

**A Ghost Light of Modernism: Reorienting the Community in
Hart Crane's *The Bridge***

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Introduction: Reenergizing a Ghost Light

Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (1930) has been labeled as "failure." This seems hardly a thought-provoking observation. As John Emil Vincent cogently puts, "[f]ailure' is used to describe Crane's life, his alcoholism, suicide, sexuality, and career, as well as single poems, groups of poems, his poetics, his execution of those poetics, and his cosmology" (127). A possible danger when drawing on such a term as "failure" to reconsider the queer potential of Crane's poetry is not only redundancy but also mere sentimentalism. According to Heather Love, moreover, "[m]any contemporary critics dismiss negative or dark representations entirely, arguing that the depiction of same-sex love as impossible, tragic, and doomed to failure is purely ideological" (1). At the risk of repeating the cliché of gay, lesbian, and queer studies, I will participate in the discourse of "failure" in Crane scholarship. In 1923, when Crane started gestating the concept of *The Bridge*, Crane wrote to his friend about "the fusion process" in his poetry, declaring that "this mystical fusion of beauty is my religion" (CPSL 320).¹ It is the fusional orientation of the poet's aesthetic aspiration that urges Crane to conceive *The Bridge* as "a mystical synthesis of 'America'" (CPSL 321). The aim of this dissertation on Crane and *The Bridge* is to see in detail how the poem fails to accomplish the desired communal identity, both structural and thematic. In so doing, I try to revitalize the textual incompleteness thus found as a

generative instant that interrupts all attempts at communal fusion with any mode of collectivity. This dissertation will have two interrelated consequences. First, it leads us to reframe one modernist's "failure" as an alternative aesthetics of "community," the issue of which has not been discussed enough in the critical history of Crane's writings. At the same time, it makes a contribution towards another reintroduction of *The Bridge*,² which has been regarded as "the always secondary" modernist epic (Bernstein, "Introduction"), as a long poem much more available to what Albert Gelpi calls "a distinctly Poststructuralist, Postmodernist sensibility" ("Genealogy" 524).

In *The H. D. Book*, Robert Duncan, whose "derivative" poetics disturbs the boundaries between romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism in poetry, invokes the name of Crane as follows: "There is one lonely ghost light of poetry where Hart Crane is seized by his vision of the Bridge" (214). The "ghost light" refers to a single light bulb illuminated on the vacant stage in an unoccupied theater. Duncan's association of Crane with that particular stage light is helpful for us to shed light on "dark" and "spectral" aspects of Crane's poetry that have not been paid enough attention. While Crane might be mistaken as a mere optimistic propagandist of the modern industrial age, new technologies and exuberant city life in the early twentieth century, Crane never fails to develop in *The Bridge* the ghostly imagery of a movie theater and other playhouses. Not

to mention “*cinemas, panoramic sleights*” (*CPSL* 33) or “[o]utspoken buttocks in pink beads” in a burlesque theater (*CPSL* 62), those apparitional flickers and gaudy glimmers are bound up with (dis-)illusion, emptiness and primitivism of the underworld, relating to the poet’s same-sex desire and experiences. In the similar vein, the image of a “ghost light” as the metaphor for Crane’s poetry helps us foreground the haunting figures in Crane’s text, whose uncanny traces point toward the melancholic space between presence and absence, making us re-experience the impossibility of fixing the past as a solid concept.

Furthermore, Duncan’s evocation of Crane in the guise of the “one lonely ghost light of poetry” draws attention to the peculiar status of Crane and his writings in the modernist canon. As Brian Reed notes in his 2012 book, Crane “has conventionally been considered something of a second-tier modernist, eminent, perhaps, but ranking in prestige and accomplishment below the likes of T. S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams” (*Phenomenal* 134). Attuned to Adam Kirsch’s 2006 view that Crane’s “work resists the complacency of canonization,”

³Reed’s observation about Crane’s place among the modernist poets can also segue to Duncan’s recollection of the “reactionary” atmosphere in the 1940s poetry world. In the 1940s, so Duncan writes, the poetry of Hart Crane, who killed himself in 1932, seemed to be left energized by Crane’s solitary vision in the almost empty theater of modernism

in which the other modernist poets such as Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Stevens “remain within the rational imagination.” Duncan’s recollection was made to imply the apparently regressive characteristics of Crane’s poetry that is shot through “the creative disorders of primitive mind” and “the shamanic ecstasies” (*H. D.* 214). At the same time, Duncan’s passage also points to the peculiar spectrality of Crane’s bizarre language and vision of “America,” which have made *The Bridge* comparatively peripheral in the modernist canon yet retained its strange flicker, calling for a constant revision, controversial reevaluation, and creative reconfiguration. This dissertation aims to reenergize the spectral light of *The Bridge* so that it enables us to traverse a range of contexts pertaining to Crane’s poetry and his poetics, and thereby to relocate them not only in the U. S. modernist poetry but also in a network of other critical discourses concerning the issue of community.

The Totalitarian Strand of the U. S. Modernist Poetry

In the 1990 essay titled “The Genealogy of Postmodernism: Contemporary American Poetry,” Gelpi suggests a close continuity between romanticism and modernism thus: “despite the manifestos and axiomatic pronouncements against

Romanticism, Modernism represents an extension and reconstitution of the salient issues that Romanticism set out to deal with.” Drawing on Nick Piombino’s recapitulation of modernist poetry in the postmodern context, Gelpi observes that “the Postmodernist position formulated itself as a critique of the paradoxes inherent in Modernism,” which goes as follows: “the centripetal Modernist effort to unify pieces into a coherent collage gives way to what is unapologetically ‘an esthetics of fragmentation and discontinuity.’” Criticizing “the vaunted claims of Modernism” as “spurious and dangerous,” so Gelpi continues, “the disillusioned Postmodernist” has warned against the following characteristics of the representative modernist poets:

The Modernist master merely put the mask of impersonality on the Romantic ego-genius, and any such exaggerated individualism led to an elitist pose of disdain for politics that itself masked the equally elitist sympathy for totalitarianism which helped make Fascism and Nazism and Stalinism possible.

In this view what was left of Modernism was immolated in the war it in part brought about. (524-25)

Gelpi’s observation, particularly his understanding of “such exaggerated individualism” as the germ of sympathy for “totalitarianism,” reminds us of the case of Ezra Pound, whose becoming of an aficionado of fascism partly derives from his nostalgia for a

coherent, unitary order, which is manifested on the aesthetic level, for instance, in the speaker's address to the ghost of Robert Browning in "Three Cantos" (1917): "You had one whole man? / And I have many fragments, less worth? Less worth?" (*Personae* 230). As Gelpi goes on to write, however, Pound came to erroneously believe that "his ideogrammic construction would constellate into a vision so psychologically and politically powerful that it would integrate the individual and transform society" (529).

Taking into consideration such a political and psychological context, we can find that the affinity between *The Cantos* and *The Bridge* is more than evident. Like Pound's ideogrammic method, Crane's idea of *The Bridge* as "a mystical synthesis of 'America'" contains a potentially dangerous aesthetic aspiration to assemble the diverse strands of American history and unify them into a coherent whole (*CPSL* 321). Concurring with Piombino's view of "the paradoxes inherent in Modernism," eventually, such aspiration for unity apparent in Crane's concept of *The Bridge* brought about "an esthetics of fragmentation and discontinuity." Although Gelpi does not mention Crane in his essay, which reinforces Crane's marginal position in the modernist canon, one aim of my study is to reinforce that Crane, too, belongs to what Gelpi defines as "the great Modernist poets" who embody a prefiguration of the U. S. postmodern poetics by "realiz[ing] the psychological and moral limits of the Modernist aesthetic and supersed[ing] it" (520).

Having said that, my emphasis on postmodern aspects of Crane's poetry does not follow Gelpi's approach, which is aimed to locate such modernist poets as Pound, Eliot, and Hilda Doolittle in a collective hinge between the modern and postmodern poetics. In comparing their earlier poems with their later ones, Gelpi appreciates the works that were written in their older age, because Gelpi affirms their recourse to extra-poetic frameworks whose "[m]eaning surpasses Modernist means" or the supposedly autotelic forms of their artworks. Evaluating their "best work," for instance, Gelpi prefers Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Pound's *Pisan Cantos* along with the final *Drafts and Fragments* to *The Waste Land* and *Mauberry*. According to Gelpi's judgement, the modernist long poems that were written in the post-high modernist period tends to become successful. This is because those poems are based on the larger "scheme of reference and relevance" such as "Eliot's particular Christian perspective" or Pound's "pantheism synthesized from the Greek mysteries and the Chinese *tao*," which could deliver them from the modernist obsession with the autonomy of poetry, and show "a point of reference and relevance outside their poetry." Chiming with Gelpi's approach, as will be shown, I do attend to the "psychological or moral" elements of Crane's poetry in terms of "community," "myth," or "America," each of whose claims vacillates between the poem's epic performance and the poet's private urge to negotiate with his sexual identity. Yet, what makes my argument

divert from Gelpi's essay is my consistent attention to the stylistic and rhetorical limits of the modernist drive for all-encompassing synthesis, which my reading of *The Bridge* will delineate in detail.

It is reasonable that Gelpi's essay does not illustrate, for example, how Pound's totalitarian motive is implicated in the actual text, for the main purpose of Gelpi's reference to Pound or to the other modernist poets is to propose "a long historical view to understand the relation of Postmodernism to Modernism," the latter of which "bore a complicated and ambivalent relation to Romanticism" (517). Since my focus is rather on the style of the poet's rhetoric, I attempt, in what follows, a short formalist analysis of *The Cantos* and *The Bridge*. Needless to say, there are obvious differences between the two poems such as the book's volume and the span of composition. But a comparative reading will demonstrate the way in which the style of their rhetoric, their use of metaphors and their contentions in the opening passages anticipate and enact the aesthetic desire for totalitarian synthesis. By doing so, I would like to show an irony concerning how their use of language at once informs and runs against with the desire to integrate the work's identity.

“And then” or “How many”: How to Begin the Modernist Epic

Comparing the modernist epic with “postmodern long forms,” Joseph Conte observes that the modernist epic can be distinguished by its “characteristic desire for ‘totality,’ which means, for the modernist, “an attempt to realize a grand design upon the world.” Talking about Pound’s epic project that strives toward “a coherent synthesis” and “an authoritarian hierarchy,” Conte argues that “the modernist epic is characteristically concerned with ‘centering,’ bringing diverse materials into synthesis” (37). With Conte’s perspective in mind, the first point to be made about the opening of Pound’s *The Cantos* is its spondee-based lines, which have remained as Pound’s virtuosic signature: “And then went down to the ship, / Set the keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and” (*Cantos* 3). With the Homeric beginning of the poem *in medias res* (“in the midst of action”), which stages Pound’s ambition to participate in the Western epic tradition, those lines register the telos-oriented drive toward an all-encompassing Image that could incorporate fragmentary elements scattered across time and space into a unitary ideogrammic organization. As critics have argued, an ultimate goal for Pound’s epic project, which was partly influenced by Fenellosa’s theory of the Chinese ideogram, was to discover an imperishable, logocentric Ideogram and carve it out in the textual field.⁴ A series of

conjunctions and adverbs are marshaled by Pound to act as the rushing energy of his grand ambition (“and,” “then,” and “forth”). By means of a volley of sibilant fricatives (“ship”; “Set”; “sea”) and a chain of near assonances (“And then went down”), Pound enacts the onrushing rhythm of a stylus-shaped “keel” striking out his passage upon the sea of great literary archives.

As though replying to the opening of *The Cantos*, the first quatrain of Crane’s “To Brooklyn Bridge,” the inaugural poem to *The Bridge*, begins by the spondaic lines, whose ascending rhythm conflates the arching leap of the bridge above the river with the beating wings of a sea gull:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest

The sea gull’s wings shall dip and pivot him,

Shedding white rings of tumult, building high

Over the chained bay waters Liberty— (CPSL 33)

The afterimage of the gull’s flight ascending over the New York harbor enfolds the act of “*building . . . Liberty*” in that of “*shedding white rings of tumult.*” Resonating with the spiraling motions of the gull’s wings, which “*pivot him*” from the water to the sky, this quatrain encapsulates a chiasmic exchange between the constructive aspiration for “*building*” and destructive desire for “*shedding*” the disorderly “*tumult.*” Not to mention

the associative link between the natural life (the gull) and human artifice (the bridge), such a figural relation that encompasses the opposite drives serves as an impacted metaphor for the authorial strife toward a high-flung vision of totality, one of whose avatars can be the abstracted figure of the Statue of “*Liberty*.” Reminiscent of Pound’s self-reflexive presentation of the act of “set[ting] keel to breakers,” which evokes the poet’s authorial inscription, the two verbs Crane chooses to describe the gull’s flight from the nocturnal perch of the water allow us to imagine the poet’s praxis of *versification* (“*pivot*”) by “*dipping*” his beak-shaped pen in an ink pot.

Besides the shared aspiration toward the epic totality and meta-poetic self-consciousness, another component that these openings have in common is the maritime setting. Initiating the quest motif familiar to the Western epic tradition, both Pound and Crane begin their long poems by the imagery of voyage such as the “keel” in *The Cantos* and “sails” in *The Bridge*. Starting from the “chained bay waters” of the harbor, “*To Brooklyn Bridge*” ends with an inclusive vision of the bridge that spans over the “*prairie’s dreaming sod*” of the continent and even the Atlantic Ocean, consolidating everything from the “*lowliest*” peoples such as “*pariah[s]*” to the highest “*God*”: “*Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend / And of the curveship lend a myth to God*” (CPSL 34).

Nevertheless, those similarities between *The Cantos* and *The Bridge* should not direct our attention away from the spectral quality of Crane's poem. Having described the gull's flight that vanishes quickly out of sight, Crane likens the gull's fleeting motion to the spectral image of ships in an office worker's daydream: "*Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes / As apparitional as sails that cross / Some page of figures to be filed away*" (CPSL 33). The image of the ships' "*sails*" "*cross[ing]*" the East River is presented only to be replaced through Crane's wordplay by "*some page of [sales] figures,*" which is "*filed away*" by a "*page*" or office clerk in Wall Street. Reminiscent of Conte's claim that the concerns of the modernist epic include "*centering*" and "*complete control over its materials*" (37), Crane's manipulation of such puns can also be considered as one of the signs of his epic aspiration to contain multifarious implications in a closed circuit of his metaphors. Yet, such puns and constant displacement of the apparitional figures point toward a crucial distinction between *The Cantos* and *The Bridge*.

As we have seen, the aspiration for totality in the opening of *The Cantos* is enacted by Pound's figuration of the linear movement of the "*keel*" thrusting "*forth*" into "*breakers*" (*Cantos* 3). In contrast, the opening of *The Bridge* is informed by the imagery of circularity and puns, turning around a wide range of "*chained*" implications. For example, the words in the opening quatrain such as "*pivot*" and "*rings*" are looped

together in terms of their circuitous shape and movement. Unlike Pound's way of opening his quest in the middle of the ongoing action ("And then"), Crane casts the opening scene of his epic quest into a cyclical process, and multiplies its origin by superimposing the dawning of a day onto the poem's beginning ("*How many dawns*"). With Crane's accentuation of circularity that is performed on various levels, it is evident that Crane, unlike Pound, sought to provide *The Bridge* with the aesthetic sense of self-enclosure. As James E. Miller correctly writes of Crane's intention to compose the long poem, "Crane did not leave the form entirely to intuitive development." Rather, Miller continues, "[Crane] had a keen sense of the poem as a whole, and he planned sections in sequence to reach a designed end" (174).

With regard to Crane's design to integrate his materials into a whole, Paul Giles insightfully points out that the final section of *The Bridge* titled "Atlantis" turns back to the opening poem through the astounding wordplay as follows. If we perceive the opening words ("*How many dawns*") punning on "Harmony dawns," so Giles argues, we can see that the leading motifs of the final section (Platonic harmony in the epigraph and the view of the bridge before dawn) are already implicated within the poem's very beginning (Giles 101). Moreover, we can detect that the last line of "Atlantis" ("Whispers antiphonal in azure swing") (*CPSL* 74) returns to the poem's beginning in terms of the imagery and the

word. To be more specific, the concluding word of *The Bridge* “swing” can be traced in the first quatrain of the opening lyric, in which we find the word “swing” embedded in “*sea gull*’[*s wing*]” (CPSL 33). Indeed, the motif of circularity evokes the Odyssean *nostos* (homeward journey), which is attuned to Pound’s use of the mask of Odysseus. Sharing the Homeric materials with Pound, though, Crane’s rhetorical style is different from Pound’s in its gesture toward the autotelic, self-enclosure, which draws a stark contrast with the expansive, linear thrust inscribed in “Canto 1.”

Pointing to Crane’s use of “a counter point of motions (bird vs. elevator; sails vs. ‘multitudes bent’),” Alan Trachtenberg associates the “emerg[ence]” of the bridge with “an image of self-containment” (154). As noted above, indeed, Crane’s heavy use of pun, along with the plethora of chained imagery of circles, can be read as an index of the authorial desire to condense the various strands of American history into the poem’s self-enclosed structure. And Crane’s design to provide *The Bridge* with an involuted shape, in which the beginning and ending are looped together, is made evident by the fact that Crane conceived the last section of *The Bridge* first and foremost (CPSL 325). Read in the light not only of the poetic form but also of philosophical terms, then, *The Bridge* will offer us an allegory for the authorial desire for the work’s unalienated identity closed up in itself. As I argue in what follows, the distinction of the rhetorical performances between

The Cantos and *The Bridge* holds true to their thematic concerns, which can lead us to see one ironic consequence.

The Bridge can be distinguished from *The Cantos* by its consistent drive expressed by the lyrical “I” toward an intimate relationality, community, and communion with others and with “America.” Whereas Pound starts *The Cantos* by transfiguring his lyric ego into an anti-lyric historian / translator who tries to reanimate the wide range of literary archives including Chinese classics, what Crane deals with in *The Bridge* is “the Myth of America” (CPSL 554). Both of the terms “Myth” and “America” are inevitably entangled with nationalist ideas such as commonly shared essences, collective identities, atavistic roots, and origins. It seems interesting, therefore, that despite Crane’s democratic aspiration to include in his poem everyone in the country from anonymous hobos to well-known heroic figures, the concept and rhetorical style of *The Bridge* betray a closer kinship than those of *The Cantos* with what Gelpi terms “the elitist sympathy for totalitarianism which helped make Fascism and Nazism and Stalinism possible” (“Genealogy” 525). The irony to be emphasized here goes as follows. Pound is notorious for basing his poetic praxis on the “authoritarian hierarchy” (Conte 37) or distinction between “good” and “evil,” between “us” and “them.” In a passages from “Canto 54,” for instance, Pound sees “History” that he seeks to condense in his poem as “a school book

for princes” (*Cantos* 280). Eventually, however, *The Cantos* turns out to be the radically anarchic, incomplete poem, which remains open to the unmanageable otherness to Pound’s authorial subjectivity: “i.e. it coheres all right / even if my notes do not cohere” (*Cantos* 817). In contrast, Crane, who is the self-confessed inheritor of Whitmanian ideal of democratic community, sought to weave the un-Whitmanian, exclusionary text, revealing the totalitarian desire for the work’s self-enclosed identity untainted by the otherness. It is in this ironical context, though, that an eventual dispersal of various forms of community and the individual lyric subject in *The Bridge* becomes ethically and aesthetically significant.

Introducing the Context of Community

Pointing to “the lack of a coherent structure” of *The Bridge*, Allen Tate writes as follows: “The single symbolic image, in which the whole poem centers, is at one moment the actual Brooklyn Bridge; at another, it is any bridge or ‘connection’; at still another, it is a *philosophical pun* and becomes the basis of a series of analogies.” (230; emphasis added). Obviously, Tate wrote this to criticize the “vagueness of [Crane’s] purpose” (229): “the style lacks an objective pattern of ideas elaborate enough to carry it through an epic

or heroic work” (230). In spite of Tate’s intention, I make use of his term “philosophical pun” to introduce the philosophical thread in my dissertation. As this study on community in and through *The Bridge* develops, my arguments turn out to be implicated in the margins of ongoing discussions around the extinction of community developed notably by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, whose work on community is in a constant dialogue, against the historical backdrop of the rise of totalitarianism, the Holocaust and May 1968, with the works by Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida and others. Needless to say, “community” itself is so receptive a term that it can contain multiple meanings at once. To put it roughly, though, in dealing with the issue of community, these philosophers attach more importance to difference, otherness, and dissemination than to commonality, continuity and reciprocity in order to point toward the impossibility of transparent communal identification. What Nancy terms as “immanent community,” based on the self-contained collective identity, is dismantled, and un-totalized singularities are privileged instead. Traditional form of community (*Gemeinschaft*) that sets itself up as an essential or mythic whole is unraveled by Nancy as “désœuvrée” (unworked), and the possible mode of modern collectivity is restated as the “[c]ommunity without community” that “ceaselessly resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual” (*Inoperative* 71). As will become clear in my study on *The*

Bridge, the aspects of community that I try to highlight are not based fully on the communitarian idea of homogeneity, shared roots, or fusion but remain resistant to those ideals. As regards this issue, my general argument goes as follows. The episodically fractured yet rhetorically networked structure of the poem can be read as an allegory of the (im)possibility of community formation, around which the thoughts of those philosophers have revolved.

Of course, my approach to *The Bridge* as the poem of “community” can be criticized as a merely impressionistic response of a self-indulgent reader, who does not take into account the historical context in which Crane wrote the poem. With such a philosophical context in mind, though, I do not attempt to explicate *The Bridge* as a philosophical verse, nor my principal intention is to graft the poem into a wider political context. However, besides what Brian Reed terms as Crane’s “nationalist aspirations” during the long process of composing *The Bridge (After 153)*, it is undeniable that the implicit logic which can be teased out from the poem’s dense textuality makes the extinction of community one of its significant concerns. Nevertheless, the issue of community has escaped any meaningful attentions in Crane scholarship. Despite the very title of the poem that articulates the concern with relationality, the term “community” has hardly found any place in books and articles that have been written of *The Bridge*. The

lack of critical attention should come as no surprise, because Crane does not use the word “community” in *The Bridge* at all. Quite the contrary, *The Bridge* is permeated with figures of loss, interruption and absence of community, which is the tribal (“The Dance”), familial (“Indiana”), fraternal (“Cape Hatteras”), religious (“Quaker Hill”), or homosexual (“Cutty Sark”). According to Nancy, though, “community” has existed in the history of Western thought as nothing but a figure of “the lost, or broken community” that “was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds” (9). Understanding community as eventhood (*Ereignis*) of incompleteness rather than as a group based on the innate identity, shared origins, and essences (xxiv), Nancy maintains that “such a ‘loss’ [of community] is constitutive of ‘community’ itself” (*Inoperative* 12). In examining what Crane calls his “architectural method” to arrange the poem’s materials so that the fifteen lyrics in the poem could be at once separate and connected (*CPSL* 554-55), I draw on Nancy’s thought of community as an allegory of Crane’s ambitious yet self-defeating will to achieve “a synthesis of America and its structural identity” (*CPSL* 325).

As I will observe in the first chapter, several studies on *The Bridge* have addressed Crane’s desire for community and intimate relationality, whether sporadically or intently. But their accounts tend to be bipolarized between the one camp that emphasizes the connective, relational aspect and the other camp that highlights the dissociated, anti-

relational aspect. Owing a great deal to the critical studies on Crane's poetry, my approach is based not on the relational / anti-relational standard but on the idea of community as what Nancy calls "*partage*," which can be understood as the way in which an act of sharing a mediated space for an incomplete transmission of the limit of a finite being becomes recognizable (*Inoperative* 25; 35). Since Nancy's conception of community simultaneously implies sharing and division of "the limit of our singular / common being" (*Inoperative* xxviii), it proposes an alternative understanding of the relation between a singular voice of each speaker in *The Bridge* and a dispersion of its meanings. Through a detailed analysis of the seven lyrics that constitute *The Bridge*, I will trace the multiple processes through which a formal and thematic dissolution, disjunction and dispersion give way to another form of conjunction and contiguity. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy writes that community should be rethought as "resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence . . . to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity" (35). Nancy's reorientation of community as *partage* will bring us to a more subtle understanding of the networked structure of *The Bridge* as a kinetic mode of community, resistant to the reduction of any modes of relation to the fusional communion of a collective body.

The Methodology of Reading *The Bridge*

Since I maintain that the enduring potential of *The Bridge* lies in the highly receptive amplitude of its networked structure rather than the linear acceleration of a so-called epic story, it is not my intention to present a sequential section-to-section study of *The Bridge*. While the middle chapter, titled Interlude, tries to elucidate Crane's design to invite the reader to assume the role of a poem's co-author who is challenged to re-shuffle its components and make sense of the arranged parts of a shadowed design, my attention falls almost exclusively on the certain sections and subsections in which the poem's concern with community is thrust to the fore. At times, I will refer to the isolated lines of Crane's other poems and the works of other poets to indicate the resemblance to, or contrast with, a given lyric. But my general approach is to organize each chapter around the close reading of an individual lyric in *The Bridge*. In the concluding part of Giles' study on *The Bridge*, Giles regards *The Bridge* as "such an extraordinary complex poem that one is left with the frustrating feeling of having merely scratched its surface." Illustrating the immense significance of Crane's use of "pun," Giles contends that "what we need in due course is the kind of minute, line-by-line attention which annotators have paid to *Finnegans Wake*, so that we can appreciate more of the subtleties that must lie

hidden in the text” (222). My close readings throughout this dissertation will demonstrate that Giles’ contention made in 1986 has not lost its relevance yet.

In considering each section and subsection of *The Bridge* as a half-isolated lyric piece, my approach follows the view of Brian Reed, who employs in his book-length study on Crane “the common albeit contradictory practice of calling *The Bridge* an ‘epic’ while referring to its distinct sections and subsections as ‘lyrics’” (*After* 129). Taking into account Crane’s genre-crossing labeling of *The Bridge* as a “symphony with an epic theme” (*CPSL* 559) or “a long lyric poem, with interrelated sections” (*CPSL* 642), I agree with Reed’s idea that “the terminological tension” between “epic” and “lyric” functions as “a reminder of the provisionality of such categories” (*After* 129). Examined in this light, the distinctive logic of each lyric in *The Bridge* will open up manifold aspects of community in which the dissemination of the discrete voices across its sections and subsections can be considered as continuous with the simultaneous division and sharing of a desiring voice in the poem’s polyphonic structure.

While my focus is consistently on the peculiar textuality of *The Bridge*, I do not mean to say that my study does not consider various discursive systems of the 1920s through which Crane negotiates with the socio-political and literary issues. Noting that *The Bridge* “contains too many unresolved tensions and leaves too many loose ends,”

Reed concludes his comprehensive analysis of *The Bridge* by posing several questions, two of which go as follows: “How does sexuality, especially nonnormative sexuality, relate to community formation on the margins? Can race really be so neatly sidelined en route to a pleasing paradigm?” (*After* 166). I will deal with those problems, especially, in the fifth chapter on “The Dance” and the seventh chapter on “Cutty Sark.” In order to illustrate Crane’s struggle to balance his private motive with the public, historical and communal subjects, I pay a certain amount of attention to Crane’s biographical sources as what Hazel Smith terms “the counter-melody to the poetry, or as yet another series of links in the hyper textual web” (53). In embedding the poem within the inter-textual network of critical discourses, I also make recourse to the queer theorists like Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Judith Butler, to the post-colonial thinker such as Homi Bhabha, and to French writers and philosophers like Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, and Michelle Foucault.

