Hiram Poetry Review

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Issue No. 69 Spring 2008

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Editor's Note

In addition to poetry and reviews, this issue of the *Hiram Poetry Review* contains the proceedings from a recent symposium held at Hiram College. The symposium, which was coordinated by classics professor and Bissell Chair in Liberal Studies Robert Sawyer, explored the life and work of poet Hart Crane. The symposium attracted quite an audience. Crane grew up in a town just three miles away from the offices of the *HPR* and spent many formative years in the Cleveland and Akron area. As a nod to our shared regional heritage, this special edition of the *HPR* includes several trascripts of presentations by the renowned Crane scholars who participated in the symposium. The *HPR* has always sought to represent America's best and undiscovered poets. Hart Crane belonged to both groups at different times in his life. That spirit of searching out the dynamics of the avant-garde while keeping alive the nobility of the art of poetry is at the core of our efforts at the *HPR*. These essays speak strongly to that spirit of innovation, iconoclasm, and tradition in Crane's work, a spirit which is shared by this journal.

As always, I am particularly proud of this issue. This year, we say goodbye to two stalwart and fearless associate editors, Jesse Ogden and Joel Milani. Part of the strength of the *HPR* stems from the diligence and perception of the book's undergraduate readers. In addition to the final editorial work of Mssrs. Ogden and Milani, there is a review of Jim Daniels' new book of poems, *Waiting in Line for the Exterminator.* Mr. Daniels gave a wonderful reading at Hiram College this past fall, and his latest book is a worthy effort.

Finally, thanks, as always, to the readers and poets whose attention and work have made the poetry of the *HPR* over the past forty-two years witty, distinct, and heroic.

Mary Kane

Looking at R.B. Kitaj's *MaryAnn*

Let's say you're MaryAnn
and nude, your buttocks
growing larger and larger only
a few feet from where
you lie because the painter
stepped inside himself when his
eye rode that line. In every
hour in which you're MaryAnn
the sound of the former
residents of your home
arguing themselves to life in your kitchen
fades, and you begin to question
whether the lilacs you smell
grow in your yard
or someplace MaryAnn
reads letters most Saturdays, licking one
finger to turn pages, eating raspberries
the way she swallowed
trumpet music until
her skin glowed. You wonder
if you'll ever stop longing. You
start to wonder if MaryAnn
imagines you in linen
slacks writing coffee on a list
magneted to an avocado
green refrigerator, whether she
opens herself, letting out mandolin players and morning
glory blue eyed women without voices, whether
she minds what the painter
takes of her and what he ignores. You think
you might walk her to the edge
of a gravel pit. Dropping
away is a sensation you carry
in the moments when you cease
being MaryAnn, but you don't
want to frighten her, having heard
whole packs of coyotes
sounding like the nights that split
open the others who lived
where you live, long
before you ever dreamed white
curtained windows that look out
on long stretches without
MaryAnn.

Yvonne Higgins Leach

Away at College

The morning struggles to life.
February rain holds down the dark sky.
Cold air moves fog patches around our property
out of boredom. Your father and sister breathe

in a deep sleep I envy.
Even the dog twitches in a dreamy sleep.
I cannot quiet my mind.
So I situate myself

on your now-empty bed
in the room you painted crimson red
when we moved here. My gesture
to your resistance: "Paint it however you like."

You adjusted, made a few friends,
worked at a fast food restaurant
like other teens. Lived through your first
heartbreak of a boyfriend, bitterly.

Empty CD cases in the metal stand,
a blank white board with no message,
your prom dress hangs limp,
covered in plastic behind the door.

And there you are just a year ago,
full-figured and modeling it for me,
arms out, twirling, chattering
about how you'll wear your hair.

The specially carved oak hope chest
is pleased to do its duty, jammed full
of memories of your life so far.
It is comforting to know

you are happy there.
Out the window rain threatens
to become snow, gray droplets glisten white,
and I carefully dust what's left of your things.

Teddy Macker

Clicker

I would like a clicker, the clicker
grim sensible librarians use
to count the number of visitors each day,
but I would like to wander the summer streets
clicking every time I see a beautiful girl,
and the girl I saw today checking her cell-phone at Starbucks,
I would click twice for her, I would have sung for her,
done a million pushups for her, painted her rump
on the side of a white van, titling the piece,
Two Hale Cornish Game Hens Snug in Fabric of Denim.
My dream? To love every girl on this planet,
even the grim sensible librarian with Easter Egg earrings,
and to travel to other planets to love them too,
and to molt and jettison this mask,
the mask I wore this morning at Starbucks
standing beside the miracle-rumped brunette, a mask that said,
Yes, I am an upstanding and respectable adult, and no,
I can't smell the crushing fresh kiwi smell of your just-washed hair.

Laura McCullough

The Burn

It's the size of a condom
or a communion wafer
which is what I thought
of when my son pulled it
out of his pocket, or the Body
of Christ in lint and gum
wrappers — condom
a more logical leap,
it even came in a package,
but he didn't buy the turkey-
call in a movie theater
bathroom. He put it
in his mouth, adjusted
his tongue and began
to gobble for me.

Last night we'd eaten
fresh turkey — the breast
darker than what we're
used to, but it was tender,
and he'd lured it out
of the woods on his own
and done the deed, put
food on his mother's table.

He took the call out
and handed it to me slick
with saliva. I hesitated

only a moment —

Once, when he was small
enough to be in a highchair,
I'd heated something
too long in the microwave
and spooned it into his mouth.
He screamed and in the instant
I knew what I'd done, I also
knew what to do and stuck
my tongue into his mouth
and swooshed it around
and sucked the food

and the burn out —

so I inserted this disc
into my own mouth now
and he tried to show me
how to work my tongue.

I was inept, produced
no brilliant trills; no Tom
would run out of the wild
for me. I gave up

and handed it back,
asked him to do it
again. *That's too weird,*
he said, *it's still wet,*
and got on his bike
and rode away

and the sound I heard —
gravel giving way
to his tires — sliced
through me like a train
I hadn't seen coming.

E.M. Schorb

Inspiration at the Art Gallery

The beautiful little love seat,
with nails pounded through
from in back and underneath,
was placed in the gallery
on exhibition. It had had
leather arm rests, but the
leather had been stripped from it
and more nails pounded up
from under the arm rests.
The symbolism was clear,
I thought, until the artist
came in and sat down on it.
He wore coveralls which were
full of tiny holes, as if shot
with a shotgun, and blood-
drenched. He stretched out
on the love seat and fell
promptly asleep, as if drugged,
and then began tossing and
turning. Now I realized
that he was not a sculptor
but a performance artist,
and this was not symbolism
but life itself. This man knew
what a love seat was, and he
inspired me at long last
to take action. I went home
to my suburban house and began
putting nails through anything
I could penetrate—a nail-gun
helped. "Have you gone mad?"
my wife of thirty years asked me.
"You're ruining everything."
"I am making it all make sense,"
I said, "because, as you know,
I am about to retire, and
I want what I have worked for
to be an honest record
of my patience and labor,
something to be proud of."
She threw up her hands, but
seemed, at last, to understand,

and began to help me with a hammer.
When there was no place left
to sit or stand or to lie down on,
we left by the front door,
stepping gingerly over the sharp
spikes at the threshold, the
neighbors speechless, gaping,
and went off in different
directions in search of another,
perhaps last and happy, life.

Stephanie Walker

Pap Smear Aubade

Our tryst was brief—she with her latex gloves fingering
the stethoscope hung loosely coy about her neck, urging
me into a standard-issue gown and metal stirrups.

But who was I to argue? Wasn't this the encounter I had
come for, after all? Didn't I know when I entered her
florescent room, what intimacy she intended?

Gently insisting *wider* and *relax*, I yielded to her tray of frigid,
kinky instruments and permitted my medicinal suitor
to scrape a souvenir from my uteral walls.

Yet afterwards, we turned our eyes to the wallpaper as I dressed,
suddenly shy, small-talking. Then almost as strangers
and relieved, I grabbed my purse and left, a mantra of

never again playing in my head. But now, in a postcard,
your words of obligation or regret,
assuring that the results, *completely normal.*

Kevin Hansen

Open Mic

-after the first line
I want to wrap my tongue
around your peppermint imperfection.

I'm not sure what side
of twenty she was, but
I wanted to raise my hand
in a way that was more
hungry than horny.
I imagined him a collage
of her first love, a random
guy from her second
weekend at school, a
boy she wouldn't
admit to her friends.

A man her mother warned
her about, more instinct
than dream. But still,
foolishly, I wanted to be him.
Even if he was fictional,
never able to touch her
because she was real, and
he was unknown
and only to her.
To have left
such a taste in her mouth.

Lisa Zimmerman

Tornado Weather

The first sign—
a shift in pressure
and God spits on the windshield.
So you throw your tools in the truck,
stop by the store for bread and cheddar,
buy smokes, drive home to the radio.
You don't walk the dog but you marvel
at the green rib of light on the horizon,
and tell Adelle she's pretty (even
with the stitches)
then head on
down to Marty's Bar
and tell him *cut me off*
before the glass starts
to rattle.

Joseph Rathgeber

Shelter

We watched him waddle in, like a short-legged mammal—
woozy, woebegone. It was in the rear of a brick-and-mortar

church—a free showing of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*,
presented by a gay couple—*A couple of gays*, an elderly man

leaned over to tell us. The wanderer glimpsed the table of
complimentary snacks: stale popcorn, like styrofoam (and

not for packaging purposes—*There are no possessions to box
and move*), pink, yellow, green bottles of warm seltzer water,

an empty coffeepot. The host who wasn't the film buff, the
one with breasts indicative of a five-month hormone

prescription, told the vagabond to help himself, so he did.
He settled in the back row, keeping his coats on. His eyes

were closed before the opening credits could dissolve—his
lids lowered, aping the light switch. *Shelter*, like the public

library, Lackawanna Terminal, and that bench at the Fourth
Street bus stop with the contour to the seat, enveloping

your body with a pocket of air. *Shelter*, like the bank foyer,
where the doors stay unlocked all night for ATM withdrawals—

carpeted, insulated paradise until the Hoboken police patrol.

Wendi Lee

Temping at the Investment Company

Is it the overhead lights, squinting
out a pale economical glow?
Some of the women here are broken:
khaki pants and grizzled hair,
hurrying down hallways
in swooping twin limps
or shuffling, heads tucked down, one
deliberate slow step at a time.
Here on the 34th floor,
stocks and bonds tickets blizzard
over desks and gleaming framed snapshots
of husbands and children.
Literature and art obsolete,
my paperback drained of words
before I crack it open, devour
its sweet pure fruit. My hands
learn code instead, broken alpha strings
like the women, heavy and waiting.
On the 34th floor, the world below
a snow globe, exquisite
and so unspeakably far away.

Emily Borgmann

Georgic: On Staying Sober

Wear whatever makes you feel good,
especially if your mother would hate it.
Remember that the most necessary things
that need to be said will only come out
in the hour between three and four a.m.
Apologize, even if you're not wrong,
if it will mend something important.
Watch the news, even when it's hard.
Read, or the stories will be lost and you will
be left with nothing. A person who can't
tell a joke properly needs a good friend.
Cry to get the kinks out. Masturbation
is good practice for anything you want
to accomplish. Insects should only be killed
if they actually perform the terrifying act
of which you're afraid. Believe in Faulkner.
Sleeping all day is just fine if it keeps you
from pain you cannot bear. If you feel
numb, lick the back of someone's thigh.

Marlys West

Unripe

They are like the hard, green skulls of dachshunds,
over the course of the week they begin to bark and turn black
shrivel from my touch
as if they knew even way back on the tree
I would bruise them. Cut us up, they whisper, mash with fork.
Salt us or not for the baby. They're ruminating.
Remember the old home? The tree? Ah,
me. Such a loss. I forget my own dry cough. Drink more tea to
chase it away but these days I don't have
time to watch clear-go-to-minty-brown water.
I can't drink anything much hotter than my own mouth anyway.
I keep wondering about the Great Pyramid.
What's it for? Whatever it has to say was already said
to the legions. The slaves knew, too, but I was not there that day.
I missed the message. *Too late, too late.*
Cripes but death seems to breathe down my neck.
I've yet to go back to the Russian baths in Brooklyn
for a good whipping with birch twigs.
It's worse than if I'd never gone. I know what I'm missing:
the whack-whack of the sticks like bristles,
the brush of the hot blood toward my heart.
I've just got to hang on.
If they find out the deal at Giza in 3072 B.C.,
bring me back from the dead. At least revive my head
so I can put one mystery, a bit of earth, to rest.
Keep my eyes bathed in permanent salt water;
I'll want to see the diagrams, proof and selvage.
And don't tell me I've been dead. Say I've been sleeping
for a long time and the whole family's coming to see me,
in the meantime would I like hear about Giza?
If I can do it, I'll nod. Tell me of my two children
in their cars, rushing, but under the speed limit,
to see me. Every day doom sat in a corner pocket,
the green wool-felt thick as the skin of the avocado,
a fruit shaped like the head of a dog carcass in the Piney Woods
I almost sat on when I peed. Monks meditate on corpses,
but I've no stomach for it. Not my cud. I'm the one who runs
with a cry on her lips, underwear caught at her hips, both legs
bandy, hoping the dead thing's breath
didn't reach the old hoo-ha. Don't speak to the river in me.
Don't sing to me of this or that disaster. I will get there
soon enough, O dead dog, steer off my husband,
that one true love, our children, and
everything I ever liked even a little; don't make it come faster.

Judy Kronenfeld

Oh To Be Green and Gloomy under the Maple Boughs

I step off the bus, alone, in the desert
brightness at a carbon copy mall
in a rarely visited carbon copy city
near my own, and the enormous shoe store
pixillates as I enter into an ungraspable
welter of detail: flowers and jewels on sandals,
slides and thongs, wedges of cork and rope,
grommets and laces, cleats, faces
in pairs and permutations—
mothers-daughters-sisters-
friends, talking with such
purposiveness. My eyes come to rest
on a set of toes on a foot that turns this way
and that in a semi-precious-stone-encrusted-
flip-flop, and rather than saying *sexy, huh*!
or, *register this new shade of burnished*
peach polish, the toes say, suddenly,
we are descendants of fins, and look like
white grubs. How easy it is
to check out of the culture,
the moment. For a quarter-hour I wander
in the aisles, as if looking for the Platonic Shoe
of Pythagorean proportions, the Lost Shoe
of Atlantis. . .

Once I twirled and twirled alone
in the sturdy saddle shoes I wore
all fall to school—my arms outstretched
like wings—and made the world kaleidoscope
around my center, and toppled
in the grass, head-rushed,
and let the world-that-was-
the-only-world-that-can-be come back;
the waterless marble mermaid fountain,
crowned by a woman in baroque swirls, returned--
"*the* statue" (not *Die Lorelei*, tribute
by Bronxites of German ancestry
to Heinrich Heine)—sparrows pecking dirty crumbs
returned, frumpy women on the benches--stockings
rolled around their ankles—returned, under the returning
canopy of trees.

I would lie for a moment on my back—while the old
women cluck-clucked—and watch
bleak leaves detach and drift down, the light
ratchet down a somber notch—blue-glazing the buildings
of my own profound borough. Then the street-lamps
clicked on, and the park began to glimmer
with a back-lit ochre glow, and it all
filled me—like some solitary German Romantic
hero—with a delicious grown-up
melancholy. My teacher scrawled
you are too young for Weltschmerz!
across my papers, but I liked how it called
to me, a barefoot boy siren
on the misted rocks, from a bend of some
future river. . .

Now the silver bus approaches,
shimmering with heat lines, sides waving in
and out, almost a mirage. . .
A strongly-scented, tanned, white-haired
man, tropically shirted, laden
with packages, smiles down beside me
on the bench, where I wait,
purchaseless,

while, on my old street, some child is running—
from the deserted benches, the deepening
shadows descending like a curtain on the statue
in the park—in her own sturdy, entirely unquestioned
shoes, home to the only-home-that-is.

Mark Simpson

The Heartless Disinterest of Poetry

You invite it for coffee
and realize what a horrid conversationalist
it is, sitting there, drinking its mocha,
offering up such impertinences
you wonder why you're here.
You want to reach over
and throttle it, but
you calm yourself,
you tell yourself you'll
just walk out of here,
forget about it, there
are others you can talk to,
plenty of others, and
it's a nice day,
you have some money
in your pocket,
a few things in the offing
that might work out for once,
so let poetry sip its mocha,
let it choke.
You stop listening.
You feel calm now.
The waiter brings your change.
"It's OK," he whispers
in your ear.

