch

assumes a certain degree of familiarity between Crane and Rimbaud, she also makes a point of aligning their similar techniques: “In its ecstatic rhythms, its swift, kindling images, its semi-colloquial, elliptical notations of the actual scene as it crowds upon a shelterless sensibility, Crane’s work testifies to the kinship between two men separated by the barriers of race, country, time, and circumstance” (144). Deutsch is also one of the first to note the source of one of Crane’s borrowings from Rimbaud: she traces Crane’s image in “The Tunnel” of “love” being reduced to “A burnt match skating in a urinal” to *Une Saison en enfer*: “The force of this passage is not lessened because it recalls, in its juxtaposition of ugliness and ecstasy, no less than its exact reference, Rimbaud’s: ‘Oh, the little fly, drunk at the tavern urinal, amorous of borage, and which a ray of light dissolves!’” (229-30). While a feeling of disgust pervades both images, Crane actually used the word “borage” in an earlier poem, “Lachryame Christi,” where degradation becomes a means toward enlightenment: “Let sphinxes from the ripe/Borage of death have cleared my tongue/Once and again” (*Complete* 19). Sherman Paul noted the possibility of this same derivation in *Hart’s Bridge* (116), though like Deutsch he cites the translation from Edgell Rickword’s 1924 *Rimbaud* rather than Watson’s 1920 translation in *The Dial*, which renders the line “Oh! The little fly drunk at the inn jakes, amorous of the borage, and which a ray of light dissolves!” (“A Season in Hell” 18).

As for Deutsch’s assumption that Crane’s claim of being ignorant in French was “a piece of mockery,” I know of no public document by Crane which professes such a stance; a more apt characterization, despite its reference to the same “statement” by Crane [perhaps she has in mind his admission to Winters “I’m not being merely modest

when I say my French is weak and my Spanish nil" (*O My Land* 285)], comes from Foster's 1940 dissertation: "His own statement that he couldn't read [French] at all is absurd in the light of cold fact. He tutored in the subject during the autumn of 1917, but when his copies of the French moderns arrived late in 1920, he depended heavily on the dictionary and probably never got entirely away from its use" (76).

Foster's analysis of Crane's relationship to French, and to Rimbaud specifically, is one of the most insightful and understanding ever attempted; it is unfortunate the dissertation was never rewritten as a book, but in spite of this fact many Crane scholars have continued to refer to it. Her examination of Crane's translations of Laforgue's "*Locutions des Pierrots*" probably lands as close as possible to the root of the question surrounding Crane's facility in French: "his comprehension when unaided by English translation was likely to be spotty and to focus on words and images rather than on the core of meaning" (78). Apart from the extremely valuable poem-by-poem and sometimes line-by-line comparisons of images between Rimbaud and Crane, Foster's study also reveals how a less than thorough knowledge of French could still have led Crane to reinterpret and extend the range of Rimbaud's poetic innovations:

Rimbaud does not present the syntactical difficulties of Laforgue and that sensing the color and movement of "*Bateau ivre*" and of *Les Illuminations* goes a long way toward their appreciation, particularly if the reader, a visionary himself, recognizes his own affinity with the tradition. A large part of the Rimbaudian text as it appeared in the French must have been imperfectly comprehended by Crane, but he read it sufficiently well that,

aided by intuitive response and community of spirit, he grasped the power of the imagery and the quality of the vision. So will a strong natural vibrato help to conceal the violinist's technical weaknesses, thus contributing to the achievement of an authentic musical interpretation.

(79)

Unavoidably, Foster's analysis depends heavily on Horton's 1937 biography. Horton's biography, though the closest chronologically to Crane's lifetime, itself depends fairly exclusively on Crane's letters and the remembrances of Crane's mother, Grace Hart Crane, so its analysis is not as impartial as one might expect. In addition, Horton generally minimizes the importance of French writers on Crane's early development as a poet. Horton's description of Crane's efforts at translation sounds overgeneralized and almost trifling:

Sporadically, he was also working on translations from the French: De Gourmont's *Marginalia* on Poe and Baudelaire, and poems by Vildrac and Laforgue. Even though he considered this a pastime and confessed to constant use of a French dictionary, he still felt that his strong sympathies with these poets qualified him as an interpreter. (97)

While Horton's contention that Crane felt "strong sympathies" with the Symbolists is incontrovertible, the reference to a translation of de Gourmont's *Marginalia* persists as another unsolved mystery in Crane scholarship. The Horton reference probably is based on a Crane letter from September 1921 during a creatively fallow period: "I am too uneasy to accomplish a thing, but hammer out a translation of de

Gourmont's marginalia on Poe and Baudelaire for *The D.D.* [the journal *The Double Dealer*]” (Weber, *Letters* 64). This prose translation either never materialized or was somehow lost; no proof of its existence, apart from the allusion in the previous letter, has ever been found, and the manuscript does not appear in nor is it referred to in Weber's “Prose Writings of Hart Crane,” Kenneth Lohf's “The Prose Manuscripts of Hart Crane: An Editorial Portfolio,” or Lohf's authoritative *Literary Manuscripts of Hart Crane*.

The expanded treatment of Brom Weber's 1948 biography improved on Horton's work by bringing critical analysis to bear on Crane's poetic achievements within a biographical context and included valuable appendices as well: uncollected poems, uncollected prose, and drafts of “Atlantis,” the finale of *The Bridge*. Weber was the first to identify how the painter Carl Schmitt helped young Crane develop beyond an imitative mélange of Imagist techniques by reading the French Symbolists instead, though Weber claims, “An affinity with the Symbolists was inevitable for an individual of Crane's lush emotional nature” (38). “Annunciations,” another early poem not included in *White Buildings*, is distinguished by “The juxtaposition of disparate detail and allusion [which] must be united in the reader's mind, a characteristic of Symbolist poetry and a chief device of the mature Crane” (46). Weber also aptly claims “Porphyro in Akron” employs “Baudelairean lines” (89), though the poem's subject matter, rather than style, seems closer to Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens* such as “*Le Crépuscule du Matin*” and “*Le Crépuscule du Soir*.”

Apart from Foster's unpublished dissertation, Weber's book also offered the first sustained discussion of Rimbaud's influence on Crane. Though dependent on

generalizations, Weber's summary is valid by and large:

in Rimbaud's life there exist many aspects which Crane found to be duplicated in his own; that Rimbaud's aesthetic theory was amenable to someone of Crane's temperament, ideas, and ambitions; that Rimbaud's poetry constituted a high point to the equalling of which a poet might well devote himself; that Rimbaud's spirit was one with which Crane felt a powerful affinity. More specifically, Crane did employ the method of Rimbaud; and there is in his poetry much of the symbolism, imagery, and vocabulary of Rimbaud, although transmuted and re-worked in accordance with an individuality that is unmistakably Crane's own" (149-50).

However, Weber's chronological account of Crane's exposure to Rimbaud contains a couple of slips. First, while Weber reasonably concedes that "It is probable that Crane's first direct acquaintance with the poetry of Rimbaud came from an article by Ezra Pound . . . in the February 1918 issue of *The Little Review*," he also assumes, "Unfortunately, for Crane did not know French, the poems were not translated into English" (144-45), which ignores the fact that Crane began studying French formally the previous year.

Second, the same misimpression about Crane's French ability informs Weber's presumption that

The opportunity to read the writings of Rimbaud in a quantity sufficient for Crane to understand the man and in a language he could understand was provided by J. Sibley Watson's article on Rimbaud in *The Dial* of

June 1920. This article was followed in the two succeeding issues by Watson's translations from Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* and *Les Illuminations*. (145)

Such a claim, in addition to its unsteady premise about Crane's "deficient" fluency in French and a misattribution of "Some Remarks on Rimbaud as Magician" to Watson instead of W. C. Blum, also ignores what Foster calls the "unnecessarily mussy and uninspiring" prose translations from *Illuminations* by Helen Rootham nearly two years earlier in the July 1918 issue of *The Little Review* (Foster 99). While Foster supposes Crane "may" have read Rootham's versions, "Since these translations appeared before the period of Crane's active interest in Rimbaud, they probably did not get more than passing attention from him at the time" (99), Crane almost certainly read them because his own letter to the editor, his second prose publication entitled "Joyce and Ethics," appeared in the same issue! Pointedly, Crane's piece rejects grouping Joyce with Swinburne and Wilde as "decadent" writers but agrees to "let Baudelaire and Joyce stand together . . . The principal eccentricity evinced by both is a penetration into life common to only the greatest" (*CPSLP* 199).

In some ways, the publication of Weber's generally laudatory biographical study signalled a wider rehabilitation of Crane's career and of *The Bridge* in particular. Oscar Cargill's analysis of Crane in 1941, although loosely categorizing the poet as a belated figure of stylistic decadence, hastily concludes that Crane's method and talent are too studiously derivative: "Poetry was never composed more deliberately than Hart Crane composed it--in deliberate imitation of Arthur Rimbaud" (275). Cargill's case for

resemblances is flimsy; he also thoroughly misunderstands Crane's aesthetic theorizing about the "logic of metaphor" and the "dynamics of inferential mention," but he draws somewhat valuable though loose connections between Crane lines and poems by Poe, Mallarmé, Laforgue, and Eliot (276). After praising the "engulfing experience" of "The Tunnel," Cargill goes on to cite *The Bridge* as "one of the great poems in contemporary American literature" in terms that emphasize symbolist techniques like synaesthesia and the juxtaposition of suggestive imagery:

The very luxuriance and abundance of America are further suggested by the imagery of the poem. The rapidly varying subject matter, the rush of one experience into another, the cinema-like shift of scene--all these evidences of unexampled richness make the Rimbaud-like collations of words more plausible. Synesthesia for once is amply justified: the reader feels that in this instance hostile words must adhere--it is part of the essential compression of the poem. (279)

Almost a decade later Southworth also claimed "Crane's images account for no small part of his worth as a poet"(169), but that critic's analysis stays mostly superficial and repetitive. While his acknowledgment that "Such obscurities as there are [in Crane's poetry] arise from compression rather than from confusion of thought," Southworth is one of the earliest critics to apply explicitly the biographical fallacy: "A second or third reading resolves most of them; a knowledge of the biographical facts integral to the poem removes all but a few" (160). The same narrow, moralistic reductivism which marred New Critical evaluations like those of Tate, Winters, and Blackmur continue to haunt

readings of Crane, often sounding most egregious and inaccurate when conducted from a psychoanalytical perspective: "The symbols Crane made are in a way inbred or incestuous in that their accessibility to the public in an emotional way depends centrally on the public's familiarity with Crane, the man" (Bleich 89). Crane's symbolist techniques, allied with his aim of constructing "absolute" poetry, lie about as far as possible in their layering of dense textual structures from any sparse, skeletal information biographical accounts might furnish.

Although Stanley Coffman's 1951 article on Crane closes by insisting that "While the qualities of the symbol do not evenly permeate the poem, while the symbol itself betrays its confusion, one ought not attempt an estimate of *The Bridge* without understanding Crane's grasp of a fundamental Symbolist technique" (in Clark, *Critical* 144), his analysis restricts itself to charting the cross-references of colors and symbols in Crane's "epic" poem. Nonetheless, some critics in the fifties began to advance a more positive and balanced view of Crane's work. Some of the most useful insights into Crane's relationship to the Symbolists and his use of their techniques occurs in a 1950 essay by Barbara Herman. Herman is the first critic to cite the only place in Crane's prose (in the essay "Modern Poetry") where he alludes to the French Symbolists specifically as a group; she connects his technical interest in the related arts of painting and writing with the spiritual underpinnings in most of his work: "Even the influence of the French Symbolists on Crane's aesthetic theory was directed by his metaphysical orientation. Crane's own comment on the Symbolist movement is extraordinarily illuminating with respect to the values paramount in his own work" (55). While she

overstates the religious orientation of Crane's verse, Herman's awareness of how Crane adopted and extended symbolist techniques remains extremely valuable, including a heuristic emphasis on the reader's importance: "If his poetry were not to be entirely private, uncommunicable experience, as much Symbolist poetry was, symbols had to be chosen that would rebound on the reader's consciousness. The effort required was not slight, and the audience had necessarily to be a sophisticated one" (57).

Herman's operating assumption that symbolist poems primarily convey utterly private experiences is a distortion, certainly, but her analysis of Crane's chief methods of linguistic "displacement" remains one of the most cogent and persuasive:

The principles of this displacement were two: distortion or syntactical displacement, and the packings of meanings by juxtaposition, either through compression or contiguity--the loading of the word or series of words with as many references, in the sense of color, emotional implication, and psychological ambiguity that it could hold. The unit was the word, and, like the spot of color in pointillism, that word could be altered in various ways by the other words placed around it. These aims were not in themselves original with Crane, nor, in any sense, outside the tradition of English and Continental verse from which he derived. It was his special application of these principles, however, which supplies the unique tone to his poetry. His chief method may be termed cross-hatching of reference. (61)

Herman's analysis yields many insights, especially when she deduces that Crane

essentially expands upon and modifies symbolist techniques. Leonard Unger and William Van O'Connor conducted a similar close reading of "Voyages II" in their 1953 textbook *Poems for Study* in order to observe how it "exhibits the influence in modern poetry of the French literary movement called symbolism," for which they supply a laundry list of symbolist characteristics shared by Crane and Mallarmé:

finding unusual relationships between objects; making evocative statements as opposed to explicit statements; exploring the connotative meanings of words rather than relying on denotative meanings; exploring the range of associations both personal and general, implicit in a coherent body of imagery; depending upon synaesthesia, or the unifying and exchanging of sense impressions; and moving from meaning to meaning within the poem by relying on association rather than strict logic. (637-38)

The close reading Unger and O'Connor conduct enlarges the sort of analysis Herman only sketches. Moreover, Herman's emphasis on spirituality, the assumption that Crane really writes as a frustrated priest trying to realize God through poetry, seems misplaced (later critics like Alfred Hanley and Sister M. Bernetta Quinn--even Robert Combs and Helge Nilsen, to a certain extent--would extend a spiritual perspective into full-length treatments of *The Bridge*, yet these readings rarely focus on technical considerations). Herman's conclusion, though, as far as it goes, is revealing:

In spite of his preoccupation with the state of consciousness he was temperamentally incapable of satisfaction with the merely symbolist poem. Symbolism for Crane, or rather those elements of Symbolism

which he extracted for his own use, were in a sense a religious substitute. He abstracted his symbols into the most economical expression in words; he juggled those words until they would support and amplify one another; he built upon them and concretized them to a point of treating them as a reality in themselves. (65-66)

Crane himself addressed the “religious” motive in his work in a letter to Herbert Weinstock after a favorable review of *The Bridge* wherein he disavows any particular spiritual orientation in his writing; nevertheless, Crane remained aware of how easily his poems could be interpreted from a religious perspective:

the essential religious motive throughout my work . . . commits me to self-consciousness on a score that makes me belie myself a little. For I have never consciously approached any subject in a religious mood; it is only afterward that I, or someone else generally, have noticed a prevalent piety.

God save me from a Messianic predisposition! (*O My Land* 426-27)

The religious dimension of Crane’s work manifests itself most prominently in his choice of vocabulary and the occasionally Christian rhetorical sweep of some of his lines. In “General Aims and Theories” Crane tried to situate his use of religious terminology within the context of twentieth-century American culture:

It is a terrific problem that faces the poet today--a world that is so in transition from a decayed culture toward a reorganization of human evaluations that there are few common terms, general denominators of speech that are solid enough or that ring with any vibration or spiritual

conviction. The great mythologies of the past (including the Church) are deprived of enough façade to even launch good raillery against. Yet much of their traditions are operative still. (*CPSLP* 218)

Trying to account for Crane's aims in writing *The Bridge* within a mythic or spiritual context led to a large-scale critical reevaluation of the poem, and of Crane's career, in the sixties. L. S. Dembo's *Hart Crane's Sanskrit Charge* is a touchstone for this brand of reconsideration, and Dembo tries reconcile Crane's symbolist techniques with the larger aspirations of *The Bridge*:

Poems like "Possessions" and "Voyages," in which the poet-voyager reaches a belle isle of the imagination wholly beyond the world, indicate that Crane had strong *symboliste* inclinations--that he was not prepared to compromise his personal vision (the pure possession) with an insensitive society and that he was willing to accept isolation. . . . But the fact is that Crane could not accept isolation and that he tried to work out a vision in which a personal notion of Absolute Beauty became effective for the whole of industrial civilization, and the isolated lyricist, preoccupied only with his own imagination, found a role in society as a seer. (7-8)

For Dembo, Crane is largely successful in adapting symbolist conventions to a larger social vision in *The Bridge*, though Dembo's skepticism regarding explanations of the "dynamics of inferential mention" and "the logic of metaphor" becomes an impediment to a full understanding of Crane's methods: "despite all his theorizing about a special logic of metaphor . . . Crane did not write in a language radically different from that of

other symbolist poets” (41). While Dembo notes a Rimbaldian approach in “Passage,” his analysis of Crane’s specifically symbolist techniques rarely proceeds beyond statements buried in footnotes such as, “There are, of course, overtones of Rimbaud in much of the imagery in ‘The Dance’” (78).

All in all, though, Dembo’s attempt to understand Crane’s methods on their own terms served as a harbinger of more sympathetic and inclusive readings. Kenneth Rexroth noted in two essays from 1961 that Crane’s adoption of Rimbaldian techniques in “Voyages” represented a high water mark of the influence of French poetry on American artists: “[Crane] never learned to speak more than a few words of French, but his ‘Voyages’ are the best recreation of Rimbaud that exist in English and his whole life was a sort of acting out of *Bateau Ivre*” (161). Despite Rexroth’s own misunderstanding of the “Crane myth” (along with its assumption of no firsthand familiarity with French) and a reliance on the distortions of a biographical approach, his insistence on the success of Crane’s carrying over of Rimbaud into modern American English in the essay “The Poet as Translator” is accurate:

Sympathy can carry you very far if you have talent to go with it. Hart Crane never learned to speak French and at the time he wrote his triptych poem "Voyages" he could not read it at all. . . . his image of Rimbaud was an absurd inflation of the absurd Rimbaud myth. Yet "Voyages" is by far the best transmission of Rimbaud into English that exists. (189)

Paradoxically, even as critics began to appreciate *The Bridge* on its own merits and to understand how Crane’s symbolist techniques functioned within the poem, many

continued stumbling over Crane's theorizing about the "logic of metaphor." Roy Pearce's *The Continuity of American Poetry* in 1961 condescendingly accuses Crane of being more interested in the "magic" of words rather than in constructing some sort of contemporary myth of America and misapprehends the poet's own awareness of the efficacy of the symbolist method: "He discovered that the possibilities for 'inflection' were limitless; he could put words in unusual contexts, work variations on their usual syntactic functions, create a grammar of his own. But he steadfastly believed that in this attempt to transform language, his role was passive" (103).