Needless to say, such a hybrid approach is threatened to draw our attention away from the language on the printed page and egregiously deform it through the interpretive lens of a given theory. What is more, as many critics have insisted, Crane’s poem can receive and contain a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. As my own readings of Crane will show, one of Crane’s characteristics lies in his resistance to hermeneutic

decisiveness so as to keep an interpretive desire drifting on. As Allen Grossman rightly notes, the “obscurity of discourse” in Crane’s poems stands for “a postponement and equivocation of the decision as to what relationships are permitted and therefore possible—an equivocation that we as readers enact when we dwell in the bewilderment of his style, and that we erase (but do not resolve) when we compel a ‘meaning’” (223-24). In the same vein, Giles notes that Crane’s “zest for immortality” can be equivalent to that of James Joyce, who “once said of *Ulysses*, ‘I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality’” (qtd. in Giles 217). In order to eschew a finalizing reduction of Crane’s poem to a single theoretical frame (because any idea or theory can be absorbed into his poems), I will stick to a formalist method that is indebted to close reading practice of the New Criticism. With an awareness of the fact that pointing out multifarious links in *The Bridge* has been prevalent in Crane criticism, I will highlight in Interlude the way in which Crane’s text activates the very hermeneutic desire to discover such links and thereby forge an affective relation with the text. Throughout my analysis of *The Bridge*, I am especially concerned with the dense intricacies of Crane’s rhetorical strategies to find an opportunity for mobilizing alternative modes of bridging, crossing, and transmission. In accessing alternative meanings in *The Bridge* that can make useful

contribution to Crane's art of bridging, the following claim made by Gordon A. Tapper remains instructive: "[R]ather than coming to rest in a normative paraphrase, which would betray the spirit in which Crane created these enigmas," so Tapper writes, "it is more important to ask why these enigmas were created in the first place" (19). With Tapper's reminder in mind, in Interlude, I will turn to Crane's letters and essays to look over his concept of *The Bridge* along with his idea of poetry in general.

Especially from Interlude on, I use such a term as "co-responding figures" by making recourse to Jack Spicer's idea of poetic tradition as a process of the disconnected dialogue between subjects. According to Daniel Katz, Spicer "wanted to mark his quibble on 'correspondence' as a multi-directional exchange of messages. And in the *New American Poetry*, the verb is italicized and hyphenated in three occurrences: '*co-respond*'" (75). In appropriating this playful term coined by Spicer, I have to eschew the terminological confusion with "correspondence" as the idea of Romanticism. The "correspondence" is closely bound up with Romanticism in which the term has been considered equivalent to an "intrinsic, organic" "continuity between the perceiving subject, the perceived world, and the medium of expression in the subtending activity of Spirit" (Gelpi, "Genealogy" 518). After the manner of Spicer, my use of "co-respond" aims to gesture toward an allegory of the self-confessedly interstitial relation that is

predicated on difference and discontinuity between each figure dispersed in *The Bridge*. Of course, the Romantic idea of “correspondence” includes not only an organic connection between opposites but also an imperfect conjunction that is based on the discontinuity between the mundane world and the transcendental realm of the absolute. In one of his letters, Crane uses the term “correspondence” to describe the concept of “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”: a metaphorical “scaffolding” . . . “gave me a series of correspondences between two widely separated worlds on which to sound some major themes of human speculation” (*CPSL* 160). Resonating with this “scaffolding,” Crane’s stated conception of “the bridge” as a symbol of connecting the past, present and future can easily be categorized as the Romantic (*CPSL* 310). In talking about “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” which is the prototype of *The Bridge* (Crane wrote to Gorham Munson in 1923 that *The Bridge* “carries on further the tendencies manifest in ‘F and H’”) (*CPSL* 314), Crane writes that he is engaged in “building a bridge between so-called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today, which has no formulated mythology yet” (*CPSL* 160). However, aside from Crane’s fusional intention to present the poem as “a kind of fusion of our own time with the past” (*CPSL* 316), the mode of link and connection I try to stress is based on that of a multi-directional “co-response” rather than one to one fixed analogy such as “the classic”

and “the modern.” With regard to the word “figure,” I use it as an intermediary term between a word’s figurative meaning and an image or form that the words in a poem can signify.

Proceedings

After summarizing the reception history of *The Bridge* in the first chapter, I will start the analysis by focusing on the way in which each of the last three additions to *The Bridge* literally collapses. Analyzing “Quaker Hill,” “Cape Hatteras,” and “Indiana” respectively, I will highlight the process in which a formal and thematic disintegration elucidates both Crane’s own decline and a looming concern with community or intimate relationality. Interlude dwells on Crane’s letters and essays not only to account for the scope of *The Bridge* and Crane’s poetics but also to demonstrate a method to interpret the inter-related loops of “inaccurate[ly] replicat[ed]” figures arrayed across the sections and subsections (Bersani, *Homos* 146). In so doing, I will reformulate Crane’s “logic of metaphor” as the poetics of spacing that activates a self-consciously mediated space for a multi-directional relation between the co-responding words and images. The elegiac atmosphere permeating the last three additions surely reflects Crane’s aggravating

circumstances in 1929. And we could argue that the melancholic mood of the three lyrics corresponds with that of the nation-state descending into the Great Depression. In the 1930s, the socialist realism becomes approved in the U. S. literary establishment, which, in turn, would denigrate the rhetorical extravagance and the queer-inflected nativist vision in *The Bridge*. By examining his idea of poetry and the related rhetorical strategies, however, I will argue that Crane's "failure" in *The Bridge* to attain the synthesized view of America and its identity is embedded within the very objectives with which Crane embarked upon his long poem as "a mystical synthesis of 'America'" in the roaring twenties (*CPSL* 321). Interlude becomes the longest one so as to function both as a transition and as a pivot on which the first three readings of the lyrics and the rest can meet and turn around to display a textual model of the community of co-responding figures.

After examining the 1929 lyrics and his letters, the rest of the chapters deals with the four lyrics ("The Dance," "Southern Cross," "Cutty Sark," and "The Tunnel") that Crane composed around 1926, when the poet, motivated by the resurgence of creative energy, managed to write the nearly two-thirds of *The Bridge*. Despite the propitious circumstance in which Crane was situated to write the poem, my readings show that what informs those lyrics is the principle of incompleteness, absence and misrecognition rather

than that of immediate connectedness, and of intimate reciprocity. It is well known that Crane sought to countervail against Eliot's "perfection of death" that he found in *The Waste Land* (CPSL 308). And an obvious contrast between Crane's "vaulting" bridge (CPSL 34) and Eliot's London bridge "falling down" in *The Waste Land* (Poems 71) appears to confirm Crane's rebuttal against Eliot's "pessimism" (CPSL 310). Yet, my close readings will reintroduce *The Bridge* as much more wasted, discontinuous, and future-denying than the ostensibly mournful text of *The Waste Land*, in whose final section titled "What the Thunder Said" we find Eliot's speaker eventually invoking an ethical solution from the philosophical text of the Upanishads. Apart from Eliot's intentions and despite the poem's fragmentary enumerations of cultural and moral degradations, the orientalist gesture that seeks a redemption by having recourse to the Sanskrit text can be read as the authorial will to reconnect a "heap of broken images" of the declining Western culture (Poems 55) and redeem it by the Sanskrit prayer for "Shantih" (Poems 71) or "The Piece which passeth the understanding" (Poems 708). The ending of *The Bridge*, as we have observed, rejects even the signal of such an authorized solution, thereby leaving the speaker's errant question unanswered: "Is it Cathay, / Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring / The serpent with the eagle in the leaves . . . ? / Whispers antiphonal in azure swing" (CPSL 74).

Chiming with Walter Benjamin's recapitulation of the "baroque" sensibility, the meticulously crafted extravagance of Crane's text resists the eventual crystallization of a redemptive vision. In foregrounding its linguistic surface whose "extravagant pomp" entangles in itself "the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the beautiful, physical nature" (*Origin* 176), my arguments about Crane's vision of "America" and its future in *The Bridge* may draw closer to the melancholic figure of Benjamin's "angel of history," whose "face is turned toward the past," "see[ing] one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" ("Thesis" 259). According to Paul de Man, Benjamin's idea of "history" is implicated not in a linear, temporal destiny that has its "original" "homeland" but in "the figural pattern and the disjunctive power . . . in the structure of language" ("Conclusions" 92). In addition to de Man's idea of "allegory" that, unlike "the symbol," "designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide" ("The Rhetoric" 207), de Man's deconstructive reading of Benjamin's essay on "translation" is insightful for my purpose to examine the dissociative aspect of Crane's supposedly associative use of language. Echoing de Man's idea, one of my contentions in this dissertation is that Crane's vision of a national history and its future turns out to the melancholic one haunted by the self-confessedly fabricated images of lost origins. In

order to reframe this point, I try to foreground what de Man calls as “a wandering, an *errance*” of Crane’s language that “never reaches the mark.” According to de Man’s interpretation of Benjamin’s idea about “translation,” such “a kind of permanent exile” of what is postulated as “the original” serves to disclose the illusion of the “original” history as the secondary artifact in the very structure of language. Following de Man’s approach, my focus on the rhetorical self-centeredness of *The Bridge* is aimed not only to highlight the “wandering” of the nativistic vision of a nation’s roots and its futurity but also to re-mobilize the “errancy” of Crane’s outlandish language by dwelling on its effect to incite and perpetuate the reader’s identificatory impulse (“Conclusions” 92). Thus, in Interlude, I will discuss “our” desire to have a writerly event of witnessing from both inside and outside of the text the multi-directional process of bridging, which can be perceived as an act of partaking of a certain form of community.

Throughout my reading of *The Bridge*, the mediated distance found in the lyrics is rethought to function to initiate a moment of transmitting the inheritances of an alternative “America,” whose substance is rendered less important than a movement through which a self-differentiating New World vision is indirectly passed from one voice to another, and from one section to another section. Then, in Postlude, I will give over Crane’s poetics of deconstructing community to the hand of another poet, namely, Frank O’Hara, an

ardent aficionado of Crane in the late 1950s. With the unabashedly romantic, and “retrograde” characteristics such as Crane’s attachment with the obsolete vocabulary and anachronistic dictions, Crane’s queer aesthetics belongs to what Heather Love calls “backward modernism” that embraces “the nonmodern in the movement,” including “primitivism,” “the concern with tradition,” “widely circulating rhetorics of decadence and decline,” or “the melancholia” (6-7). By paring Crane’s baroque, “backward” poetic practice with O’Hara’s nonchalant yet subversive poetics called “personism,” I would like to suggest a line of continuity between Crane and O’Hara, who is one of the trailblazers and great influencers of the U. S. postmodern poetics.

In order to avoid becoming the poet’s “*faithful / partisan*” (CPSL 35) who ends up merely appreciating Crane and his poetry, my aim is also to consider what Crane had not intended in finishing *The Bridge*. One could argue against my approach by finding a touch of presentism that I arbitrarily use in an interpretive framework to mistreat the historical specificity of Crane’s text. And yet, not to mention the obvious fact that any literary or non-literary text cannot be read in its own terms, this dissertation will demonstrate the relevance of my invested attention to the poem’s verbal intricacy in conjunction with its figurations of communal relationality. By utilizing a hybrid critical method that combines the various theoretical discourses with formalist analysis, I will try to uncover the issue

of community, which operates on multiple levels of the text so ubiquitously that it eventually seems to haunt the margins of *The Bridge*. To foreground the issue of community as the center of my study, I will start the first chapter by making a survey of the reception history of Crane and *The Bridge* from the early criticism onward.

Chapter 1: Overviewing the Reception History of *The Bridge*

I. From the 1920s to the 1980s

(i) The Dispute over the Unity of *The Bridge*

Although Crane conceived *The Bridge* as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (CPSL 321), the resultant form of the poem turns out to be wildly centrifugal on multiple levels. Containing the fifteen individual lyrics, *The Bridge* starts with the paean to Brooklyn Bridge, which is followed by the eight sections of variegated length and style. Revolving around vaguely American themes and motifs, the poem moves erratically through various modes of address, including rhymed dramatic monologues (“Ave Maria” and “Indiana”), disjunctive collage of advertisements transformed into grandly mannered quatrains (“The River”), Apollinaire-like visual arrangement of words on the page (“Cutty Sark” and “Cape Hatteras”), oneiric love poems (“Harbor Dawn” and “Southern Cross”), dithyrambic Shelleyan odes (“The Dance” and “Atlantis”) to name a few. While having the aspect of an epic poem that deals with America’s past and present, *The Bridge* can also be read as a personal journey of the poet as an anonymous commuter in New

York City who repeats the everyday routine of starting for Manhattan and going back to Brooklyn. Foretold by its diverse voices and styles, *The Bridge* does not offer us a linear, cumulative narrative or coherent national history but wavers through different times and places without showing a rigorously constructed design. This stylistic heterogeneity can be partly ascribable to the history of the text formation in which most of the lyrics in *The Bridge* were separately published in different little magazines and journals (*The Bridge Uncollected* 79-80). But this historical fact should not detract our eyes from Crane's design to totalize *The Bridge* as a unified long poem. For instance, *The Bridge* does have a binding symbol, Brooklyn Bridge, which is the supposed addressee both in the proem "To Brooklyn Bridge" and in the last section "Atlantis." Nevertheless, as though reflecting a bridge's unstable identity as the central topos, *The Bridge* is materialized as the long poem that seems to be an ill-sutured patchwork of fragmentary episodes in different situations. As Maria Damon concisely puts, *The Bridge* is "dizzily complex and disorienting in its scope" (148).

After witnessing Columbus' "word" of the New World (*CPSL* 35), we are led into an apartment room in twentieth-century New York where the anonymous speaker wakes up with his spectral lover ("The Harbor Dawn"). In the next lyric "Van Winkle," the speaker, who goes to work with Rip Van Winkle, is taken by the unexpected memories of

his childhood. His recollection of his mother's "Sabbatical, unconscious smile," entwined with the memory of "ston[ing] the family of young / Garter snakes" (*CPSL* 40), are taken over by the shadow of Pocahontas, inviting us to the zig-zagging journey with hobos across the Midwest through "Memphis to Tallahassee" "down to Tennessee" toward the Gulf of Mexico ("The River") (*CPSL* 42-43). After superimposing the wounded and wounding aspects of an American history onto the "flow" of the Mississippi in which we find "floating niggers" (*CPSL* 44), the poem transports us into "the pure mythical and smoky soil" (*CPSL* 556) where a sadomasochistic dance of death is enacted by the white speaker with the "Indian" chieftain called Maquokeeta ("The Dance"). Then, the mythical time bends back towards the historical time after Colorado gold rush when the aged pioneer woman mourns the disintegration of her family unit ("Indiana"). The next section "Cutty Sark" entices us to witness the experience of cruising in twentieth-century New York where the speaker encounters a strange sailor. The sailor's green eyes possess the speaker's mind, leading to a haunting rendition of a regatta of the bygone clipper ships. After celebrating the newest achievements of modern machineries in the manner of Walt Whitman, of whom Crane has been regarded as the spiritual heir, "Cape Hatteras" presents the disastrous plane crash. "Three Songs" shows the lyrical assortment of Crane's ambivalent views of the feminine ("Southern Cross," "National Winter Garden,"

and “Virginia”). By invoking Isadora Duncan and Emily Dickinson as indomitable idealists in an unsympathetic society, “Quaker Hill” portrays spiritual degradation of the new suburbia, which is followed by a commuter’s subway ride with the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe, whose “head is swinging from the swollen strap” (“The Tunnel”) (*CPSL* 69). Eventually, the poem ends with an ecstatic verbal pyrotechnics of “Atlantis,” where Brooklyn Bridge is drenched in moonshine, transfiguring itself into a “Deity’s glittering Pledge” (*CPSL* 74).

Whether or not they admired the meandering long poem as summarized above, the earliest critics were right at least in specifying *The Bridge*’s most distinctive characteristic as the poet’s rhetorical splendor bereft of any coherent narrative structure. In the 1930 review of *The Bridge*, Yvor Winters, who has once been an ardent admirer of Crane’s poetry, writes that the reader of this long poem finds Crane wasting away his “genius of high order” as a lyric poet, whose grandly mannered style has been praised by notable critics (27). Commenting on his first and only book of lyrics called *White Buildings* (1926), for instance, Edmund Wilson evaluated Crane’s “great style” as “strikingly original” with a critical reservation that it is devoid of “a great subject” or it does not have, “so far as one can see, any subject at all” (200). In the same vein, Allen Tate points out the lack of a “suitable theme” along with the disproportion between a “single” tenor and

multiple vehicles in Crane's lyrics: "The poems of Hart Crane are facets of a single vision; they refer to a central imagination, a single evaluating power" (qtd. in *CPSL* 795). Aside from "its decorative and fragmentary world," Tate highly admired Crane's "sonorous rhetoric" and his manipulation of "blank verse" in *White Buildings*, which is "measured, richly textured, rhetorical" (qtd. in *CPSL* 796).

When *The Bridge* was published, however, Crane's rhetorical style turns out to be an object of harsh strictures. This derives mainly from a disparity between Crane's stated epic intention and the disjunctive form of the finished text. Sharing a lot with the bardic social criticism of Waldo Frank and the ideas of the other writers in 1920s nativist movement, Crane sought to present himself in *The Bridge* as a visionary synthesizer of American history: "I'm on a synthesis of America and its structural identity now, called *The Bridge*" (*CPSL* 325). Instead of fleshing out such a grand concept, however, Crane seems to demonstrate in *The Bridge* what R. P. Blackmur criticizes as "radical confusion," which works to disperse not only the "structural identity" of America but also a formal integrity of the poem as a whole: "He used the private lyric to write the cultural epic . . . The confusion of tool and purpose not only led him astray in conceiving his themes; it obscured at crucial moments the exact character of the work he was actually doing" (Blackmur 21). Dismissing the fractured textuality of *The Bridge* as a form of "hysteria,"

Winters denigrates Crane's inclination "to emotionalize a theme to the point where both he and the reader will forget to question its justification" (29). While acknowledging Crane's "great genius in the Whitmanian tradition," into which Crane "grafts" "the stylistic discipline of the Symbolists" (25), Winters concludes that Crane "has demonstrated the impossibility of getting anywhere with the Whitmanian inspiration" (31).

Winters' use of the term "Whitmanian inspiration" can be exchangeable with the Romantic inspiration, whose problems, according to Winters, lie in the author's lack of "restraint" and moral scrutiny. Pointing out to "moment-to-moment inspiration" that gives the poem's lines "a pure electricity" rather than a coherent structure, Winters disparages *The Bridge* as an anti-rational verse bereft of any kind of intellectual cogency. Although less harsh in his tone and use of words than Winters', Tate also claims *The Bridge* as a grave stone of Romanticism: "Crane not only ends the Romantic era in his own person; he ends it logically and morally" (294). Criticizing the amorphous, almost empty vision of "America" in *The Bridge*, Tate writes that the "historical plot of the poem, that is the groundwork on which the symbolic bridge stands, is arbitrary and broken, where the poet would have gained an overwhelming advantage by choosing a single period or episode, a concrete event with all its dramatic causes" (287). Of course, the

irony is that both Tate and Winters, who turned out to be the representative proponents of the New Criticism, fail to separate the text of *The Bridge* from its author, linking the poem's "failure" with their personal view of Crane as the homosexual "roaring boy" (Cowley 221). Despite their homophobic biases, though, we have to admit that their reviews of *The Bridge* have remained partially accurate. Along with Wilson's judgment that Crane's "great style" does not contain "any subject at all" (200), their emphasis on the combination of the poem's rhetorical abundance and thematic diffusiveness shall be reevaluated in Postlude as a significant contribution to the poem's polyphonic structure.

Corresponding to the reevaluation of Romanticism in the United States after World War II, which is represented by the "Whitmanesque Romanticism of Beat poets like Ginsberg, Kerouac" (Gelpi, "Genealogy" 524), more sympathetic critics and writers began to defend Crane's poetry. Not to mention Robert Lowell's "Words for Hart Crane," in which Crane is invoked with Whitman as a "stranger in America" (159), the New American poets such as Allen Ginsberg (222), Robert Creeley (109-10), Charles Olson (4), Jack Spicer (7-8), Robert Duncan (*Selected* 44-45), Bob Kaufman (16-17) and others dedicated honoring comments and elegiac poems to Crane, thereby renovating a legend of Hart Crane as the "culture hero": "uneducated, alcoholic, homosexual, paranoiac, suicidal—victimized by himself and by the world—he still wrote optimistic, visionary

poetry” (Dembo 132-33). Besides gaining the privileged status of both as a countercultural hero and as the poets’ poet whose poetry functioned, for instance, as a bridge to connect Ginsberg with William Burroughs (Miles 47-48), Crane began to draw serious scholarly reassessments as the dominant influence of the New Criticism, which had institutionalized “certain Modernist values during the forties and fifties,” gradually waned (Gelpi, “Genealogy” 524). Locating “Crane’s imagination” in “the Anglo-American Romantic tradition” (Lewis vii), the critical works by R. W. B. Lewis (1967), Sherman Paul (1972), M. D. Uroff (1974) proposed compelling explications of Crane’s oeuvre.

As Lee Edelman astutely points out, however, “[t]hese newer critics did not question in any fundamental way the theoretical basis for the earlier negative evaluations of Crane’s poetry.” Rather, as Edelman writes, “they attempted to show that the verse, properly read, did in fact fulfill the requirements articulated by the critics of the 1920’s and 1930’s” (*Transmemberment* 2). By making sense of the difficult metaphors that complicate the narrative structure of *The Bridge*, in other words, they tried to demonstrate that Crane’s poetry was not deranged but *organically* coherent. As a result, the style of their arguments themselves are infected by the Romantic aesthetic. Being consonant with Ron Silliman’s view of Romanticism, which is characterized by the notions of “organic

form,” “artificial holism,” and longing for “a unity between signifier and signified” (qtd. in Gelpi “Genealogy” 539), for instance, Thomas Vogler writes of *The Bridge* that “[i]t seems inherently valuable to find a way of reading a poem so that it becomes . . . unified in structure and coherent as a whole” (146). Owing to Vogler’s valuable study and the other scholarly works in the 1970s, each section of *The Bridge* was meticulously annotated and paraphrased to yield a seemingly coherent narrative structure. Yet, Edelman keenly points out that “the task of explication that they undertook bordered frequently on sympathetic apologetics, and the analysis of the text was subordinated often to a defense of its cohesive logic” (*Transmemberment* 2).

Indeed, the critical works on *The Bridge* around the mid-twentieth century presented the acute explications and compelling arguments, categorizing the patterns and functions of Crane’s use of imagery and recurrent motifs to an extent that the reader can perceive in *The Bridge* “a high degree of organic unity” (Vogler 146). And their sequential readings of the poem’s sections and subsections may help us recognize that the individual lyrics and their thematic codes could be converged in the final section “Atlantis.” In so doing, however, their arguments tend to downlight the poem’s anti-fusional and “aggressively non-narrative” structure, to borrow Gordon A. Tapper’s phrase for “Cape Hatteras” (166). What is more, their emphasis on the “organic” unity of *The Bridge* or a

thematic interpretation of the poem in terms of “the predominant ontology of archaic man—the myth of ‘eternal return’” (Trachtenberg 147) might render invisible the poem’s erratic movement in which, as I will recapitulate in Postlude, one voice and its meanings in a given lyric is partially possessed and dis-located by a differentiating flow of the other voices throughout *The Bridge*.

(ii) A Splendid Failure: the Two Versions of *The Bridge*

The affirmative view of *The Bridge* as the organically unified poem was challenged by Edward Brunner’s *Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of The Bridge* (1985). By adopting a mode of genetic criticism to chart the developments within Crane’s manuscripts for *The Bridge*, Brunner argues that the finished 1930 version is a relative failure compared to the 1926 version. While the 1926 version was not only “a breathtaking achievement” but also “a delicate accomplishment” with “a double-edged quality” and “intricacy,” so Brunner argues, the 1927 assemblage Crane struggled to organize brought “the distortion” to the finished shape of *The Bridge* (186). What is more, Brunner goes as far as to contend that Crane “did not have to compose” the three additional poems written in 1929, namely, “Indiana,” “Cape Hatteras,” and “Quaker Hill,”

all of which “became at once, and have still remained, without question the most controversial sections of the sequence” (218). Shedding light on “Crane’s torment and indecision, his irritation and revulsion” inscribed in these lyrics, Brunner insightfully notes that “[a]ll the minor flaws” that were marginal in the 1926 version “come center stage in these three poems.” In Brunner’s view, these lyrics are “distraught and twisted, a striking mixture of businessmanlike [*sic*] craftsmanship undermined by flashes of integrity.” In accounting for the consequent flaws in *The Bridge*’s structure, Brunner emphasizes the predominant negativity apparent in these additional lyrics thus:

[Crane’s] “Quaker Hill” comparison of past with present is not calm and resigned but vexed and irritated. His homage to the maternal instinct in “Indiana” comes out as a fierce exposure of extreme possessiveness. And the airplane in “Cape Hatteras”—a favorite motif of Harry Crosby—flies only to crash.” (223-24)

Founded on the meticulous analysis of Crane’s manuscripts and the finished text, Brunner’s argument is so persuasive that even Harold Bloom, one of the consistent admirers for Crane, follows Brunner’s evaluation. Seeing the later additions as “all unworthy of Crane,” Bloom observes that he would like to “omit the three poems Hart Crane composed in alcohol and despair” (*Daemon* 451). By taking into account Brunner’s

view that the 1929 additions illustrate Crane's decline, I will reframe the negativity found in these lyrics and highlight the issues of community and communion ("Quaker Hill"), a fraternal relationship ("Cape Hatteras"), and a familial and national bond ("Indiana").

While drawing on Brunner's genetic criticism, I will pay less attention to whether his evaluation is accurate or not about the "distraught and twisted" lyrics of 1929, which, according to Brunner, brought about the "failed" structure of the final version. Nor will I make much of a sense of "unity" in my analysis of *The Bridge*. On the aesthetic concept of "unity," Gerald L. Bruns reminds us that "what are the formal, linguistic conditions which will account for our sense that a poem or an essay is a unified structure of meanings and not merely a set of random sentences is still far more open than any hitherto proposed models will admit" (*Modern* 256). Bruns' observation supports my view that any critical judgement based on binary opposites such as "unity" and "disunity" tends to obfuscate the text's rich entangling of the disconnected episodes with the co-responding voices across the sections and subsections. As evident in his ambition to reconceive "the Myth of America" (*CPSL* 554), indeed, Crane sought to arrange the mythical and historical strands of "America" into a form of "a synthesis" (*CPSL* 321; 325; 424). Crane's aspiration toward synthesis can also be confirmed in his deification of Brooklyn Bridge, which, as John T. Irwin observes, might seem to embody Hegelian dialectic: "vertical

compression in the stone towers (thesis) balanced against horizontal tension in the steel cables (antithesis) to produce suspension (synthesis)” (36). As my close readings will make clear, however, the last additions to *The Bridge* do not succeed in providing *The Bridge* with a well-balanced form that can be regarded as the synthesized “suspension.” What is disintegrated in “Quaker Hill,” for instance, is the very perspective to build and maintain such a dialectic scheme. In this line of thought, my argument seems to merely reconfirm the validity of Brunner’s view. But my reading of “Quaker Hill” will demonstrate that the poem’s moral and aesthetic force comes from the very disintegration of the synthesizing perspective enacted on multiple levels.