Jim Daniels

A Stone's Throw

The neighbors fought the plans
for the pinball palace
with the particular rage found
in factory neighborhoods
in the downward spiral
of the inarticulate map
of invisible forces.

Why weep when you'll just
get mud in your eye? In the dueling
inarticulation of immigrants,
Polish and Italian spittle rained
above the heads on the dry councilmen
umbrella-ed in bribes.

The little guy vs. the big guy,
the canned ham and jello
vs. steak and cake.
Only in the movies.
Better yet, only on TV,
less time, more commercials,
clearer resolution.

The one you can smell a mile away,
but there's only one road,
so you've got to drive
right over it, the dead whatever
stinking up the road.

The pinball palace went in
where the Sunoco station had been,
and the children dutifully flocked there,
against their parents' wishes. They spent
their allowances mastering hand controls

while their angry fathers
mowed lawns and watched out
for the dreaded influx of the Element.
They went back to hating each other,
just like the big guys counted on.

And if that's too simple of a story,
throw a rock through the glass
of the old Sunoco Station.

Jim Daniels

Resume

When was the last time you held *your* son's hand?
I'm just asking. I don't care how old he is.
Don't expect music. I'm just scraping the inside
of the jar for one last serving. Resume—
start up again. Continue. Ignore
the interruption. Make a career of it.
He didn't want my hand, but we were
crossing the street, and I gave him no choice.
He pulled away as soon as we hit the curb.
His jacket unzipped, his shoes untied,
and I could do nothing for him.
For the rest of our lives together
I will imagine traffic.

Grace Bauer

Café Culture: Adrift on the Plains

The sea motif insists itself
here at the Captain's Table Lounge
in the very middle of the middle west.

Though we're about as far from beach
as you can get, tiny remnants of it
have found their way here. A tableau

of sand and scallop shells, starfish
and seahorses, coral and whelks is embedded
in the table top's polyurethane veneer.

Fish are etched into surrounding glass,
woven into seat cushions; whales breach
across the walls, dangle from chandeliers.

The salad bar's a schooner in full sail
with an unlikely alligator menacing
the blue cheese and the ranch.

I expect the waiter to be wearing Navy whites
or maybe pirate's motley, but he's settled
for the ubiquitous black and white of his trade.

The menus — you guessed — feature mermaids
on the cover, crustacean I.D. charts on back
to help the uninformed place their orders.

But this is breakfast, so I stick
with the local basics — eggs and bacon,
whole wheat toast and coffee enough

to fuel me up for the long haul across
the prairie, this *land of flat water* archeologists
tell us was once really covered by sea.

Grace Bauer

Café Culture: Noel

That's a bummer, says the plus-sized blue-haired lady
in the booth behind mine at the Village Inn.
The Wednesday before Christmas and she has donned
her version of *gay apparel* — a sweatshirt
sporting a teddy bear in a Santa Claus hat topped
with a tinkling silver bell. Hard to picture her
ever in beads and tie dye, even jeans — much less
dropping enough acid to have what the word *bummer*
originally meant — i.e. bad trip — which is what
that sweatshirt looks like to me. I'm no humbug, mind you!
I am all about decking the halls and *fa la la.*
I drag out the tinsel every year, even the *crèche,*
though the babe in the manger to me is mostly myth —
albeit one I believe bears repeating. But right now
I'm more curious about the blue-haired lady's bummer.
I may be judgmental of fashion *faux pas*, but as for story —
I'm always open. Alas, there is too much clattering
of plates for good eavesdropping. Too many customers
hopped up on sales. Not to mention the waitresses — all wearing
battery lit cherubs on their bosoms, the jovial manager
with the Grinch on his tie humming *The Little Drummer Boy.*
I feel like Scrooge in my basic black, hunched over
a pile of papers I'm only giving B's. I add a few unearned pluses
as a gesture of my seasonal goodwill, ponder one student's advice
to *Cease* the day! Take another's *steam of conscience writing*
as an unintended gift to spark my own.

Ron McFarland

Waxing Nostalgic about Cheap Beer

Memorial Day, 2007

Ninety-three and still going strong and looking
over his shoulder merrily all the time, Dad
sings out, "What'll you have? Pabst Blue Ribbon!"
Still in tune, still the fine tenor Tom and I remember
from that minstrel show in '49 back in Ohio
and the First Presbyterian choir and all of those
enchanted vacation evenings seeking out
the quintessential seven-dollar motel.

Back in Idaho, I reminisce, it's Rainier and Schmidt,
Oly and Lucky: "It's lucky when you live out West,"
I croon a bit off key, "the West is Lucky coun-try!"
Tom speaks up for Narragansett from that hard year
after Nam at Fort Devlin: "There's a lot of good
in 'gansett!" And a lot of Genesee went down the hatch.
Tom's wife does not drink but smiles in silence
thinking of him not drinking these days either.

Jax and Pearl and Lone Star in tall bottles,
I offer, recalling my years in east Texas.
Walker County was bone dry—nine miles
to the nearest beer across the Trinity River,
two seedy bars and a beautiful one-armed woman,
Bavarian black hair, shooting pool against
what counted in those parts for cowboys.
What are they talking about, Mom asks my wife.

Good old Thirty-Three, "Ba-Moui-Ba," Tom recalls:
You had to watch out for algae, the tell-tale
slither of green smile, and Tiger beer, "Biere Larue,"
quaffed in Pleiku on the eve of the Tet Offensive.
Before the war, the other war, Dad says, he never drank.
Iron City, he adds, and maybe Mom sways in her chair
to the music of Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians,
honeymooning once more, her mind astray.

Grain Belt, I say bringing us back, Old Millwater,
Drewry's Draft, to the heartland, Stroh's and Hamm's.
"From the land of sky-blue wa-a-ters," Tom starts,
forgetting the rest of the song. Shcaefer, Rheingold.
All of this memorably cheap beer washes our lives
in its golden Lethe, cleanses our souls.

The thing guys talk about at the eleventh hour,
bars all over the world closing up for the night,
not quite talking about what's on their minds.
Mom sips at her cool blue can of Busch, her hands
trembling across the lofty Bavarian alps,
rolls her eyes at my wife: Boys, she whispers.

Rich Heller

Street Burrito

He fingers Spanish rhythms,
Moroccan or Indian leads
in the restaurant doorway.

Patrons sit on the patio
talking over the rapid
strumming.

Yellow begins to show
through the red
paint of the cracking

stucco walls. The only
thing not sun faded, not
dust dulled, not tanned

in the arid breeze are
the bunches of balloons
that fuss at the ends

of their strings under
the foot of the vendor
while she eats her street

burrito.

Timothy Green

The Good Times

for N.

They told me to remember the good times,
and so I thought of chess in the church pew.

Over and over I relived our singular match—
six moves and a handshake. Winning the toss

he led with a pawn. I mimicked his every move.
I opened the alley, brandished the bishop like

a suicide note he stood without reading, returning
to his paper, his pipe, and leaving me there

with my own mistakes. When it was my turn
I tucked in my shirt, straightened my good tie.

Read a psalm I never believed in. The choir
kicked up a few notes, one mezzo-alto short.

We drove home in pairs and ate deviled eggs—
his favorite—as if we'd always liked them most.

Holly Day

Nebraska

when my mother first went crazy
she accused my father of stealing the ocean
and hiding it from her, just
to be cruel and mean. We were living
in Nebraska
at the time, and I can still remember the look
on his face
as my father tried to defend himself
from her useless accusations.

for two more years, we sat through
days when my mother wouldn't get out or up
or those that when she did, she'd spend entirely
in the tub. "The Atlantic
feels like this," she'd tell me, urging me
to dip my fingers into the lukewarm water. "Soft.
And warm."

somehow she got better
all on her own, and in the meantime
I learned how to cook for both
my little sister and me.
And then one day
we woke up
and there was breakfast on the table
the laundry was done
and my mother was awake, out of bed,
ready to step out into the snow
and walk us to school.

It happened
just like that.

Andrey Gritsman

Poetry Reading

I read my poems to the ladies in mink coats.
I paid my dues and swallowed filtered air, yet
I felt my lips move in the morning, repeating dreams
coming from the smoked-out lungs, dreams, before lay dormant.

The ones, where foot is equal to the night's length.
The length's equal to return of summer.
Days' hustle absorbs speech like a net.
And in its remnants all looks like "or" or "either."

I will dress up like a common man: shirt, tie and
I put on my glasses to see objects' edges.
Remember: no matter what's going on—you're a messenger,
last go-between, even in drunken binges.

That's how it will be: night sings
like Helderlin, and the words are the garlands from Christmas trees.
Holiday's over, but there are couple of hints,
maybe three or five rumors and then long restless silence.

I paid the utilities for my blue computer.
I read poems to those whores in mink coats.
Still, my heart's beating into my temples, my lips moving.
They are gathering words' light spots on quiet mornings.

I will exhale filtered air out.
I will go for a walk on night's mooring,
I will stop for a moment, thinking aloud.
Turn around: this only me calling
myself, calling

Translated from Russian by the author.

Robert King

In America

The young man, farm-boy type and blonde,
comes to my outside table and asks,
because I'm smoking a cigar,
for a cigar, and lingers, talking:
just out of jail this morning
(for breaking probation) he has
the bland unknowing innocence
of the more quietly disturbed.

"Stole a cigar from a store once,"
he remarks, "that had these pilgrims on it.
What kind was that?"And I don't know.
"And a wagon," which doesn't help.

Then a girl arrives, both at the shelter
these days, she's ADD and on her meds,
he's off of his. She's a good worker,
she insists, but somehow can't keep
a job—that's why she became a dancer.

Although I'm not sure of that logic,
I can't keep from imagining her
peeled and skinny under colored lights
until the boy asks for another cigar.

Finally they rise and leave, the way
our grandparents, the pilgrims, wrecked
the Mayflower on Plymouth Rock,
stole a few wagons and jostled west,
arriving in the shelter of the
Promised Land, who then shed their clothes
and began their jobs of dancing
wildly, guilty and guiltless,
almost naked in America.

Reviews

Willard Greenwood

In Line for the Exterminator. Jim Daniels. Wayne State University Press. 2007.

The prolific Jim Daniels published three books in 2007, including two books of poetry (*Revolt of the Crash-Test Dummies*, Eastern Washington University Press, and the book reviewed here) and one collection of short fiction, *Mr. Pleasant*, Michigan State University Press. While I haven't read the latter collection, I can attest that both books of poetry are really good reads and feature a number of poems that are immediately memorable.

In Line for the Exterminator maintains a comic darkness that is probing and engaging. The poet bores into a lot of uncomfortable subject matter: racism, growing up poor, the violence of Detroit, the paradoxical closeness and disconnect that he feels with his family. On the surface it might seem as though Mr. Daniels is a political poet with some social causes to promote, and indeed, he could be read in that way. However, he imbues poem after poem with a lyric sensibility that makes their imagery and subject matter almost tangible. His frankness and humor about the despair he feels about his blue-collar Catholic upbringing is refreshing and inspired. Through the darkness of the poems emerges a fondness for the intensity of the youthful struggles of youth before innocence has been redeemed.

The muse for this book is the blighted Detroit of the 1970s, which receives a poignant and powerful update in the poem "Can't Sleep." In this poem, Daniels meditates on the fact that the mother of pop culture phenom Eminem "could have been any number of my classmates." This poem moves the subject matter of his Detroit poems beyond the realm of nostalgia, for we see as in the melancholy of this eponymous opening poem that, in spite of the narrator's efforts to protect his child, the perils of youth for his son will be unavoidable.

While that particular poem speaks to the powerful desire of the father to protect the son, what follows in the book is a remembering of all the difficult times that his own father failed at that very task. (At the end of the book, I could not keep from wondering what delights and despairs the poet's own children will be denied with the backdrop of a bourgeois life.) Daniels' book, however, uses this moment to look into the past with a productive kind of nostalgia. While we get the definite sense that the speaker does not want to return to the past, the sweet regrets and pleasures of by-gone years give this collection a lyric energy in its first and third sections.

The middle section, which is called "Digger's Body Shop," features a lot of comic poems centered on a persona, the Digger, who Daniels first introduced to his work in 1989. While this section is a little slow in points, there are some powerful

moments, such as the one captured by "Digger's Bad Reception," which features Digger's son getting into a fight. Throughout this collection Daniels writes movingly about the threat and realized threats of physical violence that peppered his youth. In fact, the poet is often at his finest in this when he writes about "getting his ass kicked." He conveys a stoicism and humor that suggests a subtle current of heroism and nobility that pulsed beneath the raw-boned surface of his *working class* youth.

Daniels imparts varied pleasures throughout this book. For the reader, they are a deeply satisfying reward.

Charles Arnett

"A Sense of Melody Grounded in the Thingness of Things: A Review of John Jenkinson's Rebekah *Orders Lasagna.*" Woodley Press. 2006.

In his first collection of poems, John Jenkinson, a gandy dancer and gravesite peddler turned English professor and Milton Center Fellow, exploits grammatical structures and the music of language to explore family relationships, sexuality, life's hardships, aging, and death. The poet develops these themes through the motifs of nature, the Christian faith, music, and household settings common to Midwest towns and farming communities. A first-person voice narrates thirty of the book's thirty-six poems.

The title poem's seventeen fourteen-line stanzas of mixed pentameters make it the longest of the poems in the book, most of which occupy a single page. Its study of family relationships begins when the speaker's daughter Rebekah, home from college, asks her mother to cook lasagna. The narrator leverages that simple request to illuminate his wife's relationship to his mother and the family's relationships to his grandfather, his son, his brother, his father-in-law, and Rebekah's latest boyfriend. But the family's after-dinner visit to the narrator's father-in-law in a nursing home reveals all of the pains and joys of their intertwined relationships to be but transitory as the visitors see their destiny. Not only will the old man never again feast on his daughter's lasagna, even now he cannot identify the members of his family who stand around his bed in their accustomed places at the dinner table.

"Lullaby," a portrait of an old woman who has outlived her dreams, illustrates Jenkinson's tendency toward density. The first stanza reads

Sweet with mildew and leaf-rot,
a choked pump-filter chugs the same slow song
that plays where the grout splits,
where nail rust roots in powdering latex,
where an Oldsmobile blossoms in oxides
under a wrestle of hedge-gnarl and ivy, sinks
to its ferrous knees in a wrangle of clover and bullthistle—
or where a human hair traces its long fall
from scalp to brush bristle, to linoleum.

A single complex sentence of sixty-seven words comprises this nine-line stanza. It begins with an adjective that modifies the subject ("pump-filter"), the adjective being modified by a prepositional phrase with a compound object. The verb "chugs" and direct object "song" follow immediately to ground the reader during the clauses that follow.

The remaining lines of the first stanza illustrate a technique Jenkinson uses frequently in other poems—taking a single idea and expanding it with devices such as lists of images. In this case, it is the direct object "song" from which additional poetic content is generated. "[S]ong" is modified by an adjective clause starting with "that." The verb in the adjective clause is amplified by a series of four adverbial clauses beginning with "where," the third of which has two verbs ("blossoms" and "oxides"). Each of these two verbs is modified by a prepositional phrase, the object of which is modified by a prepositional phrase with a compound object.

The first stanza of "Lullaby" showcases Jenkinson's musicality. The parallel grammatical structures provide rhythm: three clauses begin with "where" and the subject of the sentence, the pump-filter, "chugs" and "sinks." The stanza also uses assonance ("sweet" and "leaf," "choked" and "slow") and consonance ("slow song," "rust roots"). As reinforcement, the motif of music appears in the poem's title, in the direct object "song" chugged by the pump-filter, and in the Latin jazz that plays in the background.

Lists of vegetation ("hedge-gnarl," "ivy," "clover," and "bullthistle") express the nature motif. Adjectives enhance the descriptions ("sweet," "choked," "slow," "nail," "powdering," for example). Metaphors appear in the direct object (the pump-filter chugs a "song"), in verbs (the "rust roots," the "Oldsmobile blossoms"), and in a prepositional phrase ("to its ferrous knees"). The poem also typifies Jenkinson's use of formal diction with specific references such as "oxides," "ferrous knees," "caboodle of life," "nacreous clay," and "carapace."