Pearce's presumption of the "passive" role of the poet, of course, shoots quite wide of the mark, at least with regard to how Crane conceived of his own poetic practices. Fellow-poet Robert Creeley's 1960 essay hits nearer to appreciating Crane's technical development:

As his critics have remarked, Crane learned a great deal from the French Symbolists, and much of his early work is dominated by what he learned. . . . The point is that Crane had become at first a poet by way of a poetry dependent on irony, on the dissociations possible in the very surfaces of language, on a quick and nonpassive verbalism which was in direct opposition to anything then evident in English or American poetry. . . . But it is Crane's development away from the Symbolists, and their dependence on irony in particular, that leads to the later style. (81)

Decades afterward, Langdon Hammer would note how Crane differed from other modernists by adopting a "high style" blended of Elizabethan conventions and symbolist

mannerisms without ironically contextualizing such borrowings in typical modernist fashion: “Crane’s poem boldly distinguishes itself from other modernist texts by its refusal to ironize, qualify, or bracket (place into quotation marks) the high style it appropriates” (Hammer 132).

Critics in the sixties were the first to pay attention in a sustained way to Crane’s use of symbolist techniques, though few directly cite any French poets. Samuel Hazo’s 1963 monograph *Smithereened Apart* focuses on how even early Crane poems purposely omitted discursive connectors: “It is left to the imagination of the reader to supply the many transitions that Crane deliberately omitted” (24). But whereas Hazo praises the “virtuosic” symbolist qualities of Crane’s poems which make “legitimate demands” on the reader, “The serious reader must attune himself to them as he must attune himself to the very texture of Crane’s developing vocabulary, which is as much concerned with a word’s pigment and sound as with its meaning” (36), R. W. B. Lewis finds Crane’s characteristic condensed omission of connectors more troubling since it “baffles primarily through an excess of insinuated meaning. . . . These clusters and patterns have not, as I have said, been sufficiently fused by Crane’s shaping power; there are gaps between them across which the critical mind has to pass unaided” (141-42). David Clark’s 1963 essay “Hart Crane’s Technique” begins with similar complaints:

Every poet distorts accepted idiom and syntax and finds rich images and metaphors in order to enforce attention and to widen implication. But Hart Crane carried these techniques to an extreme, often astonishing and confusing the reader. Term and referent become indistinguishable. One

cannot tell the central point from the circumference to which the imagery has expanded it. One is afraid that there are many centers and many circumferences, arcs whose circles are not completed within the poem's subject or whose center-points lie outside that subject, thus disintegrating the poem's total effect. (*Lyric Resonance* 137)

In a slim 1963 Twayne's Series monograph, Vincent Quinn recommends rereading to untangle occasional obscurities in Crane's poems but misapprehends the experiential process involved:

His imagination was vividly responsive to the associations of images: connotations that often lie below the threshold of consciousness. He thought and felt in images; his references to a logic of metaphor accurately describe his intellectual equipment. Moreover, he believed poetry to be the concrete evidence of an experience. The poet was not to tell about an experience but to convey it to the reader in the sensual terms in which he had received it. (31)

Joseph Riddel's 1966 essay on Crane's "poetics of failure" also recognizes the symbolist roots of Crane's method, "While the symbolist poem should ideally conclude with vision or silence, with 'new anatomies' evoked, the modernist poem must celebrate victory in defeat," yet Riddel glibly dismisses Crane's approach as inherently frustrated and self-defeating; since Crane refuses to divorce issues of identity from "history" like Whitman, Stevens, or Eliot, self-destruction is the inevitable result of such a method:

the only possible solution to the poetics of failure, which is essentially the

minority report upon symbolism, is some kind of post-symbolist adjustment. . . . For a poet like Crane, however, there is ultimately no resolution: neither the broken world into which he falls nor the pure world he envisions is convincingly real for him, and hence no reconciliation of the two suffices, even were it possible. (in Bloom, *Hart Crane* 102, 108)

Nevertheless, Lewis' full-length study in 1967 signaled a general shift in the late sixties toward considering Crane within a symbolist context. Lewis presents sympathetic explications of Crane's method, examining the "intense contextual pressure" the poet brings to bear on phrases and sometimes even single words (50). Lewis' perceptive analysis of Crane's theorizing about the "logic of metaphor" is quite apt:

The poet's task, one makes Crane out to be saying, is to release the connotative meanings and insinuations of words, sometimes the mere edges and margins of their customary meanings; and to control and intensify those connotations by binding them together--make them work *upon* each other--by means of metaphor, the great binding instrument of the poetic art. (205)

While Lewis pays close attention to the details of Crane's poems, Herbert Leibowitz stays more attuned to the larger implications of Crane's symbolist method. On the subject of direct influence, for example, Leibowitz claims, "Crane learned from Eliot and the French Symbolists the habit of dropping out transitions and logical connectives and choosing words for their sonority or sensuous allure. . . . Crane's originality lies in his ability to induce words to create a network of meanings, something akin to a

chromatic scale of moods” (24, 53). Taking a cue from Crane’s theorizing about the “logic of metaphor,” Leibowitz describes the dominant symbolist method of Crane’s poems as one of “weaving, of following a word or image through its successive protean changes”: “This technique depends for its success on the spacing of connotations in irregular patterns throughout the poem; the words themselves are not split into emotive and mental units, but the reader picks them up as they impinge on his consciousness and lets them reverberate against each other” (95-96).

Leibowitz, in fact, is one of the first critics to refer to Crane consistently as a symbolist. On the subject of disrupted syntax, for example, Leibowitz admits that “Though not invented by the Symbolist poets, this attitude toward syntax permeates Symbolist poems” (166). He posits that modernist poets like Eliot, Stevens, and Crane adopt the techniques of *symboliste écriture* into English poetic forms as a way of expanding the poet’s range of expressive possibilities:

In his desire to present his network of relations and his contradictory feelings, without the intrusion of editorial comment, the modern poet tends to create a novel structure for each poem. He is willing to allow a certain amount of blurring when it is the effect of other virtues--vividness, musical effects, and discontinuity, for example. If he deserts traditional syntax, or dislocates it, he is not necessarily being capricious. (166)

A year earlier than Leibowitz’s monograph, Frederick Hoffman’s 1967 essay “*Symbolisme* and Modern Poetry in the United States” also characterized Crane, along with Wallace Stevens, as one of only two modern American poets who “derive from, or

acknowledge,” the French Symbolists and “attract attention for their continuing value” (197). Although Stevens “is only sporadically influenced by the *symbolistes*,” Crane’s situation is different:

he is probably one of the great poets in modern *symboliste* history. He forces, rather crudely, words to become metaphysical realities; he poses the *chiffonier*, the *pitre*, against Mr. Fat of Long Island; he sees lines and significance in the clown, in Charlie Chaplin, in the man who cowers in the dark corner of the urban inferno. More than that, he has Mallarmé’s trust in the magically transcendent quality of words . . . Yet Crane’s debt to *symbolisme*, acquired at second hand, does not impress. His great poetry (and he is a great poet) comes only incidentally from the *symbolistes*.

(Hoffman 197-98)

The misplaced stress on Crane’s “second hand” familiarity with the French Symbolists should be obvious; additionally, Hoffman’s remarks are so sketchily drawn that one wonders why claiming that Crane “does not make the Verb into a deity” (198) would justify characterizing his achievements as merely “incidentally” symbolist.

R. W. Butterfield’s 1969 book on Crane acknowledges the poet’s debts to the French Symbolists by way of Eliot’s influence, albeit in generic terms:

In the case of the French Symbolists, he delighted in Rimbaud’s synaesthetic devices, the basis upon which he erected his own “logic of metaphor”, and in Laforgue’s ironic concept of the clown as hero, a figure whom Crane early apotheosised in his “Chaplinesque” of 1921, but who

continued to hover in the background of numerous later lyrics. (247)

Yet Butterfield frequently avoids deciphering the dense surface texture of Crane's poems within a symbolist context on any consistent basis. Despite a fairly lengthy analysis, Butterfield repeatedly claims Crane's density of allusion and symbolist compression fail as often as succeed; according to Butterfield, the most complex poems in *White Buildings* leave the poet "in danger of making a fetish of his logic of metaphor, cultivating a privacy of allusion or a multiplicity of connotation for the sake of extravagance alone" (110). Crane often struggled against such charges of obscurity from lazy readers.

In some ways, John Unterecker's 1969 biography *Voyager* recapitulates many of the critical advances in the sixties toward appreciating Crane's style as symbolist. In addition to tracing Crane's early exposure to French Symbolist influences, Unterecker summarizes Crane's "shift in poetic technique" which became "characteristic of much of his best verse from 1921 on": "It was, to oversimplify, the imposition of a metaphysical technique on poetry that was written from a symbolist point of view. Its subject matter was almost always drawn from contemporary American life. Its imagery, though public enough, was frequently charged with private significance" (228-29). For Unterecker, Crane's mature poetry displays a textual "significant denseness" resulting from "a complicated formal structure, a structure compounded from rhymes and near rhymes, carefully adjusted rhythms, intricate multi-dimensional puns, and a system of deliberate 'echoes,' repetitions, and cross references" (229).

Along with Jules Supervielle and Osip Mandelštam, Crane is held up as one of three modernist "heirs" of the symbolists--called Post-Symbolists--in James Kugel's

1971 *The Technique of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry*. While Kugel notes that Symbolism as a dominant poetic movement had waned by the time Crane first began publishing, Crane's career demonstrates "the extent to which Symbolism has been absorbed by Modernism and has become a part of the landscape" (107). On the question of obscurity, Kugel claims that Post-Symbolists (or what I term in Crane's case Neo-Symbolists) differ from the French Symbolists by attempting to theorize a certain level of competence and involvement by the reader:

For the new generation the role of the reader assumes more importance, perhaps because of--or in sympathy with--the criticism of Symbolism's disregard for the reader, which began to appear in the late 1890s. The new poets were no longer interested in proclaiming poetry's independence of the reader, but rather in discovering what demands could be placed on him. (91)

This emphasis on the receptivity of the reader lies behind Kugel's paradoxical assertion that "Symbolism for Crane was Laforgue and Rimbaud, not Mallarmé and the literary *cénacles* of the 1880s," even though in a later footnote Kugel admits, "Not surprisingly, much of Crane's mature poetry also resembles that of Mallarmé and Roux in its density of allusion, and such poems as 'At Melville's Tomb' have a particularly Mallarmean air about them" (93, 100n.8). Kugel also offers an elementary contention that "Black Tambourine" "bears a close structural relationship to Rimbaud's 'Le loup criait'" but solely on the basis of a reliance on "abrupt shifts in diction and tone to imply parallelisms and restatements" (101).

Sherman Paul's 1972 *Hart's Bridge* reiterates Herman's earlier claim that Crane's method more nearly resembles that of a cubist rather than a symbolist, but Paul relies for proof exclusively on Haskell Block's contention in the 1970 essay "The Impact of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry" that Crane and Rimbaud are *outside of* rather than *extensions of* the French Symbolist tradition. (*Hart's Bridge* 303n.50) Besides the dubious insistence that "In its open assertion of personal feeling and experience, and in its metaphorical fluidity, Crane's poetry represents a turning away from the symbolist tradition" (216) which I account for in the introduction, Block's essay only addresses Crane's debts to the Symbolists in a short discussion of "Legend" and "Garden Abstract":

These poems are not typical of Hart Crane's early manner, which was at once more personal and more turbulent in imagery than we may find in either symbolist or Imagist poetry, but Crane was a highly eclectic poet and both of these styles enter to some extent into his art. Imagism, like symbolism, came to be rapidly assimilated into the resources in both theory and technique available to the modern poet, and the two tendencies often intersect in the work of poets who were neither symbolists nor Imagists in any strict sense. (Block, "Impact" 177)

René Wellek's historically oriented and more inclusive 1970 assessment seems more prevalent today: "only two Americans living then in England, Ezra Pound around 1908 and T. S. Eliot around 1914, reflect the French influence in significant poetry. More recently and in retrospect one hears of a symbolist period in American literature: Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens are its main poets" (*Discriminations* 99).

Despite its extremely impressionistic, occasionally derivative, and generally speculative approach, Paul's book-length analysis is one of the first critical attempts to account for Crane's use of a Rimbaud line as the epigraph to *White Buildings*: "Crane used it for its resonance--not so much to identify with Rimbaud, though it enables him to, as to suggest the spiritual adventure in terms of which he organized the book" (95). Paul's demand for a cubist orientation, however, prevents him from pursuing Crane's symbolist connections apart from isolated instances such as noting a resemblance in the phrase "New thresholds, new anatomies" from "The Wine Menagerie": "One hears Rimbaud's 'O saisons, ô châteaux!' in Crane's line" (125n.76). In another footnote, Paul contends that "Crane, of course, was familiar with Mallarmé's notion that 'poetry fashions a single new word which is total in itself'" (297n.37), yet Paul furnishes no supporting evidence beyond the surface similarities between Crane's "General Aims and Theories" and Mallarmé's "*Crise de vers*" (Mallarmé's essay is neither named nor cited beyond the phrase above). Eric Sundquist finally makes such an attribution in 1977 in a footnote: "Though Crane presumably borrows his 'single new word' from Mallarmé's theory of musical incantation in *Crisis in Poetry*, a passage in Pater's *Plato and Platonism* (which Crane in a letter singled out for praise) provides a similar version of symbolist doctrine" (399).

Gregory Zeck's 1979 Freudian reading of the "logic of metaphor" in "The Wine Menagerie" also relies heavily on Paul's purely speculative suggestion that two characters in the poem represent "father and mother seen from the 'distance' of childhood" (Paul, *Hart's Bridge* 123). Yet the Oedipal frame of Zeck's analysis fails to

account for many details of the poem, ignores Crane's homosexuality, and implicitly misapplies a quotation in a 1920 letter where Crane hints at working on "a new piece in conventional form about a child hearing his parents quarrelling in the next room at midnight" (*O My Land* 40) since "The Wine Menagerie" was composed in 1925-26. Paul's reading diverges even more widely and links the quotation with "The River," first published in 1928: "what the poet hears in the sounds of trains has as much to do with his as with the American past" since "In his boyhood and youth, Crane often traveled by train with his mother" (*Hart's Bridge* 213)! Unfortunately, the train rider in "The River" remains in second person throughout the poem, explicitly *not* the first-person speaker.

Two articles in the early seventies, one intimately personal and the other bibliographic--Alfred Galpin's "A Boat in the Tower: Rimbaud in Cleveland, 1922" and Kenneth Lohf's "The Library of Hart Crane"--provide direct evidence of Crane's familiarity with French and with the Symbolists in particular, so it is disappointing to see subsequent references repeatedly stressing the uncertainty of Crane's linguistic competence such as M. D. Uroff's hesitant qualification, "Although it is not clear that he knew enough French to be essentially influenced by him, Crane is closest in his vision to Rimbaud and behind him Baudelaire" (109), or William Van O'Connor's claim that Crane's symbolist adaptations remain restricted to his early development:

The important matter is that Crane, whether from direct readings in Rimbaud or Laforgue (Tate, his friend, said he read some French, though neither critically nor systematically) or from Edith Sitwell, Stevens, or Eliot, developed a style indebted to the Symbolists. . . . Crane,

undoubtedly, needed to discover the Symbolists in order to free his imagination. Once he had learned the possibilities in his medium, he no longer needed them as models. (78-79)

While O'Connor unnecessarily truncates the period of Crane's symbolist inclinations, Hart Crane, though he read French only slightly, studied Rimbaud and Laforgue. By the time his "In Shadow" was published in the *Little Review* in 1917, Crane had passed beyond imagism and had become more of a Symbolist. . . . In "Voyages II," for example, some of the techniques and effects developed by certain Symbolists are readily evident, (73)

at least he provides a reasonable, if somewhat sequentially and developmentally limiting, explanation of how modernists incorporated symbolist elements into their poems:

By the Symbolists, words were used not for their representational value but to create states of mind. . . . The use of all known objects as symbols with private meanings and significances was the first major step toward the obscurity that became a distinguishing characteristic of Symbolist poetry. The next step was the endeavor to employ synaesthesia, whereby all sense perception is interchangeable and unified. The third step was to dispense with logical sequence, in order to allow the extra-rational faculties and experiences full play in poetic expression. (67-68)

Galpin's personal reminiscences directly address Crane's facility in French and respond directly to Yvor Winters' charge in reviewing Taupin that Crane "does not read French" (*Uncollected Essays* 105):

The testimony I shall later quote from Tate and Cowley should in itself suffice to dispel the notion that Crane did not read French, but such notions die hard, and I can adduce evidence from personal experience. I can also respond to Mr. Winters's rather strange inquiry about how much Crane "*can learn*" from Rimbaud (in 1931), by shedding some light on how much he had already learned in 1922. (Galpin 3)

Galpin readily admits that as a twenty year-old,

Baudelaire and Verlaine, still vaguely considered symbolists, were my own favorites in 1922. . . . I was drawn [to Cleveland in June] in part by my admiration for the translations that [Samuel] Loveman made of these "symbolist" poets, in the manner of our idol Arthur Symons. I do not recall that either Loveman or myself expressed at that time any special interest in Rimbaud. However, within a week or ten days after arriving, and meeting Hart--although I had certainly arrived with little Rimbaud in mind and none in my baggage--I had completed [a] translation of *Bateau Ivre*. (5)

In addition to providing a copy of his youthful translation of Rimbaud's masterpiece, Galpin acknowledges Crane's help and advanced familiarity:

Such Rimbaud lore as I had when I came to Cleveland was probably derived from the same major source as Crane: the generally excellent translations, mainly prose, of the *Illuminations* and *Saison en Enfer* published in the *Dial* two summers previously. . . . Unlike Crane, I had no

knowledge of the famous Study in French Poets which Ezra Pound had published in the *Little Review* of February, 1918. . . . At any rate, from our first acquaintance Hart and I joined forces on Rimbaud--in the French. (5)