The dispute over the unity of *The Bridge* may fix our attention to the deceptive binaries that are derived from the assumption of a self-enclosed identity of the work as an individual totality, thereby diverting our eyes from the active network of relations mobilized both in and through *The Bridge*. His aesthetic judgment aside, though, Brunner’s study remains highly precious for its robust analysis of Crane’s compositional process in which the text literally goes to pieces. In the three additional poems, which display Crane’s “attempt to unite the themes he now wished to emphasize: the loss of the frontier, the illusory attractions of the machine, and the importance of abiding relationships,” Brunner writes, Crane “admit[s] that he has failed in his effort at an epic . . .

but assert[s] that what saves him is some inner sense of excellence, his intuitive knowledge that the love between persons is of utmost value” (231). In other words, owing to the last additions, we see clearly that the poem’s implicit motive for intimacy, love, and communal relationship takes the place of Crane’s public or epic ambition to present a panoramic vision of America. Although “community” is beyond Brunner’s central concerns, his study can be appreciated as a springboard for my study to argue that the issue of community haunts not only the later additions but also the other lyrics in *The Bridge*.

II. From the 1990s: A Failed *Nostos* and Queer Readings of *The Bridge*

(i) Nativist Strands of *The Bridge*

As the poem’s very title manifests Crane’s will to connect and restore something divided and broken, the poem’s dominant concern that governs the poet’s personal motive and historical stance is a quest for a form of communal relationality in which each individual can be embedded within a larger, collective body. Be it “a new cultural synthesis of values in terms of our America” (*CPSL* 424), “the experience and perception

of common race" (*CPSL* 466), "the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity" (*CPSL* 321), Crane's letters and essays illustrate the typically modernistic awareness that people live in a time of crisis in which "community" has been lost. Accordingly, his manner to talk about *The Bridge's* concept assumes the communitarian appeal for a collective "we" identity that is based on Crane's vision of a national identity and its origins. It is no wonder, then, that *The Bridge* can be read as an unabashedly patriotic poem that is characterized by "the nineteenth-century rhetoric of *Volk, Land, Blut, and Bund*" (Reed, *After* 163).

As suggested in the first section "Ave Maria," in which Crane dramatizes Columbus' return voyage, Crane recurrently enacts in different guises a desire for return or *nostos* (homeward journey), which Allen Grossman restates as "the tracing of 'the visionary company of love' back to the primal scene or source condition where it is an unbroken unity" (230). In the second section called "Powhatan's Daughter," Crane's desire for return is figured as an atavistic quest for national origins. Not to mention the point that Crane's phrase "our America" echoes back to Waldo Frank's *Our America* (1919), the nativist strands of *The Bridge* are continuous with the works by his contemporary, like-minded writers like Frank, Gorham Munson, Vachel Lindsay, William Carlos Williams and others. Put it shortly, as I will show both in the fourth chapter (on "Indiana") and the

fifth chapter (on “The Dance”), what animates *The Bridge*’s mythical lyrics is an atavistic impulse to return to the lost communal intimacy through which peoples could be unified by a single code of tribal or national identity. As it turns out, though, the idea of such origins is envisioned in the text as a near-empty sign of collectivity that is different from, as well as similar to, the actual nation-state. In discussing “America” in *The Bridge*, therefore, we have to distinguish Crane’s vision of America from its realistic manifestations, which include not only skyscrapers or subway stations but also various figures of the lost community in the early years of twentieth-century America.

Criticizing Crane’s lack of “indispensable understanding of his country,” Allen Tate associates Crane’s approach to America with that of a “sightseer” “with seven-league boots” who “sees nothing” about the country’s history (235). Tate’s critique of Crane as a flippant sightseer is applicable at least to Crane’s vision of America, and can be reconsidered as the issue that is worth developing in a productive direction. By taking over Tate’s criticism, for instance, Reed highlights the substance-less vision of America in *The Bridge* as the very strength of the poem:

One final word on the politics of *The Bridge*: it sought to be a definitive statement on the United States, an epic that . . . sum[s] up a people’s past and launches a grand future . . . [H]owever, Crane borrows heavily from

nineteenth-century European models to produce an “American” poetics. This poetics, moreover, devalues history in favor of transcendental bliss, a dynamic . . . traceable to Crane’s early, sexuality-related struggles with decadent precedent. A nation is imagined so that it can then be superseded in the name of *jouissance*. The America that takes shape in the bridge is thus a shaky, collapsible construct—a construct, moreover, hymned in passionate, mannerist verse, not in a fake folky Thomas Hart Benton-ish vernacular mode. Crane, after a fashion, reveals “*America*” as *artifice*, more specifically, fractured, willful artifice predicated on displacement, concealment, and jerryrigging. (*After* 166)

In a highly refined manner, Reed revalues the diffusiveness or “shakey, collapsible” artificiality of Crane’s patriotic vision, which can deconstruct the essentialist idea of a nation. Yet Reed’s conclusion, strong as it is, seems to be weakened slightly by his eventual downplay of Crane’s authorial intention to abstract or, to use Crane’s favorite trope, *purify* the specificity of a national identity. As evident in his 1923 letter to Munson in which he presents the concept of *The Bridge* as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America,’” Crane did not intend *The Bridge* “to be a definitive statement of the United States”:

History and fact, location, etc., all have to be transfigured into abstract form

that would almost function independently of its subject matter. The initial impulses of “our people” will have to be gathered up toward the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is included also our scientific hopes and achievements of the future. (*CPSL* 321)

In Crane’s design for the “mystical synthesis of ‘America,’” the nation’s historical identity must “be transfigured into abstract form,” or into an “almost” empty vehicle dissociated from its social, historical, and institutional moorings. What we must remind ourselves in this context is that, as the earlier critics have stressed, Crane’s project is partially derived from Whitman’s imagining of an “ideal” America. As Sacvan Bercovitch writes in *The American Jeremiad*, Whitman tried to “protect the American ideal by abstracting it from the real America” (199). This aspect of Whitman’s project is surely succeeded by Crane, who, in another 1923 letter to Munson, declares thus: “I begin to feel myself directly connected with Whitman” (*CPSL* 327).

Having said that, there is a crucial distinction between Whitman’s “America” and Crane’s. Although few critics have pointed out, unlike *Leaves of Grass*, the word “America” does not appear in *The Bridge* at all, thereby tacitly tempting us to perceive the traces of its absence. In each section of the poem, various names of cities, communities, and continents including the mythologized ones like Cathay, Eldorado, or

Atlantis are invoked as the provisional versions of the New World vision, which denies the possibility of a definitive identification with America. To be certain, Crane appropriates the figures of Pocahontas and Whitman with an aim to embody his vision of America. As the following chapters will make clear, though, those “American” figures remain trembling on the verge of the definitive materialization into the symbol of national identity. Abstracted into a malleable figure of the New World, in other words, Crane’s “America,” along with its “structural identity” of “our people,” is cast into the process of constant self-differentiation (*CPSL* 321).

On the one hand, *The Bridge* offers us the vivid images of the New York City with its over-sweeping evocation of the continent by directing our eyes towards California, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, the Mississippi, or many other places. On the other hand, “America” as a national identity is constantly on the move without crystalizing into a stable configuration. Seen in this light, then, *The Bridge* poses one significant question: what modes of relationality can be fashioned by partaking of such de-nationalized inheritances of “America”? While *Interlude* deals with this question by examining Crane’s poetics, it is undeniable that this near substance-less quality of Crane’s “America” has invited critics and commentators to see *The Bridge* as “failure.”

(ii) *The Bridge* as an (Un)Married Epic

In reviewing *The Bridge*, Yvor Winters complains that only one lyric in the entire sequence “endeavors to treat clearly of an individual human relationship” (26). Having read Winters’ review, Crane furiously retorts Winters, saying that “Indiana” does not have “any profound momentum on ‘individual human relationship’” (*CPSL* 641). Despite Crane’s opposition, I will side with Winters’ view with a reservation that “an individual human relationship” is thematized not only in “Indiana” but also in the other lyrics as well. However, as will be demonstrated in each analysis of the lyrics, the modes of establishing a communal bond turn out to be anti-relational to an extent that the text shows itself as a carefully woven network of failed connections.

In dealing with the motif of relational failure in *The Bridge*, we also have to take into account the poem’s failure of communication with the reader. As many critics have pointed out, *The Bridge*, when being read as a long poem, gives the reader the impression that the poem is not a series but a collage of fragmentary lyrics. This impression derives from the fact that the terms that can connect the diverse figures and episodes in the poem are hard to be established. More elaborately put, *The Bridge* does not hold out any established identity that is authoritative enough to guarantee the validity of links between

co-responding figures across the sections and subsections. When the reader is bewildered, incapable of determining a logic to connect different episodes, figures, and phrases, it can be said that Crane fails to communicate with the reader. To those multifold failure of communication in and through *The Bridge*, the queer readings have paid serious attentions since the 1990s.

As L. S. Dembo wrote in 1960, “the word ‘failure’ usually appears in any commentary on [*The Bridge*], whether the writer is pointing out a passage to be admired, praising Crane for his noble but unsuccessful effort, or simply condemning him” (4). However, the view of Crane as a “failure” has been revised by the queer readings of the poet, among which, one can name the critical works by Robert K. Martin, Thomas E. Yingling, Langdon Hammer, Lee Edelman, Samuel R. Delany, Tim Dean, Christopher Nealon, Gordon A. Tapper. Particularly since Yingling’s 1990 study on Crane, whose chapter on *The Bridge* is titled as “Unmarried Epic,” the issue of the poet’s “queer” failure has dominated books and articles on Crane and *The Bridge*. Unlike the earlier criticism that relies on the New Critical criteria to evaluate *The Bridge* as “an abortive attempt to establish an American myth and a failure in meaning, form and style” (Dembo 4), those queer readings have explored the interplay between Crane’s gender and sexuality and his thematic concerns, rhetorical ingenuities, and his erotic identification with the actual and

fantasized homosexual communities. Eventually, Crane's "failure" has come to be historicized as "the product of the ideological impossibility" (Yingling 200), understood as a queer self-dissolution by Tim Dean, positivized as "the project of poetic optimism" by Michael D. Snediker (37), or reevaluated as an "evidence of [failures'] success as lyrics" by John Emil Vincent (128). Among those and many other queer readings of Crane, what is especially remarkable in the context of my argument is Niall Munro's book-length study on Crane's queer modernist aesthetic. Published in 2015, Munro's book casts a new and productive light on Crane's poetics of relationality, which brilliantly showcases Crane's anti-heteronormative strategies to fashion a "queer community." My reservation with Munro's contention is quite local, as I totally agree with Munro's thesis as follows:

Throughout this chapter and throughout the book I have been arguing that the key principle behind Crane's queer aesthetic is relationality and a desire for community; impulses that are often quite at odds with the majority of criticism about Crane which seeks to emphasize his obscurity and difficulty . . . (172)

Quite compelling as a whole as Munro's study is, he is so earnest to defend the relational aspect of Crane's aesthetic that his argument tends to normalize the negativity of Crane's text, whose violent divisions and incoherence are identified by Edelman as the significant indicators of Crane's originality.

Dealing with Crane's "poetics of negativity," Edelman argues that the disjunctive textuality of Crane's poetry is founded on Crane's "implicit perception that breaking and bending cannot be dissociated from the activity of bridging for the 'modern' poet." Parsing a series of figures and motifs of discontinuity, bending, and rupture, Edelman contends that Crane's radical negativity (that "involves no reference to the overt attitude or tone of his work" [*Transmemberment* 13]) is allegorized by the poet's fracturing of syntax, especially, by "the rhetorical scheme of *chiasmus*." According to Edelman, chiasmus, which is "one of Crane's favored rhetorical structures," "bears a trace of the break or rupture." And a form of exchange based on chiasmus "represents a mode of connection only achieved by virtue of a breaking and a bending. Thus chiasmus . . . comes to figure a progression by means of reversal or negation" (*Transmemberment* 7). Though Edelman's emphasis on Crane's negativity seems at odds with my view of the centrality of community to Crane's poetry, his elaboration of chiastic exchange, rhetorical and thematic at once, remains instructive for us to re-complicate modes of relationality that Munro addresses in a rather optimistic light.

In treating the issue of gender and sexuality in relation to Crane's work, we have to bear in mind Reed's caution that the three "labels typically, even automatically, applied" to Crane "in recent criticism—*American, queer, modernist*—proves as likely to obfuscate

as to reveal the origins, character, and aspirations” of his poetry (*After* 10). Also, in borrowing the ideas from Bersani’s *Homos* and Edelman’s *No Future*, which José Esteban Muñoz cites as the “prime examples of queer antirelationality,” I am aware of the danger of falling into a romanticizing simplification of queer negativity by merely associating the self-shattering moments in Crane’s text with “gay male sexual abandon or self-styled risky behavior” (Muñoz 14). For example, in the fifth chapter on “The Dance,” which highlights various signs of tension between the poet’s gay subjectivity and his project of reconceiving a national identity, I attempt to account for the textual effects of narcissism and death drive in tandem with the speaker’s queer desire. However, my aim is not to equate Crane’s homosexuality with those traits but to examine the process in which the speaker’s self-shattering opens up to a possibility of another relational mode. While I agree with Reed’s warning that Crane’s poetry has been misrecognized by labeling him as the “*American, queer, modernist*” poet, I still maintain that reading *The Bridge* in the queer, nativist context does not necessarily reduce the poem’s amplitude. Rather, such queer contexts as evocative of “exclusiveness,” “strangeness,” “marginality” and “difficulty,” are necessary for us to reconsider the disparity between Crane’s aspiration for an epic totality and the finished shape of his “mystical synthesis of ‘America’” as one of portals to the issue of deconstructing communal relationality (*CPSL* 321).

In the following chapters, I will analyze the seven lyrics of *The Bridge* along with Crane's letters and essays to foreground the textual ruptures and thematic hiatuses. As many critics have pointed out, the gaps found in *The Bridge* represent the lack of synthesizing organization in Crane's writing. By analyzing the poem's ambivalent relation to the act of bridging, however, I will demonstrate that the formal incompleteness and narrative insufficiency do not deprive *The Bridge* of its strength. Quite the contrary, Crane's queer inability (and the text's refusal) to synthesize the diverse strands of the poem may well constitute *The Bridge's* greatest achievement that can incite us to revise Crane's "Myth of America" (CPSL 554) as a communal poem in which the disconnected episodes and competing voices across the sections and subsections are co-responded with each other, thereby posing a question about the individual identity both of each speaker's subjectivity and that of a national history.

Chapter 2: “When Love Foresees the End”: “Quaker Hill” and an Intimation of the Common Strangeness⁵

Near the end of 1929, Crane, under pressure to “get the 5-year load of’ *The Bridge* “off [his] shoulders,” sent the manuscript of “Quaker Hill” to Caresse Crosby (*CPSL* 632). According to Crane’s biographer Clive Fisher, Crane finished “Quaker Hill” in spite of “intense anxiety and corollary drunkenness” (415). At the moment when he finished it on December 26, Crane must have been anxious about whether “Quaker Hill” made substantive contribution to the entire structure of *The Bridge*. In the letter to Crosby in which he enclosed the manuscript, Crane wrote that “Quaker Hill” was “not, after all, one of the major sections of the poem.” He added apologetically that “it is rather by way of an ‘accent mark’ that it is valuable at all” (*CPSL* 634). Crane’s self-assessment of “Quaker Hill” has enticed not a few critics to read it as a rather weak, subservient section. Judging Crane’s view as “very apt,” for instance, Helge Normann Nilsen argues that “Quaker Hill” is “less of an independent and self-contained lyrical incantation . . . it is expository, polemic and autobiographical to an extent which makes it clearly exceptional” (132). Margaret Dickie observes that from “Atlantis” to “Quaker Hill,” the process of Crane’s composition of *The Bridge* “charted a gradual diminishment of vision, a dispersal of

energy, a dismantling of the whole structure” (74). To be certain, “Quaker Hill,” which is the sixth section of *The Bridge* yet the last one to be composed, registers a series of thematic and formal “diminishment,” “dispersal,” and “dismantling.” And Crane’s unguardedly autobiographical evocation of broken friendship and failed love may easily urge us to take Crane’s comment at his word and dismiss “Quaker Hill” as a minor section in comparison with the other critically acclaimed ones. What I aim to highlight in this chapter, though, is the process in which the very dismantling of such ideals as friendship and love is transfigured into an expectant form of community that is at odds with the future-oriented vision of a fulfilled communion.

When we read *The Bridge* in a sequential progression, we may easily interpret negative elements of “Quaker Hill” as antithetical threads to round out the poem’s dialectic scheme. Summarizing *The Bridge* in terms of the interwoven polarities, for example, Christopher MacGowan writes of “Quaker Hill” that despite the “split between the actual and the ideal, the poem seeks to bring them together through its visionary reach” (206). In the same vein, Fisher observes that “[i]n the context of *The Bridge*,” the despondent landscape in “Quaker Hill” works in segueing into “The Tunnel” section, which “follows and sounds an intimation of the redemptive harmonies of ‘Atlantis’” (417). Although those readings help us interpret the negative elements of “Quaker Hill” as the

necessary supplements to highlight, by contrast, the ecstatic vision of the poem's finale, this kind of interpretative frame may divert our attention from the poignant self-exposure that Crane achieved at the very end of the long compositional process.

To eschew reducing "Quaker Hill" merely to one of the antithetical strands to serve for a redemptive strain of the final section, we shall focus on what Warner Berthoff calls "performative logic" conveyed by the "delivered eloquence . . . of individual lines and stanzas" in the "achieved forms" which work apart from Crane's "exuberant outlining" of *The Bridge* (Berthoff 91; 109). Throughout *The Bridge*, Crane presents his speaker as a type of outcast who draws on his / her sense of displacement to mythologize a form of communal bond, whether it is familial, national, or cultural. Moving away from his earlier ideal of *The Bridge* as "a mystical synthesis of 'America'" (CPSL 321), "Quaker Hill" offers us the autobiographical figure of the poet coming at the end of his visionary perspective that a usual kind of affirmative thought cannot make sense of. Painfully bathetic and non-sublime as the eventual landscape turns out to be, "Quaker Hill" leaves the poet alone with an intimation of another communal bond that urges him to expose the limit of his own being toward the unknowable otherness.

I. "I See Only the Ideal": The "Perspective" Unworked

As suggested by the title, "Quaker Hill" evokes an epic motif of "the city on a hill," which is, as Frances Fitzgerald writes, "one of the great legends of American life" (23). But as always with *The Bridge*, a traditional border between epic motifs and those of lyric is willfully transgressed. For instance, the place name Quaker Hill is chosen to signify both the spiritual legacy of Quakers and Crane's personal memory of the upstate New York resort town in Pawling, where he lived with Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon in 1925.

⁶ Just as Crane retraces "the decline of American idealism from the Quakers to Victorian affluence to jazz-age, country-club materialism" (Gelpi, *Coherent* 415), so he introduces the poet-speaker who finds his ambitious design of *The Bridge* irreparably collapsing. As evident in "The Dance" or "Cutty Sark," which he wrote in 1926, Crane once sought to make use of the poet's marginalized status from heteronormative nationhood as the privilege to reconceive the tribal heritage of an alternative America that can be shared by the other marginal figures like Native Americans, sailors, and homosexuals. When he was about to finish the whole composition of *The Bridge*, though, Crane seemed to recognize that his visionary capacity was on the verge of disintegration:

Perspective never withers from their eyes;

They keep that docile edict of the Spring
That blends March with August Antarctic skies:
These are but cows that see no other thing
Than grass and snow, and their own inner being
Through the rich halo that they do not trouble
Even to cast upon the seasons fleeting
Though they should thin and die on last year's stubble.

And they are awkward, ponderous and uncoy . . .
While we who press the cider mill, regarding them—
We, who with pledges taste the bright annoy
Of friendship's acid wine, retarding phlegm,
Shifting reprisals ('til who shall tell us when
The jest is too sharp to be kindly?) boast
Much of our store of faith in other men
Who would, ourselves, stalk down the merriest ghost. (*CPSL* 64)

By using the oppositional pronouns “we” and “they,” Crane situates the speaker within a circle of his friends “regarding” the “cows” grazing on the meadow oblivious to “the

seasons fleeting.” Their myopic perception is dismissed by “us” as “ponderous” or obtuse, because they confuse the autumn with the early spring (“blends March with August Antarctic skies”). As Edward Brunner argues, Crane’s description of those cows suggests his “scornful dismissal of the multitudes who are characterized as no different than a herd of cows, disgustingly self-satisfied” (224). Whether “disgusting” or not, their “self-satisfied” appearance has something in common with the figures of bourgeois visitors like “the Czars / Of golf” or “highsteppers that no mouse / Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.” Disregarding the religious heritages of “the Friends,” the recent visitors and residents seem to be blinded by their materialistic perspective for pursuing their immediate satisfactions: “In bootleg roadhouses where the gin fizz / Bubbles in time to Hollywood’s new love-nest pageant” (*CPSL* 65). Unlike the actual wild flowers departing in the fall, so Crane implies, the “[p]erspective never withers from their eyes.” Like “Hollywood’s new love-nest pageant,” their worldly view of life is the socio-culturally constructed by commercialism, and the “*rich halo*” (*CPSL* 64; emphasis added) of their perspective constantly propels them to satisfy their self-interest with economic abundance.

As the phrase “bright annoy / Of friendship’s acid wine” connotes, “Quaker Hill” deals with the motif of friendship as well as that of the dispersed community of Friends, whose “old Meeting House” has been converted into “the New Avalon Hotel” (*CPSL* 65).

By using “we” identity that functions as the borderline of a distinction from others, Crane seems to distinguish “we” from “they” by accentuating the perceptiveness of the speaker and his friends. While “they” are unaware that the summer has gone, “we” are “press[ing] the cider mill,” which is a communal activity indicative of their sharing an atmosphere of the “seasons fleeting.” Corresponding with the declining mood of the summer’s end, “we” seem to recognize that their “friendship” has dispersed. As “our” “store of faith in other men” has almost departed (“till who shall tell us when / The jest is too sharp to be kindly?”), what is left for “us” to do is to recount the past, bright memory: “Who would, ourselves, stalk down the merriest ghost” (*CPSL* 64). Although the reader cannot pin down those “cows” as the representative figures of imperceptive multitudes, we cannot read those stanzas without noticing Crane’s attempt to define the “we” identity by expelling anything that is alien to the community of his friends.

While this we / they distinction appears to rest on a binary opposition between the speaker’s friends and the rest of others, this borderline comes to be destabilized if we focus on Crane’s pronominal play with the third person plural in the first line (“Perspective never withers from their eyes”) (*CPSL* 64). As a potential referent of “their eyes” is tantalizingly withheld until in the third line Crane identifies it with those of cows, the sense of uncertainty about to whom those “eyes” belong brings into question the

seemingly oppositional relation between “we” and “they.” For instance, we can interpret the referent of “their eyes” as those of Isadora Duncan and Emily Dickinson, both of whom provide the epigraph to “Quaker Hill”:

*I see only the ideal. But no ideals
have ever been fully successful on
this earth.*

—ISADORA DUNCAN

*The gentian weaves her fringes,
The maple’s loom is red.*

—EMILY DICKINSON (CPSL 64)

Invoked as the visionary artists who share inexhaustible inner resources, they surely belong to the type of Crane’s favorite figure, a “Spengler’s Faustian artist, who manifests his lust for the infinite in his commitment to perspectivism” (Riddel 79). Without mentioning the indomitable idealism registered in Duncan’s passage, we see that Dickinson’s figuration of the plants in their productive activity of weaving and looming evokes the poet’s unflinching imagination operative even in a season of decay and destitution. Throughout *The Bridge*, such visionary figures serve as tutelary angels for

Crane to keep hold of his ideal despite the fact that such a Faustian endeavor forces one to lead a life of suffering, pain and despair.⁷ Seen in this context, Crane's invocation of Duncan and Dickinson can be read as his attempt to incorporate them into the community of "we" in an antagonistic relation to the near-sighted, bovine multitudes who "should thin and die on last year's stubble" (*CPSL* 64).

Syntactically considered, however, the referent of "their eyes" can be not only those of Duncan and Dickinson but those of the bovine "they." On a thematic level as well, Crane's presentation of those artists as the inveterate visionaries tempts us to associate them with the figures of self-sufficient, myopic cows that "see no other" things except their ideals preserved "in their own inner being." It is true that, by summoning up the ghosts of Duncan and Dickinson, Crane appears to reinforce the oppositional relation between "we" as the community of perceptive artists and "they" as the self-indulgent multitudes. By rendering "we" and "they" as a couple of interchangeable figures, however, Crane connotes that both camps are similar to each other in sharing the same, obstinate "perspective" whether it is material or spiritual (*CPSL* 64).

If, as Duncan's passage implies, "Quaker Hill" deals with the impossibility for an "ideal" to be realized "on / this earth," the lyric would have read as a mere supplementary section of *The Bridge*. Because, in that case, "Quaker Hill" could function only to

emphasize Crane's idealistic perspective to project beyond *this earth* a vision of the lost promise of a desired community, thereby perpetuating the ideal with its uncontaminated quality in a dialectic relation to the actual fallen world. Of course, as Brom Weber writes, I will not deny that Crane in "Quaker Hill" is "developing the theme of the glorious past beclouded by a sorry present" (Weber 371). As it turns out, however, it is the very perspective of the poet-speaker, who seeks to construct such binary opposites, that is elegized in "Quaker Hill." Even though "[p]erspective never withers from their eyes" (*CPSL* 64), it has departed from *his* eyes.