Jenkinson structures the poem "Trimming the Dead" around contrasting imagery. The poem interweaves the themes of death, decay, and sexuality in four eight-line stanzas of free verse using conventional sentence structure. The narrator's aging father works in his garden trimming "dead shoots," "dry husks," and "leaves furling their decaying promises." In contrast, his neighbor's daughter, an image of fertility, is "budding out" and is surrounded by boys like "a cloud of sizzling bees," who treat the girl as a queen bee. But the father has learned that flowers wilt in time, and so he "cultivate[s] his fantasies in real dirt."

The poem "Grandfather's Republic" uses contrasting imagery to characterize the influence of the grandfather's prior self over his current self by weaving World War I images with images of a reluctant farmland. As he battles to transform his eastern Kansas "no-man's land" into a home, the grandfather can still hear a "brass-clad cartridge slide in its chamber." Now pollen, rather than yellow gas, causes him to drop to his knees.

In "The Shallows" the controlling metaphor of the expanse of shallow water

provides the images for describing the fading of sexual passion as a couple, though still in love, ages. They have become a "pair of ichthyosaurs," whose bed no longer "rocks the sea" but becomes only a place where they sleep in each other's shallows.

Although *Rebekah Orders Lasagna* is dense with complex grammatical structures and with diction that ranges from archaisms to slang, its imagery, music, and lucid sentences open the book's wisdom and pleasures to Jenkinson's intended audience—in his words1, "gentle hearts with developed ears," "intelligent but not intellectual" readers who have "a sense of melody grounded in the thingness of things."

1 Jenkinson, John Stephen. "Re: Rebekah ..." E-mail to the author. 16 Feb. 2007.

Addresses from The Hart Crane Symposium

Note on the Paintings of William Sommer

In May of 1921, Hart Crane, back in Cleveland after a two-year stay in New York City, was introduced by a friend to William Sommer. Sommer was a lithographer by training but had the avocation of an artist. There developed between the older man and the young aspiring poet a friendship which remained very close for the next two years.

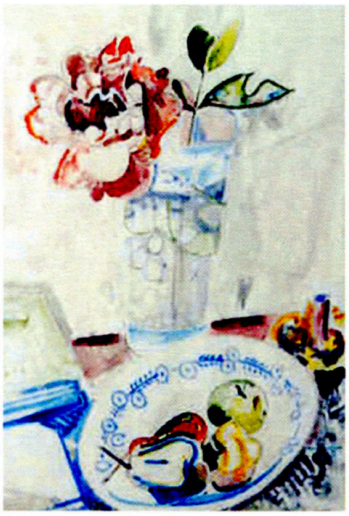
Born in 1867 in Detroit, Sommer had served an apprenticeship as a lithographer, but was very interested in art. He attended art schools for brief periods in London and Munich and devoted his weekends to art. Sommer worked and lived in Cleveland until 1914, when he purchased property at Brandywine Falls, about thirty miles south of Cleveland. Here he installed his family and set up a studio in which to paint and entertain friends and visitors interested in literature, poetry, and art. When Crane met him, Sommer had completed many watercolor paintings and sketches, but exposure to his artistic output was limited to a few friends. Crane believed that Sommer's work merited a wider public and championed his cause by sending photographs of his paintings to a dealer in New York City. However, Crane's efforts did not succeed in interesting the art world of Manhattan in his friend's work.

Crane visited Sommer on weekends and also invited Sommer to his home in Cleveland, where he lived with his mother. Stimulated and encouraged by Sommer's advice and conversations about art, Crane wrote several poems based on his experiences in Cleveland, including "Sunday Morning Apples," a warm tribute to his friend and mentor. Because Crane's zeal in promoting Sommer's work beyond Northeast Ohio was not shared by the artist himself, their close relationship cooled, though they remained friends until the poet's death.

Despite Crane's disappointment that the artist was content to limit his reputation to Northeast Ohio, Sommer's watercolors of landscapes and portraits were admired locally for their modernist style and brilliant colors. Sommer was commissioned to paint several murals in public buildings in Akron and Cleveland; his artistic output was prodigious. He was dubbed the "Sage of Brandywine" and is now recognized as an important influence in the art world of Northeast Ohio in the early twentieth century. Sommer died in 1949. The Akron Art Museum houses many of Sommer's works with one gallery devoted solely to his paintings.

Hollyhocks and Humminbird ca. 1920
Watercolor with ink, 9 x 13 inches
Tregoning & Company,
Cleveland, OH

My Studio, Brandywine 1926
Ink and watercolor, 10 x 14 inches
Tregoning & Company,
Cleveland, OH



Fruit, Bowl and Rose 1929
Watercolor, 15 x 12 inches
Tregoning & Company,
Cleveland, OH

Jim Vincent

Living in the Shadow of Hart Crane

This morning before the symposium began I had a couple pancakes and some maple syrup for breakfast. The maple syrup came from the property of Bill Rand and was boiled to its sugary essence by Bill's son Paul. In fact, the Rand's farm once owned by the Rudolph family whose daughter Lucretia was to marry James A. Garfield. From his great-grandmother Sylvina Streator, Hart Crane would have heard tales of her father Jason Streator—Sylvina Crane lived to be 94 years old and would have died in 1914. One of Sylvina's students in the one room schoolhouse just west of Garrettsville was the young Lucrecia Rudolph from Wheeler Road in Hiram Township. So the two men—a president and a poet had an intersection.

And, as you know, maple syrup figures into our story. Maple syrup is an interesting product. It is made by boiling the sap of the maple tree—trees that are quite common in northeastern Ohio. It takes about ten gallons of sap to make one quart of maple syrup. And syrup has to be made in the spring thaw when fluctuating temperature causes the maple sap to flow. According to John Unterecker in one profitable season Hart's grandfather father shipped 60,000 gallons of syrup nationally and internationally from his cannery on Windham Street.

Here's Harold Hart Crane's poem written in 1927 about March in our climate.

March

Awake to the cold light
Of wet wind running
Twigs in tremors. Walls
Are naked. Twilights raw –
and when the sun taps steeples
their glistenings dwindle
upward...

March
Slips along the ground
Like a mouse under pussy –
Willows, a little hungry.

The vagrant ghost of winter,
Is it this that keeps the chimney
busy still? For something still
nudges shingles and windows:
but waveringly,-this ghost,
this slate-eyed saintly wraith
of the winter wanes
and knows its waning.

1927

Which brings us of course, to Harold Hart Crane and to my contribution to [the Hart Crane Symposium]. I was born in Ravenna, Ohio, and grew up on State Street in Garrettsville. When I was five I moved into the house that my grandfather built in 1908 up over the hill from the village and on the road to Hiram. My grandfather's father was from Chagrin Falls, Ohio, and moved his family to Hiram and eventually to Garrettsville so that they could be closer to Hiram College where his children could get an education. Then as now Hiram is the highest point in the area—both geographically and academically.

[As part of a local tour, symposium attendees] saw the two Crane homes near St. Ambrose Church in Garrettsville and the Crane Brothers building on the Main Street – a Main Street that doesn't look that much different in the 21st century as it did at the end of the 19th. And we also got an opportunity to see the "Lifesaver Building" where myth has it that the lifesaver was conceived. Present occupants of the building tell that story. But others say that Clarence, Hart's father, thought it a good idea to have a summer candy that didn't melt in your hand and has it that his wife feared such a mint might choke a child and Clarence's response was to put a hole in it—hence the lifesaver. I know how stories grow and I take no responsibility for this.

My grandparents lived in Garrettsville at the same time as the extended Crane family, and I have no doubt that their paths crossed. My grandmother was an addictive bridge player, and she included in her bridge parties a variety of the local women. The Mrs. Scott whom John Unterecker quotes in his biography as a childhood friend of Harold was one of my grandmother's foursomes. In fact, Mrs. Scott was originally a Vanderslice whose husband ran the Garrettsville mill, one of the significant remaining historical buildings of our village.

As a Garrettsville boy, I could not wait to get out of town and live somewhere where chicken was packaged in plastic and you bought your milk at a store and did not have it delivered by some noisy milkman. I did not feel like Garrettsville was a very important place. Later I learned differently. The Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh expresses that well in this short poem.

EPIC

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided : who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.
I heard the Duffys shouting "Damn your soul"
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel -
"Here is the march along these iron stones."
That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was most important? I inclined
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.
He said : I made the Iliad from such
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

1938

Let me quote an anonymous local historian: "By 1899, Garrettsville was considered the largest maple syrup center in the world. The man primarily responsible, Arthur Crane, had his cannery on Windham Street. It was his son who founded Crane Candies and who developed the formula for Lifesavers candy, and his grandson, Hart Crane, who wrote poems now studied on college campuses throughout the country. As the business district developed, so too did churches, schools, public services, and service-oriented and social organizations. Major industry arrived in 1923 in the form of Polson Rubber, which bought out the older Cawed Rubber, perhaps best remembered for its winning baseball teams."

I recall my father, Harry Giles Vincent, Jr., telling me how proud he was when he saw in a high school geography book in the 1920s a picture of the distilling at the Crane maple syrup factory with a caption that read –"Garrettsville, the capital of the maple syrup trade in the United States."

Paul Mariani in *The Broken Tower* points out: "The genesis of Hart Crane's particular odyssey begins in the spring of 1898, when a twenty-year-old debutante from Chicago, one Grace Edna Hart, traveled by rail to Garrettsville, Ohio, for an extended visit with her aunt and cousin. Among the first families of that provincial center, and already known to the Harts, were the Cranes. A successful middle-class entrepreneur, Arthur Crane ran both a maple syrup business and the town's general store, as well as serving as director of the town's First National Bank. Arthur had one son, Clarence Arthur (C.A.), who had turned twenty-three that spring. C.A. had already put in two years at

Allegheny College in western Pennsylvania. That was before he'd decided to strike out on his own and make his fortune. At twenty, he'd taken to the open road, selling cookies for the National Biscuit Company of Akron. But soon he was back in Garrettsville, working for his father's maple syrup business. C.A. was built like a bull and had the drives of one. Passionate, headstrong, good-natured, innocent in the murderous way of many young 'red-blooded' Americans, he had an eye for women as well as for money."

As I recall as I search my memory, I always knew there had been a Crane family in the village. I knew about the Crane Brothers building, and I had a vague recollection of stories of the maple syrup cannery. My mother who is from Brockton, Massachusetts, used to argue with my dad frequently about the relative quality of Vermont and Ohio maple syrup—I was on my father's side and remain so to this day. As we talked about the Cranes in the family, I used to think that a house on State street was the Crane home. And it was not until I began my Hiram College career that I was disabused of that notion.

Again Paul Mariani says: "Little of the Garrettsville years ever found their way into Crane's poetry, at least in any recognizable sense, but there is one passage, an image of his mother sitting at the piano and singing. She sings a song with a French tag, "Do you know the place?" But there is a sense of claustrophobia about the memory, a need on the speaker's part to break free and walk among the roses, the mystical roses that would later populate his long poem, 'The Bridge.'"

I didn't know that I was growing up in the shadow of Hart Crane as a boy. But there were several hints of the Cranes and their exceptional son in the village. I was an altar boy at St. Ambrose Roman Catholic Church. In fact as many of you know, St. Ambrose met in the big Crane House for a number of years before our church was completed in 1955. As an altar boy I served at the funeral mass of many local Catholics. Some of you in the room might remember a local Garrettsville character named Charlie Goss. Charlie cleaned the rectory, mowed the lawn, and kept the sidewalk free of snow. He also frequented Hyde's Tavern, a dimly lit beer hall on the lower Main Street of Garettsville. I almost never walked on that side of the street because when I walked through the town I could barely see through the door but I could smell the beer and the cigarette smoke. Reportedly the men's room at Hyde's extended out over the river, and local legend said that at one time one of the regulars fell into the river when the toilet and its support collapsed. Charlie Goss was a town character with a local girlfriend with whom he frequented Hyde's. When Charlie Goss died, I served at his funeral Mass, and in the Mass leaflet were the lines from Hart Crane's great poem "The River." Someone in the church knew the poem and included the first several lines.

Behind
My father's cannery works I used to see

Rail-squatters arranged in no man raillery,
The ancient men -- wifeless or runaway
Hobo-trekkers that forever search
An empire wilderness of freight and rails.
Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,
Holding to childhood like some termless play,
John, Jake or Charlie, hopping the slow freight
-- Memphis to Tallahassee -- writing the rods,
blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods.

I asked my father one day as we were driving into town if he had known Hart Crane. "Yes." He said, "And he was a queer duck." My father was no homophobe so I am sure he meant that on his occasional visits he seemed a little out of place in the village.

And there were other signs in the shadows for a young person to discover. Only about 50 feet from my parents gravestone in the beautiful Garrettsville Cemetery lies the Crane plot. At the top of the hill overlooking the highway and not far from my favorite cemetery marker, a tall stone with a simple inscription – "Payne and Joy." The Crane stones clearly show that this was a distinguished family. Siblings and their parents are clearly marked but in front was the small marker – "Harold Hart Crane lost at sea 1899-1932". Because I was the family member who my grandmother designated as the grave keeper, I saw these stones every time I went to get water from the old pump not far from the Crane plot.

I graduated from James A. Garfield high school – named after a local. I was in school during the great Sputnik scare and as a result of that our government funded a national Defense education assistantship which allowed me to attend Hiram for two summers during my high school years to study physics with a great physics teacher of Hiram, Dr. Don Dooley. So when it came time to choose a college my choice was easy to make.

I was interested in both mathematics and literature – though I have to say that physics was my favorite. But through those first couple of years I inclined in a literary direction. Probably because I got to talk in literature classes.

We had three great literature teachers at Hiram then—John Shaw, who taught Shakespeare; Charles McKinley, who taught Chaucer; and a recent hire Abe Ravitz, who taught American literature. And so at Hiram we had our own confrontation between the genteel tradition of Shaw and McKinley and the proletariat vision of Abe Ravitz—it was he who said to me on the stairs of Hinsdale [Hall] one afternoon – "Jim, you need to read and study Hart Crane. He's a local boy, and that's what you should do."

And I have to say I tried. I was 20 years old and interested in many things, and I found *The Bridge* incomprehensible. Abe explicated masterfully a number of passages, but I just couldn't get my head around it. I remember clearly when Charles McKinley asked me who was my favorite poet and I replied AE Houseman—even then there was teenage angst. Charles looked at me and said: "I am not surprised." I only understood the dismissive shrug later. While Hart Crane was little appreciated in the village, he was known elsewhere. For thirty years, I have been teaching in Pittsburgh where Sam Hazo runs the International Poety Forum. Sam's first published work was on Crane. At a recent event a local Irish poet quoted several lines of Crane when she heard about the symposium. And at famous Moe's bookstore in Berkeley the clerk was elated when I bought a copy of the poems, saying "He is a great poet and vastly undervalued."

Growing up in Garettsville and attending college at Hiram, I found my geographical sites were limited. But I began to travel to Cleveland to see those places that Brian Reed described when he talked about the poem "Euclid Avenue." In the basement of the Cleveland Museum of Art I saw several paintings by William Sommer, and only later did I put together the friendship that Hart Crane had with Bill. And I remember very clearly going to the Taylor Arcade and walking into Laukhaff's bookstore. It must've been the early 60s, and I remember so clearly the sign hanging over the door. In it I saw books I'd never seen before in the collection of interesting looking men. Those two sites showed me that Cleveland could be an interesting place.

So many of us in Garettsville knew about the Crane family. We knew that they were a significant family in the village; we took pride in their mercantile skills; and we knew that the syrup on our pancakes was local syrup. We knew, too, that there was a son who went off to New York and wrote poetry. And when the marker appeared in front of the train house now occupied by the Kirks, the people of the village nodded in approbation but with rare exception there was little or no celebration.

I hope this symposium will continue the reevaluation of the work of Harold Hart Crane and that the ethos of the area will be recognized as that process proceeds.

Brian M. Reed

Modernist Ohio: Hart Crane and the Challenge of Akron

In most textbooks the name of Hart Crane (1899-1932) is indelibly associated with New York City. There are good reasons for this connection. His epic poem *The Bridge* (1930) joyously celebrates Manhattan's skyscrapers, speakeasies, jazz clubs, and burlesque shows. One encounters, too, the city's diverse population, from subway commuters to sailors on leave, from "Crap-shooting gangs" to washerwomen (Crane 63). The book's title refers to Washington Roebling's cathedral-like Brooklyn Bridge, a recurrent motif that unifies the work and that stands for the glorious new artistry that Crane believed technological progress and mass urbanization had made possible. Not surprisingly, a series of later New York-based writers—among them Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, and Samuel Delany—have plundered *The Bridge* for rhetorical strategies capable of expressing the curious craziness of life in the Five Burroughs.