If unregenerate skeptics still suspect that Galpin's personal experiences by themselves do not provide enough evidence of Crane's thoroughgoing study of French Symbolist writers--including the admission that "Hart had a good dictionary and used it conscientiously" (Galpin 8)--Lohf's 1973 "The Library of Hart Crane" supplies incontrovertible proof of Crane's early and meaningful exposure to the "first-wave" Symbolists. The previous year Lohf presented an editorial portfolio which examined the bibliographical remnants of Crane's uncollected prose wherein Lohf remarks, "Crane's fascination with words is evident in his poetry. Like the symbolists, his choice of words relied heavily on their musical and associational values. It was the evocations and overtones of words that interested him" ("Prose Manuscripts" 29). Lohf rightfully deduces that one can date relatively accurately Crane's early exposure to the Symbolists in the original French:

In a letter to his mother, dated 28 September 1917, the poet signed his name 'Hart' instead of 'Harold' for the first time. Because of the change in his name, it is possible to identify, from among the books in his library, those which he owned and read before the age of eighteen. Crane nearly always signed his full name in his books, and he frequently added the date on which he acquired it. (Lohf, "Library" 287)

The pre-1918 books include J. MacLaughlin's *Nouveau Vocabulaire*, a translation

of Jules Romains, and French texts by Charles Clément, Victor Hugo, Émile Verhaeren, and an anthology edited by Gérard Walch. Lohf cites Walch's *Anthologie des Poètes Français Contemporains: Le Parnasse et les Écoles Postérieures au Parnasse (1866-1914)* as especially important:

In 1917 he bought MacLaughlin's *Nouveau Vocabulaire* and the Walch *Anthologie*, evidences of his interest in studying and reading the French writers, particularly the poets, in their original language. . . . Important clues to his reading of individual poems can often be found in the contents pages of collected editions of poetry. . . . In Gérard Walch's *Anthologie des Poètes Français Contemporains* he checked the numerous French poets in whose writings he was interested and whose poems he probably read. Since individual works by most of these authors do not survive in his library, it is important to know with which French poets he felt the closest affinities. ("Library" 288)

The Walch book is signed in ink "Hart Crane 1917," contains annotations to poems by Émile Verhaeren, Jean Moréas, and Gabriel Vicaire, and shows conclusively Crane's familiarity with French nineteenth-century poets:

The following authors are marked with a check in the 'Table Générale des matières', pp. 563-64: Théodore de Banville, Henri Barbusse, Henry Bataille, Charles Baudelaire, Henri Beauclair, Paul Bourget, François Coppée, Alphonse Daudet, Ernest Dupuy, Paul Fort, Théophile Gautier, André Gide, Paul Haag, Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, Leconte de Lisle,

Jules Lemaître, Maurice Maeterlinck, Stéphane Mallarmé, Catulle Mendès, Stuart Merrill, Jean Moréas, Sully Prudhomme, Ernest Raynaud, Henri de Régnier, Adolphe Retté, Jean Richepin, Arthur Rimbaud, Georges Rodenbach, Edmond Rostand, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Albert Samain, Émile Verhaeren, Paul Verlaine, Francis Vielé-Griffin, and Villiers de l'Isle Adam. (Lohf, "Library" 330-31)

Among other books in Crane's surviving library which cannot be dated prior to 1918 are French texts by Guillaume Apollinaire, Rémy de Gourmont, Victor Hugo, Jules Laforgue, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Charles Vildrac, in addition to C. A. Chardenal's *Complete French Course*, and two anthologies edited by Léon-Adolphe Gauthier-Ferrières: *Anthologie des Écrivains Français du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Poésie. Tome II (1850-1900)* and *Anthologies des Écrivains Français Contemporains: Poésie* (Lohf, "Library" 300-30).

John Irwin's 1975 article "Naming Names: Hart Crane's 'Logic of Metaphor'" presents one of the most succinct interpretations of the poet's symbolist method, substantially extending and supplementing previous readings by Tate, Herman, and Lewis. Even Irwin's general comments reveal significant new perspectives on how Crane adapts symbolist conventions: "for Crane one of the major forms of metaphor is a special kind of nominalization--the production of elliptical noun phrases that represent on the level of surface form the embedding of multiple metaphoric relationships" ("Naming Names" 290). Without employing conventionally symbolist terminology or even referring to a single symbolist writer, Irwin nonetheless accurately identifies how Crane's

lexical compression works toward constructing a “countermimesis” which is symbolist to the core:

Whether as in “adagios of islands” a new complex name is created for “love,” or as in “surfeitings” an entirely new word is formed whose meaning is a multiple of the two older words it fuses, language in Crane’s poetry attempts to break a purely mimetic relationship to the external world and to establish in its place a creative relationship wherein the conjunction or juxtaposition of words on the basis of wholly linguistic features enables us to build new relations between the things they name. (“Naming Names” 295)

Richard Sugg’s 1976 book on *The Bridge* makes a similar claim that the surface texture of Crane’s poems is self-reflexive. Sugg was also the first critic to declare prominently that “*The Bridge* is about the poetic act rather than the action of the poet as a person in the world” (3), yet such a view limits the poem’s parameters, ignoring too many of the descriptive features of most of the poem and holding up consistently only in “Atlantis.” Though Sugg also makes no references whatsoever to the symbolists, even in a discussion of Crane’s aesthetics, his underlying view of the poet is not too far from my own in one major respect: as C lark suggests, “Sugg turns Crane into the ultimate modernist poet, in the sense of the poet who is the culmination of the symbolists’ tendency to make the world of the poem itself the only reality” (29).

Eric Sundquist’s 1977 “Bringing Home the Word” employs a loosely jointed scaffolding of psychoanalysis and cultural theory to arrive at a similar conclusion:

the poet acts as a detective become criminal: the search for the Word entails a seizure of power, but one in which the poet conceals (indeed, represses) certain evidence and covers the traces of his crime by rewriting himself into the script in a position of authority, by relocating within himself the Word which he seeks. (379)

But Sundquist's theorizing never accounts for the symbolist bedrock beneath Crane's methods. By contrast, Francis Fike's 1977 "Symbolic Strategy in 'Repose of Rivers'" specifically considers whether reading this poem through symbolist lenses may reveal important structural elements:

We should consider the possibility that Crane is working in a symbolist mode which requires not that each literal detail carry particularized symbolic meaning, but that some details may function in a supportive, non-symbolic way, and that the main symbolic meaning issues from the situation of the whole poem. (23-24)

Fike rather freely interchanges "symbolic language" and symbolist writings, however, so even a comment such as, "Like Rimbaud, Crane seems to have wanted to achieve maximum literal-descriptive power accompanied by generalized symbolic meaning" (24), adds little to a genuinely symbolist understanding of the poem.

The 1978 publication of Thomas Parkinson's *Hart Crane and Yvor Winters: Their Literary Correspondence* resurrected many letters from Crane which had been omitted from Weber's 1952 edition (many, but not all, of the letters Parkinson unearthed are included in Hammer's 1997 revision). While these "new" letters reveal many important

aspects of Crane's evolving aesthetic theory coterminous with *The Bridge*, Parkinson's only allusions to Crane's symbolist perspectives occur in a reference to Winters' essay "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit":

Crane read the essay and was pleased by it; it was one of the few critical works that he read seriously during 1929. The sympathetic treatment of his poetry he appreciated and had come to expect. Winters was placing him in the company of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and in his conclusion described Crane's poetry as among the major efforts and great achievements of the century. (136-37)

Winters, of course, published a scathing review of *The Bridge* the following year which led to the dissolution of his epistolary relationship with Crane. Parkinson convincingly argues that Winters began to prefer the "classicism" of Tate to Crane's more exuberant "romanticism"; while Tate and Crane both wrote in a symbolist vein and Winters did not, however, Parkinson frames Winters' attitudes toward both poets within a symbolist context: "He preferred Tate's new work to Crane's and saw Tate as Baudelaire to Crane's Rimbaud" (137). The blind spots in Winters' skewed judgment of both Crane and Rimbaud result from a thoroughgoing, extra-literary, and reductive moralism.

Robert Martin's *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* in 1979 initiated a series of gay readings of Crane, and while most of Martin's analysis of imagery and technique is of limited scope, and the homosexual emphasis occasionally skews biographical facts, he points to the poet's association with the older gay poet Wilbur Underwood as formative on Crane's early, pre-1922 style: "During the last half of this

period Crane was influenced in part by his friendship with Wilbur Underwood and by Underwood's work, largely translations or imitations of French verse which had appeared a decade earlier" (122). The observation is superfluous and unsubstantiated, not only because Crane himself was already thoroughly familiar with Decadent and Symbolist poetry by the time he met Underwood in 1920, but also because no appreciable proof exists that Underwood's style influenced Crane at all.

Hyatt Waggoner's 1982 *American Visionary Poetry* promises more than it delivers in its brief discussion of Crane. Apart from a contradictory overemphasis and simultaneous devaluation of Whitman's role as Crane's inspirational precursor, Waggoner refers to the poet as a "late Symbolist" overburdened with religious aspirations:

Like the good late Symbolist he was, Crane depended finally on poetry itself to express and support an implicitly religious Vision . . . If he were charged with a sentimental nostalgia for a dead faith, Crane had the nineteenth-century idea of the poet as the true Messiah to fall back on in self-defense. He could answer that, like the French Symbolists before him, he had simply used religious allusions to enrich his poetry. (85-86)

While Crane deploys Christian iconography and phrasing at various points, his verse never relies on any "Messiah," much less a "true" one, in its depiction of spiritual struggle and longing.

Allen Grossman's analysis of Crane's "intense poetics" in 1982 proves more illuminating, particularly with regard to the reader's relationship to the dense linguistic

texture of Crane's symbolist poetry. Grossman shows how the "obscurity" of Crane's verse is intimately bound up with its underlying strategy:

The reader must supplement the poem, endure its undefended and illogical energies, rather than "gather its sense." The reader is ambiguously internal to the poem, a part of its project. . . . the surface of the poem is designed to exhaust the finite procedures which the reader brings to it. All poetry is in some sense uninterpretable; but the "difficult" poem is *situated* on the virtual uninterpretability of the poetic text, the "infinite consanguinity" of its elements. (245)

In trying to answer the question "What Is Symbolism?" as Henri Peyre had done in a book-length treatment in 1974, René Wellek in 1982 also stressed the reader's meaning-making function as integral to the symbolist method:

The Symbolists wanted words not merely to state but to suggest: they wanted their verse to be musical, i.e. in practice, to break with the oratorical tradition of the French alexandrine and, in some cases, to break completely with rhyme. . . . Grammatically, Symbolist poetry could be called poetry of the predicate. It speaks of something or somebody, but the subject, the person or the thing, remains hidden. Symbolist poetry thus tries to distance the language utterance from the extra-linguistic situation. (23-26)

One of Taupin's translators, William Pratt, also emphasizes the difficulty Crane's symbolist techniques impose on the reader; more importantly, as Pratt notes in a 1985

essay, Crane's assimilation of symbolist aesthetics became one of the central facets of his poetry:

Both the involved syntax and the startling images of Crane's poetry are unmistakable signs that he had been reading French, and reading it effectually . . . Admittedly, it makes for some distortion of language and even some unintentional obscurity--faults which critics have often found in Crane's poetry--when a poet of Crane's spontaneous talent takes in a sophisticated foreign influence, but it also makes for phrases and lines of an unforgettable mystery and beauty, which invite the reader to explore them and try to untangle their meanings. . . . Crane's "fused metaphors" . . . are hallmarks of his poetic style, and they are also clear proofs of his susceptibility to French influence. ("French Origins" 4)

Furthermore, Pratt's suggestion that "in the modern period, and especially for American poets, 'influence' has been raised to the level of 'inspiration,' and it has served to make the poetry both more international and more individual than the poetry of any previous age" (7) aptly summarizes one plank of my argument, namely that Crane absorbed, assimilated, and then expanded upon poetic methods developed by the French Symbolists and in so doing helped rehabilitate and rejuvenate the style of modern American poetry.

In contrast with Pratt's view of Crane's symbolist roots, M. L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall persist in failing to acknowledge the poet's familiarity with the French Symbolists even when their treatment delineates such a method as in their discussion of the fifth poem of "Voyages":

Crane makes full use in ["Voyages V"] of the fact that a poem is not a literal communication but a structure of affects. "Voyages V" uses dialogue, *suggests* a scene and a relationship, *envisions* a dead, impenetrable universe--but it is a construct of tonalities and in no sense a narrative or argument. (328)

Despite Rosenthal and Gall's emphasis in 1983's *The Modern Poetic Sequence* on Crane's longer suites like "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," "Voyages," and *The Bridge*, their chief reference to Crane's poetic influences ridiculously links "Voyages VI" with Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (319)! They also shakily question the extent to which Crane internalized Pound and Eliot's advances in modernist poetic technique and completely ignore Crane's direct reading of Rimbaud:

Crane could hardly have assimilated the discoveries of his elders, Eliot and Pound, when he began writing his sequences in 1923. Although in certain respects he was indeed what he has often been called, an American Rimbaud, this was basically because of his gifts--evident in his best work --for rapid associative movement by what he called "the logic of metaphor" and for bold and drastic emotional energy. (331)

Apart from faulty chronology ("Faustus and Helen" was *completed* in 1923), such a view merely recycles tired echoes of the hackneyed assumption of Crane's "natural" gifts as a linguistic genius and fail to take account of Crane's early and rapid assimilation of Rimbaud and other French Symbolist poets.

Edward Brunner's 1985 *Splendid Failure* does a much better job of correlating

Crane's evolutionary development with Eliotic and symbolist influences. With regard to Crane's obscurity, for instance, Brunner rightly associates the poems' structural difficulties with conceptual density:

In the early poetry, what is puzzling is the excess in the poet's intense language, but that very excess, it can be discovered, is itself in line with the poet's theme, the necessity to break away from inhibiting conventions. The later poetry of *White Buildings* is genuinely difficult, inherently difficult, not to be resolved by some appeal to a general idea, because it is striving to convey simultaneously a number of overlapping ideas and contradictory movements, all of which are held in constant tension with each other. (58)

Too frequently, however, Brunner's overtly humanistic and thinly veiled psychological approach simply reduces the poems to exercises in self-therapy, a highly suspect operating assumption in Crane's case.

While Brunner's generally meticulous research helped contribute toward *Splendid Failure* winning the annual MLA Prize for Independent Scholars and tied up many bibliographic loose ends in Crane scholarship, occasional lapses mar the efficacy of his argument. He is the first published critic, for example, to pinpoint the parallels between the conclusions of "O Carib Isle!" and Rimbaud's "*L'Éternité*," confirming Foster's observation from her 1940 dissertation (Foster 177). Brunner correctly cites the revised version of Rimbaud's poem from the "*Alchimie du verbe*" section of *Une Saison en Enfer*, not the original version in "*Fêtes de la Patience*": the last two lines of the earlier

“*C’est la mer allée/Avec le soleil*” from “Festivals of Patience” lack the vehemence of the later version’s “*C’est la mer mêlée/Au soleil*” in “A Season in Hell”(132, 222) whose images are transfigured in the conclusion of Crane’s “O Carib Isle!”: “You have given me the shell, Satan,--carbonic amulet/Sere of the sun exploded in the sea” (*Complete* 112). In spite of his hyperbolic style, Brunner aptly compares the two poets’ perspective in both poems in terms of public reception:

Rimbaud’s violent raptures depended on an audience that could be shaken (and perhaps secretly wished to be shocked) out of its moribund lethargy. . . . he was insisting on the poet’s right to bring forward, however much it might cost him, a shattering dynamic vision that would (ideally) forever after alter the way the world was viewed. But Crane can no longer imagine recovering such elemental confidence in self-expression. . . . He has been virtually marooned on an isolated island, abandoned to a cemetery, in a way that is not at all unique but in fact characteristic of the place of the poet in modern culture. (106)

Unfortunately, Brunner relies exclusively on T. Sturge Moore’s translation of “*L’Éternité*” in Edgell Rickword’s *Rimbaud*, “the volume through which Crane knew Rimbaud” (106). Crane, of course, had ordered his own copy of Rimbaud from Paris in 1920 (Horton 94; Weber, *Hart Crane* 107; Crane, *O My Land* 44), whereas Rickword’s book was published in 1924. Why Crane’s French copy of Rimbaud is not included in Lohf’s “The Library of Hart Crane” is a mystery, though I presume it perished in the 1926 hurricane on the Isle of Pines (Crane alludes to losing a book in such circumstances

in *O My Land*, 315). Brunner compounds the gaffe in a footnote: “With only a vague knowledge of French, Crane would have known ‘Eternity’ from the Moore translation rather than from an earlier translation by ‘H. C. Blum’ in *The Dial*, 49 (July 1920), 1-26, because Blum translated only the prose sections and left the poetry (such as ‘Eternity’) in French” (267). In addition to mistaking “H” for “W” in Blum’s initials, Brunner wrongly attributes the inclusion of the untranslated “*L’Éternité*” to Blum’s “Some Remarks on Rimbaud as Magician” (in the June 1920 issue of *The Dial*) instead of Watson’s translation of “A Season in Hell” (*The Dial*, July 1920) which left the six poems of “*Délires II*” in French while translating all of *A Season in Hell*’s prose.