II. "Cancelled Reservations": Pathetic Fallacy Dismantled

The middle part of "Quaker Hill" presents the figure of a dilapidated Victorian hotel, from whose "central cupola, they say / One's glance could cross the borders of three states" (*CPSL* 65). According to Paul Giles's interpretation, "three states" can signify not only "the three American states (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut)" but also "the three-dimensional material world which the poet aspires to see beyond" (21). However, as though reflecting the speaker's "perspective" that has already "withered" (*CPSL* 64) and been devoid of such a transcendental aspirations, the hotel's cupola does not offer him

any kind of a panoramic vantage-point:

Above them old Mizzentop, palatial white
Hostelry—floor by floor to cinquefoil dormer
Portholes the ceilings stack their stoic height.
Long tiers of windows staring out toward former
Faces—loose panes crown the hill and gleam
At sunset with a silent, cobwebbed patience . . .
See them, like eyes that still uphold some dream
Through mapled vistas, cancelled reservations! (CPSL 64)

Besides the nautical name “Mizzentop,” the color of its building (“palatial white”) echoes back to the whiteness of sails in “Ave Maria,” the first section of *The Bridge*, in which Columbus envisions a promising sign of the future redemption (“White toil of heaven’s cordons, mustering / In holy rings all sails charged to the far / Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat / Of knowledge”) (CPSL 37). In “Quaker Hill,” though, the color white is associated with destitution and decay, which corrode “loose panes” of the hotel, which had once shown off the magnificent appearance. And the image of the “former faces” envisaged in the dusk harks back not only to the past visitors of this hotel but also to the receding faces of Crane’s friends including Allen Tate, Waldo Frank and

others from whom Crane has been estranged in the late twenties.⁸ In a letter to Frank in 1923 when Crane started gestating the concept of *The Bridge*, Crane was enthusiastic enough to idealize “some kind of community of interest” that is generated by an ecstatic experience of “communion” through poetry, friendship and love. Expanding his personal sense of lack of secure communal ties into the problem of modern society in general, Crane writes that such a “community” or even its “vision alone” would serve as an ideal “not only America needs, but the whole world” (*CPSL* 326). Resonating with Crane’s biographical vignettes such as his desperate search for a close-knit network of friends (“a silent, cobwebbed patience”) and eventual disillusionment of the broken friendship (“cancelled reservations”), the earlier part of “Quaker Hill” is filled with the mournful images and phrases that suggest at once a sense of nostalgia for the past ideal of genuine, communal intimacy and the actual impossibility of stable relations.

With the speaker’s awareness of the “death’s stare in slow survey / From four horizons that no one relates,” “Quaker Hill” begins to be occupied with disenchanting outcomes of urbanization brought on such a historically important place as Quaker Hill: “This was the Promised Land, and still it is / To the persuasive suburban land agent.” The once pastoral region has been invaded by capitalism and turned into the real estate and the site of a golf course, and the religious heritage of “Friends” such as their “ancient deal

/ Table” is sold away “at Adams’ auction” (*CPSL* 65):

What cunning neighbors history has in fine!

The woodlouse mortgages the ancient deal

Table that Powitzky buys for only nine-

Ty-five at Adams’ auction,—eats the seal,

The spinster polish of antiquity . . . (*CPSL* 65)

Evoking the atmosphere of solitary perseverance, the “spinster polish of antiquity” of the “deal / Table” recalls the “*maple’s loom*” in Dickinson’s passage along with the “mapled vistas” of the dilapidated hotel (*CPSL* 64). Sold away at the auction, though, the table is then “mortgaged” by the *dealers* (whose “lousiness” is implied by Crane’s figuration of them as “woodlouse”) who consume its “seal” and annihilates the traces of the Friends’ spiritual inheritance. Quakers’ “old Meeting House” is “[n]ow the New Avalon Hotel,” whose name (the paradisaical island in the Arthurian legend) mocks Crane’s past ambition to reconceive “America” as a New Atlantis.⁹ As the etymological sense of “mortgage” (dead pledge) resonates with the “death’s stare in slow survey / From four horizons that no one relates,” the “promised” vision of the poet’s ideal city upon the hill has been dispersed into mere commodities, while its spectral traces haunt the forlorn building of “Mizzentop.”

Just as the early Quakers proposed “rival models of what Christian ‘charity’ actually meant” and “beset” John Winthrop’s “city on the hill” (Paul, “Founding” 101), so Crane once sought to attain an ecstatic transfiguration of the bridge, whose all-encompassing “*curveship*” could “*lend a myth to God*” (CPSL 34). Seen in this light, the image of the building’s windows that “still uphold some dream” may invite us to interpret the figure of the deserted hotel as a mirror image of the poet-speaker. Reminiscent of Poe’s description of the house of Usher, Crane’s punning presentation of the building with “[l]ong *tiers* of windows” and “loose *panes*” (emphasis added) surely recalls the “stoic height” of such visionaries as Duncan and Dickinson, whose *pain*-ridden eyes, though filled with *tears*, can be imagined as “still uphold[ing] some dream” (CPSL 64). As Crane’s use of the adjective “some” implies, though, the “dream” of the “Promised Land” residing in its “windows” is inaccessible to the speaker. Despite Crane’s use of pathetic fallacy that allures us to associate the derelict image of the hotel with the speaker’s self-portrait, Crane’s figuration of the building serves only to emphasize the distance from the declining glimmer of the lost ideals from which he is irrevocably estranged.

III. "The Curse of Sundered Parentage": The Alternative Genealogy

Dispersed

Enacting the sense of radical estrangement both from the community of his friends and that of his imaginary companies, Crane in the middle part discards the collective pronoun of "we" and has recourse to the *ubi sunt* motif: "Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace? / What eats the pattern with ubiquity? / Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?":

The resigned factions of the dead preside.
Dead rangers bled their comfort on the snow;
But I must ask slain Iroquois to guide
Me farther than scalped Yankees knew to go:
Shoulder the curse of sundered parentage,
Wait for the postman driving from Birch Hill
With birthright by blackmail, the arrant page
That unfolds a new destiny to fill. . . . (CPSL 65)

Crane's summoning of the "slain Iroquois" recalls "The Dance" in "Powhatan's Daughter" section, in which he employs the figure of "*blood*," evocative of semen-ink, to inscribe

his homoerotic fantasy of dancing with the brave chief: “—*your blood / remembering / its first / invasion of / her secrecy, / its first / encounters / with her kin, / her chieftain / lover. . .*”) (CPSL 45). As will become clear in my reading of “The Dance,” Crane’s project of “The Dance” was to rewrite a national identity with “the Indian” as its central symbol so that he could graft his non-procreative, homosexual myth onto the center of national origins. As Peter Lurie observes, the “appeal of Native American culture and the figure of the Indian for Crane was their marginal position in history.” Lurie correctly writes that the “marginal status was one Crane felt in his sexual life and in his experience with his personal family and the ‘national’ family of 1920s America (and which included Crane’s troubled friendships with his literary ‘family’ or friends)” (163). In “Quaker Hill” as well, Crane seeks to imagine the “postman” bearing the tiding of “the arrant page” to “fill” or inscribe a national and personal “new destiny” of which he could partake as its active participant. However, as the word “arrant” (a variant word of “errant,” thus signifying “vagrant” and “wandering”) is closely associated with an arrant thief or an outlawed robber, the supposed promise for a new start is disenchanting and turned into the biographical figure of a “blackmail” (to be elaborated later) that aggravates the sense of split temporality of his blood kinship (“sundered parentage”).

Unlike “The Dance,” accordingly, the speaker in “Quaker Hill” is deprived of the

visionary perspective to return to America's native inheritance to access an alternative national identity that could circumvent the White colonizers' history. As evident in the stanza quoted above, the transformative "blood" belongs not to the speaker but to unknown "dead rangers" who "bled their comfort on the snow." As though admitting the disintegration of his past ambition to rewrite a nation's founding myth, Crane's figuration of the blood as the potential metaphor for semen-ink fails and becomes insufficient for re-inscribing the poet's (and America's) alternative "birthright," which is supposed to stem from "[his] kinsmen and patriarchal race" (*CPSL* 65).

As R. W. B. Lewis notes, 1929 in which Crane is urged to finish *The Bridge* by adding the three pieces "Indiana," "Cape Hatteras," and "Quaker Hill," is "a year after the final break with Grace Crane, and only a few months after the miserable quarrel between Hart Crane and his mother over the legacy from Mrs. Hart" (318). With this biographical context in mind, the speaker's rhetorical question ("Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace?") (emphasis added) can be considered as an indirect allusion to Crane's feud with his mother Grace. Along with such autobiographical references as the "blackmail" with which Crane's mother sought to coerce him to return to her place,¹⁰ the imagined scene of the interracial conflict between Iroquois and Yankees can be read as a trace of Crane's struggle to transmute his private experiences into an epic, historical

discourse. Yet Crane leaves the consequence of this battle uncertain, thereby connoting the impossibility for him to achieve both the familial and historical synthesis. Apparently, Crane seems to invoke the figure of the “slain Iroquois” as a spectral community of the tribal escorts in “The Dance” at once to “resign” his prescribed “birthright” and to *re-sign* the new one so that he can imaginarily gain the sense of release from his familial tie. Yet those Iroquois are never integrated into the form of a victimized community to whom the speaker could relate by using his own marginalized status as a communal bond. While introduced as the conquered victims, those “slain Iroquois” are simultaneously imagined as the aggressive victimizers who “scalped” the white settlers, from whose inheritance Crane’s family is derived.^{1 1} Due to this figural crisscrossing between the two oppositional camps that blurs the distinction between kin and enemies, we find it difficult to see who conquered whom in which battle and whose heritage the speaker sought to re-sign to claim his alternative “birthright” (*CPSL* 65).

In *The Bridge*’s final section “Atlantis” (the first section Crane wrote), Crane manifests his longing to recover the national and personal origins in which any kind of binary opposites can be integrated into the self-enclosed figure of a pure and harmonious sphere (“Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing / In single chrysalis the many twain, —”) (*CPSL* 73). In the end of 1929 when Crane was hurried to finish *The Bridge*, though,

his “parentage,” whether it is the autobiographical one or the imagined, is irreparably “sundered” without yielding an opportunity for him to envision a successful return to the imaginary matrix of “the single chrysalis.” The ecstatic vision of “Atlantis,” which Crane once apostrophized as “O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm” (*CPSL* 73) breaks into the disunified “factions of the dead,” and their heritage is irrevocably splintered and “resigned” or handed over to the “persuasive suburban land agent” and the “blackmail[er],” leaving Crane’s speaker alone with a “curse of sundered parentage” to bear (*CPSL* 65).

IV. Exposing Heart

Although estranged both from the actual community of his friends and from the imagined community of the nation’s marginals, Crane’s determination to “[s]houlder the curse of sundered parentage” is manifested strangely in the collective pronoun “we.” Employing the rhetoric of sacrament used by an authorial priest, Crane addresses a wider, unknowable collective to conclude “Quaker Hill,” and in extension, the long-drawn period of composing *The Bridge*:

So, must we from the hawk’s far stemming view,

Must we descend as worm’s eye to construe

Our love of all we touch, and take it to the Gate
As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late,
His news already told? Yes, while the heart is wrung,
Arise—yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!
In one last angelus lift throbbing throat—
Listen, transmuting silence with that stilly note

Of pain that Emily, that Isadora knew!
While high from dim elm-chancels hung with dew,
That triple-noted clause of moonlight—
Yes, whip-poor-will, unhusks the heart of fright,
Breaks us and saves, yes, breaks the heart, yet yields
That patience that is armour and that shields
Love from despair—when love foresees the end—
Leaf after autumnal leaf

break off,

descend—

descend— (*CPSL* 65-66)

The speaker's tentative willingness ("So, must we") to "descend as worm's eye to construe / Our love of all we touch" resonates with the final imperatives ("break off, / descend— / descend—"), reinforcing Crane's parting with a vertical and panoramic perspective of the "hawk's far stemming view." Indeed, the concluding repetition of "descend" connotes the poem's ongoing quest for the *descent* of his imaginary genealogy that is enacted through a *descent* into the subway in the succeeding section "The Tunnel." Yet, Crane's quest for the origins of a national and personal identity at the very end of the compositional process reveals the utter heterogeneity of what was imagined unifiable in 1923: "I'm on a synthesis of America and its structural identity now, called *The Bridge*" (*CPSL* 325). The self-defeating admission that he is a belated visionary who "knows himself too late, / His news already told" echoes with a severe, self-inquiring passage from "Indiana," another lyric Crane wrote in 1929 in which Crane sees himself as a late comer in the literary Gold Rush: "too late, too early... / Won nothing out of fifty-nine" (*CPSL* 49).

Although Crane acknowledges the impossibility for him to regain his earlier idealism, he does not succumb to its mere antithesis like nihilism as well. Rather, this sudden tonal shift from the melancholic lament to the incantatory exhortation appears to imply the rejuvenation of his past ideal. The tropes of the Eucharistic communion also

seem to reflect Crane's imperishable longing for an intimate communal bond with others. While situating himself within a form of community, however, the form of communion enacted here is based on a radically insufficient relationality that does not function in behalf of any communitarian ideals including organic reciprocity, communal fraternity, or shared identity.

To be certain, Crane's rhetorical strategies such as his punning of the word "heart" on his name *Hart* ("while the heart is wrung, / Arise—yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!") can be taken as, in Roger Ramsey's words, "the linguistic equivalent of transubstantiation" (qtd. in Giles 14). With no friends and folks serving for his companions, though, "this sheaf of dust" does not substitute for a hostia to generate a community of spiritual companies. Instead, it evokes not only the "sheaf" of Crane's *The Bridge* but also his own mortality ("dust") (*CPSL* 66), which is coupled with the corruptible figure of the solitary speaker associated with a "worm" delving into the autumnal soil (*CPSL* 65). Reminiscent of the "loose panes" of the "windows staring out toward former / Faces" (*CPSL* 64), his reference to the "pain that Emily, that Isadora knew" seems to indicate Crane's desire to fuse his "pain" into a communal experience of sharing the same despair of these visionaries. As we have observed, however, the speaker's perspective to perpetuate his ideal in a timeless realm has already collapsed.

Seen in this context, the “pain,” which is conveyed by the image of “autumnal lea[ves]” separately falling to the ground (“Leaf after autumnal leaf”), belongs not so much to the imagined community of the marginalized visionaries as to Crane himself, who accepts the impossibility to share with his departed companies the imminent “end” of “love,” (*CPSL* 66)—a fantasy of oneness with others, including his “kinsmen and the patriarch race” (*CPSL* 65), in the vision of an alternative America.

The form of a communality Crane has reached at the very end of composition of *The Bridge* is represented not by the transcendental and fusional “Love” apostrophized in “Atlantis,” which “chimes from the deathless strings” (*CPSL* 73), but by the figure of “patience that is armour.” While Crane’s spelling of “armour” evokes “*amour*” (semantically rhyming with “love”), this “armour” does not serve as a defensive covering to fend off the pain of perceiving the love’s end. Quite the contrary, Crane’s “armour” is a product of “break[ing]” the “heart of fright” and “unhusk[ing]” or divesting him of such metaphysical armors as the ideals of synthesis, of ecstatic fusion, or of unmediated connectedness with others. Differently put, wearing this “armour” necessitates him to expose his finite existence to the impossibility of such ideals. The moonlight that is synaesthetically combined with the song of a “whip-poor-will” reinforces Crane’s self-flagellating determination to embrace the limit of his naked being, “break[ing] off” and

“descend[ing]” in the direction of death. Sherman Paul rightly reads those passages both as Crane’s “acceptance of mortality and the attendant anguish” and as “celebration of our own painfully incarnated spirit” (260). Through the denudation of his “heart of fright,” Crane tries to affirm a productive element of “pain” that yields the “armour” to guard “[l]ove from despair.” However, what this “armour” generates is “patience” for the very “pain” caused by the heartbreaking recognition of the imminent “end” of “love.” This painful tautology implies that the speaker’s “patience” as the “armour” does not work in “shield[ing] / Love from despair.” Since the very intimation of “despair” is entwined with the “yiled[ing]” of this “patience” (*CPSL* 66), Crane’s figuration of “patience” suggests to us the impossibility of the future longing for community.

And yet, by manipulating the rhetoric of sacrament that combines prayer, rhetorical question, and imperative, Crane does urge the unknowable company to receive “this sheaf of dust,” which can be taken as the very text of *The Bridge* both thematically and structurally disintegrating in the very last phase of its composition. We can interpret Crane’s figuring of this “sheaf” as his desperate attempt to ask the reader to identify with his speech act. While his “break[ing]” “heart” is transubstantiated into a *corpus* of *Hart*, his interrogative statement (“must we”) may encourage the reader to “lift” his / her “throbbing throat” to say “Yes” of which the poet himself partakes.^{1 2} To borrow Ramsey’s

words again, these stanzas themselves are animated by Crane's "transubstantiative" use of words, intended to transfigure the "sheaf of dust" into a communion bread that surely satisfies the reader's hunger for oral (aural) pleasures (qtd. in Giles 14). While his "heart" is "wrung," his "pain" as a bread of the Eucharist (a pun intended?) might be divided by us as his readers, who can be the poet's *companions* as long as each of the readers resists the desire for a fusional communion with the poet by exerting the "patience" to face the finite nature of his or her own mortality.^{1 3} However, we cannot be sure to what extent we should take part in this secular ritual. Since Crane's call to the unknowable companies is uttered from the solitary position of his singular being, the response from us as his readers can never be a "communal" one in its usual sense. Rather than imagining a utopian vision to come, the speaker remains in the realm of his finite mortality—the traces of defeat and loss all around him.

Instead of the all-inclusive "Love" invoked in the poem's finale "Atlantis," a binding principle offered in "Quaker Hill" is the recognition of the impossibility of a fusional communion. Eventually, such a recognition is what Crane sees as a common heritage to relate with others. Radically democratized as this communality can be, the particular companions invoked in this communion are unknowable friends without the "communal" identity to be shared. Coming at the end of love and of the very end of the

composition of *The Bridge*, the collective “we” identity does not present itself except in terms of the broken fragments of the speaker’s “heart” exposed to the estranged world.

Coda

If the imagined community in “Quaker Hill” were a sort of clandestine type of collectivity whose members are brought together through the shared identity as a “stranger in America” (Lowell 159), Crane’s self-assessment of the lyric as a mere “accent mark” would have been regarded as correct (*CPSL* 634). Because, in that case, “Quaker Hill” might serve only to emphasize the theme of “The Dance” or “Cutty Sark,” where Crane envisioned the form of the tribal community of spectral “Indians” and his gay friends and lovers, whose marginal figures could be seen as the poet’s narcissistic doubles without any trace of alterity. In “Quaker Hill,” however, Crane’s vision of community, in which Crane addresses the communal collectivity by exposing himself to an impossible relationship with the unknowable others, reveals itself as something approximate to what Maurice Blanchot calls “a finite community” which “has its principle in the *finitude*” and whose “small numbers” do not result in fusional unification (*Unavowable* 6).^{1 4} Although Blanchot’s terms do not easily lend themselves to Crane’s

poetry, Blanchot's account of community and friendship can be helpful for us to foreground the communion without the knowable companions in "Quaker Hill."

In his memorial essay called "Friendship," which was written on the occasion of Georges Bataille's death, Blanchot meditates on the enigmatic nature of his relation to the dead friend. Blanchot writes that what binds him to his friend is not his knowledge of the other's personality or a shared interest in common ideals but "the recognition of the common strangeness." Blanchot in the same essay goes on to articulate the paradox of himself being unable to "speak about" and to memorialize the friendship with the departed; nevertheless, owing to the very recognition of "an infinite distance" from the dead friend, Blanchot finds himself permitted to "speak *to* them" (291; emphasis added). According to Lars Iyer, who explicates Blanchot's idea of community, what Blanchot calls "friendship" is not an intimate relationship based on "ties of mutual affection and esteem" but "a *pre-voluntary* response that arises independently of [one's] intentions" (119). Given that Crane's unexpected tonal shift in calling *to* (rather than speaking *about*) the companies is instigated by his aporia-ridden recognition of the impossibility to restore his lost ideals of love and friendship, Blanchot's idea of "friendship" can be allowed to make an entrance as a subtext for reading "Quaker Hill." Just as Blanchot comes to recognize the irreconcilable distance implicated within his close friendship with Bataille,

so Crane, coming to an end of his love and friendship with the others in his intimate realm, finds himself convoking the community of “we” as the unknowable companions that can be located in “an infinite distance” from the position of his singular solitude. Despite the ecstatic tone in the concluding stanzas, which is surely invitational, Crane’s “sheaf of dust” conveys to us nothing but the intensity of his impossible yearning for an alternative form of community (*CPSL* 66).

It is not until Crane’s “store of faith in other men” dissolves in the “friendship’s acid wine” (*CPSL* 64) and his “love foresees the end” that the poem registers an intimation of the non-communitarian community in which, resonating with Blanchot’s account of the strange amity, he is related with the plural “you” in a communal form of mutual estrangement. With its enfolding of the ideal of community into such estranging distance, Crane’s figuration of “armour” as the “patience” for having his “heart” “unhusk[ed]” and exposed to the imminent end of love should be regarded as a memorable synecdoche for his ascetic embrace of the limit of his finite, solitary existence. Hence, I will conclude that an achievement of “Quaker Hill” lies in Crane’s rendering of the “pain” of self-divestiture as the “armour” (*CPSL* 66) to empower himself at once to remain exposed to the impossibility to share with others his broken dream of love, *and* to protect the poem from re-idealizing it in a transcendental perspective. For all its aesthetic and thematic

defects that critics have pointed out, Crane in “Quaker Hill” succeeds in unexpectedly opening up the space neither of hope nor of despair, but of the expectancy for a non-fusional communion, through which each of “us” as a strange companion will be urged to co-respond with each other by partaking in the distance between the limits of his or her own finite being.

Chapter 3: “And This, Thine Other Hand, upon My Heart”: “Cape Hatteras” and Imagining a Trace of Letting Go

In *Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of The Bridge*, Edward Brunner writes that *The Bridge* turns out to be the long poem, in which Crane, “starting out in the hope of loving America, finds that America is unlovable.” However, Brunner continues, “in the process he realizes what it is that he himself values.” One of Crane’s discoveries is “Whitman’s phantom presence” in “Cape Hatteras,” the fourth section of *The Bridge*, which “holds out a hope of allowing him to embrace America” (231-32). Along with “Indiana” and “Quaker Hill,” “Cape Hatteras” is one of the later additions to the text that Crane finished in 1929. Seeing those sections as “all unworthy of Crane,” Harold Bloom observes that he would like to “omit the three poems Hart Crane composed in alcohol and despair” (*Daemon* 451). Following Brunner’s genetic criticism that charts the poem’s development from Crane’s 1926 manuscripts to the finished version, Bloom writes that “the 1926 manuscripts are more persuasive than later ones” (*Daemon* 449). Bloom’s view that the later additions illustrate Crane’s decline has been shared by many critics. Among these lyrics, as Malcolm Cowley observes, “Cape Hatteras” “is the section most often cited by those who insist that Hart’s grand project was a failure” (269).^{1 5} And one of the

objects of their criticism is the concluding image of Crane's speaker hand-in-hand with Whitman: "Not soon, nor suddenly,—no, never to let go / My hand / in yours, / Walt Whitman— / so—" (*CPSL* 60).

Responding to the negative criticism levelled at "Cape Hatteras," Thomas Yingling draws our attention to Crane's intention to "reclaim an integrative vision of homosexuality." Yingling contends that "Cape Hatteras" reveals Crane's "desire that homosexual unions transcend the ravage of time and alienation that left him bitterly and alcoholically alone by the age of thirty" (209-10). To reevaluate failure as "a positive energy", Niall Munro claims, revising Yingling's view, that "Cape Hatteras" is informed by Crane's "queer strategy." Munro considers the failure of machines in "Cape Hatteras" as an "essential element" to recover Crane's vision of a queer community (150). According to Munro's compelling argument, "Cape Hatteras" is designed to enact "a literary marriage with his queer antecedent, Walt Whitman," through which Crane will "unite his body and mind with Whitman" (158). Bearing Munro's robust interpretation in mind, I will argue that "Cape Hatteras" is much more entangled owing to Crane's doubled figuration of Whitman. Though Bruner's judgment that "Cape Hatteras" "fails to generate any life" is arguable, Bruner's view that Whitman in the poem is not "a genuine presence but a collection of phrases, a group of images, a slew of words" is insightful and worth

developing (231).

The main aim of this chapter is to highlight how Crane fails to make a queer, trans-temporal communion with Whitman, thereby recasting the impossibility of the communion with the elder comrade as a paradoxical form of relationality based on Crane's aesthetics of absence. In so doing, this chapter will argue that "Cape Hatteras" is not a merely nostalgic ode to Whitman in which Crane rejects the twentieth-century technology to establish a primitive, communion-like relationship with his favorite gay predecessor.¹⁶ Nor "Cape Hatteras" is embedded in the hierarchical opposition between an idealized vision of the pastoral brotherhood and alienating modernity. As critics have observed, Crane maintains a skeptical detachment from the modern machinery, which can be confirmed in the catastrophic scene of a death-dealing dogfight. But Crane's vision of the machine's negative consequences should not be reduced merely to a self-serving opportunity for him to invoke the redemptive presence of Whitman. Throughout this long lyric, Crane is committed to apotheosizing the technological progress so that he could show benefits of absorbing it into the poem. As we will see in what follows, Crane tries, in response to Whitman's "undenying" visionary capacity, to capture the complicated dynamism of modernity inward and outward, around and through an innovated architecture of the machines. By examining the way in which Crane negotiates this

tension between the nostalgic idealization of the past and the celebration of new technologies, typical of American modernism, I will reassess Crane's struggle to demonstrate how far his hand reaches out to the spectral hands of Whitman.

I. Revisiting "Mr. Crane's Wreckage in View"

While taking into account the negative criticism of "Cape Hatteras," my aim does not lie in defending Crane's deficient rhetorical craftsmanship. Actually, "Cape Hatteras" shows Crane at his worst. By pointing to the forced language and Crane's ineptitude in handling rhyme and imagery, some critics see "Cape Hatteras" as Crane's worse kind of self-parody, whose excessive verbiage can be taken as a sign of the poet's inability to stay loyal to his original concept of *The Bridge*. Dealing with the internal workings of the machines, for instance, Crane frequently interrupts the flow of words by having recourse to the following rhetorical bravado:

As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth
Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined
In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee
The bearings glint,—O murmurless and shined

In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy! (*CPSL* 56)

As Gordon A. Tapper parses Crane's use of theriomorphic tropes (e.g., "steely gizzards"), the figurative interpenetration of wild animals and modern machinery echoes back to the term "skyscraper primitive," which is coined by Gorham Munson to describe the then-booming machine cult among avant-garde artists (153). Dwelling on such a figurative interpenetration, Tapper also notes that Crane's manipulation of "stock in trade of poetry" including alliteration, internal rhyme, and orthographic repetition serves to present the lyric's stanza as a product of "the technology of writing," which "make[s] Crane's powerhouse a display of both mechanical power and the power of, and over, poetic language" (171). Tapper's thoughtful explication is instructive in reminding us of how the evolution of sociocultural phenomena is reflected in the lyric's rhetorical structure.