The tight association between Crane and New York City must, however, ultimately be judged something of an unfortunate distortion. In part, it stems from his early death. During his final years, he traveled widely, residing at different times in Paris, Mexico City, and Cuba. He left behind an unpublished manuscript of Caribbean-themed poetry titled *Key West: An Island Sheaf*, and, when he died, he was in the midst of researching and planning his next project, *Cortez: An Enactment*, a tragedy about Moctezuma II and the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan. Had he lived another half decade, he likely would have been memorialized not as New Yorker but rather as a cosmopolitan poet who hymned the whole of the New World.

The overemphasis on New York in the secondary literature also stems from insufficient attention to Crane's early development as a writer. He grew up far from Gotham, in Northeast Ohio, among the canals, factories, mills, and millionaires of the Midwestern economic boom of the early twentieth century. Moreover, although he did escape to Manhattan at the first available opportunity—under the pretext of seeking entry to Columbia University—he was a callow adolescent in full flight from a home life so troubled that at the age of sixteen he tried to kill himself at least once, perhaps twice. His precocious plunge into Greenwich Village's avant-garde (1917-1919) produced little more than a scattering of derivative poems and short prose pieces. Typical of these years was his stint as business manager at the fabled *Little Review*: he succeeded in selling only two ads (one to his father). Afterwards, out of money and unable to hold a job, he returned to Ohio and threw himself on Dad's mercy.

He spent the next three years living in Akron and Cleveland. During this period his verse matured by leaps and bounds. He wrote some of his best known short lyrics—"Black Tambourine," "My Grandmother's Love Letters," and

"Praise for an Urn"—and he began preliminary work on *The Bridge* and his celebrated poem sequence "Voyages." When he again attempted to crack New York's literary establishment in 1924, he brought with him his first verifiable masterpiece, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," a three-part urban-centered lyric written in the peculiar aureate ecstatic elusive idiom that would remain his trademark until the end of his life. The poet who wrote the oft-quoted lyric "The Broken Tower" (1932) in Mexico during his last days of life employed then a style first perfected while working in a store on Cleveland's Euclid Avenue. To appreciate fully the grand poems of Crane's maturity, one must figure out why 1920s Ohio prompted him to "modernize" his verse.

I.

Like most poets born in the United States during the nineteenth century, Crane began his career by imitating British models. More specifically, he fell under the spell of the Yellow Nineties. His earliest verse was anachronistic and lush, reminiscent of Algernon Charles Swinburne and Ernest Dowson:

The anxious milk-blood in the veins of the earth,
That strives long and quiet to sever the girth
Of greenery . . . . Below the roots, a quickening quiver
Aroused by some light that had sensed,—ere the shiver
of the first moth's descent,—day's predestiny (94).

After moving to New York in 1917 he found himself surrounded by authors whose innovative modes of writing were better suited to the bustle, blare, and gabble of modern urban life, among them Djuna Barnes, Eugene O'Neill, Wallace Stevens, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and William Carlos Williams. He was unsure how to respond. A lyric such as "In Shadow" (1917) might feature intensive inventive sound play, yet its Beardsley-esque posturing also appears *démodé* when compared to the chiseled free verse characteristic of such adventurous contemporary volumes as Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915) and H.D.'s *Sea Garden* (1916):

Out in the late afternoon,
Confused among chrysanthemums,
Her parasol, a pale balloon,
Like a waiting moon, in shadow swims. (10)

Pound himself so disliked "In Shadow" that he advised Margaret Anderson, the editor of the *Little Review*, not to publish Crane in the future (743).

How to adapt—or compete? A new note enters Crane's writing in 1919 in the

months prior to his move back to northeast Ohio, most obviously in two book reviews published in the little magazine *The Pagan.* Here the decadent *manqué* unexpectedly begins to sound a little like a nineteenth-century French realist. In January, he publishes a positive review of Lola Ridge's *The Ghetto and Other Poems. The Ghetto,* he asserts, is a work "widely and minutely reflective of its time" in the manner of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* whose value stems less from its aesthetic achievements than its "sincerity" and "social significance" (150). He quotes with approbation several lines from the second part of Ridge's "Frank Little at Calvary":

Over the black bridge
The line of lighted cars
Creeps like a monstrous serpent
Spooring gold. . . .

Watchman, what of the track?

Night. . . . silence. . . . stars. . . .
All's well! (qtd. 149)

Although he does not specify what draws him to this passage, one can speculate. The image of automobiles passing over a bridge at night will reappear several years later in Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge" ("Again the traffic lights . . . skim thy swift / Unfractioned idiom . . . Beading thy path" [34]), and he will recycle Ridge's odd use of "spoor" as a verb in his lyric "Cape Hatteras" ("Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky" [55]). Likewise, Ridge's deliberate misquotation of Isaiah 22:11 ("Watchman, what of the night?") and near-mention of Shakespeare (*All's Well That Ends Well*) prefigure the jaunty jagged collage-texture of "The River" and "Cutty Sark." In short, she provides a poetic idiom that Crane will be able to draw on successfully as he moves from the symbolist dreamscapes that populate his first book, *White Buildings* (1926), to the modern industrial landscapes to be found in his second, *The Bridge.*

He wasn't there yet, however. Lola Ridge's lines would have to percolate in his subconscious for several years before he would know how to respond to them. A second book review from 1919 shows him taking his first steps on that long path. It, too, illustrates a deepening interest in art "reflective of its time," and again Crane refers to Balzac as a touchstone (150). This time, though, he is positively effusive and unqualified in his praise. He has discovered a new literary hero:

Beyond an expression of intense gratitude to the author, it is hard to say a word in regard to a book such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio.* The entire paraphernalia of criticism is insignificant, erected against the walls of such a living monument. (152)

Crane clearly identifies with Anderson's subject matter, "a certain period in the development of America's 'Middle West,' so called," and he finds impressive Anderson's ability to suggest "local garments and habits" with an "economy of detail" (152-53). But what most excites him in *Winesburg is* Anderson's ability to elevate everyday life in his home state into great art, the stuff of "epics, tragedies, and idylls." He conjures "everlasting beauty" as well as "ironic humor and richness" out of "windows, alleys, and lanes" of a small Ohio town (similar, perhaps, to Garrettsville, where the poet was born). The review's tone, a mix of awe and envy, is easily explained. One can almost hear Crane pondering whether he, too, might join the ranks of the immortals to which he compares Anderson—such writers as Lucretius and de Maupassant—by ceasing to copy British models and instead writing about what he knew best, the Cuyahoga Valley where he was raised? Could he, too, add "an important chapter in the Bible of [America's] consciousness" (153)?

The *Winesburg* review dates to September 1919. By mid-November the poet was back in Ohio working for the family business, the Crane Chocolate Company. His father assigned him "a position" in a "new store" in Akron, where he was supposed to sell candy during the holiday season (214). Crane *fils* described the setting to his old friend Gorham Munson in a letter:

I was down there [at the new store] yesterday, and find that he has a wonderful establishment,—better than anything of its kind in New York. It's too bad too waste it all on Akron, but there seems to be a lot of money there that the rubber tire people have made. The place is burgeoning with fresh growth. A hell of a place. The streets are full of the debris from old buildings that are being torn down to replace factories etc. It looks, I imagine, something like the western scenes of some of Bret Harte's stories. I saw about as many Slavs and jews [sic] on the streets as on [New York City's] Sixth Ave. Indeed the main and show street of the place looks something like Sixth ave. [sic] without the elevated. (214)

Akron—meaning "the high place" in Greek—had been important since the early nineteenth century due to its location at the highest point on a system of locks and canals linking Lake Erie and the Ohio River. In the later nineteenth century rubber companies began to open factories in the area because of the ease of access both to the Great Lakes and to the American heartland. The explosive growth that Crane observed, however, is a feature of one decade in particular, 1910 to 1920, when, piggy-backing on the success of Henry Ford's Model T, companies such as Goodyear and Firestone turned Akron into the biggest producer of rubber tires in the world. In just ten years, the town's population ballooned from 69,067 to 208,435, an increase of over two hundred percent. Moreover, almost twenty percent of the new inhabitants in Akron 1910-1920 were foreign-born. When Crane arrived, the city was a frontier-like

boomtown dominated by people from elsewhere, many from as far as Warsaw or Beirut. Encountering this newly-sprouted metropolis, Crane gropes for an adequate way to depict it, resorting at last to paradox: the Wild West superimposed on Manhattan. For a nascent realist, this breakdown of straightforward description signals a serious problem, moreover, a problem that *Winesburg, Ohio*, with its focus on hot-house know-everyone small-town life, could not help resolve. What vocabulary, imagery, or symbolism could ever truthfully and precisely describe Akron's rapid drastic expansion and transformation? Any moment wrested from the flux would be like a snapshot, accurate for a day and outdated thereafter. Under such circumstances, what would constitute a "proper treatment" (153)?

The relative rootlessness of the Akron population added another complication. The city's factories and support businesses drew large numbers of unattached young men. Living in boarding houses far from kin, and flush (at least once a pay period) with cash, these men were relatively free to act on their impulses, even to reinvent themselves completely. If they wished, they could interact across class, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and racial lines that would have been much less permeable "back home." For young gay men—like Crane—this social fluidity allowed rampant opportunities to meet potential romantic partners (or one-night stands). A poem that Crane never published, "Episode of Hands," retells one such chance encounter between himself and an unnamed laborer in his father's factory. The man cuts his hand, presumably in a workplace accident, and the poet bandages the injury. One can almost hear a swell of schmaltzy B-movie music in the background:

And as the fingers of the factory owner's son,
That knew a grip for books and tennis
As well as one for iron and leather,—
As his taut, spare fingers wound the gauze
Around the thick bed of the wound,
His own hands seemed to him
Like wings of butterflies
Flickering in sunlight over summer fields . . . .
And factory sounds and factory thoughts
Were banished from him by that larger, quieter hand
That lay in his with the sun upon it.
And as the bandage knot was tightened
The two men smiled into each other's eyes. (115)

During the last months of 1919, Crane gained the courage to come out to his friend Munson, and he refers repeatedly thereafter in their correspondence to an "affair," "the most intense and satisfactory one of my whole life" (220). This "affair" continued even after Crane's father pulls the plug on the Akron venture and the poet relocated to Cleveland. (Apparently, even with the rapidly

increasing local population in the City of Rubber, the price of labor was still so "exorbitant" that C.A. couldn't cover the costs of running a shop in a "poor" location [220].) The two lovebirds, though, were still able to be together on weekends: "I live from Saturday to Saturday . . . [W]hatever might happen, I am sure of a wonderful pool of memories" (224).

This situation presented an obvious obstacle for a poet in the throes of a literary crush on Sherwood Anderson. While homosexuality had surfaced in US literature prior to 1919—it is, for example, hinted at in Anderson's short story "Hands"—not even Walt Whitman's notoriously homoerotic Calamus poems could provide many pointers when it came to celebrating a potentially long term, unapologetically blissful gay male relationship. Writing about his current private life, even obliquely, would require him to enter uncharted territory. If Crane planned to break with the retro-1890s style of his early verse by forcing himself to attend to and accurately portray the modern world in which he lived, he had to solve the puzzle of Akron.

II.

One option Crane explored was to write short verse vignettes rich in psychological "suggestiveness" (153). "Episode of Hands" is one such poem; so too is "My Grandmother's Love Letters," in which an autobiographical speaker, on a rainy night, contemplates

> the letters of my mother's mother,
> Elizabeth,
> That have been pressed so long
> Into a corner of the roof
> That they are brown and soft,
> And liable to melt as snow. (5)

These poems show Anderson's influence. They take humble people in everyday circumstances and discover in them "epics, tragedies, and idylls" (153). He, like the short story writer, seeks to "elicit the sympathy, or at least, the understanding of his auditor toward each and every one of the characters" (152). True, Crane does not try to emulate the turns and twists of plot in *Winesburg*. His short lyrics give himself no room to experiment with narrative (or any other means of introducing and connecting multiple episodes or points of view). As a consequence, these poems come off as a bit static by comparison to the stories in *Winesburg*. They are closer to *tableaux vivants* than dynamic portraits.

"Garden Abstract" demonstrates why this "distilled Anderson" approach to writing lyrics ultimately proved limiting and therefore unsatisfactory. Originally written in first person, the poem audaciously attempts to present a gay man's sexual awakening (Woods 144). Instead of setting the poem in or

near the crowded dirty streets of Akron, however, he placed his speaker in a pastoral setting, beside a fruit-bearing tree. Anderson, again, seems to have been the inspiration. The poet admired "the simplicity of A's great power of suggestion" when treating scenes of "sex-awakening;" he employs organic metaphors such as "the sap is mounting into the tree," which Crane considers to be "most mocking to the analyst" because they identify eros with "Nature," moreover, a "Nature" to which "one so willing and happily surrender[s]" (236). Although the version of "Garden Abstract" that appeared in *White Buildings* substitutes "she" for "I"—the "phallic theme" proved too in-your-face for the 1920s literary world to accept without a heterosexual makeover (229)—a potent erotic undertow remains:

The apple on its bough is her desire,—
Shining suspension, mimic of the sun.
The bough has caught her breath up, and her voice,
Dumbly articulate in the slant and rise
Of branch on branch above her, blurs her eyes.
She is prisoner of the tree and its green fingers. (7)

What is lost when "I" becomes "she" is a sense of immediate intimate correspondence between body and external nature, the "Dumbly articulate . . . slant and rise" of an erection in unconscious "mimic" of phallic boughs and branches (7). Regardless, though, whether the speaker is male or female, the poem does effectively convey what it is like to become a "prisoner" of primal biological impulses that have nothing to do with higher brain functions. The rational, sentient part of a person seems to vanish altogether, leaving no sense of separation between oneself and nature's constant unthinking surge and flow of forces: "she comes to dream herself the tree, / The wind possessing her . . . Drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight." In such a rapturous state, an individual loses touch with everything except the here and now: "She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope / Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet" (8).

"Garden Abstract" both is and is not a success. It is an acute portrait of young person verging on adulthood, akin to Cherubino's aria "Voi che sapete" from *The Marriage of Figaro*. Compared to Crane's early poetry, its diction is simplified and vigorous, and it prefers the compression and vividness of metaphor to languid similes. The lyric does not, however, convey any clear connection between its tableau and the place and time of its composition. The scene it depicts could occur in many different locales or decades. While some poets prize precisely this kind of abstraction from the particularities that give rise to a poem—Wallace Stevens comes to mind—removing an instant from time's flow is a rhetorical operation not unlike writing an anachronistic poem, that is, one that appears to belong to a different era. In both cases, a poet strives to achieve ends other than fidelity to the present moment. "Garden Abstract" is a decisive advance on "In Shadow," the lyric Pound despised, insofar as Crane

has learned to incorporate psychological realism into his verse. It is not much better, though, at suggesting a groundedness in the material reality of modern life, nor does it permit him more latitude in exploring how eros might fit into the amorphous mercurial society of the 1910s.

To become the bard of Akron-on-Cuyahoga, Crane had to start writing longer poems. That, in turn, also meant that he had to start writing lyrics that consisted of more than a single highly charged, introspective episode. Moreover, he had to find ways of letting the outside world more fully into his poems. At this important crossroads, he could have stuck with Anderson and studied the narrative techniques characteristic of US realist fiction. This possibility might sound outrageous to anyone familiar with Crane's later work, especially *The Bridge*. Nevertheless, it was an option, and even if he did not seriously consider it, he recognized its viability. In December 1919 he writes Munson and expresses his "enthusiasm" for a long narrative poem by another eminent Midwesterner: Edgar Lee Master's "Spring Lake," from his collection *Starved Rock* (221). This rollicking strange eleven-part poem tells the story of a staid town gone suddenly inexplicably cuckoo, and it tracks the adventures of Alice the psychic and the cornet player "[w]ho enticed the wife of Starling Turner / And kidnapped Imogene" (134). Crane, even at age twenty, assuredly had the taste not to imitate Masters's skeltonics, but he could have committed to experimenting with continuous verse narratives. Eventually, he might have turned out a book comparable to such Pulitzer Prize-winning volumes as Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body* (1928) and E.A. Robinson's *Tristram* (1927).