Diane Beth Garden’s fine 1985 dissertation *Arthur Rimbaud and Hart Crane: A Comparison of their Poetic Techniques and Underlying Aesthetic Goals* comes closest to what I am trying to do. Despite limiting her comparisons to Rimbaud, Garden sees Crane’s evolution as developing from a “proclivity towards an indirect, impersonal, compressed, and decadent style” (29) into a fully accomplished symbolist mode:

in the poems of 1920-1924, he develops methods that are symbolist. . . . he presents the theme indirectly through the imagery, uses words with multiple meanings that reflect and chime upon one another, disregards syntactical conventions, uses musical sounds and references, and replaces logical relationships by the truth of the imagination. (*Arthur Rimbaud* 131)

Garden’s catalogue of symbolist traits is useful, but dating Crane’s “maturity” as a symbolist at 1920 ignores successful early poems like “In Shadow” and “North Labrador,” as well as much of his juvenilia, nor is her allegorical reading of

“Annuciations” (thus disqualifying it as a symbolist poem) convincing. Still, Garden rightly assesses that “Voyages” is a fully achieved symbolist masterpiece that ranks with “*Le Bateau ivre*” as high points of symbolist poetry:

*Voyages* marks a turning point in Crane’s development. In this sequence, he develops techniques that are the foundation for his symbolist style. The theme of each poem emerges indirectly through the images. The words have multiple meanings that reflect and chime upon one another. The terms of a metaphor are related by their emotional dynamics, as opposed to establishing a logical relationship between the images. (*Arthur Rimbaud* 125)

Garden’s comparative focus may lead here to overstating the importance of “Voyages” in Crane’s development as a symbolist, neglecting to account for “Black Tambourine,” “Passage,” “Repose of Rivers,” “At Melville’s Tomb,” and so on. At the same time, however, Garden is mostly correct in describing the persistence of symbolist techniques in Crane’s later poems:

From 1925 onward, Crane puts to use the symbolist methods that he developed earlier. They are a firmly established part of his poetic craft. After 1925, his style doesn’t show any significant change with regard to this factor. He will employ these methods in some of the individual poems of *The Bridge*, and to the overall structure of the work. (*Arthur Rimbaud* 176)

The most significant difference between Garden’s argument and mine concerns influence

and artistic development: she fails to account satisfactorily for the ways in which Crane was exposed to Rimbaud's aesthetics, relying exclusively on Weber's biography, which in turn relies on Foster's dissertation, to cite only Rickword's 1924 book as the most important and singular shaping influence on Crane's appreciation of Rimbaud.

John Unterecker's 1986 biographical introduction to *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane* also stresses the poet's early exposure to Symbolism. During his first stay in New York in 1917, Crane was introduced to Padraic and Mary Colum, with whom he conducted an informal education:

Padraic, who was an acquaintance of William Butler Yeats, and Mary, a French scholar steeped in French symbolist theory, read with young Crane --line by line--not only much of Yeats' early work but also poems by Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Verlaine and discussed with him the impact on modern poetry of Arthur Symons' book on the symbolist tradition.

(Introduction xxiii-xxiv)

These details supplement the description of Crane's first stay in New York in Unterecker's *Voyager* and confirm the poet's relatively early awareness of and study of symbolist poetry.

Maria Bennett's 1987 "*Unfractioned Idiom*" explores many of the same issues, situating Crane's work in relation to modernist painting, film, photography, and music, but the most valuable portions of her analysis concern Crane's debts to Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Bennett traces many similarities in specific imagery between Crane and the French Symbolists, but her discussion of the poet's immediate forebears in English

remains fairly general:

For Eliot and Pound, the juxtaposition of ancient history, Renaissance poets, and trench warfare was not at all unusual, as the imbrication of Pocahontas, the Spanish conquest and the BMT subway was not for Crane in *The Bridge*. . . . As a result, the reader is forced to re-define his own notions concerning meaning and form within the context of poetry. Frequently, references are suspended throughout the poem so that a sense of total form in terms of their referents may only appear at the poem's conclusion; in a sense, this indicates the notion of meaning by accretion of images which is so much a part of the modern poetic sequence. (11)

In addition to tracking down stylistic affinities between Crane and Rimbaud, Bennett also connects significant biographical details between them:

As Crane fled from Ohio to Greenwich Village, so did Rimbaud, attracted by not only the artistic milieu of Paris but its involvement in the revolutionary effect of the Paris Commune. This physical deracination is perhaps allied to the amorphous quality of the poetic voice in both poets' work; although infrequent, Crane's usage of the first-person pronoun, much like Rimbaud's, gives us no clear sense of speaker. (70-71)

Her critique of the “amorphous voice” of Crane and Rimbaud fails to account for the symbolist emphasis on mystery and evocation; indirection, the lack of conventional discursive situations to “place” the speaker, and the juxtaposition of disparate imagery all contribute toward the dislocation of language each poet seeks to create.

Most of Bennett's close readings point out useful parallels between Crane, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, but occasionally an overemphasis on the speaker's subject position in specific poems leads to sweeping generalizations about each poet's aesthetic ideals. Bennet's discussion of "North Labrador," for instance, concentrates somewhat questionably on the speaker rather than the central symbol in the "source" poem: "The poet receives no answer to his question, no response to his desire; as in Baudelaire's '*Beauté*,' it is the mirror which thrusts his own image back upon him in an almost autoerotic manner" (139), yet the focus in both poems lies in the self-absorption of the female figure being addressed, not the speaker (confusing the speaker and poet in symbolist poetry is also almost always fraught with risk and frequently unproductive).

Alan Williamson's essay on Crane in the 1987 *Voices and Visions* compendium also acknowledges the poet's exposure to the symbolists via Eliot:

From Eliot, Crane quickly proceeded to the tastes Eliot was recommending in the literature of other times and countries--in particular, to the French Symbolists. Of the Symbolists, his immediate favorite was Rimbaud, and it is not hard to see why. Like Crane, Rimbaud was a rebel, a strikingly masculine homosexual poet who explored mystical borderlands of sensation and died an early death. (327)

Williamson also connects Crane's creative interests with Rimbaud's program of *dérèglement*, "a doctrine which surely influenced Crane's view of alcoholic and sexual excess as religious Ways," as well as Rimbaud's interest in metropolitan settings and the "alchemy of the word":

This is the same impossible equivalence between writing and consciousness that Crane called “absolute poetry”; and Rimbaud’s chief method for achieving it--a synaesthetic blending of the different senses, derived from Baudelaire--seems a narrower version of Crane’s stress on polyvalent mental connections, the “logic of metaphor.” (327)

Williamson rightly recognizes the subtle expansions of symbolist aesthetics in Crane’s theorizing about the “logic of metaphor” and the “dynamics of inferential mention.”

Though Williamson’s essay is fairly brief, his description of Crane’s compression and associational style bears citing: “[Crane] tends to overdetermine, to load each word with as much connotation and suggestiveness as it will bear, so that his sentences are sometimes almost unintelligible without these undermeanings” (313).

The rhetorical emphasis in the 1987 *Transmemberment of Song* by Lee Edelman proposes a clever taxonomy in which Crane’s chief figural tropes are anacoluthon, chiasmus, and catachresis. Each of these devices is prevalent in symbolist poetry, though as the limited historical dimensions of his analysis place Crane in a general “romantic tradition,” Edelman rarely addresses such *stylistic* influences. Instead, he dubiously advances a Bloomian model of Oedipal struggle, fixing on Whitman as Crane’s paternal precursor whose “rhetorical authority” the younger poet must usurp (190). Crane himself unequivocally disavowed any interest in pursuing such “mastery” over other artists: “I resent being posed in a kind of All American Lyric Sprint with anyone, as the competitive idea seems foreign to my idea of creation” (*O My Land* 380). As another critic remarks, “Compared to not a few of his senior American contemporaries--Frost,

Williams, Stevens, Jeffers, all appearing at times to resent the mere existence of poetic voices other than their own--Crane seems without competitive prejudice" (Berthoff 5). More dependably, Edelman analyzes the inexhaustibility of multiple interpretations readers confront in Crane's poems: "'irreconcilable' possibilities produce a fissure in which meaning cannot be recuperated. Crane's poetry, of course, delights in such gaps, such cognitive lacunae. . . .Crane's poetry derives its power from the consistency with which it questions or problematizes the referential function of language" (86).

The discussion of symbolist aesthetics in a chapter on Tate and Crane in Albert Gelpi's 1987 *A Coherent Splendor* displays a staggering breadth and precision. Comparing Crane's approach with the symbolist techniques of Tate and Eliot in their early poems, Gelpi argues that

The development of Symbolisme in France and its far-reaching and long-lasting impact on poetry in English (particularly following Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* at the turn of the century) mark a shift from the Romantic location of the individual in the cosmos to the exploration of internal states recorded and even created in the act of language. . . . whereas Eliot drew principally upon the tragic irony and wit of Baudelaire and Laforgue to voice his own self-conscious experience of disillusioned impotence, Crane looked principally to Rimbaud.

Admittedly there is verbal evidence of Laforgue's and Eliot's influence in such early Crane pieces as "Pastorale" and "In Shadow" . . . In fact, it was less Rimbaud's tone and themes that Crane adopted than his technique for

provoking a visionary state. (395)

Most of Gelpi's observations are more appropriate in the context of my own discussion of Crane as neo-symbolist in chapters three and four, but the following summation of the rationale behind Crane's attempt to employ symbolist methods in a "public" poem like *The Bridge* is worth citing here:

For Eliot and Tate, both of whom manifested for Crane an intimidating assurance and authority, the fatal Romantic error, which opened the way for Symboliste solipsism, lay in making the weak individual with his limited consciousness, rather than the collective consciousness with its institutionalized structures, the vehicle of divine revelation. Crane set out to dispute the point by writing a Symboliste poetry of affirmation, like Rimbaud's visionary writings, to counter the Symboliste poetry of negation in Poe and Baudelaire, Eliot and Tate. (Gelpi 403)

The detail and cogent argumentation in Gelpi's analysis contrast starkly with the generalized and rather superficial discussion of Crane's aesthetics in Warner Berthoff's 1989 *Hart Crane: A Re-Introduction*. Berthoff barely mentions Crane's symbolist bent at all, the only mention occurring in a discussion of the early emergence of Crane's "vital signature" in 1918: "[a] half line in 'Carrier Letter' marks Crane's first use of a cadence and syntactical pivot he would return to more than once in his mature work ('much follows, much endures': see, *inter alia*, 'New thresholds, new anatomies' in 'The Wine Menagerie' or 'Time's rendings, time's blendings' in 'The River')" (11). The accompanying footnote merely parrots earlier observations by Foster and Paul and

additionally miscounts the number of Crane's translations from Laforgue's "*Locutions des Pierrots*":

The spellbinding precedent for this would be Rimbaud's "O saisons, ô châteaux!" (*Une Saison en enfer*). Crane's command of French, as everyone remarks, was not much better than Whitman's, though he worked up two translations from Laforgue that appeared in the May 1922 *Double Dealer*--a month ahead of maiden contributions by Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. (114)

Ernest Smith's 1990 "*The Imaged Word*," examines the overall coherence and infrastructure of Crane's first volume. Hampered by a humanistic and sociological thesis focusing on the poet's response to the "external world," Smith's analysis nonetheless argues that the "second group" of poems in the book, "Garden Abstract" through "North Labrador," reveals a symbolist orientation: "These are the earliest poems in *White Buildings* in terms of date of composition, revealing the influence of the Imagist and French Symbolist poetry that Crane was absorbed in while writing them (1917-early 1920), before he encountered *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*" (7). Smith's assumption (prefigured by Longenbach) that Crane's exposure to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* somehow led to a wholesale revision in the poet's style is untenable; Joyce's prose style does not appreciably surface in Crane (unless one counts the compression which accompanies the stream-of-consciousness technique, an already established feature even in Crane's juvenilia), nor was Crane's early response to Eliot's poem particularly enthusiastic: "It was good, of course, but so damned dead. Neither does it, in my

opinion, add anything important to Eliot's achievement" (*O My Land* 108). Crane would revise his estimate of *The Waste Land* in coming years, but he followed Eliot's career avidly and by June 1922 would admit that he had "been facing him for *four* years" already (*O My Land* 89).

Smith's most valuable contribution, at least for understanding Crane's poems from a symbolist perspective, lies in his tracing out of the internal cross-resonances and echoes within the poems of *White Buildings*. While his analysis of specific image clusters and phrases points out some of the ways Crane's poems reinforce one another, Smith's general observations are also sound: "connotatively, particular images and units of phrasing echo one another throughout the volume, establishing 'associational meanings' that multiply and thereby link individual poems" (9). Though Smith does not go so far as to assert a symbolist undergirding to the patterns he outlines in Crane's poems, his description of how these symbol clusters work is conceptually symbolist: "images within Crane's poems reverberate off one another, often qualifying or expanding the affective qualities of particular lines" (83).

Thomas Yingling's landmark *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text* (1990) synthesizes and deftly consolidates while extending the contemporary trend begun by Robert Martin and Gregory Woods toward reading Crane primarily as a gay artist. Yingling astutely acknowledges that since homosexuality is "alternately sublimated, repressed, or oppressed" in the text of *The Bridge*, the appeal of a gay studies reading of Crane's work mainly attracts readers "interested in the question of homosexuality" (252-53). Nevertheless, in referring to the foreword of *White Buildings*, "Tate recognized that

Crane's verse perhaps required a different mode of evaluation than that applied to other texts of modernism, that it was difficult and intertextual in a way that broke the boundaries of the discrete poetic object" (58), Yingling accedes in a footnote to a mode of reading that I am trying to emulate:

Tate has identified without being able to achieve a new critical task, one that moves beyond the close reading of individual poems into something like analysis of the textuality of a writer's work. Crane's work announces (in 1926) that something other than New Criticism will be needed to explain all of the products of the modernist imagination. (258)

In "Hart Crane's Poetics of Privacy," Tim Dean smartly revises the gay studies model of Crane's obscure language by showing how Crane's lexicon is grounded in issues of ontology rather than epistemology (the subtextual "closet" logic of homosexuality): "The poems in *White Buildings* are constructed not according to the logic of a more or less legible homosexual code but according to the logic of a radical privacy that attempts to circumvent the very possibility-condition of such a code by constructing a form of privacy alternate to that of the closet" (101).

To a larger extent, though, Yingling's thorough and discriminating analysis leads him to foreground Crane's poems within a symbolist context quite often. One of Yingling's sharpest symbolist connections occurs in a footnote countering the restrictive and "transparently absurd" thesis of Edwin Fussell that "the diction of American poetry defines it as American [which thereby] dismisses Wallace Stevens as having 'whored after the Roman vernaculars'":

One can find a host of Puritanical biases buried in this statement; perhaps the one most germane to this study is the notion that allegiance to French Symbolism (that painted but empty whore of the nineteenth century) rather than American plain speech is to be deplored as inappropriate to the question of poetry in America. For Crane's work, such a notion is baffling--for he is, on the one hand, far more overtly concerned with America as a social, political entity than someone like Eliot. On the other hand, his work is far from the plain-speech tradition. (17, 230)

On another occasion, Yingling associates Crane's poem "Passage" with the epigraph to *White Buildings* from Rimbaud's "*Enfance*" with great insight. The apocalyptic Rimbaud line, "*Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant*" ("This can only be the end of the world, ahead"), derives from part IV of "*Enfance*." After noting how the whole section of Rimbaud's sequence "is in fact a map of slippages and unsettled identities leading not to some resolution of crisis but dissolving in a forbidding and inhuman wasteland,"

Yingling then quotes the entire section before tersely concluding,

Crane's "Passage" shares with "*Enfance*" this vocabulary of abandonment, this symbolic landscape and its stifling atmosphere, and the distant, unachievable goal of an identity confirmed in the regularity of social conventions; there is perhaps no better gloss on Crane's reading of the subject's construction in the gaps and aporiae of language than Rimbaud's reading of it. (125-26)

One other book from 1990 deserves notice, not for its rather thin analysis but for its first appendix: Wallace Fowlie's *Poem and Symbol: A Brief History of French Symbolism* generously prints a private 1935 letter from Allen Tate to the author regarding Crane and the French poets, especially Rimbaud, "with the conviction that future scholars will find it useful" (153). No one else has commented on the text, and its insights are integral to my own readings in later chapters. Fowlie probably drew upon Tate's insights in composing the brief section on Rimbaud and Crane in *The Clown's Grail* (1948), though Fowlie's observations in that text scarcely proceed beyond generalizations such as that Crane "felt strong affiliation" with Rimbaud's work, "although he was unable to read it easily in the original. Their experience and temperament were so similar that there was little need for Crane of literal translation of Rimbaud's texts" (133), or "Behind Rimbaud and Crane, and fully known to both of them because he possesses their temperament and prefigures their art, stands Charles Baudelaire" (136). Gregory Woods justifiably characterizes the readings of Rimbaud and Crane in Fowlie's *The Clown's Grail*, which was reprinted as *Love in Literature* in 1965, as "nastily homophobic" ("Hart Crane" 59).

On the most general level, however, Tate's letter to Fowlie in the appendix to *Poem and Symbol* testifies that Crane's "knowledge of French was very limited. . . . the actual influence of Rimbaud, or any other foreign poet, was very slight," yet he also acknowledges "Crane's more than superficial likeness to Rimbaud is not without significance. The more I study this matter of influence, the more I am convinced we must go carefully" (153-54). In addition to naming specific texts Crane used, such as the Modern Library Series of Baudelaire translations by various authors edited by T. R.

Smith, Tate also reveals for the first time that “Crane knew more about Baudelaire than about Rimbaud” (154).

Developing theoretical insights from Edelman and Yingling, Patrick McGee’s first chapter of *Telling the Other* (1992) shows how the speaker and readers of a Crane poem are consigned to “a world in which words never quite reach their referents, though the suggestiveness of their relational play seems almost unlimited” (33). McGee uses Crane’s last poem, “The Broken Tower,” to illustrate how Baudrillard’s notion of “symbolic exchange” helps readers appreciate the ways in which a poem may “work self-consciously against critical judgment, against poetry’s tendency toward aesthetic objectification” (32).

In “Hart Crane’s Difficult Passage” (1993), J. T. Barbarese locates Crane firmly within the romantic tradition, albeit acknowledging that his “early poetry issued from an apprenticeship in Eliot and Pound” (421). For Barbarese, Crane’s style has matured by 1921 into a

lyrical signature: an attitude of *epideixis*, of impassioned invocation, a habit of emphatically *pointing* to what is beloved. . . . the impression this habit leaves on readers: they are lifted out of their reading as the poem is taken off the page, out of the realm of the literary into that of spoken or presentational arts like drama or oratory. (423-24)

Though reluctant to recognize the approach as symbolist, Barbarese admits that behind “the core of Crane’s poetics” lies “a conviction that the poetic shape of an idea *is* at once ‘idea,’ or thought, or feeling. And nothing else quite like this conviction exists in the

core curricula of Modernist poetics, which embraces an analytic lyricism of infinite discrimination but retreats from such connectedness, such ‘infinite consanguinity’” (440). Barbarese then confirms Tate’s suggestions that the major precedent which Crane’s poetic theory builds on is Baudelaire’s, but the analysis of “Baudelaire’s importance to Crane” which follows merely concentrates on similar tropes of “connection” in “*Correspondances*” and “*Voyages II*” (440-41).