While Tapper's careful reading conforms to his argument that "the reconciliation of the nature-technology dichotomy is one of the principal objectives" in "Cape Hatteras" (150), such an approach may downplay another view that those overloaded tropes are employed to cloak the sense of difficulty Crane confronts in reanimating his 1923 conviction: "Potentially I feel myself quite fit to become a suitable *Pindar* for the dawn of the machine age, so called" (*CPSL* 328). We can argue, for example, the bombastic tone heard in the above stanza, with such a redundant phrase as "blind ecstasy," does not

operate to extoll but to depreciate the supposed splendor of the machine age. Indeed, such lines as “giggling in the girth / Of steely gizzards” might be appreciated as Crane’s attempt to disclose a symbiotic relation by assimilating the machine to the realm of the living internal organs. But the harsh repetition of “g’s,” conveyed with the strident exclamation, easily turns the lyric into a mock-ode on the “blind,” self-destructive use of machines / words, conveying the reader the sense of impasse not only of the technological or industrial advancement but also of Crane’s craftsmanship. In this regard, Philip Horton, the earliest biographer of Crane, was perceptive enough to detect a number of shortcomings in “Cape Hatteras”: “Probably all great poets at their worst have unconsciously burlesqued their own style, but few have done it more obviously than Crane” (262). Horton discredits, for instance, Crane’s insistent use of the vocative. “Taxed by having to stimulate a sincerity he did not feel,” Horton says, Crane’s apostrophizing Whitman betrays “the incredible strain of forced creation.” Whereas Horton’s criticism against Crane’s insincerity to Whitman is debatable, his comment on the “hysterical haste that made any musical cadence or basic rhythm impossible” is partially applicable to “Cape Hatteras” (262-63).

Horton’s severe criticism of “Cape Hatteras” harks back to the reviews written by the earlier critics, namely, Yvor Winters and Allen Tate. Winters finds in Crane’s attempt

to embrace “Whitmanian inspiration” nothing but the moralistic and aesthetic disintegration. Calling Crane’s “flaws” as “a public catastrophe,” Winters declaims that “with Mr. Crane’s wreckage in view, it seems highly unlikely that any writer of comparable genius will struggle with [‘Whitmanian inspiration’] again” (27; 31). Relatively tempered in tone and vocabulary, Tate’s review is equally dismissive in judging “Cape Hatteras” as “a series of short flights, or inventions connected only in analogy—which explains the merely personal passages, which are obscure, and the lapses into sentimentality” (230). Despite such scathing epithets as “catastrophe,” “wreckage,” and “lapses,” we should admit that a part of their comments remains persuasive, especially given their association of the poem’s “failure” with the image of the catastrophic plane crash enacted at the lyric’s center.

In the middle of “Cape Hatteras,” a warplane is shot down and smashed into “shapeless debris” at Cape Hatteras, the area where the powered flight of the Wright brothers first succeeded in 1903 (*CPSL* 58). As Munro elaborately argues, “Cape Hatteras” shows Crane dramatizing the failure of machines on levels of both style and theme. Quite compelling as Munro’s reading is, Munro’s sympathetic approach, predicated on the assumption that “Crane actually sought to embrace failure,” tends to be so eager to defend a redemptive aspect of Crane’s counter-normative, queer aesthetic that it tends to

normalize the radical negativity of Crane's text. As I have maintained, what should be revalued about Crane's poetry is the violent disruptiveness that dismantles the fantasy of a unifying totality.¹⁷ By taking heed of Munro's invaluable study that aims to retrieve the "constructive" aspect of Crane's "queer project" (156), then, I aim to re-appreciate the earlier harsh criticism and shed a new light on the speaker's anxiety, despair, state of disconnection, and the shadow of death. Disparaging "Cape Hatteras" as "a failure, both as a complete poem and as a contributory part of *The Bridge*," Brom Weber was right, at least, to note that "the symbolism" in this lyric is "extremely difficult to untangle" (365-66). As I will discuss in what follows, it is this "extremely" entangled quality that animates Crane's torqued relation both with the state of modernity and with the spectral figure of Whitman.

II. Interweaving Queer Strands "under the Looming Stacks"

In the opening of "Cape Hatteras," Crane introduces the figure of Pocahontas as "our native clay," whose fertile energy is hidden "below derricks, chimneys, tunnels" (*CPSL* 54). Besides showing the influence from Waldo Frank's idealization of "the Indian" in *Our America* whose world is imagined submerged by the iron-laden materialism of

“the Caucasian floods” (110), Crane’s juxtaposition of the primitive force with the modern machinery recalls Leo Marx’s study of the dialectic between the affirmation of technological marvels and critique of its increasing utilization. As evident in the following passage that suggests the original transparency of the Edenic past (“Adam and Adam’s answer in the forest / Left Hersperus mirrored in the lucid pool”) (*CPSL* 55), for instance, we can detect in “Cape Hatteras” what Marx calls “the psychic root of all pastoralism,” which is “something of the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence ‘closer to nature’” (6). Then, as the lyric unfolds, Crane starts imagining the realm of modern technology as an alternative frontier at once new and ancient:

The nasal whine of power whips a new universe . . .
Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky,
Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house
Stars prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs,
New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
Of dynamos, where hearing’s leash is strummed . . .
Power’s script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred

Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars. (*CPSL* 55-56)

Evocative of the nation's technological advances along with its heroic expansionism, the impact of the "power house" is admired as though the physical force of "dynamos" could enable people to explore "a new universe." Viewed through the structure of the power plant, the "[s]tars" are charged with revelatory meanings to change our view of reality ("New verities"). Perceiving the grandness of the mechanical construction in terms of linguistic inscription such as "proverbs" and "script," Crane attempts to treat the recent technological achievements as sublime embodiments of the "single, new *word*," which he seeks to generate in his poetry (*CPSL* 163).

In his 1925 essay called "General Aims and Theories," Crane articulates his ambition to write the poetry of "absolute beauty," whose "evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an 'innocence' (Blake) or absolute beauty." Resonating with the above passage from "Cape Hatteras," which combines the newness of advanced machineries with psychological illumination, Crane elaborates the ideal way in which his poetry affects the reader's consciousness:

In this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from pervious precepts or preconceptions. It is as though a poem gave the

reader as he left it a single, new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader's consciousness henceforward. (*CPSL* 163)

According to Crane's poetics, the role of "a single, new *word*" is not to convey a preexisted, symbolic meaning but to establish an affective bond between poet and reader by calling for the reader's participation in discovering a hitherto un contemplated, therefore "new" interrelationship between the words in a given poem. In the same manner, so Crane seems to suggest in "Cape Hatteras," the seemingly unrelated elements such as the sky in a starry night and the smokestacks of the "gigantic power house" can be brought into "new inklings" and be made to reveal "[n]ew verities" (*CPSL* 55).

As evident in the painful image of the "[s]tars" that "prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs," indeed, Crane never forgets to warn against the increasing use of machines, implying that the scientific exploration for the "new universe" may result in a disaster (*CPSL* 55). However, attuned to his statement in "Modern Poetry" that the poet must "absorb the machine" and "*acclimatize*" it (*CPSL* 171) rather than merely admire like Futurists in Europe or denigrate it like Frank in *Virgin Spain* (1926),^{1 8} Crane tries to temper such anxiety by attempting, in a queer manner, to assimilate the figures of modern machines to the realm of much more primitive technology. Dwelling on the stanza quoted

above, Paul Giles observes that “looming,” “leash,” “bobbin,” and “spools” can be read as a series of puns on “the weaver’s loom.” Giles writes that those puns indicate “Crane’s belief in how twentieth-century technology is essentially no more than a reincarnation of more primitive tools” (12). Although Giles does not develop this observation in terms of gender issues, Giles’ insight is helpful for us to consider Crane’s queer strategy, which is not only to assimilate the threatening force of machines, but also to countervail the ostensibly masculine gesture of celebrating technological advances.

Pointing toward Robert Duncan’s appropriation of “the trope of weaving for writing,” Greg Hewett notes that such a trope “derives from a women’s tradition rooted in the myths of Ariadne, Circe, and Penelope, a tradition contingent on the historical fact that women have had little access to formal, written language, let alone ‘literary language,’ and therefore have composed in ‘crafts,’ primarily in textiles.” In reading one of Duncan’s overtly homosexual poem “Torso,” Hewett foregrounds the way in which Duncan inverts “the heralded modesty” of Penelope to modify the “simple masculinity” of Odysseus. Through the process of “unweav[ing] the clothe of language,” Hewett contends, “what gets uncovered is not the inflated phallus, the phallus as transcendent signifier, the phallus of Adam naming everything properly, the phallus of Jehovah/Moses laying down the Law, the phallus of John's Lord Jesus Christ supplanting all words with One, His Own,

but, rather, a phallus acknowledging its power source in a historically feminine process” (522).

Turning back to Crane’s poem with Hewett’s observation, we come to find in *The Bridge* the similar queer subversion of the phallogentric strand of the Western, male-centered literature. As suggested by Crane’s transfiguration of the bridge in “Atlantis” into a weaving-machine (“Pick biting way up towering looms that press / Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade”) (*CPSL* 72), the formal and thematic structure of *The Bridge* is conceived by the poet assuming a “feminine” role of a weaver, spinning yarns. While the phallic leap of the bridge as the poem’s central symbol is obviously masculine, its masculinity is always-already implicated in the myths of Ariadne, Calliope, Penelope, and other female weavers. Of course, such protean capacity of the bridge itself can be taken as a sign of the poet’s phallic potency to appropriate “female” elements in the literary tradition. Foreshadowing Duncan’s queer appropriation of the feminized myths, nevertheless, Crane’s consistent recourse to pun, whose connective-function is deeply resonant with the imagery of a looming-machine, signals the poet’s identification not only with the masculine landscape of the modern factories but also with the ancient female weavers. However dehumanizing the machines can be, so Crane suggests, they can be interwoven by the poet as a linguistic engineer-weaver into the mythic and “feminine”

realm of poetry, dominated by such female weavers as Penelope, Calypso, and Circe.¹⁹

Crane's queer-inflected attempt to deal with machines can be related to the figurative inextricability between the newest machinery and poetry as a primitive instrument for weaving a queer lineage with Whitman. Not to mention the section's ending in which Crane seeks to imagine the cross-temporal handclasp with the elder poet, Crane's desire to make a close kinship with Whitman is prefigured by the title "Cape Hatteras," which is linked to the Wright brothers' first flight in Kill Devil Hills (near the cape). As suggested by Crane's imagining of the brothers' "twinship," Crane views their flight not only as a legacy of America's technology but also as the spiritual monument of their fraternal kinship. On the one hand, indeed, their flight is celebrated especially as it holds out the possibilities for "soul, by naphtha fledged into new reaches" to explore then unknown planetary space like "the closer clasp of Mars" (*CPSL* 56). On the other hand, the airplane of Wright brothers, which is a representative modern invention for conquering the space, is regarded by Crane also as a symbol of the poetic exploration of the "soul" in search of its ideal counterpart, Whitman as the *right* brother. However, foretold by the word "Mars" (the Roman god of war), Crane has to deal with the technologically advanced catastrophe of World War I before he invokes the presence of Whitman.

The middle part of “Cape Hatteras” is filled with the imagery of “War”: “Hell’s belt springs wider into heaven’s plumed side. / O bright circumference, heights employed to fly / War’s fiery kennel masked in downy offings,—” (*CPSL* 56). And through the ferocious aerial combat (“War’s fiery kennel” implies warplanes’ dogfight), the fighter pilot called Falcon-Ace is shot down, and his “[l]ead-perforated fuselage” crashes into the cape: “Remember, Falcon-Ace, / Thou has there in thy wrist a Sanskrit charge / To conjugate infinity’s dim marge— / Anew . . . !” (*CPSL* 57). As Crane’s allusion to Whitman’s “Passage to India” intimates (“Sanskrit charge”), it is the moment when the speaker faces the “mashed and shapeless debris” that Whitman emerges as his cross-temporal brother, supposedly to redeem the catastrophe (*CPSL* 58).

According to Munro’s argument, the doomed flight of Falcon-Ace functions as an opportunity for Crane to initiate “a literary marriage with” Whitman, “so that the ‘dim marge’ to be conjugated is not simply filled with language, but with bodies as well: his and Whitman’s.” I agree with Munro’s interpretation that the “dim marge” is the marginal area where Crane “re-negotiate[s] a place on the margins and brings his queer project into the light” (158). But Munro’s provocative suggestion that the failure of the machine is derived from Crane’s “necessity for a return to the primitive ways of living” is arguable (166). As evident in the speaker’s address to Whitman, who “set breath in steel” (*CPSL*

59), Crane invokes Whitman not so much as a mechanophobic, luddite figure who rejects modern technology as the all-inclusive, “undenying” poet, whose visionary capacity is praised as “[s]ea eyes and tidal, undenying, bright with myth” (*CPSL*55). Nor can I follow Munro’s claim fully that Crane “succeeds in finding [‘a reaffirmation of faith in his project’] when he joins his poetic voice to the queer poetics of Whitman” (159). As Langdon Hammer observes, in 1923 when he started conceiving the idea of *The Bridge*, Crane imagined himself in “the nation described in Frank’s *Our America*, and he fully expected *The Bridge* to win for him a place in the national literature.” “By 1926, however,” Hammer continues, “when he arrived in Cuba, Crane’s identification with Whitman had permanently divided him from friends like Tate, and he had fled the nation he wished to speak to and on behalf of” (*Janus* 171). Seen in this context, Whitman in this lyric should be considered not as a redemptive presence but as an excruciatingly ambivalent figure, indicating at once Crane’s intense estrangement and yearning for an intimate connectedness with others.

Admittedly, “Cape Hatteras” finds Crane seeking to return to Whitman so that he would resuscitate 1923 conviction: “I begin to feel myself directly connected with Whitman” (*CPSL* 327). And this sense of direct connectedness appears to be reconfirmed at the section’s ending by the image of their handclasp (“My hand / in yours”) (*CPSL* 60).

As though deflating the phantasized presence of such hand-holding, however, “Cape Hatteras” is soaked with the entangled sense of intense isolation from, and mournful attachment with, the imagined absence of Whitman.

III. Returning Home to “Junctions Elegiac”

“Cape Hatteras” surely abounds with the signs of Crane’s attempt to resuscitate the earlier grand design of *The Bridge* as the epic poem dealing with “the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554). Echoing back both to Frank’s vision of an alternative America as the submerged land of the “Indians” and to Lewis Spence’s pseudo-theory of Americas as the salient remnants of the sunken city Atlantis, “Cape Hatteras” offers us the imagery of submergence of a continent that evokes Crane’s atavistic impulse to return to origins. Crane starts “Cape Hatteras” by presenting the speaker as a traveler “return[ing] home” from older countries such as “Marseille” and “Bombay” to his native coast (“our own / Hearths”) (*CPSL* 54):²⁰

Imponderable the dinosaur

sinks slow,

the mammoth saurian

ghoul, the eastern

Cape . . .

While rises in the west the coastwise range,

slowly the hushed land—

Combustion at the astral core—the dorsal change

Of energy—convulsive shift of sand . . . (*CPSL* 54)

Besides presenting the image of “we” “return[ing]” from the Old World “to our own / Hearths” (*CPSL* 54), Crane enacts here the visionary voyage of the speaker returning to the “hushed land” of a prehistoric “America.” The figures of “the dinosaur” and “the mammoth saurian,” which are superimposed onto the geographical shape of the “Cape,” imply the speaker’s desire to escape from modernity towards the primitive world in which “America” could restart from its primordial beginning. The motif of returning recalls Crane’s private endeavor to interweave in *The Bridge* the vision of his imagined homeland, one of whose names is Atlantis. As observed above, Crane’s idea of Atlantis is inspired both by Frank’s works and Spence’s *Atlantis in America*. The influence of Spence’s book is immense to an extent that Crane writes Frank that he has “discovered that it IS the real Atlantis, even of geology!” (*CPSL* 475). Crane’s exultation partly comes from Spence’s claim that the traces of Atlantis can be discovered in Native American cultures.^{2 1}

Evoking the rise of a continent from its primordial beginning, though, Crane's use of the scientific words to refer to geological conditions of the continent makes us conscious of the fabricated nature of the nativist vision of pure origins, uncontaminated by technological artifice. Commenting on the panoramic landscape in the opening stanza that suggests the imagined view from the cockpit of the Wright brothers' aircraft, Lawrence Kramer notes that the "images of combustion, change of energy, and shift of sand refer obliquely to the Wright Brothers' flight (the firing engine, turning propellers, and the shifting sand in the dunes of Kill Devil Hills" (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 71). By signifying the inextricable entanglement between the primordial energy and the aircraft, such lines as "Combustion at the astral core—the dorsal change / Of energy—convulsive shift of sand" imply that the seeming opposition between the original plenitude of an authentic beginning and modern alienation caused by the progress of scientific knowledges is a misleading one. As implied by the speaker's vision of the "red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas," which is juxtaposed with "derricks" or "tunnels," the atavistic will to return to the origins of an alternative America can be written only as a result of its contrasting difference from the products of modern industrial technology such as an aeroplane. Starting "Cape Hatteras" by intimating his self-awareness of the impossibility of returning to the place of purified origination, Crane tries to reinforce his faith in the

“red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas,” whose energy is, like Atlantis, submerged yet potent enough for his imagination to re-elicit in twentieth-century America (*CPSL* 54).

As foreshadowed by the word “twinship” (*CPSL* 56), the evocation of the physical continent of America as the female figure entails its male counterpart, Whitman, whose figure Crane appropriates as a symbol of the “Spiritual body of America” (*CPSL* 440). As the epigraph indicates (“*The seas all crossed, / weathered the capes, the voyage done . . . / —WALT WHITMAN*”) (*CPSL* 54), the seas are so consummately explored that they no longer provide the possibility of a further quest. Thus, the speaker turns to Whitman to ask whether “infinity” is “still the same” as when Whitman “walked the beach / Near Paumanok—your lone patrol—and heard the wraith / Through surf, its bird note there a long time falling” (*CPSL* 55). As implied by Crane’s allusion to Whitman’s “Sea-Drift” (especially “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”), however, Crane’s emphasis is placed on the role of Whitman as a mourning poet, located “at junctions elegiac.” After enacting the plane crash, accordingly, Whitman is invoked as “[t]he competent loam” and “the probable grass,” bearing “the rebound seed,” which encapsulates Whitman’s vision of resurrection and growth. (*CPSL* 58). Whitman’s capacity for a spiritual wound-dresser is desperately desired by Crane, who struggles to incorporate the catastrophe of the Great War. As Lee Edelman astutely observes,

“Whitman with his ‘rebound seed’ binds Crane as he bound the wounded soldiers” (*Transmemberment* 223). But the “rebound” involves a negative process of undoing the vision of Whitman to re-bind it from the very beginning. As the phrase “junctions elegiac” implies, the “junction” or the meeting-place between Crane’s speaker and Whitman turns out to be “elegiac” (*CPSL* 58) in the literal sense. In elegizing the war dead, the speaker comes to mourn the absence of Whitman as well, whose figure is supposed to represent Crane’s earlier ambition for writing *The Bridge* as the “synthesis of America and its structural identity” (*CPSL* 325).

Recapitulating the tradition of English funeral elegy, David Kennedy enumerates its characteristics such as “the invocation of a muse,” “the use of pathetic fallacy, that is the attribution of human emotions to the world of nature,” “catalogues of flowers and animals; and the apotheosis of the dead person” (12-13). Concurring with Kennedy’s catalogue, the latter part of “Cape Hatteras” finds Crane deploying traditional elegiac practices such as flower-gathering (e.g., “the mountain laurel,” “Potomac lilies,” “the Pontiac rose,” and “Klondike edelweiss” and pathetic fallacy (“How speechful on oak-vizored palisades, / As vibrantly I following down Sequoia alleys / Heard thunder’s eloquence through green arcades”) (*CPSL* 59). Despite the imagery of forging a fraternal kinship (“Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound / Of living brotherhood!”) (*CPSL*

58) and of the epic inclusiveness (“New integers of Roman, Viking, Celt— / Thou, Vedic Caesar, to the greensward knelt!”) (*CPSL* 59), what becomes insistent through Crane’s repetitive use of imperatives and apostrophes is the speaker’s profound estrangement from a national, collective consciousness (“Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman”), corresponding with the imagined solitude of Whitman in his “lone patrol” (*CPSL* 55). This sense of indirectly shared solitude, with Crane’s employment of the conventions of funeral elegy, puts into question the supposed presence of Whitman’s comradeship rooted in “our own / [h]earths” (*CPSL* 54).

Here let us turn to the poem’s epigraph to consider Crane’s use of Whitman’s passage: “*The seas all crossed, / weathered the capes, the voyage done . . . / —WALT WHITMAN*” (*CPSL* 54). Quoting the line from the eighth section of “Passage to India,” Crane leaves out the rest of the section in which Whitman envisions the reunion with his “Comrade / perfect” in an explicit manner: “As fill’d with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found, / The Younger melts in fondness in his arms” (*Portable* 282-83). Concerning “the full context of Crane’s allusion” to “Passage to India,” Robert K. Martin argues that “Crane’s use of this passage as his epigraph suggests that . . . the conclusion is to be a triumphant celebration of love, now rendered timeless and complete” (*Homosexual* 151). Hammer interprets Crane’s choice of these lines as “one measure of

the endurance of [Crane's Whitmanian] vision throughout the making of *The Bridge*; and it insists that the goal of poetic quest in *The Bridge* is a point at which distinction between self and other, the elder and the younger, the spirit and the flesh, have dissolved (or 'melted away') in the achievement of a bond that is sexual and fraternal at once" (*Janus* 189). While both Martin's focus and Hammer's are on the "complet[ion]" and "endurance" of Crane's ideal for establishing a communion-like relation with Whitman, what is obscured by such an emphasis is the effect of Crane's omission of the homoerotic lines from the epigraph: "The Younger melts in fondness in his arms" (*Portable* 283). While we could contend that Crane's omission can be taken as a trace of the displaced homosexual desire, we should not deny another possibility that this omission is intentionally made to intimate the hidden absence of, or spectral presence of the "Elder Brother," under the constant intimation of its vanishing.

IV. So "Suddenly" and So "Soon"

As Yingling observes, "Cape Hatteras" "carries a trace of a love poem," especially as "it ends with the image of Crane and Whitman hand-in-hand, never to be parted" (210). Although we should be cautious about the rose-colored phrase "never to be parted,"

Yingling's view of "Cape Hatteras" as Crane's love poem for Whitman can be justified, for instance, by Crane's reimagining the Wright brothers as "[t]wo brothers in their twinship" (*CPSL* 56). Whereas Orville and Wilbur are not twins, Crane's emphasis on their "twinship" indicates his will to prove an intertwined relationship with Whitman as his ideal twin. In Whitman's poem titled "Recorders Ages Hence," to which Crane alludes ("—"Recorders ages hence"—ah, syllables of faith!") (*CPSL* 55), Whitman addresses his future readers, telling them to recount his "happiest days," when he and his comrade were "wandering hand in / hand" and "twain apart from other men" (*Portable* 196). As though responding to Whitman's demand for an intimate "twinship," Crane tries to evoke the immediate presence of Whitman's "other hand," which is laid "upon [his] heart" while another hand of Whitman holds a "wand" to "beat a song": "And this, thine other hand upon my heart" (*CPSL* 58). Along with the allusions to, and quotations from, Whitman's poems in "Cape Hatteras,"^{2 2} Crane's depiction of Whitman's "hand," internalized within the speaker, seems to fulfill Whitman's prophecy, performing a textual version of Whitman's afterlife perpetuated in Crane's poem. But the word "other" to qualify Whitman's hand can also signify Crane's awareness of the incorporated yet ultimately unassimilable *otherness* of Whitman, which cannot be reduced to the manageable spirit in the phantasmic realm of the poet's imagination.

The speaker's much twisted relation with Whitman comes into full play in the ending. Declaring that Whitman's "vision is reclaimed," Crane concludes "Cape Hatteras" as follows:

And see! the rainbow's arch—how shimmeringly stands

Above the Cape's ghoul-mound, O joyous seer!

Recorders ages hence, yes, they shall hear

In their own veins uncanceled thy sure tread

And read thee by the aureole 'round thy head

Of pasture-shine, *Panis Angelicus!*

yes, Walt,

Afoot again, and onward without halt,—

Not soon, nor suddenly,—no, never to let go

My hand

in yours,

Walt Whitman—

so— (*CPSL* 60)

Apparently, Crane's speaker is hand in hand with Whitman to walk together across the "rainbow's arch" that rises above the "ghoul-mound" of the technological destruction.

With the imagery of communion (*Panis Angelicus* means “bread of angels”), this conclusion has been read as the consummation of their fraternal reunion, and few have pointed out the speaker’s sense of estrangement, disconnection and renunciation.^{2 3}

Indeed, Crane’s speaker attests the “sure tread” of Whitman with two “yes”s. However, since the term “uncancelled” to refer to Whitman’s “sure tread” evokes the act of annulling the former cancelation, the passage can signify both the infrangibility of Whitman’s footsteps—no one can cancel his “sure tread”—and the intimation of another cancellation—it has already been cancelled before. In doing so, the concluding stanza destabilizes the “sure[ness]” of the speaker’s affirmation. Though Crane refers to the future generations of “Recorders,” moreover, the act of “uncancell[ation]” of Whitman’s “sure tread” might belong to the ideal brothers to come, not to him. A series of negatives (“Not,” “nor,” “no”) also works in reinforcing the assumption that Crane’s covenant with Whitman has already been “cancelled.” In Crane’s notes for “Cape Hatteras,” the conclusion is registered as “Resolution (Whitman)” (qtd. in Delany 220). But the resolution appears to be beyond the reach of Crane’s speaker, whose final address to Whitman is characterized by four dashes reproducing the sense of increasing distance from Whitman. Each figure in the last sentence is tellingly disconnected on the page. And the speech “suddenly” stops as though the speaker realizes the absence of their entwined

hands. The (in)concluding word “so—,” with a following dash, can be seen, then, as a trace of the imagined moment of renunciation or letting “go.”

To go further in our investigation into Crane’s (dis)connected relation with Whitman, let us take a look at Crane’s original outline of “Cape Hatteras.” Among several outlines composed in 1927, the following synopsis should be cited at length, since it encourages us to re-complicate the concluding passage:

Whitman approaches the bed of a dying (*southern*) soldier—scene is in a Washington hospital. Allusion is made to this during the dialogue. The soldier, conscious of his dying condition, at the end of the dialogue asks Whitman to call a priest, for absolution. Whitman leaves the scene—deliriously the soldier calls him back. The part ends before Whitman’s return, of course. The irony is, of course, in the complete absolution which Whitman’s words have already given the dying man, before the priest is called for. This, alternated with the eloquence of the dying man, is the substance of the dialogue—the emphasis being on the symbolism of the soldier’s body having been used as a *forge* toward a state of Unity . . . The appeal of the scene must be made as much as possible independent of the historical “character” of Walt. (qtd. in Weber 260)

Given Crane’s intention to treat Whitman as a near-impersonal figure (“as much as

possible independent of the historical ‘character’ of Walt”), we are permitted to presume that this synopsis is absorbed into the text so thoroughly that concrete details disappear from the finished text. For example, although we cannot find in “Cape Hatteras” the death-bed dialogue in the hospital, Crane’s references to the Great Wars are registered side by side with the figure of Whitman as a wound dresser: “Thou, pallid there as chalk / Hast kept of wounds, O Mourner, all that sum / That then from Appomattox stretched to Somme!” (CPSL 58). Instead of the “dying (*southern*) soldier,” we find the dying pilot who has in his “wrist a Sanskrit charge” and whose “stilly eyes partake / [w]hat alcohol of space” (CPSL 57). Since Crane is notorious for being an alcoholic *poète maudit*, “wrist” and “alcohol” can serve as a pair of the self-referential words, implying the poet’s empathy with the doomed pilot called “Falcon-Ace.” Identifying with the death-dealing pilot, furthermore, Crane performs at the lyric’s center the self-shattering skywriting to represent the catastrophic scene of the plane crash as the pictogram of a falling spiral. (CPSL 57-58). In place of the Southern soldier dying in the Civil War, it is Crane himself as a doomed writer struggling in 1929 to complete *The Bridge*, who “deliriously” calls back the absent figure of Whitman: “Our Meistersinger . . . it was thou who on the boldest heel / Stood up and flung the span on even wing / Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!” (CPSL 59). As the synopsis describes Whitman “le[aving] the scene” without

answering to the dying soldier, it is no surprise that the planned “dialogue” is turned into a volley of (“delirious”?) apostrophes in the finished text.