Providentially for literary history, Hart Crane was reading another poet, too, during December 1919. In the same letter that he praises Masters he goes on to say that "[m]ore and more" he is turning toward T.S. Eliot "for values" (221). At this point, of course, Eliot was not yet a New Critical god. He had published only one book, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). The extreme fragmentation and eccentric erudition of "The Waste Land"(1922) still lay in the future, as did *The Sacred Wood* (1920), which cemented his reputation as the *arbiter elegantiarum* of Anglo-American literary modernism. Eliot did, however, in "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock," offer an extraordinary and *très, très moderne* portrait of London. From the opening simile comparing the sky to "a patient etherised upon a table" to the closing image of Prufrock walking by the sea with "the bottoms of [his] trousers rolled," Eliot's poem serves up one *choc* after another (3-7). Along the way, he provides spot-on anecdotes and epigrams about English polite society and its hidden neuroses. Dramatic irony, apt allusions to Shakespeare, rampant feminine rhymes, and an array of other virtuosic techniques both deepen a reader's appreciation of Prufrock as a character and inflect in informative ways the poem's portrait of a wholly, identifiably twentieth-century metropolis. Finally—and for present purposes, most significantly—instead of narrative the poem relies for its unity on tone, atmosphere, and repeated motifs, structural devices more often associated with

music than fiction.

In mid-1920, Crane writes his first multi-part poem, a true breakthrough into a new style, what he calls his "Akron suite" (240). Its title alone—"Porphyro in Akron"—signals a shift in literary allegiances away from Anderson and toward Eliot. Porphyro is the name of the chief male character in John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820), a long poem in Spenserian stanzas which fancifully reworks the folk superstition that young women will dream about their future husbands the night before St. Agnes's feast day. Porphyro, in love with Madeline, sneaks into her chamber on the night of 20 January (the eve in question) and insures that, when she wakes, the first thing that she will see is him, in hopes that she will think that she is still dreaming and become convinced that he is her future spouse. Keats's tale of confusion between reality and fantasy is written in an intensely lyrical style forthrightly indebted to the medieval romance tradition. Plunking "Porphyro" down in "Akron" was a way of directly engaging what till now had remained implicit: What happens to a poet steeped in the masterpieces of British literature past who finds himself in a polyglot middle American insta-city? Could fey medievalisms be used to celebrate the Rubber Tire Capital? This scenario could be a tragic one—a reiteration of the alienated artist *topos* so common in modernism—but the title carries a hint of self-mockery. As an authorial stand-in, Porphyro is faintly ridiculous. No Michelangelo, his primary artistic gesture is to redecorate sleeping Madeline's bedroom by stacking "candied apple, quince, and plums, and gourd," and assorted other "spiced dainties" and "delicates" on "golden dishes and in baskets bright / Of wreathed silver" (274-75). And this artistry is not for the ages: it is to dupe Madeline, to make her think that she is still dreaming, and then to permit him to woo her under false pretenses. Porphyro the deceiver and Akron the get-rich-quick boomtown might, in fact, have more to offer one another than initially meets the eye. Crane's "Akron suite" contains subtle ironies foreign to the straight-ahead, stoic style of *Winesburg.*

Indeed, one of the things it ironizes is Midwestern realism. Part one of "Porphyro in Akron" opens with a free verse passage that (except for the sly, slant-rhyme triplet in lines 1-3) sounds more like, say, Carl Sandburg's *Smoke and Steel* (1920) than Crane:

Greeting the dawn,
A shift of rubber workers presses down
South Main.
With the stubbornness of muddy water
It dwindles at each cross-line
Until you feel the weight of many cars
North-bound, and East and West,
Absorbing and conveying weariness,—
Rumbling over the hills. (98)

In these streets given over to laboring men and the transportation of goods, there is no obvious place for Porphyro. In such a setting, what relevance might fancifully romantic nineteenth-century preoccupations have, whether it be William Morris's interest in Norse legends or Swinburne's Hellenic paganism? In Akron, references to the Old World are more likely to be literal than literary:

The dark-skinned Greeks grin at each other
In the streets and alleys.
The Greek grins and fights with the Swede,—
And the Fjords and the Aegean are remembered. (99)

The speaker tries to find an appropriate diction to celebrate the manly men of Akron. First he tries for a Biblical-prophetic register, but his echo of Isaiah 2:4 ("They will beat their swords into plowshares") veers quickly into the ridiculous: "The plough, the sword, / The trowel,—and the monkey wrench!" Then he tries for odic posturing, but again, the contemporary references undercut that stance, too: "O City, your axles need not the oil of song." In full pyrrhic retreat, he echoes the downbeat close of "Prufrock," consigning himself to irrelevance:

I will whisper words to myself
And put them in my pockets.
I will go and pitch quoits with old men
In the dust of the road.

Crane knew his Eliot well: "dust," "old men," and "whisper" are a classic objective correlative for sterility, and "pitch[ing] quoits" is Eliotic form of damnation. One gives up on higher things and shrinks into the meaningless roles and rituals of bourgeois life.

III.

If "Porphyro in Akron" ended there, it would be a no more than a somewhat depressing poem about the incompatibility of high art and twentieth century commerce. Conventional orchestral suites, though, contain both slow and fast movements, a sarabande as well as a gigue, and Crane's "Akron suite" likewise changes its affect as it moves from the first to second part. This new section begins with a short bridge passage:

And some of them "will be Americans",
Using the latest ice-box and buying Fords;
And others,— (99)

The Akron folk desiring the "latest ice-box" and the newest model Ford belong to the gray world of Part One, the Akron of weary labor, competition, and oil-rinsed axles. Who are the "others," though? Part Two takes up the topic of the easy sociability of strangers in a new land. The speaker is no longer a removed spectator of the city's comings and goings. He reminisces about spending a companionable afternoon with an immigrant family:

I remember one Sunday noon,
Harry and I, "the gentlemen",—seated around
A table of raisin-jack and wine, our host
Setting down a glass and saying,—

"One month,—I go back rich.
I ride black horse. . . . Have many sheep."
And his wife, like a mountain, coming in
With four tiny black-eyed girls around her
Twinkling like little Christmas trees. (99)

The setting is Sunday, not a weekday. The mood is not resignation but *Gemütlichkeit.* Dialogue appears for the first time, as does fantasy ("I go back rich") and glimmers of beauty and transcendence ("Christmas trees"). The "fights" and "stubbornness" of Akron's unfettered capitalism in Part One might be inimical to the poet, might force him into self-defeating irony, but, paradoxically, that marketplace also gives rise to new if transient forms of community in Part Two where poetry and art do find a welcome home (98-99):

some Sunday fiddlers,
Roumanian business men,
Played ragtime and dances before the door,
And we overpayed them because we felt like it. (99)

This kind of music, "Sunday fiddl[ing]," is a "business" perhaps, but it takes place in ephemeral spaces of joy and camaraderie ("ragtime and dances"), and money is an impoverished inadequate measure of what performers give audience ("we overpayed them because we felt like it"). Part Two does not so much contradict as supplement Part One. The roll of objective chronicler of the city might be barred to the poet in an era when verse is like "quoits," a game played only by men too old or unskilled to be part of the work force. Activities deemed profitless entertainment by bean counters, though, do have their place when judged by different standards, and poets as scribes and purveyors of dreams can thrive interstitially and opportunistically wherever people come together to forget the importunate demands of the Protestant work ethic.

Part Three provides yet another perspective, a more private and reflective one. It also adds a feeling of balance and completion to the work by tightening the

poem's focus yet further, from outdoor and public spaces (Part One) to shared domestic spaces (Part Two) to the privacy of the speaker's hotel bedroom (Part Three). (Narrative, as Crane was quickly discovering, was far from the only way to create momentum and logical coherence in multi-part work.) One might expect this final section to resemble the Anderson-ish character studies that he had been writing in the months previous, since the speaker is now alone, as well as in a room into which the *realia* of Akron life do not visibly intrude. It would fit Crane's recent pattern if Part Three launched into another abstracted portrait of a mental state, whether arousal ("Garden Abstract") or loss ("My Grandmother's Love Letters") or otherwise. Instead, the speaker's privacy is unexpectedly porous and populous, decisively shaped by his experiences with books, popular culture, and other people.

Right off, the diction is emphatically, even parodically American: "Pull down the hotel counterpane / And hitch yourself up to a book." Then, another text and mind intrude. Crane quotes the first three lines of a stanza from Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes":

> Full on this casement shown the wintry moon,
> And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
> As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
> Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
> And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
> And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
> She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
> Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
> She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint. (272)

At this point in the story, Porphyro has crept into Madeline's room, and he is watching her pray for a vision of her future husband. This stanza by itself can sound rather chaste, and Crane does end his quotation after the words "heaven's grace and boon." But anyone who obeys the poet's order and "hitch[es]" herself to Keats's *Lamia, Isabella, the Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems* (1820) knows very well that the next stanza turns into a strip tease:

> Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
> Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
> Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
> Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
> Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
> Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
> Pensive awhile she reams awake, and sees,
> In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
> But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled. (272-73)

Crane's speaker turns right to the "good part" of the poem, so to speak. What draws him to this semi-salacious scene? This variety of verse might be canonical but is neither prophetic nor rhapsodic (masks the speaker had tried out, unsuccessfully, in Part One). It is a poetry of gorgeous surfaces that titillates both the ear and inner sight. While Keats might not be everyone's favorite *livre de chevet*, he, too, like Part Two's Roumanian fiddlers, is shown to be capable of playing a joyful role in the world of Akron 1920.

Suddenly, the poem takes a wildly disorienting free associative leap. After spying on the "warm gules" of Madeline's "fair breast," abruptly and without transition a reader encounters a new quotation, this time in French: "Connais tu [sic] le pays . . . ?" (100). True, in 1920 the reference would have been much more obvious than it is today—a little like interjecting "It's been a hard day's night" into a 2007 poem—but why it appears would have been just as mysterious to audiences then as now. "Connais-tu le pays" was a popular aria from Ambroise Thomas's opera *Mignon* (1866) that would have been a standard part of any US amateur singer's repertoire well into the twentieth century. In the opera, after Wilhelm frees Mignon from the band of gypsies that had kidnapped her as a child, she shares what she dimly remembers of the land where she was born:

Connais-tu le pays où fleurit l'oranger,
Le pays des fruits d'or et des roses vermeilles,
Où la brise est plus douce et l'oiseau plus léger,
Où dans toute saison butinent les abeilles,
Où rayonne et sourit, comme un bienfait de Dieu,
Un éternel printemps sous un ciel toujours bleu?
Hélas! que ne pis-je te suivre
Vers ce rivage heureux d'où le sort m'exila!
C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais vire,
Aimer, aimer et mourir!
C'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là! oui, c'est là!

[Do you know the country where the orange tree flowers,
The country of golden fruit and vermillion roses,
Where the breeze is sweeter and the birds lighter
Where the bees gather nectar in every season
Where it glows and smiles, like a kindness from God,
An eternal spring under a blue sky?
Alas! that I cannot follow you
To the happy coast from which fate has exiled me!
It's there, it's there that I wish to live,
To love, to love and die!
It's there that I wish to live, it's there! yes, it's there!]

What if anything explains the speaker's non sequitur introduction of this song after only three lines of Keats? While the themes of love and longing connect "Eve of St. Agnes" and "Connais-tu le pays," Crane could easily have chosen any number of other texts (or arias) that share as much or more. The leap from Keats to *Mignon* seems calculated to register as a puzzle, a sequence of statements that invites readers better to understand the speaker's interior life. One certainly has the impression that there might be a inaccessibly private, missing term that could link A and B in a rationale manner. An ensuing flash-back contains a crucial clue:

Your mother sang that in a stuffy parlour
One summer day in a little town
Where you had started to grow.
And you were outside as soon as you
Could get away from the company
To find the only rose on the bush
In the front yard (100)

The speaker recalls a time when, still a boy, he slipped away from one of those interminable indoor "stuffy" adult occasions to which grown ups are forever subjecting their offspring. This escape "outside" offers a surprise, however. He finds a single "rose on the bush." Inside, his mother, pretending to be enslaved Mignon, had been singing about her ardent desire for "le pays des fruits d'or et des roses vermeilles," the land of golden fruits and vermillion roses. Her son has escaped captivity of a kind, only to discover . . . what, one of the roses his mother was singing about? Art uncannily, unexpectedly mirrors life. What counts as truth under such circumstances, what as dream? There's another twist, too. Thinking that he would be by himself, the boy instead finds a flower that has become indelibly associated with his mother, and with art. When and where can one be truly alone, if symbols stumbled on accidentally so easily recall to us our intimates? Out of such introspective moments are poets born.

Significantly, the rose in the yard explains the earlier leap from Keats to "Connais-tu le pays." The line immediately after Crane stops quoting "Eve of St. Agnes" mentions roses—"Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest" (272)—as does the second line of the aria, again, one line after Crane ceases quoting. The speaker has suppressed the image linking the two, though not irretrievably so. It emerges full-flower, as it were, only on the third occasion, creating in retrospect a coherence that had earlier been lacking. The poem thereby dramatizes how random thoughts, disparate texts, and stray memories can crystallize into form.

Of course, in a poem about art and the perpetually-changing modern city, such moments of crystallization do not last. The drift of the speaker's thoughts is rudely interrupted:

But look up, Porphyro,—your toes
Are ridiculously tapping
The spindles at the foot of the bed. (100)

Memory's tricks gives way to solid reality, and a wandering mind is recalled to the body ("toes . . . ridiculously tapping"). Or so it would appear, at least at first. This awakening, however, like the young boy's escape from the "stuffy parlor," in fact runs smack into a symbol, this time phallic "spindles at the foot of the bed" instead of the feminine rose. It's as if the speaker's restless feet complete another three-act movement: from purely textual and heteroerotic (Porphyro gazing at Madeline) to past-tense Oedipal (mother and son) to prospectively homoerotic (spindles in bed). "Porphyro in Akron" captures the quicksilver mobility, and inseparability, of thought, fantasy, and desire, what Sigmund Freud in another context would describe as the amazing malleability of the libido.

The poem draws to a close by making explicit what had been implicit throughout, Crane's quest to redefine the vocation of poet in response to Akron's challenge. He has left Balzac and Anderson far behind, and seeks a fluid transgressive voice for himself to rival what Eliot achieves in *Prufrock and Other Observations*:

And a hash of noises is slung up from the street.
You ought, really, to try to sleep,
Even though, in this town, poetry's a
Bedroom occupation. (100)

The speaker first returns to exaggeratedly American diction ("hash . . . slung up"). Crane underlines that this poem, unlike his earliest verse, is not subservient to the British tradition. One can read Keats without writing like him. One can even borrow his seeming-paradoxes, such as the proximity and interpenetration of truth ("really") and dream ("sleep"), and renew them to be relevant to "this town," where poetry, instead of the balm that Keats wished it to be, is a "Bedroom occupation." These last two words are richly ambiguous. On the face of it, they would appear to repeat the note of alienation and isolation that occurred at the end of Part One. Yet Part Two demonstrated that the artist's "business" exceeds and eludes the logic of the market—thus making "occupation" a similarly unsettled term—and Part Three has shown that a "bedroom" is hardly a retreat from questions of nationality, power, and identity. Bedrooms, as Crane knew well, were places where "affairs" go on that violate the norms and expectations of society at large. And this poem—a missive to the outside world—ends in the bedroom, with the poet listening to the "noises . . . slung up from the street" and responding with a display of his privatemost thoughts and feelings. Poetry as a bedroom occupation overcomes any separation between privacy and publicity, and it insists on active links between eco-

nomics, community, psychology, and self-fashioning. Moreover, instead of representing a refinement on realism à la Balzac or Anderson, poetry as a bedroom occupation breaks with it, recognizing that "the real" is slippery mutable concept. One person's reality is another's dream (or nightmare).

When he finished "Porphyro in Akron," Crane had fully modernized his poetry. He had fought through the fundamentally nineteenth-century modes of representation that had attracted him earlier in his career, and he had embarked on the project that would preoccupy him until the day of his suicide: Can one write poetry as endlessly variegated, as protean, as modern life itself? What rhetoric, what language, what forms are capable of accomplishing such a titanic task? In an important sense, every major Crane lyric wrote after 1920 amounts to a revision of, or coda to, the breakthrough that was "Porphyro in Akron."