John Norton-Smith’s *A Reader’s Guide to White Buildings* (1993) presents some of the most detailed readings of Crane’s transmogrifications of symbolist precursors, tracing specific lines and images to writings by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Vildrac, and Valéry. Norton-Smith dates Crane’s full maturity as a symbolist poet fairly late: “by the summer of 1923, the latent symbolist tendency of his verse (present in occasional elements from 1917 onwards) began to prevail. Density of meaning, compression and complexity of expression, obliqueness of plot transitions began to cohere in a dominant form” (4), but he also acknowledges that “Crane’s interest in, and reading of French late Romantic and Symbolist verse must have begun well in advance of 1920” (69). Assembled from notes by Victor Shretkowitz after Norton-Smith’s death in 1988, the text suffers from a fragmentary structure; in addition, most of the research derives from the late sixties, so Norton-Smith needlessly laments, “We do not know enough about the poet’s private reading during this period to provide dates and authors confidently” (69), a fine record of which can be deduced from Crane’s letters and Lohf’s “Library of Hart Crane.” As a whole, however, Norton-Smith presents one of the most thoughtful and detailed discussions of Crane’s debts to the Symbolists, correctly concluding, “The

significant change in Crane's sensibility begins with his first-hand reading of Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Laforgue and Eliot" (149).

Although the focus on Tate and Crane might lead one to expect Langdon Hammer's *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (1993) to address symbolist aesthetics, Hammer is more intent on opposing Crane's late romanticism to Tate's classical Eliotic strictures of high modernism and New Criticism. Nevertheless, in analyzing the finale of *The Bridge* Hammer distinguishes between the multi-layered symbolist orientation underlying Crane's poem with the more conventional expectations of Tate's most famous poem, "Ode to the Confederate Dead":

So, too, the "new octaves" evoked in the third stanza are both diatonic intervals of eight degrees and the eight-line units before us on the page, which organize, in material and immediately visible structures, the progressive ascent of Crane's ecstatic utterance. What Crane is seeking in these self-descriptive tropes is not the "imitative form" of "Ode to the Confederate Dead," where the action of the verse mimes or replicates, in a mode of commemorative ceremony, heroic events unavailable to the poet; in "Atlantis," the action of Crane's language is itself the heroic event it describes. (183-84)

Hammer is also correct in refining ideas by Grossman and Gross that some of Crane's syntactical contortions are rhythmic in origin, dependent on symbolist emphases of musicality. Hammer points to the juxtaposed symbols in "At Melville's Tomb" as evidence:

the multiple figures in the second stanza's substitutive chain (wrecks-calyx-chapter-hieroglyph-portent) are organized *as* a chain and not a random series less by logic or grammatical relation than by the catena of pentameter. This is frequently the state of affairs in Crane's poems, where meter takes over the work of grammar in the construction of an elaborate apostrophe or an extended series of appositive phrases. (153-54)

Even more importantly, Hammer refers to Crane's essay "General Aims and Theories" to account for what I am calling Crane's neo-symbolist recognition of the reader's importance in modernist poetry. Though veiled by a superfluous sexual patina (a tone that intrudes too frequently in his editing of the *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*), Hammer's remarks on the collaborative role of the reader confirm the intimate and potentially transgressive symbolist axis at the center of Crane's poetics:

Crane imagines the act of reading a modern poem--when it is successful, when the reader and poet really "spark" (a slang word Crane used)--as a tryst. Reading is like cruising; it calls for shared recognitions; it communicates pleasure and pain. Even the arbitrariness of the union between a modern poet and a reader, the necessary impersonality of their bond, becomes the ground of a profoundly personal relation, a communication that exceeds the demands and conventions of civil reference. (160)

Hammer provides a more persuasive description of Crane's attitude toward his readers in the introduction to *O My Land*:

Crane asks the reader of his poems to take part in their making because a poem's meaning is always something for the reader to complete.

Complete, not create: the distinction matters, because Crane saw poetry as a collaborative act in which meaning is confirmed by being shared; neither poet nor reader is free to use words capriciously, without reference to the other. For Crane approached the reader of his poems as a kind of correspondent, and his deepest wish in poetry was to be *received*. (xxv)

Part of the difficulty contemporary readers face in Crane's poems derives from the symbolist poet's disregard for narrative and traditionally discursive structures. Today's literary theorists, of course, seize on the dense verbal textures foregrounded in Crane's poems, though without attributing such an orientation to symbolist aesthetics. Samuel Delany, for instance, argues that Crane's poems highlight in stark relief what language poet Ron Silliman calls the pure "materiality of the signifier":

It is easy to see (and to say) that Crane's poetry foregrounds language, making readers revel in its sensuousness and richness. But one of the rhetorical strategies by which he accomplishes this in line after line is simply to shut down the semantic, referential instrumentality of language all but completely . . . [words] arrive in swirling atmospheres of connotation, to which they even contribute; but reference plays little part in the resolution of these poetic figures. Reading only begins with such

lines as one turns to clarify how they resist reference, resist interpretation, even as their syntax seems to court them. (210-11)

Thus despite occasional attention devoted to discussing Crane's status as a symbolist poet and the reading challenges his poems present, critics generally have failed to measure the topography of Crane's work within a consistently symbolist framework. Fragmentary and incomplete analyses of Crane's symbolist methods have impeded an appreciation of the extent to which Crane introjected and modified the aesthetics and techniques of major symbolist poets like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. Past the centennial of his birth, the time has come for a sustained examination of Crane's various responses to the notion of literary influence, the specific ways he assimilates and adapts symbolist techniques, and how Crane's symbolist orientation fueled rather than detracted from his effort to portray modern American culture.

## Chapter Two: T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and Literary Influence

Hart Crane's career represents the most accomplished expression of the symbolist sensibility in modern American poetry. Before one fully explores the depth and range of Crane's borrowings from and extensions of poetic methods developed by the French Symbolists, one must first understand the specific milieu in which Crane began his career as a poet. The initial crucial link in Crane's appreciation for French poets of the late nineteenth century, of course, is T. S. Eliot, a fact Crane acknowledged in one of his first letters to Allen Tate [I have not edited Crane's letters for either grammar or spelling]: "my affection for Laforgue is none the less genuine for being lead to him through Pound and T. S. Eliot than it would have been through Baudelaire" (*O My Land* 85). While situating Crane in relation to Eliot should have become almost commonplace nowadays, these notes will hazard a fresh attempt to gauge as fully as possible Crane's unique relationship to Eliot as one of the chief influences on the younger poet's development.

Though Wallace Fowlie's *Poem and Symbol* prints a previously unpublished 1935 letter from Allen Tate which touches directly on Crane's relationship to Eliot, "Of course he was immensely influenced by Eliot, in his youth, and by some phases of Pound; but by 1924 he was in revolt against these poets" (154), a close examination of Crane's letters shows how the chronology here is a bit suspect. More accurately, Crane's attitudes

toward Eliot as a creative influence fluctuated quite a bit over the course of his career, encompassing a spectrum of emotions from intense admiration to jealous dismissal.

Among Crane's literary influences, Eliot remains the most consistent recipient of Crane's attention over most of the younger poet's career. As early as 1920, Crane recognized the artistic authority of Eliot and suggested that "Eliot's influence threatens to predominate the new English" (Weber, *Letters* 44). Crane's respect for Eliot persisted even as late as 1927; in a letter to his patron, Otto Kahn, Crane catalogues the portions of *The Bridge* already published in journals by parenthetically noting, "I have been especially gratified by the reception accorded me by *The Criterion*, whose director, Mr. T. S. Eliot, is representative of the most exacting literary standards of our times" (*O My Land* 308). How, then, did Crane finally arrive at a point where, as Tate puts it, "several years before he died he hated [Eliot and Pound] in a definitely personal sense" (Fowlie, *Poem and Symbol* 154)?

The most convincing answer to this quandary is advanced by James Longenbach who argues that Crane's fluctuating relationship to Eliot depended more on how others interpreted Eliot rather than Crane's own personal response to Eliot's work: "Early on, Crane cathected to the more passionate aspects of the older poet's work, and that passion fueled his own poetry; later, as influential readers defined Eliot's achievement in different terms, Crane could no longer see his debt to the Eliot they denied" (103). In essence, Crane's opposition to Eliot in the mid-twenties derives from a reaction to the New Criticism-oriented perception of Eliot's legacy: "Crane often said that his own work was designed as a correction of Eliot's, but the poet he corrected was the Eliot defined by the

dull-minded Munson and Tate" (Longenbach 83). Longenbach seizes on the fragile vulnerability of Eliot's early poems as containing attitudes congenial to Crane. Crane's citation of lines from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in his explanation of the "logic of metaphor" in his famous letter to Harriet Monroe (*O My Land* 280) confirms this view as much as, if not more than, Longenbach's analysis of Eliot's "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry."

This particular Eliot essay, the fourth in a series entitled "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" in the journal *Egoist*, dates from July 1919 and has never been reprinted, but its erotically charged trope of influence illuminates Crane's own attitudes toward poetic influence to a startling degree. Crane cited Eliot's essay in a letter to Tate whose last portions have been lost; pointedly, Langdon Hammer "wonders if Tate lost the rest of Crane's letter deliberately; it is one of the few gaps in a correspondence Tate clearly cherished" (136).

Eliot's essay describes poetic influence in terms which sound surprisingly similar to Tate's assessments of Crane's belated "hatred" of Eliot. The surviving portion of Crane's letter that cites Eliot's essay begins, "Admiration leads most often to imitation; we can seldom remain long unconscious of our imitating another, and the awareness of our debt naturally leads us to hatred of the object imitated" (*O My Land* 90). So far as it goes, this brief assessment reinforces Tate's view that Crane grew to loathe Eliot's impact on the younger poet's literary development, but as the later (missing) portions of the essay reveal, Eliot's theory of influence distinguishes between trivial imitation and genuine influence:

This relation is a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy, with another, probably dead author. It may overcome us suddenly, on first or after long acquaintance; it is certainly a crisis; and when a young writer is seized with his first passion of this sort he may be changed, metamorphosed almost, within a few weeks even, from a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person. . . . It is a cause of development, like personal relations in life. Like personal intimacies in life, it may and probably will pass, but it will be ineffaceable . . . We may not be great lovers; but if we had a genuine affair with a real poet of any degree we have acquired a monitor to avert us when we are not in love. . . . We do not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of the changed man; we have not borrowed, we have been quickened, and we become bearers of a tradition. ("Reflections" 39)

Similarly, at a point still relatively early in his career (1921), Crane describes his response to what he calls his "long-standing friendship" with Elizabethan writers like Donne, Webster, Marlowe, and Jonson as running parallel to Eliot's own development:

I can find nothing in modern work to come up to the verbal richness, irony and emotion of these folks, and I would like to let them influence me as much as they can in the interpretation of modern moods,--somewhat as Eliot has so beautifully done. . . . I don't want to imitate Eliot, of course,--but I have come to the stage now where I want to carefully choose my most congenial influences and, in a way, "cultivate" their influence. . . .

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. (*O My Land* 72)

Crane's early respectful attitude toward Eliot's achievements curiously resembles Eliot's own appreciation of a formative debt to Laforgue, though Eliot writes retrospectively from a 1950 vantage point:

[Laforgue] was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech. Such early influences, the influences which, so to speak, first introduce one to oneself, are, I think, due to an impression which is in one aspect, the recognition of a temperament akin to one's own, and in another aspect the discovery of a form of expression which gives a clue to the discovery of one's own form. These are not two things, but two aspects of the same thing. (*To Criticize* 126)

For Crane and the Eliot of "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry," poetic influence shapes a younger, identity-forming artist primarily through appeals to sensibility (temperament) and style (one's form of expression). However, the important distinction to note in the alignment of these unconventional attitudes toward influence is how these methods of conceptualization differ significantly from the impersonal theory of composition famously proposed in Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which became a dominant aesthetic touchstone for many subsequent critics.

Whereas Crane emphasizes the emotional dimension of other great Elizabethan

poets (and surely he hopes to cultivate this aspect of their art as much as their "verbal richness" and "irony"), in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot reconfigures the emotional component of the equation of influence so that finally, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion" (*Selected* 43). As Longenbach points out, Crane gravitated toward Eliot's earlier theory of poetic influence from "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" instead of the later more famous revision: "an Eliot who spoke of influence as a 'love affair' reft by 'crisis' and 'passion' (rather than an ordered assessment of existing monuments) might really have believed in the power of a moment's surrender" (87). Langdon Hammer calls attention in a parallel way to how Eliot censored the earlier vision of influence by excluding "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" from his first volume of collected essays, *The Sacred Wood*:

Eliot replaced its model of literary affiliation with a fundamentally different account of how one enters into poetic community. For "Tradition and the Individual Talent" rejects the homoerotic metaphor and Paterian language of the *Egoist* essay in favor of institutional discipline, filial piety, and a poetics of renunciation. Eliot's spooky qualification-- "probably a dead author"--is meant to emphasize the merely figurative status of his erotic conceit. (*Crane and Tate* 136)

Significantly, Eliot's later theory of impersonal poetry from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" served as the interpretive backbone of New Critical readings of Eliot's (and, unfortunately, Crane's) works and led to Crane's subsequent rejection of this more pessimistic vision of Eliot that so many others championed.

Nevertheless, in spite of Crane's explicit rejections of Eliot's negativism (particularly following the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922), the two poets' approaches toward both aesthetics and literary influence coincide in many ways. Before examining these convergences, one must see that Crane felt pressure throughout his career to differentiate his own projects from those of Eliot; such a struggle surfaces repeatedly in Crane's letters:

I have been facing [Eliot] for *four* years,--and while I haven't discovered a weak spot yet in his armour, I flatter myself a little lately that I have discovered a safe tangent to strike which, if I can possibly explain this position,--goes *through* him toward a *different goal*. You see it is such a fearful temptation to imitate him that at times I have been almost distracted. . . . In his own realm Eliot presents us with an absolute *impasse*, yet oddly enough, he can be utilized to lead us to, intelligently point to, other positions and "pastures new." (*O My Land* 89)

As the previous quotation shows, Crane felt an affinity with and an admiration for the technical achievements of Eliot but conversely saw their deployment as misguided and unnecessarily pessimistic. In another letter from 1923 to Gorham Munson, Crane reiterates his desire to appropriate Eliot's technique for other ends:

You already know, I think, that my work for the past two years (those meagre drops!) has been more influenced by Eliot than any other modern. . . . There is no one writing in English who can command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure toward

an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a skeptical age) ecstatic goal. (Weber, *Letters* 114-15)

Within three years, though, in the middle of a period of doubt regarding the potential success of his grand project *The Bridge*, Crane's resentment toward the climate of negativism fostered by the popular perception of Eliot as the spokesman for the culture of decay explodes: "Rimbaud was the last great poet that our civilization will see--he let off all the great cannon crackers in Valhalla's parapets, the sun has set theatrically several times since while Laforgue, Eliot and others of that kidney have whimpered fastidiously" (*O My Land* 259). Even after the completion of *The Bridge*, Crane admitted to a reviewer that one of the goals of his great poem involved breaking loose from the "particular strait-jacket" of fashionable Eliotic pessimism: "The poem, as a whole, is, I think, an affirmation of experience, and to that extent is 'positive' rather than 'negative' in the sense that *The Waste Land* is negative" (Weber, *Letters* 351). Regarding aesthetics, Crane still maintained a respect for Eliot even while trying to distinguish his "epic" project from Eliot's: "It took me nearly five years, with innumerable readings to convince myself of the essential unity of that poem [*The Waste Land*]. And the *Bridge* is at least as complicated in its structure and inferences . . . perhaps more so" (*O My Land* 427). This letter from April 1930 hardly seems inflamed with the "personal hatred" Tate claimed Crane harbored toward Eliot after 1924.

Crane's revolt in sensibility against the "voluptuous melancholics of Eliot" (*O My*

*Land* 249) has misled critics into concluding that Crane denounced all the poetic technical achievements of Eliot, even though constitutive parallels run throughout *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*: “Frequently, references are suspended throughout the poem so that a sense of total form in terms of their referents may only appear at the poem’s conclusion; in a sense, this indicates the notion of meaning by accretion of images which is so much a part of the modern poetic sequence” (Bennett 11).

Regarding the similarity between Eliot and Crane's aesthetics, both poets view their creativity as a uniquely modern attempt to surrender to the urban surroundings rather than imposing a vision on the contemporary landscape. As Eliot asserts in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (*Selected* 40). In a related vein, Eliot invokes Baudelaire as a significant precursor in the same way that Crane frequently calls on Rimbaud as inspiration, but the best focus of Eliot’s praise centers on Baudelaire's approach: “It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity*--presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself--that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men” (*Selected* 234).

Crane's view of the modern poet's role is remarkably similar in many ways, but whereas Eliot goes only as far as insisting on self-sacrifice in the interests of heightened intensity, Crane's essay "Modern Poetry" extends this notion to include the poet's ethical

response following such a volitional surrender:

For unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e., *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function. . . . [This process] demands, however, along with the traditional qualifications of the poet, an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life. This presupposes, of course, that the poet possesses sufficient spontaneity and gusto to convert this experience into positive terms. (*CPSLP* 261-62)

Whether these "positive terms" Crane refers to indicate something as simple as socially productive effects may be open to debate, but in all likelihood--as another reflection of a divergence from Eliot's approach--Crane probably means something closer to an affirmation of life, what in another context he terms "an actively operating principle of communal works and faith":

The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in "action" (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith), and I don't mean by this that his procedure requires any bona fide evidences directly and personally signaled, nor even any physical signs or portents. . . . It has always been taken for granted, however, that his intuitions were salutary and that his vision either sowed or epitomized "experience" (in the Blakian sense). Even the rapturous and explosive

destructivism of Rimbaud presupposes this, even his lonely hauteur demands it for any estimate or appreciation. (The romantic attitude must at least have the background of an age of faith, whether approved or disapproved no matter.) (*O My Land* 258)

Thus while Eliot and Crane both emphasize the modern poet's need to open himself up to, in the sense of surrendering to, the mechanical stimuli of urban life, each conceives of the goal of such a process as radically divergent.

One might qualify this characterization since the surrendering Eliot indexes applies not only to urban sensations (as Crane explicitly states) but more importantly to a notion of tradition. Crane too was acutely cognizant of tradition and the necessity for modern poets to "make it new" (as Pound's slogan decrees). However, while Eliot consistently calls on tradition to lend institutional standards and stability to each new poet's efforts, Crane relies on tradition to narrow and focus the contemporary poet's field of production: "if my work seems needlessly sophisticated it is because I am only interested in adding what seems to me something really *new* to what *has* been written" (*O My Land* 70). Richard Strier characterizes Crane's textual approach by quoting from the poet's essays: "'Partial surrender to the seeming accidents of language' is the essence of Crane's poetics. And Crane did not want the associations produced by these surrenders to be arbitrary and purely personal; he wanted them to be . . . 'absolute.' He wanted meanings to be read 'out of' rather than 'into' his poems" (181).