However, having said that, the figural absence of Whitman does not prevent Crane from initiating another sort of “dialogue.” Crane writes in the synopsis that “[t]he part ends before Whitman’s return, of course.” This matter-of-factly tone of “of course” implies that the failure of their communication is considered integral to the conclusion. That the scene in a Washington hospital should be cut off before Whitman’s return hints at a possibility of the *dying* soldier’s failure to see Whitman again. Crane finds in this situation the “irony,” noting that though the soldier calls for the priest for absolution, he has already been absolved unknowingly by the “words” of Whitman. The irony holds true to Whitman’s side as well. Since Whitman “leaves the scene” in the direction for the priest without realizing his achievement, which is to say, “the complete absolution” that his “words have already given the dying man,” Whitman must have felt the powerlessness of his words that would promise, to use the passage from 1876 “Preface,” “Death, Immortality, and a free entrance into the Spiritual world” (*Comprehensive* 746). Seen in this light, though the dialogue’s emphasis is solely put on “the soldier’s body” as “a *forge* toward a state of Unity,” not only the consequent immolation of “the soldier’s body” but also the poignant incompleteness of their communication can also be considered as a

generative process for activating “a *forge* toward a state of Unity” (qtd. in Weber 260). Ironically, indeed, it is not the successful reunion of the divided men but the dialogic synchronicity of each other’s failure to realize the successfulness of their exchange that seems (to the reader) to contribute to the fleeting sense of quasi-reconciliation.

Read against the above analysis of Crane’s synopsis, in which their communal sense of failure can serve as an allegory of the persistence of their indirect relation, the conclusion can be interpreted from another angle. If the solitude of the dying soldier, accompanied by the departing figure of Whitman, can function as a “*forge* toward a state of Unity” (qtd. in Weber 260), the concluding “so—” is to be read as the emblem of the sad solidarity between the two poets, who *fail together* to meet and complete the other’s desire to re-pair the ideal “twinship” (*CPSL* 56).

Coda

Without offering us the manifestation of the speaker’s direct connectedness with Whitman, the latter part of “Cape Hatteras” locates the spectral opacity in Whitman’s figure as follows:

Not greatest, thou,—not first, nor last,—but near

And onward yielding past my utmost year.

Familiar, thou, as mendicants in public places;

Evasive—too—as dayspring's spreading arc to trace is:— (*CPSL* 59)

In spite of the words “near” and “past my utmost year,” “Cape Hatteras” does not gesture toward the physical proximity and the spiritual immortality of Whitman. Rather, by disclosing the estranging familiarity of the desired twin (“Familiar” *and* “Evasive”), the lyric both appropriates and preserves the opaque otherness of Whitman, who turns out to be the speaker’s intimate yet unreachable elder (br)other. Correspondingly, Crane’s attempt to assimilate the machines into the realm of poetry ends with privileging neither the technological innovation in the modern society nor the meta-poetic exploration for “a single, new *word*” in a conclusive manner (*CPSL* 163). This does not mean to contend that Crane strategically avoids coupling the speaker and Whitman in a self-enclosed intimate sphere, thereby enabling him to repeat the imaginary attempt to pair up with the ideal twin. Undeniable is the fact that “Cape Hatteras” is the record of Crane’s earnest struggle to explore how far his hand reaches out to Whitman, rather than to inscribe the mutual failure to meet the other. For all the weakness and flaws in “Cape Hatteras,” what is remarkable is the very process of Crane’s reaching out toward the other, which leaves us with the tangible trace of the ever-disappearing hand of Whitman.

Chapter 4: “Oh, Hold Me in those Eyes’ Engaging Blue”: “Indiana” and the Land of Intimate Strangers^{2 4}

From the moment of *The Bridge*'s publication, “Indiana,” the concluding lyric of “Powhatan’s Daughter” section, has provoked severe critical reactions. Unlike the preceding lyric called “The Dance,” which Crane composed in 1926, “Indiana” is one of the later additions in 1929 that Crane was hurried to write for meeting the publisher’s deadline. It is undeniable, therefore, that the lyric has vulnerable aspects that may lead us to see it as a mere sentimental folk ballad, if not as a “mawkish and helpless” lyric which “fails miserably” as Yvor Winters claims (26), or as “one of the most astonishing failures ever made by a poet of Crane’s genius” as Allen Tate comments (233). Pointing out Crane’s lapse into “occasional sentimentality,” for instance, Daniel Gabriel identifies the lyric’s “most serious problem” as Crane’s failure to manipulate the “tone” of “the mother’s voice,” of whose speech the entire lyric consists (“Crane fails at the feminine here”) (110-11). By disparaging the lyric’s sentimentality, many commentators up to the present date have almost unanimously considered “Indiana” as one of the weakest lyrics in *The Bridge*.^{2 5}

Whether or not we can support those critical comments on Crane’s failure to control

sentimentality becomes worthy of consideration, given Crane's own view of sentimentality manifested in the letter to William Wright:

I admit having felt considerably jolted at the charge of sentimentality continually leveled at the "Indiana" fragment, particularly when such charges came from people who acknowledged a violent admiration for Hardy's poetry. For many of his lyrics have seemed to me at least as "sentimental" as this "mawkish" performance of my own. But I approve of a certain amount of sentiment anyway. Right now it is more fashionable to speak otherwise, but the subject (or emotion) of "race" has always had as much of sentiment behind it—as it has had of prejudice, also. Since "race" is the principal motivation of "Indiana," I can't help thinking that, observed in proper perspective, and judged in relation to the argument or theme of the "Pocahontas" section as a whole, the pioneer woman's maternalism isn't excessive. (*CPSL* 654)

Here we can note Crane's deliberate engagement with sentimentality, an attitude which could be easily repudiated not only as anachronistic but as effeminate and immature particularly in his literary community.²⁶ Along the same line of Winters' accusation of "Indiana" as the "mawkish and helpless" failure (26), Tate criticizes "poetic sentimentality" that he finds in *The Bridge* as the "emotion undisciplined by the structure

of events or ideas of which it is ostensibly a part” (230). Regardless of the expected charges from his friends and critics, however, the above letter finds Crane being conscious about his choice of the motif (“the pioneer woman’s maternalism”) and performativity (“‘mawkish’ performance of my own”) of “sentiment,” thereby asserting his disciplined craftsmanship to deal with “a certain amount of sentiment.” And it is evident in the above passage that Crane understands both “sentiment” and “race” as the interdependent terms: “the subject (or emotion) of ‘race’ has always had as much of sentiment behind it—as it has had of prejudice” (*CPSL* 654).

My concern in this chapter is with examining how Crane’s strategic treatment of sentimentality works in conjunction with the issue of “race.” In so doing, I will analyze the “maternalism” in the pioneer woman’s speech with an eye for how Crane negotiates with the tension between his private impulse (sentiment) and the historical necessity (race) so that the lyric could function as an indispensable piece contributing to Crane’s concept of *The Bridge* as “the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554).

In the introduction of *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, Shirley Samuels writes that “in nineteenth century America sentimentality appears as a national project: in particular, a project about imagining the nation’s bodies and the national body.” Pointing to “the involvement of

women as objects or agents of these policies,” Samuels defines “sentimentality” as “a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer.” Then, Samuels continues to write that “sentimentality produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class, and gender boundaries” (4-5). Samuels’ observation is illuminating for us to foreground the way in which the sentimental “maternalism” of the pioneer woman in “Indiana” works in crossing the relational boundaries, be it familial, racial, or sexual (*CPSL* 654). It is true that the dominant timbre of the speaker’s voice sounds sentimental as it unleashes her personal response to the failure of her family unit. Beneath and through the mawkish figure of the speaker, who seems to be devoid of any sense of irony and restraint, “Indiana” will show Crane engaging in his epic project of exploring an alternative mode of affiliating his speaker (and himself) to a communal body of “America.”

I. “The Morning Glory”: What Is Furled in Her Song?

According to John T. Irwin, the ballad-like form with the traditional imagery of a rural life Crane employs for “Indiana” derives from “the 1917 ballad . . . ‘Back Home Again in Indiana’” (81-82). By appropriating the sweet-old cadence of the song that

presents a lone “I” yearning for his / her childhood, as we will see, Crane foregrounds the wanderer’s nostalgia for his / her homeland to be “back home again” on the familial and national level. “Indiana” starts by the speaker, the aged pioneer woman, delivering a valedictory to her son called Larry, who decided to leave the family farm in Indiana to become a sailor:

The morning glory, climbing the morning long

Over the lintel on its wiry vine,

Closes before the dusk, furls in its song

As I close mine . . . (*CPSL* 48)

By using the flowery image spreading into full bloom to fade in the afternoon, Crane introduces the speaker in a mood at once sentimental and self-reflective. The flower’s wrinkled surface evoked by the textual image (“furls”) is merged in the reader’s imagination with the wrinkled skin of the speaker, who has been past her prime and feels her emotional resources drying up as her “song” is nearing its end. Besides Crane’s association of a woman with a flower, we find in the rolled up texture of the “morning glory” the figurative conflation of the flower, woman, and text of poetry, the latter of which was subject to the “cultural feminization” in Crane’s time (Dean 100). This feminine triplet presented at the very beginning of the lyric leads us to confirm that Crane

purposefully invokes sentimentality as the female speaker's attribute, whose song concludes "Powhatan's Daughter."

In the outline of *The Bridge* Crane sent to his patron Otto Kahn, Crane notes that "Powhatan's Daughter" is "mainly concerned with a gradual exploration of this 'body' [Pocahontas] whose first possessor was the Indian." After equating the mythical figure of Pocahontas with "the physical body of the continent, or soil," Crane writes that the "love motif" is embedded in "Powhatan's Daughter" that "carries along a symbolism of the life and ages of man (here the sowing of seed) which is further developed in each of the subsequent sections." Crane enumerates each role of the five sub-subsections as follows: "In 2 (Van Winkle) it is Childhood; in 3 (The River) it is Youth; in 4 (The Dance), it is Manhood; in 5 (Indiana) it is Age." Crane's superposition of a man's growth and decline on a national history suggests that "Powhatan's Daughter" reads as a biography of America in which "the love motif" is "interwoven and tends to be implicit in the imagery rather than anywhere stressed" (*CPSL* 554-55). Crane's emphasis on the "implicit" status of "love motif" encourages us to presume as follows: the image of the "morning glory" can be a proleptic figure that "furls" within itself a biography of the imagined America. This presumption cannot be far-fetched, because, as we will examine below, the "climbing" movement of the flower corresponds with the speaker's elegiac glance to the

earlier, glorious nationhood that was engaged in exploring the fertile land. Operating as the verbal flower in which multifarious implications are intertwined, the flowery image turns back to the mother's "song" that begins to retrace the past when she was a young ambitious pioneer traveling with her husband to strike a bonanza in the Colorado Gold Rush (*CPSL* 48).

As foretold by the composite metaphor of the flower opening only to be closed "before the dusk" (*CPSL* 48), Crane interlaces throughout "Indiana" different aspects of the American dream all of which are captured in an unstable moment of transition when peoples are estranged from a sense of belonging and become nostalgic for such ideals as a complete family unit or a sustainable, national inheritance. We can read "Indiana," in this respect, as Crane's West narrative, which concerns the fate of peoples ensnared in the Gold Rush fever. While utilizing a melodramatic setup in which the pioneer mother craves for an enduring relationship with her son, Crane offers us an implicit critique against the Euro-Americans' self-destructive compulsion to exploit rich soils. Just as an ominous connotation of "As I close mine" intimates a closing of the "mine," whether of material riches (gold) or of her emotional resources (song), so the image of the "morning glory" expanding itself "the morning long" provides Crane with an opportunity to mourn for the disastrous issues of the national myths including the Far West and Virgin Land (*CPSL*

48).

Driven by the “dream called Eldorado,” the speaker “once rode off” with a mass of other pioneers only to experience the death of her husband (“we’d buried him behind us, far / Back on the gold trail”). And her memory bitterly recaptures the illusory nature of the “gold trail” that brought them nothing but “barren tears” (“But we... / Won nothing out of fifty-nine—those years— / But gilded promise, yielded to us never, / And barren tears”) (*CPSL* 49). Despite the seemingly simple surface of the lyric, as observed, we come to notice Crane’s rhetorical self-consciousness permeating the “sentimental” female voice. Corresponding with the entangling movement of the flower’s “wiry vine” (*CPSL* 48), Crane interweaves in the mother’s speech the fragmentary pictures of the settlers cornered into displaced circumstances by their own exploitative drive.

II. Toward the (Homosexual) Sublime

As suggested by the poem’s title, all of *The Bridge*’s sections present the people and their desiring voices on various kinds of threshold: Starting from the “*elevators*” that “*drop us from our day*” (*CPSL* 33) in “*To Brooklyn Bridge*,” for instance, the first section “*Ave Maria*” finds Columbus on the ship returning to Spain; the speaker of “*The Harbor*

Dawn” drifts in “*a / waking dream*” (*CPSL* 38), and the speaker of “Van Winkle” walks to his job. Correspondingly, their identities located in these liminal spaces are presented as in flux, suggesting that one’s subjectivity is informed by the space in which it is situated. Also in “Indiana,” Crane uses the threshold imagery (“lintel” [*CPSL* 48], “prairie’s door,” tearing of “my womb” [*CPSL* 49]) to evoke how transitional the nation was in the mid-nineteenth century when peoples had to abandon their dream of the inexhaustible frontier and supplant it with another ideal alternative to the myth of the Far West. This holds true to the speaker’s son called Larry, who is located at the very threshold of his life (“Yes, Larry, now you’re going to sea”) (*CPSL* 50).

Larry’s determination to depart from the family farmhouse that is the result of his parents’ failure at “the dream called Eldorado” (*CPSL* 49) suggests his aversion to the greed for riches. The name “Eldorado” reminds us of the Spanish search for gold in the mythical city El Dorado, which ended up in the devastation of the Aztec world. The motif of a quest for gold is a *basso continuo* of *The Bridge*, in which Crane invokes the land of wealth in various guises. In Crane’s view, the unquenchable desire for gold is constitutive of “the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554), which has been relayed by a wide range of gold-seekers from the Argonauts (“Atlantis”) and such well-known explorers as Columbus (“Ave Maria”), Pizarro, Cortés, (“Van Winkle”), and De Soto (“The River”) along with

the anonymous gold seekers including Larry's parents. Seen in this context, Larry's attempt to leave his pioneer mother implies the son's distrust of the pioneering adventure represented by those conquerors and explorers.

However, Larry's decision to leave the farmhouse and, by extension, to disown the familial inheritance, can be taken as a mere repetition of what their parents had already done. Crane's use of words makes us notice a figurative interchangeability between the myth of "Eldorado" in the Far West and the dream of exploring the sea as another frontier, both of whom can be equivalent in terms of a quest for the Sublime. According to Robert F. Gross, who makes a comparative reading between Tennessee Williams and Crane, the motif of "the hero" who "turns his back on the Beautiful to seek the Sublime" is "a major tradition of American literature" (233). By summarizing Edmund Burke's theory of the Beautiful and the Sublime, Gross observes that "the pleasure of the Beautiful demands the ability to feel completely in control, whereas "the pleasure of the Sublime is to be had in surrendering to a masculine power other than one's own, to be pleasurably transported in one's own lack of mastery." Having paraphrased Burke's idea, Gross begins to disclose how Burke's sexual anxiety works to aestheticize and thereby asexualize the Beauty and the Sublime, the latter of which is "fundamentally masochistic" (232).

Although Gross does not mention "Indiana" in his argument, "Indiana" perfectly

conforms to the tradition of the “Burkean movement away from Woman and ‘her’ realm of the Beautiful, toward the veiled homosexuality of the Sublime” (233). Since Crane sought to provide *The Bridge* with an epic strain by including diverse cultures and voices of America under the category of “the experience and perceptions of our common race, time and belief” (*CPSL* 466), he did not fail to interweave in the poem’s texture a thread of the “veiled homosexuality of the Sublime” (Gross 233). As Thomas Yingling and other queer readers of Crane maintain, Crane’s project for *The Bridge* entails an adventurous task for a modern homosexual poet to graft his homosexual myth into the center of a national identity by rewriting Pocahontas legend.²⁷ Seen in this light, then, the figurative interchangeability between the parent’s failed quest and Larry’s departure for the sea comes to overshadow not only Larry’s future but also the viability of Crane’s queer adventure for the Sublime.

III. “Won Nothing Out of Fifty-Nine”: A Self-Criticizing Lyric

Before turning back to “Indiana,” we have to recapitulate the historical context of “Powhatan’s Daughter” by drawing on Jared Gardner’s argument that the section’s historicity ties itself both to Crane’s visionary imagination and to the contemporary social

facts. In 1920s America, according to Gardner, the society sought to formulate an alternative American race based on the biology-free inheritance, which is purified of its European one (26). Crane's engagement with the Pocahontas myth draws a parallel with the contemporary social project to claim the alternative inheritance for America with "the Indian" as its symbol. By examining "The Dance," Gardner argues that the vision of the homoerotic union between the white speaker and the Native American chieftain enables Crane to restore the homosexual subject to the center in an American history, while gay men were purged in the military realm by then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt (32). As Gardner rightly observes, the "leading actors" in Crane's attempt to rewrite the "national and sexual identity" are "the Indian and the sailor," both of whom are "brought together" in "Powhatan's Daughter" as the "mutually inextricable in the formulation of an American race" (27).

In accord with Gardner's observation, "Indiana," the finale of "Powhatan's Daughter," offers us a number of anti-heteronormative elements. For example, the speaker's account of the past includes the violent imagery that refers to the excruciating pain of the biological birth ("As once my womb was torn, my boy, when you / Yielded your first cry") and the disintegration of the heterosexual family ("Then, though we'd buried him behind us") (*CPSL* 49). And as we have observed above, Larry's decision to

leave the farm to become a sailor connotes his rejection of the biological inheritance, which can also be extended to his unknowing rejection of heteronormative nationhood.

However, the speaker's address to Larry hides beneath its maternalism Crane's severe self-criticism against his project for claiming a new national identity purified of a biological genealogy. As suggested in her reminding Larry of his close resemblance to his father ("And you're the only one with eyes like him") (*CPSL* 50), the mother's speech insinuates that even though Larry leaves the farmhouse, he could never derail himself from the familial blood-tie. By confining Larry's figure in the specular relationship with his mother, Crane's enactment of the mother's address implies that Larry cannot escape from the "gold trail" to whose "gilded promise" his parents once dedicated themselves in the past (*CPSL* 48). The opening stanza ostensibly shows the speaker as a mere mawkish woman devoid of her emotional resources ("As I close mine"). Echoing back to Crane's letter to Wright, however, her speech turns out to display an aspect of the skillful "performance" (*CPSL* 654) of a possessive mother:

Then, though we'd buried him behind us, far

Back on the gold trail—then his lost bones stirred . . .

But you who drop the scythe to grasp the oar

Knew not, nor heard

How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too—

Waved Seminary Hill a gay good-bye . . .

We found God lavish there in Colorado

But passing sly. (*CPSL* 49)

By grounding the mother's recollection in a version of chiasmic crisscrossing, Crane leads us to see the figure of Larry, who "grasp[s] the oar" to leave the farmhouse, as an inverted mirror-image of his mother, who "drop[ped] the scythe" and "[w]aved Seminary Hill a gay good-bye" to head toward Colorado. The word "Prodigal" is placed as a verbal pivot on which the other words are organized in a quasi-symmetrical composition ("How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too"). As a result, "Prodigal" can be read both as a vocative to Larry and as an adjective qualifying his parents. In doing so, Crane enacts the way in which the maternal narcissism of the speaker threatens to erase Larry's individual distinction, as if compelling him back to a prenatal state. Thereby, Larry's decision to divest himself of the familial inheritance to be a sailor appears to be a specular replication of the pioneering spirit of his parents, who "once . . . too" turned their back on their home in favor of the nomadic life of searching for the Sublime ("We found God lavish there in Colorado"). On the one hand, to be certain, the mother seems to concede that Larry's

decision to leave Indiana will result in a new start: “(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)” (*CPSL* 50). Taking into account Crane’s mirror-like configuration, which emphasizes the specular similarity between the mother and her son, though, we cannot help surmising that Larry’s departure for the sea would end in as much a futile migration as the one his parents had already experienced.

As mentioned above, moreover, Larry’s refusal of inheriting the farmhouse owned by his mother, who failed to sustain a heterosexual relationship with her husband, comes to be seen in parallel with Crane’s own project in *The Bridge* that is driven by “the veiled homosexuality of the Sublime” (Gross 233). Though the reason of Larry’s departure remains unspecified, Larry’s destination (sea) is inseparable from such romantic terms as freedom, motion, and sublime. Since the same desire for the Sublime motivates Crane as well, who has set out to quest in *The Bridge* by invoking the bridge to “*lend a myth to God*” (*CPSL* 34), the speaker’s reference to “God,” which she saw “lavish there in Colorado” and which eventually dissolved into the “gilded promise” of “gold” (a loose pun on “god”?) (*CPSL* 49), can be read as a signal of Crane becoming doubtful of the validity of his poetic voyage:

The pebbles sang, the firecat slunk away

And glistening through the sluggard freshets came

In golden syllables loosed from the clay

His gleaming name. (*CPSL* 49)

Exploring “the intersections between Crane’s queerness and modernism,” Niall Munro keenly points toward Crane’s resistance to “certain aspects of the dominant heteronormative modernism” (14). In the mother’s reminiscence of the betrayed promise followed by the burial of her dead husband (“Then, though we’d buried him behind us, far / Back on the gold trail—then his lost bones stirred . . .”), in this context, we might be allowed to perceive Crane figuratively equating the death of Larry’s father with the imaginary elimination of his modernist predecessors. To use the words of Christopher Nealon, who summarizes Gardner’s argument, Crane, in “Powhatan’s Daughter,” seems to create “a narcissistic myth of American history that begins with the poet himself” (30). However, the imagery used in the above stanza is derived from the very works of the first-generation modernists, one of whom is Wallace Stevens. Unmistakably, Crane’s “firecat” comes from Stevens’ “Earthly Anecdote” (“A firecat bristled in the way”) (3). With the figurative conflation between the irrepressible memory of the dead and the burial of the father, whose “lost bones stirred,” furthermore, the above passage inevitably echoes back to the ominous lines from Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (“Where the dead men lost their bones”) (*Poems* 59). These inter-textual echoes may function to reduce Crane’s “pioneering”

project to deal with “the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554) to a pastiche of his literary antecedents. In this context, then, “Indiana” can be read as the self-criticizing lyric that displays Crane writing about himself, who is engaged in hunting for the “golden syllables” in vain by mining through the past literary “pebbles” and “clay.” In a self-defeating way, so we can presume, Crane interpolates in the lyric the poet’s figure as a late comer in the literary gold rush in the early twentieth century, identifying not only with Larry but with Larry’s parents, who came “too late, too early... / Won nothing out of fifty-nine” (*CPSL* 49).

As observed earlier, “Indiana,” along with “Cape Hatteras” and “Quaker Hill,” is the last additions Crane was goaded to write in 1929 to meet the publisher’s dead line. And critics point out that these lyrics show the signs of Crane losing the confidence he once had between 1923 when he conceived the vision of *The Bridge* and the summer of 1926 in which he wrote two-thirds of *The Bridge*. By adopting a mode of genetic criticism to chart the changes and developments within Crane’s manuscripts, Edward Brunner concludes that “[b]y the fall of 1927 . . . the likelihood was that Crane had lost confidence in his own writing” (220). Moreover, according to Crane’s biographical information, 1929 is a year after Crane’s “ultimate break with his mother Grace Crane” (Lewis 318). As though reflecting Crane’s declining circumstances in 1929, indeed, “Indiana” presents the

sterile landscape in which the nation's growth is brought to a halt with the poignant portrait of the disintegrating family. In both formal and thematic level, "Indiana" seems to be Crane's bitter admission that he has lost the initial ambition to create an over-sweeping "mystical synthesis of 'America'" (CPSL 321).

In 1923, the idea of *The Bridge* was conceived by Crane as a young, passionate aficionado of America. But in 1929, he felt estranged from heteronormative nationhood and found America not worth praising. While paying attention to the ominous undertone of Crane's self-inquiry implicated in the mother's speech, however, we should not miss the speaker's speech act still enacting the moment of an intimate communication at the midpoint of "Indiana." It is true that Larry's figure (as well as the poet himself) could be subsumed in an array of gold seekers whose quest will end in a disastrous shipwreck. Foreshadowed by the specular relationship between the mother and her son, what is more, Larry's oncoming initiation into a community of sailors (and, by extension, Crane's conceiving of an alternative national identity exempt from biological reproduction) is to be stranded. At the same time, as we will see below, Crane's dramatization of the transitory yet intimate communication between the two female strangers invites us to envisage a subversive potential of the very impossibility for Larry / Crane to be free of the familial and national ties.

IV. "Perhaps a Halfbreed"

As cited earlier, Crane wrote to Wright that "the principal motivation" of "Indiana" is "race," which he understands as hard-wired into the idea of "sentiment" (*CPSL* 654). This might sound puzzling to us unless we remember that what is negotiated throughout "Powhatan's Daughter" is the transmission of a new national identity with "the Indian" as its central symbol. In the preceding lyric titled "The Dance," Crane envisions the founding moment of an alternative America by enacting the speaker's homoerotic union with the symbolic "Indian" called Maquoqueeta. According to Gardner's view, which my reading of "The Dance" considers debatable, this union reconciles the two non-procreative modes of genealogy, yielding "a notion of race that fully bypasses the body in favor of an incorruptible machinery of cultural transmission" (46). The motif of the "Indian" along with that of the transmission of an alternative genealogy reemerges in "Indiana," where the speaker recollects the evanescent, quasi-encounter with a "homeless squaw" crossing her path:

The long trail back! I huddled in the shade

Of wagon-tenting looked out once and saw

Bent westward, passing on a stumbling jade

A homeless squaw—

Perhaps a halfbreed. On her slender back

She cradled a babe's body, riding without rein.