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Vivien H. Pemberton

A Scholar Adventures: My Search for Hart Crane

The focus of the Bissell Symposium at Hiram College is the poet Hart Crane whose roots run deep in this Portage County area, even in this school. It was here that the poet's grandfather Arthur Edward Crane and grandmother Ella Melissa Beardsley, the "belle of Portage County" met when Arthur saw Ella in the chapel. Throughout his life Arthur was devoted to this institution contributing his time, his money, and his leadership when needed. His two daughters, sisters of Hart Crane's father Clarence Crane, also had deep connections to this campus. Alice Crane Williams, the poet's piano teacher and aunt, graduated from Hiram before going abroad to continue her music studies in Germany. Elizabeth Crane Madden, the poet's second aunt returned from Oberlin Conservatory to teach violin at Hiram and donated her beautiful instrument to the college before her death. *The American Weave* literary journal publisher and poet Loring Williams established the "Hart Crane—Alice Crane Williams Memorial Award" at Hiram in honor of his late wife and her nephew. Nearby Garrettsville was the home of the large Crane family and the birthplace of the poet. It is gratifying for me to see the poet has gained honor in his own country as evidenced by this well attended event hosted by Hiram College. And I am humbled to see on display here some of the rewards of my research on loan from Kent State University: Hart Crane's christening gown and a selection of some of his significant letters.

When I first became interested in Hart Crane and his poetry as a graduate student at Kent State University, little did I guess that interest would become a lingering avocation and an adventure which would lead me to meet many fascinating people and to form rich lifelong friendships with several of them. Enhancing those rewards was my acquisition of a treasure trove of correspondence and other materials which has greatly expanded our biographical knowledge of the poet and his milieu and significantly enlarged the Hart Crane Collection in the archives of the Kent State University Library. Other institutions, and even the village of Garrettsville, have enjoyed corresponding benefits along the way. Other Crane scholars have eagerly mined the materials I found in my search which began more than forty years ago when, after reading Crane's poetry and becoming captivated by it, I naturally wanted to know about the poet who hailed from Garrettsville, Ohio, so close to my home and school. I was especially interested in learning about his cultural heritage; surely he had sprung from rich roots! The only biography available then was Philip Horton's, *Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet* (1937) which I promptly read but sensed there was surely more to learn. Curious to know about his Garrettsville beginnings and whether or not anyone still living remembered this gifted Ohioan, I decided to explore his background. When I began my search, there was little local knowledge *of* or interest *in* the poet, which made

my search for Hart Crane especially challenging.

I was fortunate, however, in finding several key sources of both facts and artifacts in each of the four Ohio places where the poet had successively lived: Garrettsville, Warren, Cleveland, and Chagrin Falls. My exploring was not necessarily done in that order; I was often working simultaneously in several places with different people.

I began chronologically in Garrettsville where Harold Hart Crane had been born to Clarence Arthur Crane and Grace Hart Crane on July 21, 1899. His birthplace was an imposing dwelling on Freedom Street that had been a wedding gift from the Arthur Cranes, his grandparents who lived in the larger more elegant house next door, now the rectory for St. Ambrose Church. In my early search, the only reference I found to him in the town was the inscription "Harold Hart Crane 1899-1932 Lost at Sea" which his stepmother Elizabeth (Bessie) Meacham Crane had had carved into his father Clarence Crane's headstone in Evergreen Cemetery.

However, I soon discovered one of my primary sources of information about the area and the family through the pages of small print found in the many years of large old, bound volumes of *The Garrettsville Journal.* The newspaper's editor William Dickey permitted me to take them to my home in Bristolville where I could search through them and glean many bits of valuable information about the Crane family, its varied cultural and educational interests, its solid standing in the community, its business and political activities, and young Harold and the little town in which he "had started to grow."At one time, the poet's uncle Cassius Crane was the editor of the *Journal* and his uncle Frederic Crane contributed many articles and poems to it under several different editors. The poet's grandfather, Arthur Crane, contributed historical pieces, poetry, and accounts of the family's travels. In its pages I read the vital statistics of the family: the births, the marriages, and the deaths. And from its contents I learned exactly when Clarence Crane moved his family to Warren, then when both Arthur and Clarence moved their families to Cleveland, along with frequent accounts of their many return visits to the village where most of the Cranes remained. The old papers proved to be a repository of family information indeed! However, in addition to the knowledge I gained from them, Hiram College also benefited when, at my suggestion, Mr. Dickey donated those dusty old tomes to the Hiram College Archives where they could be used by others interested in studying the history of the area and its people.

Following my study of *The Garrettsville Journal,* I visited the Portage County Historical Society in Ravenna where its genealogist Orral Frank helped me a great deal when she directed me to old regional biographical atlases and pamphlets containing the valuable early history of the Crane and Streator families in Portage County. Apparently fearing I might discredit the poet's family, Miss

Frank wrote me a cautionary letter saying:

By the way, don't blame Hart Crane's peculiarities on his parents and his upbringing. The Crane family had many bankers, businessmen, lawyers, teachers, etc...Hart proved the inherent weakness in himself. The Mr. Crane who started the Crane Candy Store and owned Canary Cottage Restaurant in Chagrin Falls was from this line too. The Streators were also a good line...Don't downgrade Hart Crane's ancestors!

Miss Frank's attitude was typical of that which I found in the area in the 1960s. Among those who knew of their native son, I sensed in most a feeling more of shame than of pride.

One source led to another. Through Garrettsville historian Georgia Alford, I met the vivacious octogenarian Ida Vanderslice Scott. Her family had owned and operated the Old Garrettsville Mill, and she delighted in telling the old stories of the town and its people. More importantly, she was well informed about the Crane family tree and all its branches. She was acquainted with several of its members and knew their whereabouts. Moreover, she proudly recalled young Harold Crane and his family and pleasantly shocked me by having a copy of his collected poems. It was she who was instrumental in my getting to know both sides of Hart Crane's family. She told me of the poet's Crane kin in Cleveland and directed me to his only surviving Hart relatives in Warren, both of whom I would get to know very well.

I was not really surprised to learn that Ida Vanderslice Scott also knew the Streators and corresponded regularly with the poet's elderly distant cousins, former Garrettsville residents, Francelia Streator Crawford and her uncle, Sidney Streator in Idaho. When I wrote to them, both were cordial and eager to share with me their own biographies and their memories of Hart Crane and his family. That was not all they shared: from Sidney I acquired for Kent State Library the more than forty 1881-1925 research diaries of his father, the Portage County amateur naturalist George Jason Streator. Mr. Streator was honored to know his father's work would thus be preserved. (Kent biologist Ralph W. Dexter has published several scholarly papers based on them.) And happily for me, Francelia offered me the chance to purchase my first Hart Crane first edition, his 1926 *White Buildings* which had been a gift from the poet to his great aunt, Lucy Crane Carnahan shortly after it was published. Needless to say, I accepted her offer.

In 1966, I joined the faculty of Kent State University Trumbull Campus in Warren, Ohio, where my research further took me. Warren was the original home of his mother's people and where she was born. It was also the place where Hart Crane and his parents had lived from his second through his ninth year. Over the years, Warren proved to be an invaluable source of first-person

recollections and Hart Crane memorabilia. Several childhood friends were still living in the area and possessed clear memories of their young playmate. But the most important contributors to my Warren Crane research were Helen Hart Hurlbert, the poet's only Hart first cousin, born in 1892, and her daughter Zell Hurlbert Draz born in 1923. Helen's mother Zell Smith Hart Deming had been Crane's godmother and his life-long confidante. Helen, who succeeded her mother as publisher of *The Warren Tribute Chronicle*, had long been interested in promoting, preserving, and perpetuating her cousin's memory and literary reputation in Ohio and found in me a willing partner in her endeavors.

As publisher of *The Tribune*, Mrs. Hurlbert gave me access to its files, but even more generously, gave me family photographs, including unpublished ones of Hart Crane, and a clipping file she had kept about Hart Crane and his work containing reviews and articles from national publications. Helen could never accept two pertinent facts about her cousin: one that he was a homosexual, and two, that he had killed himself. Of the two, suicide seemed to be the more objectionable to her, perhaps because both her father Frank Hart and her grandfather James Smith had killed themselves—her father, while Helen was still an infant, by morphine overdose, possibly accidental—and her grandfather by a self-inflicted gunshot. But for whatever her reason for doing so, she had heavily censored many of the reviews and articles in her file, either by excising portions or by blacking them out altogether. Of course her clippings guided me to their originals which made a telling comparison and revealed her painful reluctance to accept what had been written about her younger well-loved cousin. While I was overwhelmed by these items, she tantalized me further with the promise of even more exciting gifts when she wrote me a note saying, "Did I tell you I have Hart's baptismal gown—which when I can get up on the 3rd floor to locate—I'll send it to you, if you want it. have a large briefcase with Hart Crane memorabilia, etc. that also needs to be gone over." In several later notes she referred to the gown in her attic as his "christening gown," but she was consistent in promising the gown to me—*if* I wanted it; I didn't know how she could believe otherwise.

Following Warren, Hart Crane's next home was Cleveland where he lived periodically for much of the rest of his short life. Even after the acrimonious divorce of the poet's parents and later the poet's death, the Hart and Crane sides of his family had maintained contact with each other and remained on cordial terms. This relationship prompted Helen to introduce me to Clarence Crane's sister in Cleveland, Elizabeth Crane Madden, the poet's beloved "Auntie Bess," and her daughter Elizabeth (Betty) Crane Madden, his adoring younger cousin. On the basis of Helen's recommendation they accepted me from the start. We developed a trusting relationship then, and over the years, as with Helen, a close friendship that lasted the rest of their lives. Perhaps because they believed the Cranes, particularly Clarence, had been much maligned by

Philip Horton in his biography of Crane and by Waldo Frank in his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* (1933), Mrs. Madden and Betty were eager to show me a different side of the family and, as Mrs. Madden said, "set the record straight." They were also happy to share with me details of the family's cultural heritage, my particular area of interest.

Bess and Betty introduced me to other members of the extended family, who, as did they, permitted me to examine firsthand the writings, musical compositions, and paintings that clearly revealed Hart Crane's heritage. For example, Frederica Crane Lewis lent me her father Frederic's voluminous book of poetry; Loring Williams provided me with his late wife's catalog of published music so I could purchase several pieces. He also gave me the little magazines in which her poetry had been published. Bess gave me old concert programs from Alice's career as a concert pianist. They also shared with me books and copies of family photographs and letters, Bess and her grandmother's paintings, Betty's ceramics. Betty permitted me to read both her Grandfather and Grandmother's exquisitely written and meticulously kept diaries. Arthur had written his symbolic will in his in which he bestowed his literary interest to his descendents. From the information I had gathered on the poet's background, I knew he had indeed sprung from rich roots and wrote about it at length in my essay, "Hart Crane's Heritage" in *Artful Thunder: Visions of the Romantic in American Literature in Honor of Howard P. Vincent* (1975) Eds. DeMott and Marovitz.

All the Crane women possessed keen memories and supplied me with vital information essential to bridging gaps in Hart Crane's biography. One such contributor was Helen Crane Sherwood whose mother Alma Crane, Hart's great aunt and the family nurse, attended Grace Crane at the poet's birth and years later after her suicide attempt when she nursed Grace totally at home to avoid a trip to the hospital and possible public exposure. This important episode in Crane's life I first revealed in my essay "Broken Intervals..." in *The Visionary Company* (1983). Another important person I came to know through Bess and Betty was the poet's stepmother, Elizabeth (Bessie) Crane Hise. She talked of the poet's tranquil time spent with her and his father at Crane's Canary Cottage, their beautiful "carriage trade" restaurant and home in Chagrin Falls before he went to Mexico where he spent his final days. When I met her, she had again been widowed and was in the process of selling the property which she had earlier maintained as an antique shop with her second husband Donald Hise. From her I purchased a childhood oil portrait of Hart Crane which I continue to treasure.

After her mother's death, Betty Crane Madden became as interested in memorializing her cousin Hart Crane as was Helen Hart Hurlbert. Eventually, the two counterpart cousins worked together toward that goal in Garrettsville.

Helen, meanwhile, continued to be very serious about honoring Crane's memory in Warren. Her first attempt was to request the city council name a new bridge being constructed over the Mahoning River in his honor to call attention to him, to his childhood in Warren, and to his most celebrated work, *The Bridge.* She published supporting letters written by scholars and students in her *Tribune.* Her request was nevertheless rejected—with no explanation.

She did not abandon her quest, however. Kent State Trumbull officials realized that the campus had outgrown its renovated factory office building in Warren when classes were also having to be held elsewhere in the city. The trustees decided to build a large permanent campus in Warren to accommodate the increasing demands of the area. A lovely and convenient site was secured, plans were drawn by the architects, and fund raising was begun in earnest involving many of us in the Trumbull Campus community. My assignment was to solicit a generous donation from Mrs. Hurlbert. I was overjoyed when she responded to my request with a pledge for a very large contribution to go toward the building. It carried with it, however, her expressed provision that the library itself, although housed in a multipurpose building, be designated "The Hart Crane Library." The Trumbull Campus Board of Trustees graciously accepted her donation, but when the new campus was completed, declined to honor her request for the library to be so named out of the concern that, as one board member put it, people would call it "Fairy Land."

Disappointed again in her efforts, Helen enlisted Betty Madden to work with the two of us in getting an official Ohio historical marker erected at the poet's birthplace in Garrettsville. We sought permission from the home's owner, from the village, and from the Ohio State Historical Society for a marker to be erected on the site like those used at other designated historical places throughout the state. Helen and Betty would underwrite all costs. We received permission from all concerned and plans were made for the bronze plaque to be cast and a ceremony to be held at its unveiling on July 21, 1974, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the birth of the poet. Pulitzer Prize winning poet Richard Howard wrote a poem for the occasion, and the event under the auspices of Kent Sate University Library was planned. Unfortunately, the birthplace owner had evidently not understood who was to be involved in the ceremony. As luck would have it, he was an officer in the Ohio National Guard. Kent State University had been the site of the May 4, 1970, tragedy involving student Vietnam War protesters and the Ohio National Guard in which four students were killed. As a result, the home owner withdrew his consent. Consequently, a small 75th anniversary celebration was held at Garrettsville's Evergreen Cemetery near the large Crane family plot where Crane's name, birth, and death dates appeared on the marker of his father. Appropriately, the second portion of the ceremony took place about 500 yards from Crane's birthplace on the bridge by Garrettsville's historic old mill and mill-race, mentioned by Crane in "The Dance" section of *The Bridge.* This portion depicts sites known

by Crane from his Hiram-Garrettsville visits of his youth: the village, the mill-race, the hills and waterfalls nearby, the portage climb to a different watershed. It was a fitting alternative choice. The larger commemoration was held on the Kent Campus. Both Betty Crane Madden and Helen Hart Hurlbert who wished to memorialize their cousin in Garrettsville were deeply disappointed; so was I. It was years before a marker was placed at Crane's birthplace.

1976 marked an exciting year in my Crane search when I learned of the large cache of Hart Crane's correspondence, books, and miscellaneous materials which had been in storage at Crane's Canary Cottage in Chagrin Falls since the poet's death more than forty years before. Upon her sale of Canary Cottage and her move to a retirement community, Bessie Crane Hise had passed them on to Betty Madden for Betty to decide their final disposition. I learned of the materials shortly after Betty received them when she asked me to go through them and choose an appropriate letter for her to donate to the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, of which she was a member. I selected the letter dated April 1, 1917, from Hart Crane to his father because it mentioned Cleveland sites. Through a temporary loan, many of the letters had already become a permanent part of the Hart Crane collection of a major university without the family's consent, despite the legal efforts of Betty's attorney father to retrieve them. For that reason, Betty wanted to determine the final dispensation of her documents and promised—in time—to pass the correspondence on to me to place in the growing Hart Crane Collection at Kent State University Library. For the time being however, she made photocopies of every letter and postcard for me and gave me permission to use them so long as I did not reveal their ownership. She was very pleased at the prospect of her letters eventually going to Kent State. She liked the university's size and its location in the home county of the Cranes, Portage County. She also like the security provided by the archival care the letters would receive and the thought of their being there as a permanent memorial to Hart Crane. The memorial component especially interested her following her disappointment when she and Helen tried and failed to have an historical marker placed at the poet's birthplace in Garrettsville.

With her permission and encouragement, I began to work with her materials and published probably the most important item in her Crane collection in my essay, "Hart Crane and Yvor Winters, Rebuttal and Review: A New Crane Letter," *American Literature* 50 (1978) which was later included in David R. Clark's *Critical Essay on Hart Crane* (1982). Among Betty's materials I had discovered Crane's fragile carbon copy of his long-sought June 4, 1930, letter to Yvor Winters following Winter's excoriating review of *The Bridge*. Although Winters kept other Crane letters, he presumably destroyed this one since the original has not yet been found. Crane's letter is such a lucid, eloquent and impassioned defense of his work that it is almost painful to read. Thanks to Betty Madden and her generosity to me, it is now available and can be read by all who want to read it.