At odds are two different conceptions of the modern poet's role. While Eliot and Crane both emphasize the necessity for a conscious surrendering to experience, how each

poet translates this capitulation into verse differs significantly. In Eliot's case, as the impersonal theory advanced in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" indicates, the artist undergoes an internal disjunction: "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (*Selected* 41). For Crane, by contrast, the poet does not suffer an interior split but rather attempts to provide the poem with its own dynamic trajectory:

It is my hope to go *through* the combined materials of the poem, using our "real" world somewhat as a spring-board, and to give the poem *as a whole* an orbit or predetermined direction of its own. I would like to establish it as free from my own personality as from any chance evaluation on the reader's part. (This is, of course, an impossibility, but it is a characteristic worth mentioning.) (*CPSLP* 220)

Whereas Eliot asserts a separation of the poet from his work as "the more perfect" artist, Crane qualifies a similar viewpoint by recognizing that such an effort derives more from the artist's desire rather than any actualization. As Thomas Yingling suggests, at root Crane's aesthetic is experiential while Eliot's insists on the segregation between the artist and his specific milieu: "While Crane qualifies this by claiming the poet must still obtain some 'universal' perspective to insure that his reactions are not simply idiosyncratic, it is clear that he posited a more somatic relation between text and writer than did Eliot (and through him a generation of reader-critics)" (19).

The direct borrowings of phrases or images by Crane from Eliot initially seem relatively minimal: the lover's "every third step down the stair" (l. 15) of "Stark Major"

recalibrating the young man carbuncular who “grope his way, finding the stairs unlit” (l. 248) in *The Waste Land*’s “Fire Sermon”; the portrait of “The Fernery” presenting a composite of figures from “Aunt Helen” and “Cousin Nancy”; line 10 of “The Wine Menagerie” comprising a catalogue which ends with “manure” rather than the “merds” of line 12 of “Gerontion” (not to mention John the Baptist imagery in “The Wine Menagerie” drawing from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” or the Lazarus reference from the same Eliot poem recurring in the closing lines of “The Tunnel”); and the “tom-tom scrimmage” of “National Winter Garden” echoing “Portrait of a Lady.” Beyond this short list, one easily finds many general Eliotic resonances directly impinging on poems such as “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” “Ave Maria,” “The Harbor Dawn,” “Van Winkle,” “Southern Cross,” and “The Tunnel.”

The penultimate poem in *The Bridge*, “The Tunnel,” stands as one of the best symbolist modern American poems, yet its odd critical treatment remains emblematic of how Crane and his epic’s reception have been distorted by subsequent Eliotic lenses. Gregory Woods, for example, detects despair underneath the whole structure of *The Bridge*: “the poem is profoundly nostalgic, and its language is itself both the instrument and the object of that nostalgia. In these respects, the poem reinvokes the tendencies of its main model, *The Waste Land*; and it also, albeit perhaps inadvertently and only occasionally, reflects on the present with a negativism more characteristic of Eliot than of Crane” (50). In a similar light, William Pratt sees the sordidness of “The Tunnel” as an intractable urban subconscious image of the larger poem’s conflicted purposes, a contradiction left unresolved in the text:

Time, however, has proved Eliot's devastating criticism of the modern city increasingly relevant, while Crane's optimism about the modern city did not even last through the writing of his poem. We read *The Waste Land* at the end of the century with a sense still of its devastating truthfulness about the moral and spiritual state of man, while we read *The Bridge* with a sense that Crane's major symbol deserted him, his subconscious pessimism about the modern city having become more truthful than his conscious optimism about it. (*Singing the Chaos* 11)

One of the critical fountainheads of such an emphasis toward attaching overall negativism to *The Bridge* resides with Allen Tate: "Far from 'refuting' Eliot, [Crane's] whole career is a vindication of Eliot's major premise--that the integrity of the individual consciousness has broken down" ("Hart Crane" 321).

Such readings fail to account for *The Bridge's* nuanced, encyclopedic renditions of many different strata in American culture or the psalm-like hopeful invocations in the concluding lines of "The Tunnel" or the ways the poem anticipates the dithyrambic raptures of "Atlantis." Critic William McMahon points to one of *The Bridge's* inversions of *The Waste Land*: "Eliot's 'Death by Water' section, which does not contain a resurrection episode, must be seen in relation to Crane's 'The Tunnel,' which handles a similar death and submergence motif but does include resurrection" (396). As the most saturatedly Eliotic of Crane's poems (as well as the only one editorially published by Eliot), "The Tunnel" nevertheless occupied an ambiguous position in Crane's larger scheme for *The Bridge*. Just as he had advised Tate toward "willfully extracting the more

obvious echoes of Eliot” regarding an early poem (*O My Land* 129), Crane thought he had accomplished the same maneuver in “The Tunnel”: “the rawness of the subject necessarily demands a certain sort of sensitizing introduction--which, if it savors a little of Eliot and his ‘wistfulness,’ seems nevertheless indispensable toward the fixation or due registration of the subsequent developments of the theme. I flatter myself that I drop off the Eliot mood quite a ways before Chambers Street” (*O My Land* 333). The lines in question (83-91) show the extent to which Crane carries the Eliot mood a bit longer:

For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street.  
The platform hurries along to a dead stop.

The intent escalator lifts a serenade  
Stilly  
Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then  
Bolting outright somewhere above where streets

Burst suddenly in rain. . . . The gongs recur:  
Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door.  
Thunder is galvothermic here below. (*Complete* 99-100)

These lines echo Eliot’s “The Burial of the Dead” from *The Waste Land*, “Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,/And each man fixed his eyes before his feet” (ll. 64-65), even though the later concluding lines of Crane’s poem invoke an uncertain yet hopeful perception. Read merely partially, “The Tunnel” as a synecdoche of *The Bridge* seems to embody a hopelessness that the larger poem itself may suffer from, but such a reading willfully neglects the redemptive and socially inclusive gestures the whole poem contains. For example, the loving address to the motherly “Wop washerwoman” in lines 100-05 of “The Tunnel” marks her as Genoese, an echo of exiled Columbus from “Ave Maria” that helps bind these disparate parts of *The Bridge* together. Crane’s tactic

mimics the palimpsestic blurring of characters in *The Waste Land*: “the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples” (Eliot, *Complete* 52 n.218).

Even the conclusion of “The Tunnel” shows how Crane adapts and diverges from his source in Eliot’s “The Fire Sermon” from *The Waste Land*. “The Fire Sermon” ends in a conflation of Buddha’s Fire Sermon and St. Augustine’s *Confessions*:

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord Thou pluckest me out  
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning. (*Complete* 46)

The crescendo of “The Fire Sermon” appropriates Elizabethan diction to represent St. Augustine in order to give the lines a heightened grandeur, but the underlying sentiment expresses revulsion and rejection of the body. This mini-prayer in Eliot’s poem calls for a renunciation of the flesh; one of the relevant notes to *The Waste Land* calls attention to the interposed lines from Buddha and St. Augustine: “The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident” (*Complete* 53). Paradoxically, the “Fire Sermon” ends in a protracted paroxysm of sensual climaxes which nevertheless remain embedded in tropes of corporeal denial.

In contrast, concluding sections of “The Tunnel” also borrow Elizabethan diction (like many Crane poems) to invoke a sense of sublimity, but the mood of urban degradation turns redemptive and inclusive:

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam,  
Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;  
Condensed, thou takes all--shrill ganglia  
Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.  
And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,  
The sod and billow breaking,--lifting ground,  
--A sound of waters bending astride the sky  
Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . . !

\* \* \*

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,  
O Hand of Fire  
gatherest--  
(Crane, *Complete* 100-01)

Instead of a desire for ascetic release from somatic experience like in “The Fire Sermon,” the mini-prayer at the climax of “The Tunnel” calls for an acceptance and celebration of the city dwellers’ shared “agony.” Also, Crane’s “Hand of Fire” imagery in “The Tunnel” reasserts a spiritual dimension by echoing the last lines of “Ave Maria” from earlier in *The Bridge*: “Te Deum laudamus/O Thou Hand of Fire” (*Complete* 50).

Comparing such passages side by side helps illustrate some of the ways Crane transmutes his Eliotic influence into a different outcome, one whose technique derives from the older poet but whose attitudinal register redirects the predecessor’s negativism. One of Crane’s letters even characterizes such an attempt in relation to Allen Tate’s persistent criticism: “Tate’s greatest rage against me at times has been on account of my avowed (and defended) effort to transcend these Eliotish sighs and tribulations, and to reach some kind of positive synthesis” (*O My Land* 380).

In one major respect, though, Eliot and Crane approach the modern poet’s role from the same standpoint. Eliot’s explication of the “mythic method” in Joyce’s *Ulysses*

(a system of scaffolding which retrospectively applied both to *The Waste Land* and Crane's "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen") clarifies the strategy Eliot often employed himself:

Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. (*Selected* 177)

In remarkably similar terms, Allen Tate's introduction to Crane's first volume *White Buildings* focuses on the dilemma these modern poets share: "The important contemporary poet has the rapidly diminishing privilege of reorganizing the subjects of the past. He must construct and assimilate his own subjects. Dante had only to assimilate his" (Introduction 53). Crane saw the modern poet's role in much the same way, yet his conception of the poet's synthesizing function is more inclusive than either Eliot's or Tate's suggestions: "one needs to *ransack* the vocabularies of Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster (for theirs were the richest) and add our scientific, street and counter, and psychological terms, etc. Yet, I claim that such things can be done! The modern artist needs gigantic assimilative capacities, emotion,--and the greatest of *all--vision*" (*O My Land* 137).

Even though this chapter relies on primary sources, we can conclude that Eliot's influence on Crane was a substantial and lasting one in many respects. Crane's

"rejection" of Eliot stemmed more from the way Eliotic pessimism was taken as a template for the modern period rather than any denial of Eliot's aesthetic or technical approaches to verse. Crane's early recognition that "the audience for my work will always be quite small" (*O My Land* 70) finally proved prophetic when those around him whom he counted on to understand and appreciate his work denigrated its naivete (especially when compared to Eliotic cynicism) and mistook its optimism for inappropriate affirmation. Crane foresaw this development when he began *The Bridge* and Eliot's "The Hollow Men" seemed to dominate the literary landscape of the mid-twenties; he almost seems to be talking to himself when he ponders the conclusion of "The Hollow Men": "is this acceptable or not as the poetic determinism of our age?! I, of course, can say no, to myself, and believe it. But in the face of such a stern conviction of death on the part of the only group of people whose verbal sophistication is likely to take an interest in a style such as mine--what can I expect?" (*O My Land* 230-31). Eliot himself hints at an unstable, wavering line between influence and appropriation: "the difference between influence and imitation is that influence can fecundate, whereas imitation--especially unconscious imitation--can only sterilize. . . . imitation of a writer in a foreign language can often be profitable--because we cannot succeed" (*To Criticize* 18-19). Next to Eliot's comments, Crane's epistolary reflections on translating Laforgue's "*Locutions Des Pierrots*" sound uncannily familiar:

There are always people to class one's admirations and enthusiasms illegitimate, and though I still have the dictionary close by when I take up a french book, a certain sympathy with Laforgue's attitude made me an

easier translator . . . than perhaps an accomplished linguist might have been. However, no one ought to be particularly happy about a successful translation. (*O My Land* 85)

The doubt and vulnerability Crane displays in borrowing from the French Symbolists seem far removed from the superficially assured veneer Eliot exhibits in his later career (at least after “The Hollow Men”). As Anna Balakian intimates, Eliot’s later adherence to narration, description, and overtly philosophical diction runs counter to the symbolist tendencies of his formative period:

symbolism marks a stage in [Eliot’s] development as a man of letters, after which a definite break occurs in the direction he takes. Although he suggests that the influences of Laforgue and the metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England are concurrent influences on him. They seem to have operated, in effect, a conflict in him, and the metaphysical wins out in the end over the symbolist. (*Symbolist Movement* 173)

Poetically, Eliot very nearly abandons symbolist aesthetics after 1925, whereas Crane consistently employs and keeps modifying a symbolist aesthetic in *The Bridge* and later *Key West* poems such as “To the Cloud Juggler,” “The Idiot,” “Royal Palm,” and “O Carib Isle!” Albert Gelpi’s summation of this historical differentiation looks accurate:

The development of Symbolisme in France and its far-reaching and long-lasting impact on poetry in English . . . mark a shift from the Romantic location of the individual in the cosmos to the exploration of internal states recorded and even created in the act of language. Eliot reviewed that

development in his 1948 essay “From Poe to Valéry” as testimony to his own exorcism of vestigial Symboliste influences from his later poetry.

But Crane was a purer Symboliste than Eliot. (395)

Eliot is the modernist poet who turns away from a symbolist approach in practice but nevertheless retains a deep-seated affiliation with and respect for the French Symbolists who helped him metamorphose “from a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person.” One line from Eliot’s essay “From Poe to Valéry” touches directly on the aesthetic conduit which I have been sketching out running from Poe to the French Symbolists and back to Crane: “[Poe’s poetry] has the effect of an incantation which, because of its very crudity, stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level” (*To Criticize* 31).

The mysterious quality that accompanies poetic influence remains elusive to any sort of definitive critical definition, but modern symbolist claims built around an embroiling yet temporary love affair or the lone poet affixing new productions to some ideal order of historical monuments should not limit the horizon of investigation in this field. Newer classifications might bring us closer to a just appreciation; David Bromwich, for example, volunteers “affinity” as a more apt term to describe the relationship between Crane and Eliot in a triangulation with Allen Tate’s greatest poem:

The influence of “Gerontion” on the “Ode to the Confederate Dead” differs in character from the influence of *The Waste Land* on *The Bridge*. In the first case the relation is that of principle and illustration, in the second that of statement and counter-statement. Affinity seems a truer word than influence to describe the latter sort of kinship. (50)

Haskell Block once confided to me in a private conversation that “affinity” would encompass a more accurate assessment of Crane’s relationship to the French Symbolists than “influence.”

Other models might prove just as illuminating. Despite the passionate language that suffuses Eliot’s and Crane’s reflections regarding poetic influence, an older adversarial critical model such as Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* may misrepresent the creative dynamic involved, particularly given the sexually charged valence surrounding Eliot’s early poems. A relevant passage from the interview with Allen Tate in John Unterecker’s *Voyager* may prove useful in contextualizing, or sexualizing, our notions of influence between these poets:

[Crane] said, “I admire Eliot very much too. I’ve had to work through him, but he’s the prime ram of our flock,” which meant that in those days a lot of people like Hart had the delusion that Eliot was homosexual. “Ram of our flock” I didn’t get onto until later, and when I knew Hart, much later, we joked about it.

Then, right after that, he sent me in typescript his poem “Praise for an Urn,” which appeared in the *Dial* a month or two later. I thought it was a very beautiful poem. Even now, I’m astonished that a boy of 21 or 22 could have written it. (240)

Robert K. Martin suggests a retabulation in our critical notion of influence that might have some bearing on the developmental interrelatedness between Crane and Eliot outside the strictures of Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*:

Bloom's paradigm, rooted as it is in a Freudian view of competition between father and son, is heterosexual in its assumptions and inadequate for dealing with the more complex relationship between an older and younger poet in a homosexual context, where there may be a significant element of erotic attraction involved in "influence." The master-protégé relationship might be a more useful model for such relationships.

(236n.51)

Whichever way we try to refine our understanding of literary influence, whether as crisis of passion, struggle for Oedipal dominance, or tension between master and apprentice, in the case of Eliot and Crane the elder poet served as a model and yardstick of achievement against which Crane could measure his own growth throughout the whole of his career. Almost as significantly, Eliot (and Pound) in large part introduced Crane to the French Symbolists, the poets whose aesthetics and techniques Crane most adapts into his own idiom.

## Chapter Three

### Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Crane

*Voilà! c'est le Siècle d'enfer!  
Et les poteaux télégraphiques  
Vont orner,--lyre aux chants de fer,  
Tes omoplates magnifiques!*

[There now! It is the Century of hell!  
And the telegraph poles  
Will embellish,--lyre with iron voice,  
Your magnificent shoulder blades! (Fowlie, *Rimbaud* 115)]

The following discussion does not intend to present an exhaustive or comprehensive account of Hart Crane's prodigious borrowings from the French Symbolists. My aim is more modest: in attempting to demonstrate the clear affinities in aesthetics and techniques between Hart Crane, Charles Baudelaire, and Arthur Rimbaud, I am trying to contribute toward a fuller collective understanding of Crane's place in the symbolism of modern American poetry along the lines hinted at by Henri Peyre:

There is no way of making even a summary sketch of what one might call the various European and American symbolisms and to evaluate what they sought from France and thought they had found there. Such a task could only be approached by a constellation of specialists intimately versed in the national languages, and not French by preference, for a certain

patriotic vanity slips easily into these subjects. Our conviction remains, moreover, that in every spiritual exchange the influence (and its capacity for assimilation and imaginative transformation) counts infinitely more than the person from whom the influence emanates. (140)

The following analysis aims to sketch out some of the many parallels between Crane's symbolist methods and those of Baudelaire and Rimbaud and then explore the ways in which he assimilated and transformed their insights and techniques.

Conventional views of when Hart Crane begins to adopt symbolist elements into his poems typically restrict this "phase" to the early twenties after an Imagist apprenticeship; R. W. B. Lewis' view is fairly representative: "The *symboliste*-Eliot aspect . . . was in the ascendancy in Crane's early creative years, and it reached its peak in 1920 and 1921" (9). Crane's exposure to the French Symbolists, however, actually dates almost from the inception of his publishing career. Margaret Foster shows the considerable extent to which Crane's second published poem, "October-November" (1916), is indebted to a series of Imagist "Symphonies" by John Gould Fletcher, which in turn derived their style from Rimbaud (Foster 62-64).

More significantly, Crane's third poem, "The Hive," displays the unmistakable tincture of *symbolisme*, deriving much of its imagery from Baudelaire:

Up the chasm-walls of my bleeding heart  
Humanity pecks, claws, sobs, and climbs;  
Up the inside, and over every part  
Of the hive of the world that is my heart.