Her eyes, strange for an Indian's, were not black

But sharp with pain (*CPSL* 49)

Discussing “Indiana” as one of exemplary pieces of the 1920s nativist literature, Walter Benn Michaels sees this squaw as Crane’s “easy translation of the wanton Pocahontas into the ‘halfbreed’ ‘squaw,’” who is “a product and thus a carrier of miscegenation” (49). Whether or not Crane’s “easy translation” of Pocahontas into the maternal figure of the “squaw” attains the equally easy transmission of the inheritance of Pocahontas from the mythical realm of “The Dance” into the historical realm of “Indiana” is a matter of certain dispute. But there can be little doubt about Michaels’ claim that we notice a certain insensitivity in Crane’s way of dealing with the racial other. Except the remark on the squaw’s “slender back,” Crane’s portrait of the squaw does not offer us an enough account of her physical / psychological / ethnic personality to represent the leading role in a racial discourse. While remaining uncertain of the squaw’s ethnic identity (“*Perhaps* a halfbreed”) (emphasis added), the speaker’s memory focuses on the squaw’s “eyes,”

which she finds “strange for an Indian’s, were not black / But sharp with pain”:

And like twin stars. They seemed to shun the gaze

Of all our silent men—the long team line—

Until she saw me—when their violet haze

Lit with love shine . . .

I held you up—I suddenly the bolder,

Knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer.

She nodded—and that smile across her shoulder

Will still endear her (*CPSL* 50)

Reminiscent of the speaker’s maternal narcissism annihilating her son’s individuality, Crane seems to eliminate the otherness of the squaw by turning her into an intermediary figure in whose “pain”-ridden eyes the mournful figure of Pocahontas in “The Dance” “griev[ing]” over her lover’s death could be merged (*CPSL* 47). What is more, Crane’s recourse to the extra-linguistic communication (“mere words could not have brought us nearer”) reminds us not only of Tate’s criticism of “Indiana” as “a nightmare of sentimentality” (233) but of Crane’s notorious reduction of a Native American to the “glorious and dying animal” (*CPSL* 556). Ruthlessly depersonalized, the figure of this

“homeless squaw” leaves almost nothing but her “strange” eyes “[l]it with love shine” and “smile across her shoulders,” which the speaker recollects as if they were her “endear[ing]” souvenirs of the interracial communication.

We could not do enough justice to the above passage, however, until we examine what kind of “love” is activated in this fleeting, yet intensely affective exchange. Concerning Crane’s aspiration “toward a grand vision of historical, ethnic, and geographical unity (or ‘bridging’),” Peter Lurie reads “The Dance” to argue that Crane’s “efforts at connection” are “[d]efined generally as erotic and physical, and such unions in Crane are achieved most often through a sexualized and . . . pleasurable suffering.” Regarding “[m]asochism and erotic wounding” “as a connecting agent” for Crane to “enter history” (156), Lurie convincingly observes that what makes Crane’s text distinctive from the masculine modernist canons such as *Absalom, Absalom!* is “the mutuality of suffering that Crane effects for both his presumably white speaker and his Native American subject” (163). Although Lurie’s reading of *The Bridge* focuses mainly on “The Dance,” what is enacted in the transient communication between the two women in “Indiana” also partakes of the masochistic and vaguely homoerotic communion through the “sharp[ness]” of “pain” (*CPSL* 49). According to the speaker, who retraces the movement of the squaw’s eyes (“sharp with pain”) (*CPSL* 49), the squaw responds

only to the speaker's attention while "shun[ning]" "all our silent men," whose "gaze" can evoke not only the white aggression towards Native Americans but also the heteronormative economy reproduced in their "long team line" (*CPSL* 50). In so doing, these stanzas make us see the significance of the "pain" in the squaw's eyes, as it initiates the moment of the speaker's empathy with the squaw's suffering from being subject to greed and violence implicit in the heterosexual paradigm.

In the exchange between the two female strangers, for instance, the speaker's interest in the squaw is motivated by her homo-oriented desire that works in homogenizing, rather than distinguishing, the difference between the speaker and the squaw. Resonating with Leo Bersani's idea of "homo-ness," Crane's dramatization of the interracial exchange reinforces how supplementary the other's difference is compared with their shared sameness such as their outsider-hood ("Her eyes, strange for an Indian's"), and mother-hood ("I held you up"; "She nodded").²⁸ Eventually, indeed, the grand concept of *The Bridge* as "a mystical synthesis of 'America'" (*CPSL* 321) is diminished to the figurative conflation of the two women, both of whom can be coupled through their pre-linguistic expressions evocative of masochism and "maternalism" (*CPSL* 654). In the final phase of the compositional process, however, Crane still seeks

to enter and rewrite a national history and its identity through the personal sentiment of “pain” that seems to cross the racial boundary.

As we will see in the fifth chapter on “The Dance,” the mythical figures of Pocahontas and her escorts are subsumed into the natural elements, envisioned by the speaker both as lost and present everywhere in the “pure mythical and smoky soil” (*CPSL* 347). Therefore, we cannot see, as Crane insists in the letter to Kahn, whether the succession of non-biological “Indian” inheritance from the squaw to the pioneer woman is accomplished. What can be confirmed, at least, is that the transient meeting of their eyes enables the viewpoint of Crane (and of the reader) to retrospectively locate the crossing figures of the two women in the imagined form of a tribal community whose origins can be traced back to Pocahontas. Of course, the speaker is not aware of herself participating in a process of sharing the alternative genealogy derived from “the Indians.” As will be observed in what follows, however, Crane identifies with this female speaker, and projects his displaced sense of belonging onto that of the pioneer woman, whose manner of addressing to her son shows her ambiguous feeling about her own relation to the family farm in Indiana.

While living at the farmhouse in Indiana, she simultaneously grants a psychological privilege to another bond of kinship derived from the place called “Arrowhead”:

“remember / You were the first — before Ned and this farm,—... / And since then—all that’s left to me of Jim / Whose folks, like mine, came out of Arrowhead” (*CPSL* 50). The speaker’s reference to “Arrowhead” functions to bind her, her dead husband, and Larry in the realm of her intimate sphere, and thereby would exclude the other son (Ned) and relatives from the “Arrowhead” community of her “folks.” As the name “Arrowhead” recalls the typically “Indian” attribute (“arrow”), and as her memory of crossing the squaw is bound up with that of the “folks from Arrowhead,” the speaker’s intense attachment or sentiment toward her “folks” imaginarily crosses the boundaries of race, binding her and the squaw in a transracial kinship. Bearing in mind the suggestive phrase in her self-pity (“I’m half of stone!”) (*CPSL* 50), moreover, the speaker’s surmise of the squaw as “[p]erhaps halfbreed” (*CPSL* 49) can also be a sign that the speaker herself, rather than the squaw, is the spiritual “halfbreed,” uprooted from the stable sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the lyric’s title “Indiana” (the name means “the land of Indians”) suggests a subversive idea that it is not only the imagined twins of Pocahontas’s daughters (the speaker and the squaw) but the very origins of “America” are wandering tribes of “homeless” “halfbreed[s]” (*CPSL* 49) estranged from a sense of their one identifiable home. In the letter to Yvor Winters, we see Crane’s version of Pocahontas / the national

body that is not a wife (homemaker) monopolized by the “one white marriage license to the English settler.” Rather, Crane’s Pocahontas is figured as a sexually promiscuous, therefore unassimilable “daughter,” who could be at home among “a thousand Indian lovers” (*Hart Crane and Ivor Winters* 74) while remaining as a stranger to the heteronormative family system. With Crane’s version of Pocahontas as a “*wanton young girle*,” around whom her anonymous lovers are ecstatically dancing (*CPSL* 38), then, we can reconsider the flimsy image of the squaw as follows: Crane’s depersonalization of the squaw works in subtracting the one’s knowledge of the other’s personality (racial, psychological, and whatsoever) to an extent that he can render the squaw’s personhood incomplete enough to become at once a stranger whose personal identity remains unspecifiable *and* an intimate friend who shares a plenty of sameness with the speaker, with other like-minded peoples, and with the nationhood of Crane’s “America.”

As we have observed earlier, Crane’s 1923 grand concept of *The Bridge* as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (*CPSL* 321) is eventually materialized in 1929 as the tiny, fleeting exchange between the two women. Accordingly, the lyric foregrounds not the purified national inheritance but the sharing of the very halfbreed-ness between the two strangers as a mode of communality. And yet, given the imaginative translation of the incompleteness of one’s identity into the tribal heritage of national origins, we are

invited to revalue a subversive potential in this “sentimental” lyric. In the following section, we will read closely the final exchange between the mother and her son with an eye on another process of the imaginary transfiguration of their communal heritage.

V. “Traveler—Stranger, Son,—My Friend—”

In the concluding stanzas, the mother’s eyes are intertwined with Larry’s, which, as the poem’s marginal gloss notes, “*read / her* [supposedly Pocahontas] *in a / mother’s / farewell gaze*” (CPSL 48). Crane enacts here more than elsewhere various doubling activities as though implying that the poet too, along with the speaker and Larry, has received the inheritance of the “twin stars” flashed in the squaw’s eyes:

I’m standing still, I’m old, I’m half of stone!

Oh, hold me in those eyes’ engaging blue;

There’s where the stubborn years gleam and atone,—

Where gold is true!

Down the dim turnpike to the river’s edge—

Perhaps I’ll hear the mare’s hoofs to the ford . . .

Write me from Rio . . . and you'll keep your pledge;

I know your word!

Come back to Indiana—not too late!

(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)

Good-bye . . . Good-bye . . . oh, I shall always wait

You, Larry, traveler—

stranger,

son,

—my friend— (*CPSL* 50)

Crane's use of the trope for the lover's diametric gaze reminds us of "The Good Morrow" by John Donne (one of Crane's heroes), in which Donne enacts the mutual mirroring of each lover's image in the other's eye ("My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears"). Whereas Donne's poem imagines the "one little room" where the figure of the lovers as the united hemispheres can "rest" at home in their everlasting connectedness ("Where can we find two better hemisphere / "Without sharp north, without declining west?") (3), the "mother's / farewell gaze" does not focus on the fixed image of Larry, and it does not yield a sense of stable belonging (*CPSL* 48). As connoted by the speaker's reference to

“the stubborn years” that “gleam and atone” in Larry’s eyes, instead, this exchange initiates the process of an imaginary transfiguration of the tribal heritage through which Larry’s eyes are replaced by the eyes of Jim, whose image conjures his (and her) “folks from Arrowhead,” and “Arrowhead” then evokes the squaw and her “strange” eyes, in whose “endear[ing]” “smile” Crane and the reader can recollect the event of sharing the halfbreed-ness between the two women.

As if reflecting the indomitable spirit of a pioneer heading toward “the river’s edge,” the speaker envisions in Larry’s eyes the alluring expansion of the sea (“engaging blue”) to which she would seek after the “true” “gold” (*CPSL* 50), not the “gilded promise” of “the dream called Eldorado” (*CPSL* 49) but the imperishable sense of belonging and enduring relationship (“There’s where the stubborn years gleam and atone,— / Where gold is true!”) (*CPSL* 50). With the ironical rhyming of “true” with “blue” that evokes the sea at once as an uncontainable and uncontrollable space, however, we cannot help interpreting her daringly sentimental plea for Larry to “hold” her in his eyes as nothing but the final farewell from the mother to her son. Despite her wish that Larry will keep in touch with her (“Write me from Rio”) or her promise that she “shall always wait / [him]” (*CPSL* 50), the speaker seems to know that whether or not Larry comes back to Indiana

would not eventually matter, since their homeland has been always already the land of “homeless” “halfbreed[s]” (*CPSL* 49).

Given the root meaning of “Indiana” (the land of Indians), we are allowed to see that Crane in “Indiana” is still engaged in redefining the meaning of a homeland (and by extension, “America” itself) by transforming the idea of “America” as the country founded by Pilgrim Fathers into the land of Pocahontas, “Indians” and their “halfbreed” relatives. Far from the actual Native Americans, though, those folks are invented by Crane with an aim to affiliate himself to the spectral genealogy based on the alternative national origins. Thereby, as I will elaborate further in the fifth chapter on “The Dance,” the speaker’s self-defeating yearning for belonging to her “true” “folks” (*CPSL* 50) conflates with Crane’s as a modern homosexual poet living in the society that claimed the non-biological, pure national identity with “the Indian” as its symbol while homosexual men were expelled from the armed forces (Gardner 27). Drawing a parallel with the social project, Crane’s attempt to create and transmit an alternative national identity comes to disclose a critical contradiction implicated in the notion of the transmission of a “pure” race. Because, as we will see in detail in the fifth chapter, Crane’s vision of the “pure” national identity turns out to be richly impure or heterogeneous, derived from the

promiscuous and non-possessive play between Pocahontas and her “thousand Indian lovers” (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 74).

In the concluding stanzas of “Indiana,” Crane seems to make the speaker transmit to Larry the alternative lineage through the mutual reading of their eyes. But Crane’s vision of the tribal community presupposes a non-biological, therefore non-possessive relationality. Accordingly, Crane’s enactment of the transmission of the alternative lineage from the pioneer woman to Larry entails the mother’s cutting the familial tie with her son and turning him into a near stranger. Crane’s configuration of this mother-child dyad resonates with the chiasmic crisscrossing between the dispossessed squaw moving westward (with the [dead] baby on her back) and the speaker as a disheartened pioneer turning back east (with Larry in her arms). And just as Crane does not allow the speaker to possess the full knowledge about the squaw and thereby to incorporate the squaw’s figure imaginarily into the speaker’s incomplete self, so the intertwined figures of the mother’s eyes and her son’s only reflect each other without producing the unified image of a familial bond. Just as her para-linguistic exchange with the squaw produced an intense yet ephemeral moment of intimacy only to drift them apart, the tribal bond of her “folks” remains transient and even spectral like “twin stars” flickering in the squaw’s eyes (*CPSL* 50).

Coda

Succeeding “The Dance” (written in 1926), “Indiana” continues to explore the alternative model of community-making, which could enable Crane to circumvent the hetero-normative idea of biological reproduction in favor of an emotional (and in this sense, sentimental) way of spiritual transmission. As we have seen, however, this project is mocked, subverted and turned against itself by Crane. His self-awareness about the vision’s unviability would not be inscribed more poignantly than in the concluding passage, where the speaker keeps on (mis)calling Larry: “oh, I shall always wait / You, Larry, traveler— / stranger, / son / —my friend—” (*CPSL* 50). As long as the speaker impersonalizes the other to an extent that she could see Larry not in a single, fixed personality but in his provisional types of being (a “stranger,” “son,” and “friend” at once), “Indiana” proposes an undemanding mode of relationality, which is, as Bersani proposes in *Homos*, “grounded in a desire indifferent to the established sanctity of personhood” (149). Also, by intertwining “sentiment” and “race” (*CPSL* 654) as the interdependent terms, Crane shows us that the idea of “race” could be nothing but another “gilded promise” (*CPSL* 49), a myth fabricated not only by the pioneer woman’s “mawkish” nostalgia for the wholeness of her family (*CPSL* 654) but also by the nation’s yearning

for the purified American identity that could distinguish itself from the European heritage. Paradoxically, in this respect, the “sentimentality” of “Indiana” can be read as critique of the very sentimental gesture of expressing the desire for a lost, original communality.

Anyway, Larry will “be a ranger to the end” (*CPSL* 50). The next section titled “Cutty Sark” finds a Melvillean, bizarre sailor, whom the speaker encounters in the modern Manhattan and hears him exclaiming that he “can’t live on land.” Transfixed by the sailor’s strange, “GREEN — / eyes,” the speaker sees “the frontiers gleaming of his mind” (*CPSL* 51-52). Not to mention the association between “Arrowhead” and Melville, the figure of the sailor reminds us, in many ways, of the departing son in “Indiana.” But we cannot pin down the sailor in “Cutty Sark” as the aged or reincarnated figure of Larry as some critics contend (Paul, *Hart’s* 225). There is a wide gap on the narrative level between the ostensibly mythical lyrics in “Powhatan’s Daughter” and the “Cutty Sark,” in which the tribal figures of Pocahontas and her lovers disappear, at least, from the main text. And yet, as the pioneer woman in “Indiana” seems to forecast, and as my reading of “Cutty Sark” will demonstrate, Larry does not have to be back home again to partake in a transient yet intimate communication with the folks from “Indiana.”

Interlude:

“An Act of Faith besides Being a Communication”: Reconsidering Crane’s Poetics of Bridging

“It is a new feeling, a glorious one, to have one’s inmost delicate intentions so fully recognized as your last letter to me attested.” In a 1923 letter to Waldo Frank, Crane thus expresses his gratitude for Frank, whose sympathetic response to his poem (“For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”) is regarded by Crane as “the most sensitizing influence.” “What delights me almost beyond words,” so Crane continues, “is that my natural idiom (which I have unavoidably stuck to in spite of nearly everybody’s nodding, querulous head) has reached and carried to you so completely the very blood and bone of me” (*CPSL* 326). For all the exuberant tone, Crane betrays here a critical dilemma around which the reception history of Crane’s poetry turns out to be revolved. On the one hand, Crane is well aware that his “natural idiom” charges his poetry with the notorious obscurity, which has fixed his reputation as a “difficult” poet. In a 1921 letter to William Wright, for instance, Crane notes that “the audience for [his] work will always be quite small” (*CPSL* 256). On the other hand, however, Crane considers his “natural idiom” as “unavoidabl[e],” since, as the essentialist term “natural” implies, Crane equates his peculiar use of words

with the carrier of his desiring body, bearing across various levels of distance to the reader “the very blood and bone of [him].” Given Crane’s idea of poetry as a Christ-like medium to extend and transport the essential core of his *corpus* and touch to the receiver, it is no surprise that Crane in the same letter calls the communication between poet and reader as “communion.” Conflating his private sense of solitude into the public issue of the loss of communality, Crane asserts to Frank that “some community of interest” or even its “vision alone” will be an object of which “not only America” “but the whole world” is in “need” (*CPSL* 326). This letter was written in 1923 when Crane started gestating the concept of *The Bridge* as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (*CPSL* 321).

Langdon Hammer writes that in *The Bridge* “Crane dreamed of uniting his identities as a lover and a poet . . . The dream is of a democratic community that would, like Whitman’s America, include in it the homosexual and his joys” (*O My* xxi). Throughout the long compositional process, indeed, Crane insists that *The Bridge* both as a symbol and the text is supposed to operate as a unifying medium that not only connects the present America at once to the past and to the future but also binds peoples. Since its publication, though, *The Bridge* has been criticized as a failure (if splendid), mainly because its fragmentary structure and opaque, sometimes impenetrable language contradict Crane’s epic ambition to synthesize “organic and active factors in the

experience and perceptions of our common race, time and belief” (*CPSL* 466). The gap between Crane’s stated ambition for unity and the disunified text of *The Bridge* has been examined from various perspectives, socio-cultural, historical, or psychoanalytical. But few explanations have brought us closer to an understanding of the work’s internal disintegration that is, as I shall argue, derived from Crane’s idea of poetry not only as the bridge to reconcile various divisions but also as the activator of a mystical experience of “communion.”

Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s view, Paul de Man writes that “modernity” can be characterized by “a loss of the sacred,” or “a loss of a certain type of poetic experience” that was replaced by “a secular historicism which loses contact with what was originally essential” (“Conclusions” 78). Given this aspect of “modernity,” Crane’s longing for the mystic form of “community” and “communion” can be seen as a sign of what de Man terms “nostalgic primitivism” (“Lyric” 168). Indeed, the seemingly anti-rational, regressive gestures that Crane frequently made have been often criticized by such earlier commentators on Crane and his works as Yvor Winters, Allen Tate, and R. P. Blackmur. At the same time, though, a close examination of Crane’s idea of poetry discloses the traces of the poet’s challenging attempts at once to demystify and to reconfigure the lost connections with the nostalgic ideals including the ecstatic mode of “community” and

“communion” in the early twentieth century (*CPSL* 326).

With the above observations in mind, I will examine in this chapter Crane’s letters and essays to look over his concept of *The Bridge* along with his idea of poetry in general. As for focusing on Crane’s letters rather than his poems, any considerations of his unrealized claims could be dismissed as irrelevant, particularly when dealing with Crane’s intention that has never found an adequate realization in *The Bridge*. As we will see, though, some of Crane’s letters and the essay in the 1920s suggest to us how his idea of poetry actually determines much of the text’s de-centered structure. My main contention is that Crane’s “failure” in *The Bridge* to attain the synthesizing vision of “America” and its identity is embedded within the very objectives with which Crane embarked upon *The Bridge*. Put in this way, the argument in this chapter seems to merely reconfirm the derogatory views proposed by the earliest critics. While regarding their denouncing comments as partially correct, however, I will reconsider the “negative” split between Crane’s ambitious intentions and the resultant, fragmentary text to propose a productive method for accessing the inter-related loops of figures arrayed across the sections and subsections of *The Bridge*. Then, by examining Crane’s letters and essays in detail, I aim to reformulate Crane’s “logic of metaphor” (*CPSL* 163) as the poetics of spacing that activates a mediated space which is an ineradicable constituent of the multi-directional

relation between the figures in the poem. As I've noted in Introduction, this chapter becomes the longest one so as to function both as a transition and as a pivot on which the first three readings of the lyrics and the rest can meet and turn around to display a textual model of the community of co-responding figures.

I. "New Hierarchy of Faith": An Evidence without Any Authorial Witness

As suggested by the letter to Frank in which the concept of *The Bridge* is beginning to be crystalized, one of Crane's insistent concerns is to explore a form of intimate relationality such as "some community of interest" (*CPSL* 326). Niall Munro has recently picked up the issue of community as the central subject of his 2015 book-length study. By examining Crane's earlier poem "Episode of Hands," Munro highlights "the democratic strain of intersubjectivity that runs through Crane's work." Foregrounding the theme of "relationality and a desire for community" as "the key principle behind Crane's queer aesthetic" (7), Munro's argument emphasizes Whitmanian aspect of Crane's project, which is surely attuned to Crane's communitarian appeal apparent in his letters. Highly insightful as Munro's argument is, his emphasis on the democratic thrust of Crane's desire might render less visible the anti-relational drive that is equally implicated

in his poetics.²⁹ While bearing Munro's compelling discussion in mind, then, we will dwell on some passages from Crane's 1925 essay titled "General Aims and Theories" and his correspondence with Gorham Munson and Frank. In those passages, we find Crane proposing his idea of poetry in conjunction with his interest in "America" as an emerging subject of *The Bridge*.

America is one of the terms of value in *The Bridge*. In "General Aims and Theories," Crane states his intention to write "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," whose anti-Eliotic motif is developed into *The Bridge*. Manifesting his concern "with the future of America," Crane writes that it is less the nation-state ("a state or group of people") than "America" as the New World vision that is important to him as a would-be epic poet in twentieth-century America. Crane maintains that he is "persuaded that here [in America] are destined to be discovered certain as yet undefined spiritual qualities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere" (*CPSL* 161). Characteristically bombastic as Crane's vocabulary is, his ambition to discover "a new hierarchy of faith" should not be taken as a whimsical claim.³⁰ In 1926, for instance, Crane writes a letter to Frank in which he uses the term "faith" to restate the same ambition he had manifested in the essay. While in residence on the Isle of Pines in Cuba, where he manages to write nearly two-thirds of *The Bridge*, Crane is exhilarated by the

soaring resurgence of creative energy and elaborates the idea of *The Bridge*. Echoing back to the essay, in which Crane sees the “certain as yet undefined spiritual qualities” of America as the “new hierarchy of faith,” Crane specifies in the letter to Frank “the very idea of a bridge” as “an act of faith besides being a communication.” Rather than a symbol of unification or reconciliation with which the image of bridge is habitually associated, Crane’s concept of the bridge is equivalent to “an act of faith,” which is supposed to be a praxis for the poet to act out. Critics have already pointed out that *The Bridge* has the aspect of a self-reflective poem about the poet’s act of creating the poem.³¹ But how Crane’s “act of faith” effects his making of the “new hierarchy” or in what way the “hierarchy of faith” can be seen as “new” has rarely been discussed yet (*CPSL* 466).

In a 1926 letter to Munson, Crane articulates his “theoretical differences of opinion with [Munson] on the function of poetry, its particular province of activity, etc.” Whereas Munson demands (so Crane guesses) of poetry a rigorous system of hierarchy based on an expository and rational system of thought (“exact factual data . . . ethical morality or moral classifications, etc.”), Crane proposes his idea of poetry as “the concrete *evidence* of the *experience* of a recognition” (*CPSL* 436). Writing about the gist of his poetics that confirms Daniel Gabriel’s claim that Crane “was an astute letter writer and theorizer about poetry and more of a ‘thinker’ than he has been recognized for” (5), Crane writes of the

way in which an alternative hierarchy of “faith” operates in a reading of poetry:

When you attempt to ask more of poetry,—the fact of man’s relationship to a hypothetical god, be it Osiris, Zeus or Indra, you will get as variant terms even from the abstract terminology of philosophy as you will from poetry; whereas poetry, without attempting to logically enunciate such a problem or its solution, may well give you the real connective experience, the very “sign manifest” on which rests the assumption of a godhead.” (*CPSL* 436)

In emphasizing the role of poetry as a connective medium, Crane contrastingly juxtaposes two modes of connection, that is, the “man’s relationship to a hypothetical god” and “the real connective experience,” the latter of which can be considered as a communication between poet and reader. What should be noted particularly in this passage is that the relation to a binding principle in the transcendental realm (“man’s relationship to a hypothetical god”) is rendered subservient to “the real connective experience” through a poem, on whose “sign manifest” “the assumption of a god head” “rests.” As the verb “rests” suggests, Crane accentuates here the dependence of a mythic meta-narrative to gather people into a unitary community in the name of “a hypothetical god” upon an imaginary interaction between poet and reader. Typically modernistic as Crane’s idea sounds, a novelty of his “hierarchy of faith” lies in its prioritizing of the recognition of a

fact of communication as such over its contents to be exchanged. In other words, Crane's proposition involves a radical reorientation of poetry, suggesting that a poem does not deliver a preexisting idea, message, narrative, or reality but incites the reader to retroactively construct them through the act of interaction with a poem. Having summarized thus, we come to find Crane's "new hierarchy of faith" (*CPSL* 161) resonates with his letter to Frank, in which the "vision" of "some community of interest" is retroactively generated from the epistolary communication, or "communion" with Frank, who received (in Crane's fantasy) "so completely" Crane's "natural idiom" as the essential part of his desiring body ("very blood and bone of me") (*CPSL* 326).