From time to time I used other Crane letters, photographs, and recollections in articles I published about the poet in different issues of *The Hart Crane Newsletter, The Ohioana Quarterly, The Icon, Western Reserve Studies,* and *The Visionary Company.* In my essay, "Broken Intervals—The Continuing Biography of Hart Crane" in *The Visionary Company* (1982), I summarized some of the information, major and minor, which I had discovered through my years of research. These facts included the name of Alverez Bravo, the Mexican photographer who had photographed David Siqueiros' brooding portrait of Hart Crane before the poet himself destroyed it. And, helping to clarify Crane's chronology, I wrote of Clarence Crane's maple syrup cannery in Warren in 1901 as "the largest of its kind in the world." A discovery I alluded to earlier was the suicide attempt of the poet's mother Grace after his father Clarence refused to remarry her. I wrote about this with specific details to which no one else had access. This event seems to me to be crucial to the understanding of the relationships within Hart Crane's family. Especially important from the relatives' viewpoint was the conclusion I drew, from the letters themselves, that Crane's father had been more supportive of his son both emotionally and financially than was previously believed. This essay has been the most used of my published writings; it has also been the least documented.

Disappointed in her attempts and still undeterred in her determination to memorialize her cousin, Helen Hart Hurlbert finally just presented Garrettsville with a large rose quartz boulder with a suitably inscribed bronze plaque honoring Hart Crane and arranged for it to be placed on village property beside the replica of the Old Opera House tower under construction on the site of the original building. The dedication ceremony, at which I had the honor of being the guest speaker, was held on November 20, 1978. Mrs. Hurlbert at age 86 was too frail to be present, but it was well attended by town officials, villagers, representatives of the *Warren Tribune,* students and professors from Hiram College, Cleveland State, and Kent State Universities. The guests of honor were Hart's cousins Zell Hurlbert Draz and Betty Crane Madden. Mrs. Hurlbert was so touched by the town's willingness to accept her gift that she made a generous contribution toward the completion of the tower and the restoration of Garrettsville's historic town clock.

In 1979 Zell Hurlbert Draz, Helen's only child, succeeded her mother as the publisher of the Warren Tribune Chronicle. She thus continued the family dynasty of the Warren newspaper by becoming the third woman in succession to head the publication following in the footsteps of her grandmother Zell Hart Deming, who was the first woman member of the Associated Press, and her mother Helen Hart Hurlbert who served as the publisher for fifty years. Until then, Zell had made only occasional visit home before her return to Warren. She and her three sons had lived abroad much of the time and in the East otherwise.

Zell, who had childhood memories of her cousin Hart Crane, continued with her mother's interest in preserving his memory by assuming the cost of funding the annual "Hart Crane Poetry Award" sponsored by the Kent Trumbull Campus Department of English with the winning entries published in The Icon, the school's literary magazine. She also introduced me to the avant-garde "Miss Finny," Luise Finny Young, the Warren area's legendary piano teacher. Zell, who was periodically estranged from Helen, called her mother's age-mate her "spiritual mother." Miss Finny had long been a friend of Helen through whom she had met Hart Crane. She was very perceptive about him and his poetry and shared with me her vivid memories of him. We sometimes read and discussed his poetry together. Without a doubt, she was the most fascinating woman I have ever known. Completely unconventional, she had lived in France and eloped with her Father's gardener with whom she shared an enduring marriage. Her wide circle of friends and acquaintances had included the mystic P.D. Ouspensky, author of Tertium Organum and Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel laureate poet. Thus it is no surprise that she and Crane had enjoyed each other's company enormously when he visited his cousin Helen in Warren. In memory of him, when Miss Finney died in 1979, she left the bulk of her sizable estate to the Trumbull Campus of Kent State University for fine arts programs and scholarships. She also left the school her Steinway concert grand piano. Her star student, professional pianist Michael Roberts returned from New York to perform in Kent Trumbull's first "Miss Finny Performing Arts Series." Zell was very pleased about her friend's bequest and most likely encouraged her to make it. So was I.

Without the duties of The Tribune, Helen Hart Hurlbert with Zell's help, finally had time to explore her cavernous third floor and find among the clutter the Crane memorabilia she had so often promised me, beginning a decade earlier, and which I had begun to have doubts about ever seeing. She and sometimes Zell began giving me the items piecemeal as they found them. Each item was clearly labeled in Helen's bold distinctive script and mailed or given directly to me usually in a large manila envelope bearing Warren Tribune Chronicle in the corner. The memorabilia included photographs, books, letters, and the long-promised prize: Hart Crane's long, exquisitely embroidered christening gown. Another gift was Elizabeth Belden Hart's school bell from her teaching days, the grandmother Helen and Hart shared and he memorialized in his tender poem, "My Grandmother's Love Letters." A real surprise was Grace Hart Crane's beautiful white hand-stitched wedding night gown, so similar to her son's christening gown it might have been sewn by the same gifted seamstress.

Although the mementos from Helen Hart Hurlbert and then from Zell after her mother's death in 1987 were personal gifts to me without any conditions, I gave most of them to the Hart Crane Collection at Kent State University Library to which I had already given the many Crane family documents and letters given to me by Ted Hirt who discovered and purchased them for me at

Hart Crane's cousins' estate auction. I welcomed Helen's because they were from the Hart side. The gifts from Helen and Zell included the poet's christening gown, his mother's wedding nightgown, and his grandmother's school bell, as well as Helen's clipping file and photographs.

Another treasure, the one that I still own, is a short 16mm home movie of Hart Crane taken by Helen's husband Griswold Hurlbert in the backyard of their Oak Knoll Avenue home in Warren. This film was made when Crane visited his cousin after returning to Ohio briefly in July 1931, following the death of his father Clarence Crane. On the same occasion nine-year-old Zell, with her Kodak Brownie camera, snapped the photograph of Crane holding a kitten and reclining in a lawn chair with the Hurlberts' house in the background. The original of this photograph was given to me by Helen in 1975. Its first use was in my essay, "Poetry and Portraits: Reflections of Hart Crane," *Hart Crane Newsletter* (Fall, 1977). The picture has subsequently been published elsewhere with different photographers, dates, locales, and original sources cited for it. The movie however, in addition to showing the poet in motion, bears irrefutable evidence of the origin of the photograph it coincidentally documents.

When I was asked by the New York Center for Visual History to act as the Ohio consultant for its "Hart Crane: The Broken Tower," segment in its thirteen part PBS poetry series "Voices & Visions," I did not suggest to the producer Lawrence Pitkethly that my Crane home movie be incorporated into it because Crane was depicted throughout by an actor quite unlike Crane in appearance. My role was to scout the Ohio sites for filming, including Garrettsville and Hiram, and to recreate Crane's Cleveland bedroom. I finally located a conveniently vacant round tower room in a commercial building in downtown Warren and used it to duplicate Crane's sanctum se la tour. My husband and I furnished it almost completely from our home. For a special Hart Crane connection we used our cherry desk that had originally belonged to Crane's Warren neighbor Mrs. Levi Sutliff (correct spelling) who lived across from him on High Street. She was said to have entertained the young boy with stories of Ohio's early Western Reserve. Another Crane touch: the serape seen on the chair was one Hart had sent his cousin Helen from Mexico and was supplied by Zell.

In 1984 Betty Crane Madden finally had the opportunity to be directly involved in memorializing Hart Crane in Cleveland. Peter Putnam, a wealthy philanthropist who with his late mother Mildred Andrews Putnam had given sculptures and paintings worth millions to Case Western Reserve and Princeton Universities and the Cleveland Museum of Art, telephoned both Betty and me saying he had commissioned the well-known Cleveland sculptor William McVey to create a large statue of Hart Crane to be given to Case Western where the poet had briefly attended classes in advertising. He wanted

the two of us to be his representatives and serve as consultants to the artist since he lived in distant Houma, Louisiana. He thought it especially important that Betty be involved because she had known Crane and could help guide McVey who otherwise had to work exclusively from photographs. Consequently, we had the pleasure of making repeated visits to McVey's lovely studio/home Pepper Pike to watch as the sculpture took shape going from photograph, to drawing, to maquette, then to full size clay to be cast in bronze. Betty had been so disappointed at the results of her earlier efforts in Garrettsville that she delighted in the whole experience because she was confident of its outcome. We both enjoyed the company of Mr. McVey, a gifted artist and gentleman whose imposing presence and physique belied his eighty years. One would have no trouble believing that in his youth he had been a Rice football star playing under the legendary coach John Heisman.

The Case Western Reserve University Library staff planned an exhibition of Hart Crane books and memorabilia to be held in conjunction with the dedication of McVey's sculpture. A representative contacted Betty Madden about using any books or materials which she might be willing to lend or donate for the display, preferably the latter. Hesitant about lending the letters because of the family's past experience in doing so, Betty decided to go ahead with her previous plan to give her collection to me to donate to Kent State University. Although she was extremely proud to be Hart Crane's cousin, she wanted neither credit nor publicity. I suspect one reason was she was afraid she would be expected to grant interviews to the media. Already shy, she was even more reluctant to expose herself to public scrutiny because in recent years she had developed a severe speech disorder known as "spasmodic speech dysphonia" which made it very difficult, as well as embarrassing, for her to speak clearly or carry on a conversation without hesitating or raising or voice to a shout. It was a serious handicap that affected all aspects of her life and often isolated her from all but her closest friends and family members. Thus it was that in August 1985, a month before the Case Western event, I delivered her box of 115 letters to Kent State University Library for its Hart Crane Collection. As she anticipated, the gift drew national attention.

The well-attended ceremony at the dedication of McVey's bronze sculpture was held at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland on September 14, 1985. Crane scholar Prof. Thomas S. W. Lewis of Skidmore College and I were the two guest speakers for the event. Betty Crane Madden and Zell Hurlbert Draz were again the guests of honor representing the Hart and Crane families. Peter Putnam, a shy reclusive man, did not attend. In fact, Betty and I never saw him; neither did Mr. McVey. However he seemed pleased when I telephoned him later to tell him of the success of the event and the crowd's admiration of the sculpture and appreciation of his generosity. He plied me with questions and asked me to send him photographs along with any and all newspaper accounts of the celebration. There was no doubt he was clearly interested in the reception accorded his magnificent gift.

In Mr. McVey's studio, I had seen the two maquettes, miniatures of the sculpture he had made, and learned one was to go to Columbia University Library for its Hart Crane Collection. With the hope that Mr. Putnam would consider donating the second one to our Kent State University Library in memory of the poet, our curator Alex Gildzen wrote to him with that request. Unfortunately, Putnam's prior experience with Kent State had left him unwilling to be generous the second time. The reason was that in 1978, his mother had commissioned George Segal, one of America's preeminent sculptors, to create for Kent a work commemorating the May 4, 1970, tragedy in which the four students were killed. When it was delivered, Segal's sculpture depicted Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Kent State officials rejected Mrs. Putnam's $100,000 gift as "too violent" and "inappropriate." Consequently, she gave the sculpture to Princeton University. Once more the Kent State Tragedy had impinged upon the honoring of Portage County's Hart Crane. Two years after giving the Crane sculpture to Cleveland, Putnam who had earned his doctoral degree at Princeton in physics and apprenticed under Einstein, was struck and killed at 62 by a drunken driver while riding his bicycle to work as a night watchman on a swing bridge in Louisiana. Through the Mildren Andrews Fund, which he had greatly increased through shrewd investing, he and his mother left $37,000,000 to the Nature Conservancy Fund dedicated to preserving endangered wetlands nationally. Fortunately, as did Crane's cousins before him, he had also tried to preserve the memory of Ohio's Hart Crane.

There is no doubt that many Ohioans recognize the name "Hart Crane" today, unlike the time so many years ago when I first heard of him and began my venture. I have been fortunate in my search to have so often met the right people to guide me at the right time. The people who, by sharing with me their original Crane letters, memories, and memorabilia, provided me with a rich source of Crane material to explore and explicate. Leading the list would be the Crane and Hart family members and friends herein mentioned, now all gone. I also began my search when some of the poet's notable contemporaries were still living who were gracious enough to respond to my queries about him: Carl Schmitt, Alvarez Bravo, Malcolm Cowley, Susan Jenkins Brown, and Katherine Anne Porter.

While I have been retired from teaching for some time, I have continued my interest in Crane scholarship, nevertheless, by lending assistance—when requested—to other Crane scholars: for example to Clive Fisher when he was writing his splendid biography Hart Crane: A Life (2002) and more recently to Prof. Langdon Hammer when he was editing his beautiful Library of America volume, *Hart Crane: Complete Poems & Selected Letters* (2006). It's a most welcomed book, whose accurate and comprehensive chronology alone also makes it a necessary one to own.

My husband Robert and I are still surrounded by reminders of my Hart Crane

adventure: in much of which he was also a participant. On our walls hang the childhood portrait of the poet from his stepmother Bessie Crane Hise and the two beautiful needlepoint stitcheries made for me by Helen Hart Hurlbert. From Zell Draz we have the framed 1790 *London Times* which was originally protected under glass on her grandmother Zell's desk before it hung above her mother's then her own. Also from Zell we have the antique oriental rugs from Helen's Tribune office, and from Betty the LLadro birdgirl figurine, a reminder of our happy wildlife excursions. And in my bookcase, in addition to my many Hart Crane books, I have from Helen, her mother Zell Hart Deming's "Day Book" containing the glue-in *original* copy of Hart Crane's photograph and poem, "With a Photograph to Zell, now bound for Spain." Most treasured among our furnishings is my inheritance from Betty: her beautiful baby grand piano at which we shared so many pleasant hours in Cleveland. Appropriately on the lid was always a small photograph of Hart Crane. The bench is still covered by a lovely needlepoint pad made by her mother, the poet's "Auntie Bess." So it's little wonder that when I look around my home, I remember Hart Crane and all my Hart and Crane friends with whom I have shared many memories and the adventures of my lifetime.

Langdon Hammer

Recognizing Hart Crane

"Language has built towers and bridges, but itself is inevitably as fluid as always." This is one of Hart Crane's key ideas and for him something like an article of faith, with implications for the kind of poetry he wrote as well as for the whole shape of his literary career. When we want to understand what Crane's work is about, it is a good place to begin. It is the last sentence of "General Aims and Theories," a statement Crane made in 1925 in order to help his friend Eugene O'Neill write a preface for Crane's first book of poetry, *White Buildings.* Crane knew that his difficult, deeply original poetry would require defense and explanation—and ideally an endorsement by an established author like O'Neill (who in the end ventured only a book jacket blurb).

The full final paragraph of Crane's statement reads: "New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation. And while I feel that my work includes a more consistent extension of traditional literary elements than many contemporary poets are capable of appraising, I realize that I am utilizing the gifts of the past as instruments principally; and that the voice of the present, if it is to be known, must be caught at the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic. Language has built towers and bridges, but itself is inevitably as fluid as always."

There is much that is characteristic of Crane here. He sees his poetry as embodying "new forms of spiritual articulation," which arise from "new conditions of life." This is what it meant for him to write modern poetry, and it is the theme and goal of his long poem, *The Bridge.* It is not personal ambition: Crane wants to "catch" not his own voice but "the voice of the present." He knows that he needs "instruments" to do that: what he calls "the gifts of the past," by which he means all the historical and formal resources of poetry, including meter and rhyme, myth, metaphor, and much else. These are the tools with which "language has built towers and bridges" (and for Crane, the "towers and bridges" of past literature are themselves tools of this kind). They represent language as ground plan and structure, measure and proportion. Crane uses them to grasp something else, however: language as flux, which is language in the present, as it exists outside of, and prior to, all received structures. He knows that, to "catch" this dimension of language, he must use poetry's tools in new ways. He must take "the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic"—not to mention the ordinary reader.