And of all the sowing, and all the tear-tendering,  
And reaping, have mercy and love issued forth.  
Mercy, white milk, and honey, gold love--  
And I watch, and say, "These the anguish are worth." (137)

The poem's dominant image seems adapted from Baudelaire's sonnet "Causerie," particularly the sestet [all unattributed translations are my own]:

*Mon coeur est un palais flétri par la cohue;  
On s'y soûle, on s'y tue, on s'y prend aux cheveux!  
--Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue!...*

*O Beauté, dur fléau des âmes, tu le veux!  
Avec tes yeux de feu, brillants comme des fêtes,  
Calcine ces lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes!*

[My heart is a palace wrecked by the mob;  
They get drunk there, fight, tear each other's hair!  
--A perfume floats around your naked throat!...

O Beauty, tough scourge of souls, you want it!  
With your eyes of fire, brilliant as red feasts,  
Burn up these tatters salvaged from the beasts!]

As usual, of course, Crane transfigures his symbolist sources and often modifies the direction of their emotional trajectories. While both poems revolve around images of crowds and personal suffering, "The Hive" alters the despair and erotic invitation at the end of "Causerie" into a feeling of temporary respite and satiety.

Despite the agricultural tropes Crane employs--"sowing," watering ("tear-tendering"), and "reaping"--the central image in "The Hive" appears to be a reflection of the metropolis, or rather agricultural imagery superimposed onto a cityscape. Langdon Hammer suggests how "The Hive" bears the stamp of Crane's lyric signature in spite of its rhetorical or allegorical simplicity: "This poem is juvenile work, but it is recognizably

Crane's in its intricate, compressed syntax; its formal decorum and dignity; its exaggerated, expressionistic figures of speech; its earnestness and passion; and above all in its ethical concern with the 'worth' of passion" (*O My Land* 4). The swarm imagery may also derive from crowd descriptions in other Baudelaire poems such as "*Au Lecteur*," "*Les Petites Vieilles*," or "*Le Crépuscule du soir*." Anne Kilner Winters cites this last poem (for its connection with urban prostitution) in her discussion of the confluence between "The Hive" and Baudelaire, the earliest such notice (1993):

Crane at several points slips into "swarming" figures for the crowds in Manhattan . . . It would be possible, of course, to assume that the immediate source of such echoes of Baudelaire's lines was Eliot's citation of them in the notes to *The Waste Land*. But as early as 1917, in a poem called "The Hive," written about his first encounter with New York's multitudes, Crane had already used Baudelaire's metaphor. Perhaps this was one of the poems he or Loveman had translated, but in any case swarm-imagery abounds in Baudelaire. (40)

Anne Winters' reference to translation needs clarifying: Samuel Loveman, who would eventually become executor of the poet's estate after the death of his mother, met Crane in 1921 in Cleveland, even though the earliest mention of their acquaintance occurs in a letter from June 1922: "You will like my classic, puritan, inhibited friend, Sam Loveman who translates Baudelaire charmingly!" (*O My Land* 92). Although Crane indicated a familiarity with Baudelaire in a brief essay entitled "Joyce and Ethics" in *The Little Review*'s July 1918 issue, another letter from February 1920 also mentions the

French poet: “Just now I am deep in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*, and won’t brook anything healthful or cheery about the place” (Weber, *Letters* 33). As Crane had begun studying French in 1917, his reference to reading Baudelaire may indicate access to the French text or perhaps just the translated collection edited by T. R. Smith in 1919 which Tate alludes to in his letter to Fowlie: “Crane knew more about Baudelaire than Rimbaud. He was easier to decipher. He pored over the original, but he actually read again and again the Baudelaire translation in the Modern Library Series” (Fowlie, *Poem and Symbol* 154).

Baudelaire’s “*Les Petites Vieilles*” possibly furnishes a source for the imagery of “The Hive” (as opposed to its more obvious origin behind the “ancient women/Gathering fuel in vacant lots” in part IV of Eliot’s “Preludes” or the “rifts of torn and empty houses/Like old women with teeth unjubilant” in part III of Crane’s “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”) since swarming imagery appears in lines 25-26 of Baudelaire’s “Little Old Women,” “*Et lorsque j’entrevois un fantôme débile/Traversant de Paris le fourmillant tableau*” (“when I see a lame phantom/Cross Paris’ swarming scene”), in Walch’s *Anthologie*, which Crane owned in 1917 (Lohf, “Library” 288).

When discussed at all, “The Hive” is normally seen as important in Crane studies mostly because this poem prompted Crane’s mother to suggest he change his professional name from “Harold Crane” or “Harold H. Crane” to “Hart Crane” in a letter on March 29, 1917 (Lewis, *Letters* 55). The “H,” short for “Hart” (his mother’s maiden name), was omitted for the first time in his professional career with the publication of “The Hive.” Unterecker’s version of the story reads,

In later years, after his final break with his mother, Hart would assure Lorna Dietz that it wasn't his mother's letter that had induced him to change his name but rather his hatred of the shrill "Haaaarooooold" she had used through his childhood to call him in from play. But for whatever reason--and affection is the most likely one--the next poem he published was signed *Harold H. Crane* and all subsequent ones *Hart Crane*.

(*Voyager* 74)

Unterecker may be conflating items here as the next *two* poems Crane published, "Fear" and "Annuciations," were both attributed to "Harold H. Crane," though they appeared in the same issue of *The Pagan* (April-May 1917). The first use of "Hart Crane" occurred with the publication of "Echoes" in the October-November 1917 issue of *The Pagan*.

Curiously enough, the first recorded use of the poet signing his name "Hart" occurred in a letter to his father on August 8, 1917: "ironically it is one of the few times that the poet used the name 'Hart' in letters to his father. To the Crane side of the family he remained 'Harold,' while for his mother's side he became 'Hart.'" (Lewis, *Letters* 67). The first time Crane signed a letter to his mother using "Hart" occurred on September 28, 1917 (Lewis, *Letters* 70), the cut-off date Lohf used to help categorize the books in Crane's library the poet did not date himself.

I belabor this minor point of literary history in order to call attention to the importance of French poets to the *whole* of Crane's artistic development. Though space limitations prompt me to focus an analysis only on the affinities between Crane and Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, more exhaustive research is needed to trace Crane's

debts to the “minor” *symbolistes*. To point toward a small example, Hammer aptly calls “My Grandmother’s Love Letters” the “first poem of Crane’s maturity” (*O My Land* 8), yet no one heretofore has investigated Crane’s admission that “[Charles] Vildrac is the one who set me on the track of the Grandmother mood, and it is odd that our poems [Witter Bynner’s poems and translations of Vildrac] should have come out in the same issue [of *The Dial*, April 1920]” (*O My Land* 39). As Crane ordered French texts of Laforgue, Rimbaud, and Vildrac which arrived in October 1920, the source Crane used to get “set on the track” of the delicate mood in “My Grandmother’s Love Letters” may derive from the Walch anthology, one of the two volumes of French verse edited by Léon-Adolphe Gauthier-Ferrières, *Anthologie des Écrivains Français du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* which Crane also owned, Vildrac’s *Livre d’Amour*, or some other text.

“My Grandmother’s Love Letters” was the first poem for which Crane received payment, and he described its publication as a sexual and professional transaction: “[it] tempted *The Dial* to part with ten dollars, my first ‘lirty’ money,--the seduction was complete” (Weber, *Letters* 32). Despite claims that throughout his career Crane “managed to publish without much difficulty almost everything he submitted” (Schwartz, “Recognition” 93), the density and experimental symbolist underpinnings in his method repeatedly thwarted his reception by American publishers and editors. The Boni and Liveright firm originally agreed to publish his first volume, *White Buildings*, only if Eugene O’Neill would write the preface (for the fullest account of the episode, see Marc Simon’s “Eugene O’Neill’s Introduction”). Crane complained about the situation bitterly: “I have enough enthusiasm from other astute and discriminating people in

America to make me feel that my writings are justified. Publishers shy at it, of course, because they know it won't make them money. Meanwhile the same flood of mediocrities in verse continues to be printed, bound and sold year after year" (Weber, *Letters* 212).

Crane encountered repeated difficulties with the editors at the two most prestigious poetry journals of the day, Harriet Monroe at *Poetry* and Marianne Moore at *The Dial*, yet monetary pressure often forced him to compromise his work in seeking their approval. The most egregious case is Moore's truncated editing of "The Wine Menagerie," about a third of which was published as "Again" in *The Dial*'s May 1926 issue. Crane's response was predictable: "What it all means now I can't make out, and I would never have consented to such an outrageous joke if I had not so desperately needed the twenty dollars" (*O My Land* 210). His most scathing complaint in this regard concerned the submission of "The Dance" to *The Dial* in 1927 (which printed it without changes in the October issue): "I've had to submit it to Marianne Moore recently, as my only present hope of a little cash. But she probably will object to the word 'breasts', or some such detail. It's really ghastly. I wonder how much longer our market will be in the grip of two such hysterical virgins as the *Dial* and *Poetry*!" (*O My Land* 319). In a way, the sexualized discourse Crane resorts to in discussing his publication frustrations reflects a certain degree of misogyny as well as a thoroughgoing disrespect for the repressively restrictive modern American culture within which he had to work. Crane's opaque symbolist orientation also partly accounts for the lukewarm reception he frequently received from literary editors.

“Passage,” for instance, is an accomplished symbolist poem which was rejected by both Moore at *The Dial* and by Eliot at *The Criterion* before being accepted by Edgell Rickword for Britain’s *Calendar* in July 1926 nearly a year after its completion the previous summer. In typical fashion (for Crane the latest project was usually uppermost in his estimation if it came near achieving his goals), he called it “the most interesting and conjectural thing I have written--being merely the latest, I suppose,” and then in the same letter quoted Moore’s comments verbatim: “We could not but be moved, as you must know, by the rich imagination and sensibility in your poem, Passage. Its multiform content accounts, I suppose, for what seems to us a lack of simplicity and cumulative force. We are sorry to return it” (*O My Land* 205). What Moore calls the poem’s “multiform content” lies at the heart of Crane’s neo-symbolist approach: “Passage” is not just a straightforward narrative *rite de passage* as the title might suggest, nor is it solely concerned with the fluctuations and dissatisfactions of evolving identity, nor does it revolve simplistically around the impossibility and ineffability of representation, whether of the self or external “reality,” though the poem addresses all these issues. *Symboliste écriture* like Crane’s involves using words with precision to mean more than only one or two things; that is, the poem’s multiform content--even from phrase to phrase or image to image--aims at accurate statement while still invoking a multiplicity of meanings and evoking moods or states of consciousness.

“Passage” commences with the sort of audacious and evocative imagery for which Crane is famous:

Where the cedar leaf divides the sky  
I heard the sea.  
In sapphire arenas of the hills  
I was promised an improved infancy. (21)

Harold Bloom's reading of the poem misguidedly superimposes an Oedipal theme of struggling to overtop Whitman and Wordsworth as poetic predecessors by focusing exclusively on the poem's exploration of identity, yet Bloom's characterization of the opening stanza's precocity is apt: "Is there a more outrageously American, Emersonian concept and phrase than 'an improved infancy'?" (Introduction 6). To a large extent, Bloom's emphasis on his own theory--the anxiety of influence--prompts him to recycle the specious argument first advanced by Yvor Winters that Crane's primary literary forebears are Emerson and Whitman.

Such readings depend on the poem's deceptively contorted "narrative": though a sequential procession seems to lend a shape to the images in the first four stanzas of "Passage," pivoting around a willed abandonment in line six ("My memory I left in a ravine"), the landscape remains a blend of earthy details (buckwheat, boulders, rain, "red and black/Vine-stanchioned valleys") and human habitations ("moonlit bushels" and "alleys") which combine to evoke a barely conscious attitude of freedom and self-empowerment, hinted at by the speaker's parenthetical claim "I had joined the entrainments of the wind." The juxtaposed descriptions, however, are far from naturalistic in any conventional sense; instead, the poem's image clusters echo off one another to evoke an "internal" world of the mind. The method approximates the symbolist ideal of *la poésie pure*, evoking a psychological as well as a physical

landscape: “Since poetry consists of words, the more poetry inclines away from descriptive referentiality toward autotelic self-referentiality and hypostasized self-subsistence, the more purely evocative the language” (Gelpi 56). As Ernest Smith intimates, however, the symbolic texture of the opening lines of “Passage” is not only conceptually suggestive in its tactile qualities but thematically important as well:

Crane again employs a form of synaesthesia, hearing the sea while observing a single leaf against the sky, perhaps tinkling in the wind. These lines, which by themselves would form a delicate oriental tone-poem, also suggest the working imagination of a highly attuned sensibility. To see the sky as “divided” by a leaf in the foreground is more than an unusual observation; it also portends the division of the self that the poem explores, beginning with the fourth line. (61)

Viewing the central struggle of “Passage” as solely one of identity splitting--the speaker divorced from “memory” yet striving to defend a vocational status as poet--superficially seems reasonable enough, but almost no commentator has noticed that the poem involves as many as four “characters”: the wind, an interlocutor, the thief, and the speaker (possibly a fifth if one differentiates between the “present” speaker in the poem from his incarnation prior to abandoning “memory”). Thus the poem should not be read in a conventionally reductive way as embodying merely an internal debate. The fourth stanza clearly addresses an interlocutor, a “chimney-sooted heart of man,” distinct from the speaker who nonetheless occupies an analogous position; such a maneuver universalizes the implications of unfulfilled success beyond the confines of the speaker:

“It is not long, it is not long;  
See where the red and black  
Vine-stanchioned valleys--“: but the wind  
Died speaking through the ages that you know  
And hug, chimney-sooted heart of man!  
So was I turned about and back, much as your smoke  
Compiles a too well known biography. (21)

Contemporary queer theorists, of course, often seize on the phrase “a too well known biography” to lament the degree to which Crane’s personal life has dogged his reputation, yet the yoking of smoke to a presence which has been transformed or forgotten, often in a funereal or crematory dimension, occurs in other poems like “Emblems of Conduct” [“By that time summer and smoke were past./Dolphins still played, arching the horizons,/But only to build memories of spiritual gates” (5)], the tenth quatrain of “The Dance” which presages the approach of the transformative “thunder-bud,” or in the famous allusions to the failure of representation at the conclusion of “Praise for an Urn”:

Scatter these well-meant idioms  
Into the smoky spring that fills  
The suburbs, where they will be lost.  
They are no trophies of the sun. (8)

Such patterns (linking smoke with biography, for example, or seeing a cedar leaf divide the sky) not only reveal a consistency in Crane’s manner of troping but also indicate the range of his metaphorical innovations. As Blackmur remarks of Crane’s symbolic descriptions in another context, “The freshness has nothing to do with accurate observation, of which it is devoid, but has its source in the arbitrary character of the association: it is created observation” (137).

The most astonishing “created observations” in “Passage” unravel in the poem’s harrowing conclusion after the speaker returns to the ravine, touches an “opening laurel” (a traditional Apollonian symbol of poetic mastery with which the speaker must “argue”), and confronts “A thief beneath, my stolen book in hand” (21). Trying to recover “memory” from the stolen book, the speaker justifies trespassing (paradoxically, both the thief and the speaker are transgressors) on the grounds of “transience” and incomprehension, “fleeing /Under the constant wonder of your eyes–,” before the poem’s apocalyptic ending:

He closed the book. And from the Ptolemies  
Sand troughed us in a glittering abyss.  
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)

The poem’s conclusion halts at the limit of articulation, suggesting in immanent form a theme of identity fractured by linguistic circumlocutions, one which is strongly Rimbaudian in flavor and that represents in one sense the extent to which Rimbaud and Crane develop beyond Baudelairean strictures:

The extremity of the poetic gesture here frees Rimbaud from the devious ironic discipline of Baudelaire’s work. The poet is no longer ‘double’ but caught up in the shock-waves of his own ‘exploding’ identity. Where Baudelaire’s risk-taking in the city had involved a calculated play of aloofness and surrender . . . Rimbaud seems determined to destroy the very axis of the self. (Nicholls 29-30)

Tate's letter to Fowle specifically mentions "Passage" as an example of the "more than superficial likeness" between Crane and Rimbaud:

It was not influence that accounts, in my opinion, for the parallel; I am convinced that Crane would have been essentially the same--except possibly for one poem, "Passage," which is interesting but not first-rate--had he never known anything about Rimbaud. I suppose the same thing was bound to happen to our romanticism that had happened two generations earlier in France. For this reason I think we may say that Crane's poetry came, historically, a little late, Eliot having already passed through that stage of romanticism before Crane had written a line.

(Fowle, *Poem and Symbol* 154)

Though Tate is not explicit, the literary evolution out of romanticism to which he refers is the symbolist stream of modernism. Eliot's progression along this current receded after the mid-twenties, but Crane's symbolist orientation remained constant throughout his career. Though a bit overly schematic, Gelpi's attempt at historically situating Crane's poetic approach is relatively accurate: "Crane's sensibility and his aesthetic, as a matter of fact, wavered uncertainly between Modernism and Romanticism; his compromise was Symboliste. . . . he settled for converting the nuances of relativity into a poetry whose synesthetic 'logic' pushed those nuances toward a verbal cohesiveness beyond mere accident" (419).

Tracing the myriad resonances and echoes of Rimbaud in Crane's work remains a prodigious enterprise. The dissertations by Margaret Foster and Diane Garden do the

most detailed jobs thus far of drawing specific connections between the two poets, but many critics have tracked the threads between Rimbaud and Crane's magnificent "Voyages" sequence. Though initially skeptical in 1989, I have since been convinced of the perspicuity of Donald Justice's hint to me that "The Dance" owed a great debt to Rimbaud's "*Le Bateau ivre*" ("The Drunken Boat"). Rimbaud represented a form of poetic revolt and experimentation which influenced the entirety of Crane's career; the new kinds of poetry Rimbaud calls for in "*Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs*," ones with electric butterflies and telegraph poles as lyre strings, would be answered by the poems of Hart Crane.

## Chapter Four: Mallarmé and Crane's Neo-Symbolist Poetics

Hart Crane assimilated the chief poetic currents of his time in remarkably quick fashion. Crane's precocity and early mastery of such a wide range of poetic forms remains nearly unmatched among American poets, yet scant attention has focused on his affinities with Stéphane Mallarmé. In many ways, Mallarmé and Crane articulate poetic approaches which represent the nearest theoretical embodiment of symbolist aesthetics yet produced by poets themselves. Though neither Crane nor Mallarmé is considered a systematic literary theorist, their aesthetic approaches overlap and parallel one another in several specific dimensions, most importantly, symbolist poetry's incantatory creation of a "new word," the necessity of a sophisticated readership in appreciating the "shorthand" methods of *symboliste écriture*, and an emphasis on verse rather than the versifier.