Crane is a crucial poet in a literal sense because he centered his poetry on this problem, this crux. Dedicated simultaneously to language as structure and to

language as flux, his work holds together competing dimensions of the medium. If we step back and take a long perspective, scanning the history of American poetry from Crane's suicide in 1932 to our own period, we see a long contest between enemy camps, with the formalists on one side and experimentalists on the other, each claiming half of the whole vision of language Crane insisted on. In his curious, idiosyncratic isolation (there is no poet quite like him), Crane has been important to poets on both sides of this divide—to Allen Ginsberg as well as Robert Lowell, Charles Berstein as well as Rosanna Warren. If poetry has become frustrated with that impasse and impatient to get around it, one sign may be a renewed interest in Crane. Last fall the literary magazine *Field* published a symposium on the poet with commentary by Charles Wright and Thomas Lux, among others. More reappraisals appeared following the publication in October of the Library of America's *Hart Crane: Complete Poetry and Selected Letters*, which I edited. These included in *Bookforum* an essay on Crane by Mark Ford and appreciations of Crane by Wayne Koestenbaum John Yau, C. D. Wright, and Robert Kelly—a group of poets who do not divide neatly into formalists and experimentalists. Perhaps Crane caught "the voice of the present" of our present moment too.

This does not mean this his "idioms and circumlocutions" have become any less shocking or challenging. Crane set himself an impossible task: to choose both structure and flux is like trying to build towers and bridges out of the sea; his means and ends war with each other, and the same energies that build up Crane's poems break them down. We see his acute, troubled awareness of the problem in his poetry's obsessive return to a select set of symbols: tower, bridge, river, sea. Crane tells stories with these symbols that dramatize the ambition and cost of his double commitments. Two of these symbols—tower and bridge—appear in the verse fragment that follows, one of the many that are part of Crane's oeuvre. Enigmatic and evocative, the fragment presents us with a brief, interrupted narrative in which the contending principles of Crane's verbal creativity join in conflict.

The sea raised up a campanile . . . The wind I heard
Of brine partaking, whirling into shower
Of column that breakers sheared in shower
Back into bosom,—me—her, into natal power . . .

The fragment ends almost as abruptly as it begins, and the tower it describes, like the structure of the utterance itself, breaks down before it has been built. A campanile is of course specifically a bell tower, a landmark built high to orient the public life around it and broadcast the sound of its bells, marking the hours or calling people together in civic or religious ceremony. It is a good image for Crane's public ambitions for his poetry. But this campanile is no conventional architectural form. It is a name for a waterspout at sea. The ener-

gy of the sea that raises the spout is countered at once by the wind, which drives the breakers against the column, "shearing" it. But these are not two distinct forces as much as two aspects of a single force. We see both in the "whirling" of the spout: it is a structure in motion, turning on itself, constituted by its undoing—and an image, perhaps for Crane's rhetorical "circumlocutions." The spout also suggests a way to visualize the relation between the ground plan that is Crane's verse form (the rhymed iambic quatrain, with Alexandrines in the first and fourth lines and pentameter lines in the second and third, which is the pattern of his final poem, "The Broken Tower") and the dissolving surge of a sentence that trails into ellipses, creating a grammatical fragment that is broken off before the main verb has appeared. Three sharp enjambments seem to locate that shearing action in the turning of the verse itself.

The breakers "shear" the poet-speaker "Back into bosom . . . into natal power." Or, more precisely, they drive "me—her" there. Typically, Crane's radically compressed syntax results in difficult grammar. The pronouns "me" and "her" are appositives that refer either to "bosom" or "shower." We might paraphrase the idea this way: the breakers and the wind that propels them produce the waterspout while also driving it back into the sea from which it arose, breaking it down into the elements that compose it—what Crane refers to as "me" and "her." We can read those pronouns as indicating distinct persons or positions. Or, we can read them as designating a composite identity, "me—her," in which the first person and the third, the poet and his medium have become one, or very nearly so. The dash that separates and unites those terms allows for, and probably requires, both readings. The relation between "me" and "her" is like that between the campanile and the sea that raises the tower up out of itself.

There are four manuscript versions of the fragment; the text cited here comes from the Library of America edition of Crane. The fragment was first published in 1946 in a slightly different version in Crane's *Collected Poems*, edited by Waldo Frank, under the title (invented by the editor) of "The Return." That text gives another version of the second and third lines: "Of brine partaking, whirling spout in shower / Of column kiss—that breakers spouted, sheared . . . ," while the first and fourth lines are the same (but Frank replaced the final ellipses with a period). Throughout Crane's poetry, the "kiss" is the sign of perfect recognition or acknowledgement (in "Legend" Crane calls kisses "the only worth all granting"). In this case the "kiss" seems incestuous, joining mother and son, or poet and his muse. The idea makes sense because Crane's intention to "catch the voice of the present" has led him to risk returning poetry to its source in language as flux—which he identifies with the mother tongue, and which is prior to the civilizing systems of language as structure. Going forward means going backward in the circular movement of the "whirling spout." Allen Grossman comments on the metaphor in "Hart Crane and Poetry," an essay on "The Return" first published in 1981. He explains: "...the seriousness of the

lyric person (Crane's intensity) is always incestuous, and therefore, like Crane's style, touched with abhorrence and disfigurement, portending an autonomy that is not 'elite' (as Crane's poetry is sometimes called) but inimical to civility in the largest possible sense. The rescue contemplated, however"—Grossman is describing the fulfillment that Crane seeks, which he imagines as a rescue at sea—"is not incest but the nurturing of the 'me' and the 'her' at a common bosom, the 'natal power' of both."

Being driven "Back into bosom" is like birth, a renewal of "natal power," then, but it is also like death, breaking off speech. The event is both triumphant and calamitous, and it contains in miniature the ambiguous history of Crane's life and work, as Grossman observes. The four-line fragment tells a story in which the grandest cultural ambition, the building of a tower in poetry, bridging earth and heaven, ends in dissolution—as it did, in Crane's case, in death by drowning in 1932. The fragment also suggests that the story—the story of Crane's turbulent career, prematurely broken off—follows the problem that he sets himself when he courted the "natal power" of language, a force capable of raising towers and bridges, but by its nature fluid, engulfing, and boundless.

Crane never won a prize, and apart from the Guggenheim Fellowship he held in Mexico in the last year of his life, which he felt he squandered, he received no honors. Reviews of *The Bridge* were largely favorable, but the ones that mattered most to Crane by his friends the poet-critics Allen Tate and Yvor Winters, with whom he had discussed the poem for years, were at best mixed, at worst brutal. He died without the recognition he sought. His body disappeared in the Atlantic. ("Lost at Sea" reads the face dedicated to Crane on his father's grave in Garrettsville, Ohio, the poet's birthplace far inland.) And his body of work remained to be collected by others.

The process began when Grace Hart Crane opened her son's trunk, following his suicide, and discovered one of the manuscript pages of "The sea raised up a campanile..." With the help of Mrs. Crane and Crane's friend, Samuel Loveman, Frank edited the first version of Crane's *Collected Poems* in 1933. Further collections of Crane's canon, with improved texts and expanded selections, appeared in 1958 (edited again by Frank), in 1966 (edited by Brom Weber), and in 1986 and 2000 (both edited by Marc Simon). Over the same period, five selections of the poet's letters appeared; these included volumes of his letters to Susan Jenkins and William Slater Brown edited by Jenkins (1969), to Yvor Winters edited by Thomas Parkinson (1978), and to his family edited by Thomas S. W. Lewis (1978), as well as two collections of general correspondence, one edited by Weber (1952), the other by myself and Weber (1997).

In short, the gathering of Crane's work has been a long process, and the work of many hands. This gives the Library of America edition special symbolic value. With the red-white-and-blue ribbon across its cover, the solemn, hand-

sized black book gives Crane's writing a permanent, apparently definitive form. It places Crane on the shelf side by side with some of the American authors he most admired—Whitman, Melville, Poe—as well as his contemporaries, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, and Robert Frost (the only other modern poets who have appeared in the Library of America series). Surely this is the recognition he longed for.

Adam Kirsch made the point in his review of the book in *The New Yorker*: "At last...Crane has been given a place, the most unassailable one in American letters: a volume of his own in the Library of America. *Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters*...can be seen as a conclusion to the long debate over Crane's stature." Kirsch goes on to say, correctly, "Still, the question of what Hart Crane 'stands for' in American literature"—and therefore what it is that we are recognizing when we recognize Crane—"is difficult to answer. His work resists the complacency of canonization, blazing with qualities that are the opposite of classical: precocity, obscurity, and verbal recklessness."

So it is no surprise that the most prominent review of the volume was an attack on Crane. This was William Logan's two-page essay in *The New York Times Book Review*, with the provocative title, "Hart Crane's Bridge to Nowhere." It is not good form for the author or an editor to answer a negative review of his book, especially when, as in my case, he has already had the opportunity to publish a letter to the *Book Review* editor. But Logan's review, which prompted the *Times* to print four letters beside mine, is worth dwelling on briefly because it reproduces some of the key criticisms Crane received in his lifetime, and because the fierceness of its mockery reveals, as in a distorting mirror, the fierceness of Crane's example. In this way it says more about what is at stake in Crane than respectful, polite reviews.

"Wearing the scarlet A of ambition," as Logan evokes the poet at 17 arriving in New York, Crane "confidently predicted that he would 'really without doubt be one of the foremost poets in America." Crane failed to make good on his prediction, according to Logan, because he didn't work hard enough at his writing ("Crane dreamed of being a poet much more often than he sat at his desk and wrote poems"). The poet was perhaps distracted because "...his sexual appetites were voracious and involved far too many sailors," Logan writes (raising the question of just how many sailors should have been enough). As it has for other critics, Crane's scandalous behavior suggests to Logan an explanation of his scandalous rhetoric, as if one conditioned the other or as if they were analogous: as Logan put it, "he mixed [metaphors] almost more often than he mixed drinks." All of this returns, but as explicit ad hominem attack, to the moral criticism of Crane's work in Tate, Winters, and R. P. Blackmur, among others. For Logan, Crane failed as a poet because he lacked the patience and maturity—both in his life and in his work—to achieve the classical perspective of the contemporary model he rejected but should have emulated, T. S. Eliot.

The "scarlet A of ambition": it's an odd, inspired phrase. Unlike Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Crane is blamed for the magnitude and intensity of his desire alone; he already wears his mark of shame at 17, in advance of any deed. There is something right about this. The precocious autodidact wants to make himself a great poet not by degrees, through a process of maturation entailing ironic reflection on his motives, as Eliot did (who at the beginning of his career, in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," takes the role of an aging man), but by returning his poetry to its sources in "natal power." His drive to claim his place in the Library of America on, as it were, the basis of birthright, marks Crane even in prospect as an outcast and example to the culture, a warning, which is how Tate and Winters interpreted their friend's career. It is a judgment rendered from the point of view of language as structure on a transgressive desire that Crane himself figured as incestuous.

In the issue of *Bookforum* featuring Crane, Wayne Koestenbaum describes the same aspects of Crane's work that Logan fixes on, but values them differently. "I love the purposeless buildup, the hefty, panting artifice," Koestenbaum writes of Crane's verse, as if it were a muscle-bound physique like that of one of the sailors Crane admired. "His lines want to 'get off,'" Koestenbaum writes, suggesting both sexual and lyric transport, "but they can't." This is another way of saying that Crane's hyper-wrought verse breaks off under the pressure of its own demand before the structure can be built. Koestenbaum goes on: "Crane didn't 'influence' me. But his desire influenced me—his wish to be a pumped-up poet, to write lines obscenely loaded with ore, after Shelley or Keats."

This stylistic effect of "buildup" in Crane's poetry, which makes it "shocking to the scholar or historians of logic," produces an excess of potential meaning that amounts for some readers to no meaning at all. The problem implies an attitude toward poetry that Koestenbaum explains by reference to his own case: "When I write, I'm always *not yet a poet*; I'm a striver, a yearner, hoping to crash the House of Poetry. I stand outside, like Stella Dallas, hungering. Crane must have felt like an outsider to Poetry. He wrote high because he wanted to push his way in. Aspirational, toked-up, Crane's language articulates that forlorn position of *gazing into the future, into Poetry as futural.*" Let me in, Crane demands, from outside the House of Poetry. His ambition stakes everything on poetry: outside it he has nothing; inside, everything he desires. But he cannot inhabit the poetic structure he builds. He seizes on language that is preludial. With it he can only gaze "*into the future, into Poetry as futural.*"

For Crane, a second-generation modernist, the House of Poetry appeared in the form of little magazines such as *Poetry* in Chicago, where Yeats, Pound, Eliot, H.D., Stevens, Williams, and Moore had published poems in the 1910s. When he sent one of his lyrics there in 1926, the editor, Harriet Monroe, stopped him at the door. With "At Melville's Tomb" in hand, she complained, "Your ideas and rhythms interest me, and I am wondering by what process of

reasoning you would justify this poem's succession of champion mixed metaphors, of which you must be conscious. The packed line should pack its phrases in orderly relation, it seems to me, in manner tending to clear confusion instead of making it worse confounded." Crane's reply developed ideas he had set down in "General Aims and Theories." It appeared in the magazine along with his poem and Monroe's objections.

Looking at the images in the poem's first two stanzas, Monroe challenged the poet: "Take me for a hard-boiled unpoetic reader, and tell me how *dice* can *bequeath an embassy* (or anything else); and how a calyx (*of death's bounty* or anything else) can give back a *scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph*; and how, if it does, such a *portent* can be *wound in corridors* of shells (or anything else)." Crane would get around to saying how, but he began his letter by rejecting the basis of Monroe's objections. Contrasting his method and her expectations, Crane explains: "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." There are two ideas to stress here: Crane wants to activate the potential associations between words, rather than the association between particular words and things (the "logically rigid significations" of words), and he wants—he needs—that verbal "interplay" to operate on the reader's "consciousness."

Rather than "illogical," these impinging "connotations" make a claim, Crane argues, to an alternative logic—he calls it "the logic of metaphor"—that is internal to the poem. But the system demands the "recognition" of the reader (that's the word he uses). The poet's message is complete when it is received by the reader, but only then, and only provisionally. The process must be repeated, the aim of recognition achieved again by the next reader or the next reading. The process must be open-ended because Crane's aim is open-ended: he wants his poetry, he explains, to go on generating "added consciousness and increased perceptions."

"At Melville's Tomb" helpfully models the challenge Crane sets his reader by dramatizing Crane's experience reading of Melville. Crane began reading Melville with enthusiasm in 1922: "until the recent craze about him," Crane told a friend, "I never had heard of him." In fact not so many contemporary readers had: Melville was not yet the canonical figure in American literature he would become; he was still, as Koestenbaum says of Crane, "an outsider to Poetry." This is what Crane means by placing Melville, who died on dry land, among those lost at sea—in the symbolic space described in, but also constituted by, his imaginative writing. Reading Melville, the poem proposes, is like deciphering "the dice of drowned men's bones" and other fragments driven to shore by the waves (their repetitions evoking the open-ended reading process

Crane describes in his letter to Monroe):

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

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.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
No farther tides...High in the azure steeps
Monody shall not wake the mariner.
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

Melville once stood on shore and read the message of the beating waves; Crane, his reader, does now; and we as Crane's readers do in turn, positioned in relation to Crane as Crane was to Melville, taking our place in an ongoing series of recognitions. Looking back, which is what we do when we read, we recognize, as Melville and Crane did, a "portent" in the text before us, an image of potential, of the future. This is an image made out of the primal creativity of language: a power to shape the object world in the image of desire by making a new claim on it. Through language desire calls into being the object it seeks—a structure drawn out of flux: so the eyes of the drowning, cast upward in hope, must have "lifted altars," a means of worship in the absence of any institutional promise of redemption; and the mariner's instruments ("Compass, quadrant and sextant") can be said to have "contrive[d]" the tides he rode upon. "New forms of spiritual articulation" arise in this way.

And what happened out there in the waves? The sea raised up a campanile. The wind sheared the structure as it rose, driving the poet and his muse together, leaving an incomplete sentence, and the poet drowned ("Lost at Sea").

To recognize Crane as the poet he was, we need to understand that he is still, and can only ever be, awaiting recognition. There will be no definitive edition of his work. "This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps."

Contributor's Notes

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Andrey Gritsman is a native of Moscow who emigrated to the United States in 1981. A physician, poet, and essayist, he has published five volumes of poetry in Russian. He was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2005, 2006, and 2007. He has poems, essays, and short stories published or forthcoming in over 60 literary journals, including *Nimrod International Journal, Confrontation, Cimarron Review, Hotel Amerika,* and *Ars Interpres* (Stockholm, Sweden). Gritsman received his M.F.A. in poetry from Vermont College. He runs the Intercultural Poetry Series in a popular literary club, Cornelia Street Café, in New York City. He also edits an international bilingual online poetry magazine, *www.interpoezia.net.*

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