While in all his letters Crane makes only one passing mention of Mallarmé, grouping the elder poet with Huysmans as "elegant weepers" juxtaposed to the comedy of the Dadaists in vogue in 1922 (*O My Land* 81), Crane and Mallarmé pen remarkably similar descriptions of their poetic aims. Richard Strier and Eric Sundquist remain the only critics to have noted the resemblance between the "new word" at the conclusion of Mallarmé's "Crisis in Verse" essay and a key section of Crane's essay "General Aims and Theories," but the passages warrant re-viewing. Notice how both passages address the effect as well as the aftereffect that symbolist poetry aspires toward; Mallarmé says,

Out of a number of words, poetry fashions a single new word which is total in itself and foreign to the language--a kind of incantation. Thus the desired isolation of language is effected; and chance (which might still have governed these elements, despite their artful and alternating renewal through meaning and sound) is thereby instantly and thoroughly abolished. Then we realize, to our amazement, that we had never truly heard this or that ordinary poetic fragment; and, at the same time, our recollection of the object thus conjured up bathes in a totally new atmosphere. (*Selected* 43)

Mallarmé would go on to explore the impossible ideal of abolishing chance in his revolutionary poem “*Un Coup des dés*” (“A Throw of the Dice”). Nonetheless, one wonders how Crane devised such a parallel assessment, especially since the slight, posthumous *Vers de Circonstance* from 1920 was the lone extant Mallarmé book Crane owned at his death (Lohf, “Library” 318), and very few English translations of Mallarmé existed by the mid-twenties when Crane presumably wrote “General Aims and Theories”:

Its evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an “innocence” (Blake) or absolute beauty. In this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions. It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single, new *word*, never

before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader's consciousness henceforward. (*CPSLP* 221)

Whereas Mallarmé suggests the “new word” of a symbolist poem remains on some level “foreign to the [originary] language” and thus a “kind of incantation” whose novelty lingers for the reader's recollection “bathe[d] in a new atmosphere,” Crane posits that his type of absolute (or what I am calling neo-symbolist) poem also persists in an extra-lingual realm--“never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate”--which still functions as a “self-evident active principle” in the reader's subsequent consciousness.

Both Crane and Mallarmé engage in a quest for poetic aftereffects which exceed the strict limits of their native tongues. Perhaps such a quest necessitates forays into other languages. Even though Mallarmé himself claimed, “I learned English simply in order to be able to read Poe better” (*Selected* 15), a critic like Joseph Chiari may be onto something when he suggests learning English represented an attempt to expand the capacities of language: “In the case of Mallarmé it is quite possible that a sufficient, yet incomplete knowledge of English, together with the exercise of translation, may have given to the French language an elasticity hitherto unexplored, a freedom in the use of words hitherto unknown and a syntactic suppleness hitherto unwarranted” (78-79). Such cross-pollination lies behind Jacques Derrida's assessment that “Mallarmé's language is always open to the influence of the English language, that there is a regular exchange between the two, and that the problem of this exchange is explicitly treated in *Les mots anglais*. For this reason alone, ‘Mallarmé’ does not belong completely to ‘French literature’” (125). In short, I contend Crane studied the French Symbolists for much the

same reason Mallarmé studied Poe in English--to widen the capacities of poetic language at the poet's disposal, and some of the effects Crane discovered can be traced back through the circuit of influence from Poe to the French Symbolists. Such a notion infuses Eliot's characterization of the appeal to those French poets of an "unchanging immediacy" in Poe's poetry: "It has the effect of an incantation which, because of its very crudity, stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level" (*To Criticize* 31).

Further links between Crane and Mallarmé can be seen in "At Melville's Tomb," a poem with "a particularly Mallarmeian air" (Kugel 100n.8). In addition to alluding indirectly toward Mallarmé's *Tombeaux* poems for Poe, Baudelaire, and Verlaine, some of the imagery in Crane's "At Melville's Tomb" seems deliberately to invoke key lines from the fantastic "*Toast funèbre, à Théophile Gautier*":

*A qui s'évanouit, hier, dans le devoir  
Idéal que nous font les jardins de cet astre,  
Survivre pour l'honneur du tranquille désastre  
Une agitation solennelle par l'air  
De paroles, pourpre ivre et grand calice clair,  
Que, pluie et diamant, le regard diaphane  
Resté là sur ces fleurs dont nulle ne se fane,  
Isole parmi l'heure et le rayon du jour!* (ll.40-47)

For one who has now vanished into the ideal  
Duty we are given by the gardens of that star,  
A solemn agitation of language in the air,  
In commemoration of a calm catastrophe,  
Vast translucent calyx and purple ecstasy  
That, diamond and rain, with gaze forever clear  
Remaining on those flowers, of which none disappear,  
Isolates in the hour and radiance of the day! (*Collected* 45)

Crane echoes these lines in quatrains two and three (ll. 5-12) of “At Melville’s Tomb”:

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,  
The calyx of death’s bounty giving back  
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,  
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,  
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,  
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;  
And silent answers crept across the stars. (*Complete* 33)

As the editor at *Poetry* magazine, Harriet Monroe admitted baffled interest in “At Melville’s Tomb,” asked Crane to justify its “succession of champion mixed metaphors,” and then printed his epistolary answer elucidating the “logic of metaphor” alongside the poem and her own original request and subsequent reply in the October 1926 issue.

Regarding “the calyx of death’s bounty,” Crane writes, “This calyx refers in a double ironic sense both to a cornucopia and the vortex made by a sinking vessel” (*O My Land* 281). Diane Garden shows how the whirlpool image implicit in the flower leads to the “bounty” of a cornucopia, and in doing so she illustrates a kind of fundamental symbolist progression: “‘Calyx’ and ‘cornucopia’ are connected by means of visual association-- their conical shape, and not through logic. Crane chooses an object, leaves literal reality behind, and then moves into a series of metaphors . . . He is not interested in the thing itself but the state of mind it elicits” (“Hart Crane Goes to School” 77). This last sentence, of course, reiterates one of the most famous slogans of Mallarmé: “paint, not the thing, but the effect which it produces” (*Commemorative* 27). One wonders too if the “frosted eyes . . . that lifted altars” image in “At Melville’s Tomb” (as well as the “lost morning eyes” of lifted swimmers in “Voyages VI”) might owe something to a prose line

from Mallarmé's essay "Sacred Pleasure": "Behold eyes, lost, ecstatically, outside their curiosity!" (*Commemorative* 115).

Besides borrowing specific images and the rapid concretion of metaphors technique, Crane's letter to Monroe also articulates an aesthetic approach whose parameters resemble those of Mallarmé. For example, in an interview Mallarmé distinguished the symbolist method from the then-dominant mode of descriptive Naturalism: "literature is more of an intellectual thing than that. Things already exist, we don't have to create them; we simply have to see their relationships. It is the threads of those relationships which go to make up poetry and music" (*Selected* 23-24). One of the starkest passages from Crane's letter to Monroe on the "logic of metaphor" sounds eerily reminiscent of Mallarmé:

As a poet I may very possibly be more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness (and their combinations and interplay in metaphor on this basis) than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significations at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem. This may sound as though I merely fancied juggling words and images until I found something novel, or esoteric; but the process is much more predetermined and objectified than that. (*O My Land* 278)

Though Mallarmé and Crane both pursue the psycholinguistic creation of a "new word," one distinction may indicate the difference between symbolist and neo-symbolist orientations. Mallarmé, like Baudelaire and the other symbolists, worked in reaction to a

relatively unified culture, even if one of disbelief and revolt. In such a milieu, Mallarmé could on some level sincerely say, “all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book” (*Selected* 24), or write the following free of irony:

Languages are imperfect because multiple; the supreme language is missing. Inasmuch as thought consists of writing without pen and paper, without whispering even, without the sound of the immortal Word, the diversity of languages on earth means that no one can utter words which would bear the miraculous stamp of Truth Herself Incarnate. (*Selected* 38)

For American neo-symbolists like Crane, Eliot, or Stevens, the fragmented culture of modernism forced the artist to confront any kind of verbal idealism with skepticism and irony, as in “The word within a word, unable to speak a word,/Swaddled in darkness” from Eliot’s “Gerontion” (the explicitly Christian context of the Word in “Ash Wednesday” and the “Four Quartets” embodies an attempt at forced regression to that earlier unified sensibility). In his prose, Crane admits, “Language has built towers and bridges, but itself is inevitably as fluid as always” (*CPSLP* 223), but in his poems Crane is one of the last poets to employ the grand style--and its underlying idealism--unironically through most of his career. From the progression of “Creation’s blithe and petalled word” to the “imaged Word” of “Voyages VI,” to the “incognizable Word of Eden” in “Ave Maria,” to the held out hope of “some Word that will not die!” in “The Tunnel,” to the wonderfully orgasmic “multitudinous Verb” of “Atlantis,” Crane consistently clings to a belief in the efficacy of the Word as an possible incarnation of life

or desire. Only in his last poem, “The Broken Tower,” does the poet overtly question the estrangement between his word and the Word:

And so it was I entered the broken world  
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice  
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)  
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

My word I poured. But it was 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? (*Complete* 160)

For more than seventy years, few scholars have kept trying to elucidate the nuances of the means by which Crane enacts these “impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness” and their connections to Mallarmé’s practices. Yvor Winters, for example, asserts that “Repose of Rivers” proceeds along the same lines of development as “*Surgi de la croupe et du bonde*” (“Sprung From the Croup and the Flight”) by Mallarmé: “the words are constantly balancing on, almost slipping from, the outermost edge of their possible meaning. Their meaning is defined frequently not by the dictionary, but by their relation to other words about them in the same predicament. . . . Everything in the line is strangely incandescent, seething, alive” (*Uncollected* 247). So far as the individually evocative symbols in “Repose of Rivers” lead to an overall sensory impression laden with psychological significance, Winters’ claim of resemblance holds true; to a degree, the liberating implosion of identity in Crane’s “Repose of Rivers” resembles the weary regret tinged with hope in Mallarmé’s poem, but the resemblance mainly derives from the suggestive, intuitive response underlying each poem.

One might cite other seemingly direct echoes in imagery from Mallarmé to Crane such as the way the cold feminine beauty of “North Labrador” derives from “*Héroidade*,” or the similarity in feeling of the misplaced speakers in the last lines of “Key West” (“There is no breath of friends and no more shore/Where gold has not been sold and conscience tinned”) (*Complete* 126) alongside the turn at line 11 in “*Las de l’amer repos*”: “*Je veux délaisser l’Art vorace d’un pays/Cruel*” (“I would forsake the hungry Art of a cruel land”) (*Collected* 16, though my translation). Even the main figure of “*Le Sonneur*” (“The Bell-Ringer”) serves as an inspiration for the beginning “sexton slave” speaker in “The Broken Tower.” A perhaps more important convergence in approach between Mallarmé and Crane concerns their expectations toward the audience.

Both poets were frequently beset by critical charges of obscurity. In the famous letter to Harriet Monroe on the “logic of metaphor,” Crane insists on an active imagination in the audience: “In the minds of people who have sensitively read, seen and experienced a great deal, isn’t there a terminology something like short-hand as compared to usual description and dialectics, which the artist out to be right in trusting as a reasonable connective agent toward fresh concepts, more inclusive evaluations?” (*O My Land* 280-81). Crane then refers to Eliot’s “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” to illustrate the responsibility poet and reader share in thinking metaphorically: “It is of course understood that a street lamp can’t beat with a sound like a drum; but it often happens that images, themselves totally dissociated, when joined in the circuit of a particular emotion located with specific relation to both of them, conduce to great vividness and accuracy of statement in defining that emotion” (*O My Land* 281).

Mallarmé also addressed the issue of obscurity and the need for an attentive and sophisticated audience in an 1891 interview, “The Evolution of Literature.” Mallarmé asserts that younger symbolist poets draw nearer the poetic ideal than the older generation of Parnassians because the latter

present things directly, whereas I think that they should be presented allusively. Poetry lies in the *contemplation* of things, in the image emanating from the reveries which things arouse in us. The Parnassians take something in its entirety and simply exhibit it; in so doing, they fall short of mystery; they fail to give our minds that exquisite joy which consists of believing that we are creating something. To *name* an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The ideal is to *suggest* the object. It is the perfect use of this mystery which constitutes symbol. . . . [obscurity is dangerous] regardless of whether it results from the reader’s inadequacy or from the poet’s. But if you avoid the work it involves, you are cheating. If a person of mediocre intelligence and insufficient literary experience happens to open an obscure book and insists on enjoying it, something is wrong; there has simply been a misunderstanding. There must always be enigma in poetry. The purpose of literature--the *only* purpose--is to *evoke* things. (*Selected* 21-22)

In this interview Mallarmé epitomizes many of the key tenets of symbolist poetry, but throughout he emphasizes the importance of the poet and reader as co-creators. While

Crane also stresses the poet's duty to aim for lucidity in spite of extreme metaphorical compression, he finally places the greater interpretive burden on the reader. Via a curious twist, Crane positions himself as both poet and reader when discussing the "dynamics of inferential mention" in the essay "General Aims and Theories":

In manipulating the more imponderable phenomena of psychic motives, pure emotional crystallizations, etc., I have had to rely even more on these dynamics of inferential mention, and I am doubtless still very unconscious of having committed myself to what seems nothing but obscurities to some minds. A poem like "Possessions" really cannot be technically explained. It must rely (even to a large extent with myself) on its organic impact on the imagination to successfully imply its meaning. (*CPSLP* 222)

What an astonishing admission! The nearest equivalent in English lies in an unpublished letter from T. S. Eliot to I. A. Richards:

if the reader knows too much about the crude material in the author's mind, his own reaction may tend to become at best merely a kind of feeble image of the author's feelings, whereas a good poem should have a potentiality of evoking feelings and associations in the reader of which the author is wholly ignorant. I am rather inclined to believe, for myself, that my best poems are possibly those which evoke the greatest number and variety of interpretations surprising to myself. (*Inventions* xxvi)

Whether the "absolute" effects Crane strives for in "General Aims and Theories" (*CPSLP* 220) or the "objective correlative" Eliot idealizes in his essay on *Hamlet* (*Selected* 48),

both modernists acknowledge the constitutive contribution of the reader to neo-symbolist poetry's goal of evocation.

Crane's most recent biographer, Clive Fisher, nicely characterizes the interplay between poet and reader alongside a parallel emphasis on verse as its own entity:

His lyrics were edifices rather than incisions--but because Crane understood elusiveness as a literary virtue and as a condition of existence they were necessarily constructs of apparently shifting stability and permanence. Built upon observations which he hoped were true to nature, they were held together with metaphors that could suggest without ever insisting. They depended for their life not only on the passion of the poet as he wrote them but on the responsiveness of their readers, who might sometimes connect the metaphors into a strong and coherent structure while at other times taking meaning on trust. (332)

Fisher rightly underscores the conceptual autonomy toward which Crane's poems aspire, and in that respect Crane fully belongs to the symbolist tradition, whose central technique involves what Bernard Weinberg calls "a truncated metaphor" or what René Wellek describes as "the poetry of the predicate": "in most older poetry the 'thing' was the theme and the 'image' illustrated it, while in Symbolism the image assumes materiality and the thing is merely its accompaniment. Grammatically, Symbolist poetry could be called the poetry of the predicate. It speaks of something or somebody, but the subject, the person or the thing, remains hidden" ("What Is Symbolism?" 27). One of the best descriptions



resemblance in Crane's method of composition: "One can go only so far with logic, then willfully dream and play--and pray for the fusion.--*When* one's work suddenly stands up, separate and moving of itself with its own sudden life, as it must; quite separate from one's own personality" (*O My Land* 289).

So why should what I called in the introduction "third-wave" symbolists, such as Eliot, Crane, and Wallace Stevens, be considered neo-symbolists instead? Apart from refining and synthesizing the aesthetics and techniques of the "first-wave" French Symbolists, the neo-symbolists place an increased emphasis on the reader's responsivity to the text. Anna Balakian provides one of the best cultural and artistic explanations for this evolution:

The poet is not as isolated in 1900's as in the years of the *fin de siècle* . . . In most of T. S. Eliot's comments about the effect of the poem, there is a definite awareness of the presence of the reader--and not simply a handful of readers, such as the *habitués* of Mallarmé's Tuesdays. If there is hermeticism, for instance, there also seems to be the foregone conclusion that this elliptic writing must bring the reader--of course, the elite reader--into some kind of communication with the poet. Eliot says, in *The Uses of Poetry*: "meaning [is] necessary to soothe the reader while the poem does its work." Earlier symbolists would have been content with whatever the poem had done to themselves; in the process of creation here there is a definite intent that the spirit of the poem permeate *the other* as well as the self, in a relationship in which the reader becomes a kind of

alter ego, or performs the function of mirror for Narcissus. (*Symbolist Movement* 159-60)

Neo-symbolist Anglo-American poets realized that modernism brought about a revolution in artistic sensibility which affected not just the production of poetry but a wider, reinvigorated range of reception as well. To an extent, many modernist poets also wrote as literary critics in order to acclimate and educate their audiences, in short, to teach their readers how to read this new type of verse. John Irwin indicates how in Crane's poems an attention to form works in concert with an attention to the reader's response:

Crane's metaphors never offend by being obvious. Their very difficulty is an implicit compliment to the reader whose feeling for verbal nuances is trusted to supply the link between tenor and vehicle. Characteristically, in Crane's verse the metaphoric relationship "A is B" takes by ellipsis the form of a complex word or phrase "AB," and this complex word or phrase becomes in turn part of the metaphoric relationship "C is AB," and so on, with mounting complexity. The structure of a typical Crane metaphor is a microcosm of the structure of a typical Crane poem, and both are in turn embodiments of his concept of the poetic act. ("Naming Names" 286)

Crane might never have succeeded as a neo-symbolist poet without first sharing and then adapting the aesthetics and techniques of Mallarmé, more specifically, through their shared interest in poetry's incantatory creation of a "new word," their insistence on a sophisticated audience who would appreciate the "shorthand" methods of symbolism,

and their emphasis on verse as its own material and conceptual entity beyond the immediate concerns of the versifier.

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