Needless to say, though, such an intra-textual communication is predicated on various levels of difference, spatial, temporal or psychological. Therefore, the experience of "communion" (*CPSL* 326), however intensely it can be felt, does not add up to an intersubjective relationship on which the shared vision of a communal identity can be founded. The same can be said of "the real connective experience" Crane talks about in the letter to Munson. And Crane himself is aware of the deceptive nature of such a fusional experience. In defining a poem as "the concrete *evidence* of the *experience* of a recognition," Crane writes that "[a poem] can give you a ratio of fact and experience, and in this sense it is both perception and thing perceived according as it approaches a

significant articulation or not.” Rather than fostering the traditional idea of poetry as an expression of, recollection of, or equivalent to, a poet’s “significant” experience, Crane sees a poem as an “*evidence*,” connoting his subtle understanding of the paradoxical nature of poetry and, in extension, of the writing in general. On the one hand, a poem has its presence as a “thing,” for what is written has the “concrete” materiality valuable in its own right (“concrete *evidence*” and “the thing perceived”). On the other hand, so Crane’s circumlocutory phrasing implies, a poem that is materialized as the “*evidence*” is nothing but an empty shell or signifier, pointing toward what is left in the wake of the past “*experience* of a recognition” that will never be restored. Whereas the “*experience* of a recognition” is preserved as its “concrete” testament by the poet’s writing, the subject of its experience (“perception”) has become the trace of its dispersal, leaving an un-certifiable “*evidence*” of whatever “recognition” the subject had once experienced (*CPSL* 436).

Crane’s “new hierarchy of faith” renders the fact of recognizing “the real connective *experience*” more worth having than the information to be communicated through poetry (*CPSL* 161). As observed above, though, the “*experience*” of such an immediate communication can never be instantiated except in the mediated form of its “*evidence*,” which interrupts the experience’s authenticity by banishing its authorial

subject from the written record. Given Crane's definition of a poem as "both perception and thing perceived," his notion of poetry seems to prefigure Jacques Derrida's notion of the writing as a concrete ground of the epistemological interplay between presence and absence. I would like to point out, however, that such doubling dynamics of the writing legible in Crane's essay does not seem to get along with his fantasy of intra-textual "communion" between poet and reader, foreshadowing a failure of his connective impulse. In the following section, I will discuss a relation between Crane's ambivalent idea of poetry and the non-totalizing narrative structure of *The Bridge* by reading another letter to Frank. In that letter, Crane talks about "the real connective experience" in terms of his sexuality (*CPSL* 436), which enables us to shed a different light on the germ of the poem's structural fragmentation.

II. "The Word Made Flesh": A Mystic Communion and / or Queer Self-Shattering

Understanding Crane's ambition for "a synthesis of America and its structural identity" (*CPSL* 325) as directed "toward a grand vision of historical, ethnic, and geographical unity (or 'bridging')," Peter Lurie writes that Crane's "efforts at connection" are figured "as erotic and physical." Lurie continues that "such unions in Crane are

achieved most often through a sexualized and, as suggested by his speaker, pleasurable suffering” (156). Lurie’s observation about Crane’s eroticization of a unifying impulse in *The Bridge* can be confirmed also in Crane’s 1924 letter to Frank in which Crane refers to the relationship with his new found love, Emil Opffer. Vincent Kaufman notes that a writer’s letters are traditionally seen as a sort of “empty lot” which is “hidden between the life and the work; an enigmatic zone connecting what the writer is to what he writes, where life sometimes seeps into the work, and vice versa” (qtd. in Katz 61). Kaufman’s observation is more than pertinent to the following passages from Crane’s letter with a reservation that the verb “seeps” sounds too modest to describe Crane’s enactive recollection of his love experience.

“At any rate, my aptitude for communication, such as it ever is! has been limited to one person alone, and perhaps for the first time in my life.” In this exulted tone, Crane writes of the erotic communication with his lover, under whose influence Crane imagines himself “changed—not essentially, but changed and transubstantiated as anyone is who has asked a question and been answered.” Given such emotional intensity as we will perceive below, it is possible for us to see the influx of the poet’s private life into the core of the emerging concept of *The Bridge*:

I say that I have seen the Word made Flesh. I mean nothing less, and I know now

that there is such a thing as indestructibility. In the deepest sense, where flesh became transformed through intensity of response to counter-response, where sex was beaten out, where a purity of joy was reached that included tears. (*CPSL* 383-84)

In terms of his use of words, Crane's recognition of "the Word made Flesh" is continuous with the idea of his "natural idiom," which is supposed to carry the poet's desiring body (*CPSL* 326), initiating "the real connective experience" between poet and reader (*CPSL* 436). Concerning the vocabulary of communion ("the Word made Flesh"), Thomas Yingling emphasizes the inseparability between Crane's poetry and his repressed sexuality, and observes that homosexuality for Crane "becomes a trope for identity that grounds itself in a theory of incarnation beyond language, thereby solving both the dialectic of mind / body and the relation between literature and the flesh damned to hate and scorn" (87). Yingling's point surely resonates with the redemptive aspect of *The Bridge*: to set up a platform for reconciling the ruptures in the personal and a national identity. However, as Yingling aptly claims "the virtue of *The Bridge*" as Crane's "earnest attempt to construct harmony" that "never completely resolves the conflict homosexuality names for American culture" (226), whether Crane's recognition of homosexual love as the incarnated word could "solve the dialectic of mind / body" leaves a room for a further

consideration.

Dwelling on the passage about “the Word made Flesh,” Yingling astutely finds “the substantially masochistic trace in the phrase ‘where sex was beaten out’” (88). Yet, Crane’s reenactment of the “intensity” mobilized by the erotic “response to counter-response” records more than the masochistic, painful pleasure. As suggested by the violent phrase “beaten out” in the letter to Frank, Crane imagines sexuality as a molten metal on the forge upon which the lovers’ physical communication, like a smith’s hammer, strikes out the “intensity” to an extent that his sexual identity is momentarily shattered, leaving nothing specific about his personhood except the “purity of joy . . . that included tears” (*CPSL* 384). Corresponding with the evanescent figure of “tears,” this “purity” cannot be yielded but in the written record that testifies the absence of the liquefied subjectivity of Crane, who had recognized the incarnate word through the ecstatic experience. Such temporal depersonalization of the eroticized subject has been an issue that queer readers of Crane, including Tim Dean and Merrill Cole, have dealt with.

Discussing Crane’s violent lyricism, Cole argues that Crane’s lyricism “would shatter the subject—that is, the poet-speaker, as well as the reader-initiate—into what [Tim] Dean terms, ‘a *jouissance* that eliminates every subject position (105).’” Cole elaborates his point as follows:

Crane would have us experience the poetic speaker's self-effacement and relive disfiguration. His paradoxical effort is to render the sacrificial gesture immortal: the defacing of the poetic monument, performed by the poet and rehearsed by every reader, rather than the finished structure itself, is meant to effect this. (112)

Although the focus shared by Dean and Cole is rather on Crane's lyrics, I would like to apply their emphasis on the violent, self-dissolving aspect of Crane's poetics to consider the structural fragmentation of *The Bridge*. As many queer readings of Crane have insisted, one of Crane's dilemmas throughout his career lies in the relation between poetry and homosexual flesh. And that complex relation at once runs against and informs the non-totalizing structure of *The Bridge*. As we will see in the following chapters, many forms of relation dramatized in *The Bridge* are not solved but dissolved through *jouissance* (self-shattering) of the subject's personal identity. Despite Crane's stated recognition that "there is such a thing as indestructibility" (*CPSL* 384), this kind of fusional experience does not show itself in the text of *The Bridge* except in a moment of shattering the supposed ground on which an "indestructibl[e]" bond between persons is to be based.

Getting immersed in the memory of the ecstatic experience, Crane, in the same

letter to Frank, refers to Brooklyn Bridge by writing as follows: “And I have been able to give freedom and life which was acknowledged in the ecstasy of walking hand in hand across the most beautiful bridge of the world, the cables enclosing us and pulling us upward in such a dance as I have never walked and never can walk with another.” In the latter part of this letter, Crane magnifies his private experience with his lover into a more authoritative realm of the communal vision. Crane’s portrait of the New York harbor is transfigured into the legendary cities of faith and commerce (“Jerusalem and Nineveh”), both of which are imagined by Crane as “related and in actual contact with the changelessness of the many waters that surround it” (*CPSL* 384). This imaginative leap from a narrow and intimate sphere to a cosmic vision of the inclusive collectivity turns out to be the driving force of *The Bridge*, which Crane calls “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (*CPSL* 321). In the finished text, though, such an unifying vision shows itself as a spectral figure of the inchoate community that is ever on the verge of crystallization. One of the reasons why *The Bridge* has been labeled as “failure” lies in this point that the very desire to experience a *mystical* communion both in and through a poetic text is at odds with the stated ambition to capture the vision of a communion-like experience in a *synthesized* form. Since the attempt to translate the dynamics of such desire into poetry necessitates the subject’s self-shattering, it is no surprise that the text as its “concrete

evidence” is robbed of the panoramic perspective to organize multiple strands of America in a cumulative development (*CPSL* 436).

Owing a great deal to the queer readings by Yingling, Dean, and Cole, in this context, I would like to revisit to the earlier criticism, especially, by Allen Tate, whose argument has a strong affinity with those queer readers. In the essay on Crane, Tate acutely points to the very issues that the queer readings of Crane since 1990s have aimed to historicize, psychoanalyze, and reconfigure:

[Crane’s] world has no center, and the compensatory action that he took is responsible for the fragmentary quality of his most ambitious work. This action took two forms, the blind assertion of the will; and the blind desire for self-destruction. The poet did not face his first problem, which is to define the limits of his personality and to objectify its moral implications in an appropriate symbolism. Crane could only assert a quality of will against the world, and at each successive failure of the will he turned upon himself. (235-36)

First of all, it is necessary to point out that Tate’s personal knowledge of Crane influences his view of Crane’s work as irresponsible and amoral. In addition, we need to qualify the validity of Tate’s criticism against the “fragmentary” structure of *The Bridge*. As

manifested in the letter to his patron Otto Kahn, Crane sought to resist the temptation to organize American history in a chronological order and thereby to provide it with a single, authoritative statement:

It seemed altogether ineffective from the poetic standpoint to approach this material from the purely chronological angle—beginning with, say, the landing of "The Mayflower," continuing with a resume of the Revolution through the conquest of the West, etc. One can get that viewpoint in any history primer. What I am after is an assimilation of this experience, a more organic panorama, showing the continuous and living evidence of the past in the inmost vital substance of the present. (*CPSL* 554)

While insisting the need to eschew "the purely chronological angle," Crane does not deny history at all but rejects the notion that there should be a singular, linear logic to it. In Crane's idea of the poetic "assimilation" of historical experience, history does not have to be registered on a single, chronological plane; rather, it can show itself in an "inmost vital substance of the present" in which all of the history can be experienced as the contemporaneous. Aside from a touch of homophobia legible in his denouncement of Crane's immorality, though, Tate's observation quoted above is apt in highlighting the self-destructive structure of *The Bridge*. Particularly, Tate's juxtaposition of "the blind

assertion of the will” with “the blind desire for self-destruction” is relevant to our examination of Crane’s poetics, which eventually contradicts his stated design to present “a more organic panorama” of a national history in “the *continuous and living evidence* of the past in the inmost vital substance of the present” (emphasis added).

On the one hand, indeed, Tate’s emphasis on Crane’s “blind[ness]” is amply justifiable, because Crane in the poem recurrently enacts a “self-destructive” moment in which the desire to build an unmediated connection undermines the very basis for setting up a solid relationship with the desired other(s) or with national origins. On the other hand, however, this blindness or purposeless-ness, which Tate ascribes to the poem’s fragmentary structure, can be reconsidered as the purposeful one, especially if we consider Crane’s “will” as equivalent to his willing enactment of the “act of faith” (*CPSL* 466). It is true that Crane’s definition of a poem as the “concrete *evidence*” connotes the disappearance of the authorizing subject from its recorded “*experience* of a recognition.” At the same time, however, the evident materiality of the subject’s dissolution in the text functions as the figural switchboard to activate “the real connective experience” with the reader of his poetry (*CPSL* 436). In order to examine this paradoxical strategy, we will read the passages from “General Aims and Theories” side by side with Crane’s letters, one of which is the letter to Harriett Monroe, the editor of *Poetry* magazine. Reading these

documents will help us reconsider Crane's "idea of the bridge as "an act of faith" in terms of the poet's rhetorical strategy (*CPSL* 466).

III. Reformulating the "Logic of Metaphor": Crane's Poetics of Spacing

In "General Aims and Theories," Crane proposes the technical purpose of his poetry as follows:

As to technical consideration: the motivation of the poem must be derived from the implicit emotional dynamics of the materials used, and the terms of expression employed are often selected less for their logical (literal) signification than for their associational meanings. Via this and their metaphorical inter-relationships, the entire construction of the poem is raised on the organic principle of a "logic of metaphor," which antedates our so-called pure logic, and which is the genetic basis of all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension. (*CPSL* 163)

By granting primacy to the "metaphorical inter-relationship" and "associational meanings" of words, Crane puts "their logical (literal) signification" in second place. In so doing, Crane locates "the motivation of the poem" in an interpretive process of exploring

“implicit” or unmapped relations between words rather than a representation of a preexisted idea or symbolic meaning. It is true that Crane’s idea of metaphor draws on a conventional view of metaphor as based on figures of analogy or resemblance, which, like symbol or simile, helps us see one object through another, so that a similarity between different objects are revealed. Yet, Crane’s interest does not lie in the metaphor as a trope for the “logical (literal) signification,” which conveys one idea analogically through the presentation of another. Rather, he emphasizes the “implicit” interrelatedness between a word and a word *per se* as the structural foundation on which “the entire construction of the poem is raised.” Crane’s emphasis on the linguistic inter-relatedness rather than the inherent “meaning” of a metaphor leads us to the letter to Munson, in which Crane elaborates his idea of poetry by talking about the shared quality between poetry and Plato’s writings: “Plato doesn’t live today because of the intrinsic ‘truth’ of his statements: their only living truth today consists in the ‘fact’ of their harmonious relationship to each other in the context of his organization of them. This grace partakes of poetry” (*CPSL* 437). By drawing attention toward the subordination of Plato’s “statements” to “the architecture of [Plato’s] logic,” Crane goes as far as to deconstruct the “intrinsic ‘truth’” of Plato’s argument. To use Crane’s logic, for instance, we can argue that Plato, a famous rejecter of poets, actually needed what Crane sees as the poetic “grace” in order to argue

against poetry. In Crane's view, the "truth" in Plato's statements does not belong to what Plato wrote about. Far from partaking of the unchangeable signified, so Crane suggests, the "truth" in Plato's writing actually belongs to a "living" experience that is activated in the readerly process of recognizing the orderly form of its rhetorical arrangement in which each part of Plato's statement is related with the others.

With the apparent rejection of a referential function of a poem in favor of the internal dynamics of its interrelated parts, Crane's poetics seems closer to Stéphane Mallarmé's *poésie pure*, whose subject matter is equivalent to the self-sustained process of a poem's own unfolding. As several critics have pointed out the similarity between Crane and Mallarmé,^{3 2} Crane's hope to "give the poem *as a whole* an orbit or predetermined direction of its own" (*CPSL* 163) or to attain "another logic, quite independent of the original definition of the word or phrase or image" (*CPSL* 166) has something in common with the "negative discourse" of Mallarmé, who "attempts to isolate the act of signification from its results, that is, from the formation of a signified" (Bruns, *Modern* 136-37).

Bearing the tendency toward the self-autonomous quality of a poem, though, Crane's idea of poetry, unlike Mallarméan poetics, does not aim to make a poem embody the absolute meaning emptied of all the outside references in the concrete realm of human

activity. Noting that his poetry does have a “statement” that is “pseudo in relation to formal logic” but “completely logical in relation to the truth of the imagination,” Crane illustrates the way in which “the reference” of such a trope as “adagios of islands” in his “Voyages” is “to the motion of a boat through islands clustered thickly, the rhythm of the motion, etc.” (*CPSL* 163). Nor the non-referential aspect of Crane’s logic of metaphor is used to render his poetry totally self-contained and “complete in itself” as Howard Moss claims in criticizing Crane’s metaphorical presentation of Brooklyn Bridge (32-33).

In 1922 letter to Sherwood Anderson, Crane describes the ideal form of his poetry as follows:

What I want to get is just what is so beautifully done in [John Donne’s “The Expiration”],—an “interior” form, a form that is so thorough and intense as to dye the words themselves with a peculiarity of meaning, slightly different maybe from the ordinary definition of them separate from the poem. (*CPSL* 265)

Intimating the desire for a state of inwardness, privacy, and homosexual closet, Crane’s idea to provide his poem with the “‘interior’ form” seems to confirm the self-contained status of his poetry which Tate associates with Crane’s “locked-in sensibility, the insulated egoism” (228). As Dean argues, however, what Crane simultaneously aims to achieve by

this “interior” form is a poetic intensity that allows for the “inscription of the poem’s reader inside the text,” thereby deconstructing the idea of privacy itself (89). Dean argues that the reader of Crane’s poetry is invited to be a component of the text-space, and, for the duration of the poem, he / she is deprived of an opportunity to take an interpretive distance. In “General Aims and Theories” as well, Crane’s emphasis on the “implicit emotional dynamics of the material used” reinforces Crane’s idea of poetry as the writing not to be understood but to summon up the reader to participate in a connective activity on the “emotional” or unconscious level. Reminiscent of “an act of faith” Crane talks about in conjunction with the symbol of the bridge (*CPSL* 466), in other words, Crane’s poetics aims to make a poem “act” or take a particular effect on the reader. In doing so, as Crane imagines, the poet’s body could be transmitted through the mediating devices of a poem to the reader, and thereby an affective relation with him / her could be actualized.

Hence, Crane’s poetry challenges the reader to exert an intense identificatory impulse to follow the poet’s exploration of the “implicit” “associational meanings” among catachrestic words (*CPSL* 163) whose meanings are deranged not only from “the ordinary definition” (*CPSL* 265) but also from the pre-existing signified of homosexuality in the closet. Seen from this perspective, Tate’s criticism against Crane’s language as a sign of the poet’s “locked-in sensibility, the insulated egoism” (228) turns out to be at

once right and wrong. Although Crane seems to crave for a self-enclosed realm of his narcissistic fantasy, Crane's idea of poetry is predicated firmly on the "previous or prepared receptivity to [a poem's] stimulus on the part of the reader" (*CPSL* 166). Put it shortly, his stated wish for the self-enclosed "'interior' form" results in exposing his poetry to the exterior, opening toward the reader as the other. By aiming to equate his poem with the self-enclosed intimate sphere, paradoxically, Crane's poetry comes to be outside of itself.

As for the invitational, writerly quality of Crane's poetry, Hammer notes that Crane's poetry "does its work—it builds its bridges—by linking reader and poet on the level of the 'Unconscious' or the 'imagination.'" Hammer continues as follows:

Crane asks the reader of his poems to take part in their making because a poem's meaning is always something for the reader to complete. Complete, not create: the distinction matters, because Crane saw poetry as a collaborative act in which meaning is confirmed by being shared; neither poet nor reader is free to use words capriciously, without reference to the other. For Crane approached the reader of his poems as a kind of correspondent, and his deepest wish in poetry was to be received. (*O My* xxv)

Hammer's point makes clear the deliberate incompleteness of Crane's poetry, whose associative logic is supposed to interiorize the reader's perspective within the text. At the same time, however, we should not downplay the fact that the inter-subjective confirmation of a poem's "meaning" "shared" between poet and reader is not granted a privileged status in Crane's idea of intra-textual communication which Crane himself demonstrates in the letter to Monroe.

Responding to Monroe, who was embarrassed by the "illogicality of relationship between symbols" in Crane's "At Melville's Tomb," Crane delivers the elaborate apology for the obscurity of his metaphors: "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" (*CPSL* 165). Before answering Monroe's questions about "the obscurities apparent in [his] Melville poem," Crane cites a passage from T. S. Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and demonstrates how his logic of metaphor operates in the actual reading of a poem: "You ask me how *compass, quadrant and sextant* 'contrive' tides. I ask you how Eliot can possibly believe that 'Every street *lamp* that I pass *beats* like a fatalistic *drum!*'" While stating his "recognition that emotional dynamics are not to be confused with any absolute order of rationalized

definitions,” Crane elaborates the way in which Eliot’s metaphor is to be responded by the reader:

There are plenty of people who have never accumulated a sufficient series of reflections (and these of a rather special nature) to perceive the relation between a *drum* and a *street lamp*—via the *unmentioned* throbbing of the heart and nerves in a distraught man which *tacitly* creates the reason and “logic” of the Eliot metaphor. They will always have a perfect justification for ignoring those lines and to claim them obscure, excessive, etc., until by some experience of their own the words accumulate the necessary connotations to complete their connection. (*CPSL* 166-67)

In the earlier part of this letter, Crane writes how his poetics prioritizes the “*inflection of language*” over “the original definition of the word or phrase or image,” and later he restates the mechanism of the “*inflection of language*” by such a term as “inflection of experience”: “The reader’s sensibility simply responds by identifying this inflection of experience with some event in his own history or perceptions—or rejects it altogether” (*CPSL* 166). Read against these passages, Crane’s negotiation with Eliot’s poem can be taken as an ideal version of the identificatory process in which the “inflection of language” in Eliot’s passage is responded by the “reader’s sensibility,” thereby producing “the

reason and ‘logic’ of the Eliot metaphor.” Again, unlike a preconceived logic through which words and phrases are composed to convey a coherent meaning or fixed tenor of the metaphor, Crane’s logic of Eliot’s metaphor is created *after* the reader has “perceive[d] the relation between” the dissociated words and images in the poem. This kind of epistemological subversion has already been familiar to us, since we have examined Crane’s “new hierarchy of faith” (*CPSL* 161), in which the imaginary communication between poet and reader is supposed to create a poem’s content retroactively (such as “an assumption of some godhead”) (*CPSL* 436). In Crane’s idea of poetry, the logic to connect disjunctive images does not come into existence until the reader responds to the speaker’s perception. Bearing this in mind, we are allowed to examine “the reason and ‘logic’ of the Eliot metaphor” presented by Crane as a record of Crane’s attempt to identify with the poem’s speaker.

Although my explication of Crane’s poetics may sound unnecessarily tautological, what I aim to accentuate is the fact that Crane’s practice of reading goes much subtler than a mere identification or empathy with Eliot’s speaker. In connecting the two discrete images in the poem (streetlamp and drum), Crane extrapolates another term, that is, “the *unmentioned* throbbing of the heart and nerves in a distraught man.” As the italicized word “*unmentioned*” and the indefinite article in “a distraught man” suggest, Crane does

not specify the man's figure as Eliot's speaker. While this can also be considered as an intense mode of identification such as empathy, what is remarkable about Crane's identificatory process is that his exertion of receptivity effects not so much an arbitrary self-imposition of his personal experience onto the poem. Rather, Crane subtracts his individual personhood so that it can be relocated in this "*unmentioned*" figure of an anonymous man. Differently put, Crane's way to "complete [the metaphor's] connection" takes a form of the self-subtraction of a reader's personal subjectivity which is divested of all the attributes but an ineluctable inflection of the impersonal, living body ("throbbing of the heart and nerves") (*CPSL* 167).

Needless to say, it is Eliot, who theorizes the poetics of impersonality, which had the significant influence on Crane's work: "my work for the past two years (those meagre drops!) has been more influenced by Eliot than any other modern." However, as Crane says to Munson that he will "take Eliot as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction" (*CPSL* 308), Crane embeds his own poetics of impersonality in Eliot's so deeply that it turns out to function, despite (or because of) that fundamental derivation, as its utter contradiction. As evident in "Tradition and Individual Talent," which expounds a poet's duty to "develop or procure the consciousness of the past," Eliot believes that a "continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" will enable

the poet to be connected to “something which is more valuable.” More specifically put, Eliot’s poetics of impersonality is practiced to connect his authorial identity to the Western literary tradition, thereby begetting a cultural continuity between the past and the present: “There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition” (*Sacred* 52-53). On the contrary, Crane’s idea of impersonality is both the required precondition for and the inevitable result of an intense communication between poet and reader that is not encumbered by the proprietary dictate of an each one’s personality. As though foreshadowing the analysis of Michele Foucault, who puts into question the idea of author as the owner of his / her text (137-38), Crane’s poetics of impersonality entails not the reinforcement but the interruption of a continuity of the subject’s authorial identity that is required to share and confirm the consistency of a supposed meaning or development of a given poem.

In elaborating Crane’s poetics of impersonality, it is helpful to consider Leo Bersani’s exploration of what he calls “pure relationality,” because the mode of relation Bersani deals with can be seen as analogous to Crane’s privileging not of the expository meaning but of the imaginary “inflection” of the words (*CPSL* 166). Commenting on Georg Simmel’s essay on sociability, Bersani remarks “a certain kind of rhythmical play” operating both in sociable communication and in gay cruising:

Rhythm is what remains when content is stripped away. Both the “objective qualities which gather about the personality” (“riches and social position, learning and fame, exceptional capacities and merits of the individual”) and “the most personal things—character, mood, and fate”—have no place in sociability . . . Without content sociability nonetheless imitates the rhythms of “real life.” In conversation, for example, it is the movement of arguments rather than their substance that excites us. (*Rectum* 46-47)

Given Bersani’s point that draws attention to the excitement that derives from the “rhythm” and “movement” of sociability rather than its “content” and “substance” in conversation, what Crane is engaged in by reading Eliot’s poem can be reconsidered as an imaginary transfiguration of his readerly identity into what Bersani terms a “self-subtracted being” or, more pertinently, “rhythmed being” (*Rectum* 48). In introducing the figure of “the *unmentioned* throbbing of the heart and nerves” as the figural bridge to forge a metaphorical inter-relationship between the two disjunctive images, Crane’s emphasis is put on the rhythm of a man’s body (“throbbing . . . of the heart and nerves”) rather than “objective qualities which gather about the personality” that constitute the identity of the “distraught man.” This point makes us recognize a certain parallel between Crane’s practice of reading and gay cruising, on which Bersani speculates by explicating

Simmel's essay. Chiming with Bersani's idea of relationality, one's personality as a whole has no place in the mode of poetic communication demonstrated by Crane. In Crane's reading of Eliot's passage, the reader is demanded to transport his / her personhood outside of itself to be rediscovered in the rhythm of a heart-beat which is shared "fatalistic[ally]" between each person through their mortality (*CPSL* 167).

As suggested above, the depersonalizing effect necessitated by Crane's "logic of metaphor" draws a parallel with Crane's erotics of "communion" in which the movement of the lovers' bodies ("response to counter-response") is figured as the rhythm on the active forge on which "sex was beaten out" to yield "a purity of joy" (*CPSL* 384). Suggestively, Yingling associates Crane's figuration of the "sex" that is "beaten out" with "drumbeats," "one of Crane's favorite ritualistic metaphors for passion" (88). To use Crane's unforgettable coinage in "Voyages III," in other words, Crane as a reader who connects the two images in the Eliot's metaphor participates in the process of "transmemberment" (*CPSL* 26), dismembering his individual personhood to be re-membered into an intermediary figure which could represent each of Crane and Eliot, but not quite each of them.

As Bersani observes, "pure relationship" can be possible "only if we renounce, at least momentarily, the acquisitive impulses that draw us into group" (*Rectum* 47). Bearing

in mind Crane's eroticization of the reading process, then, it is no surprise that Crane's practice of logic of metaphor brings about a sense of mediation and distance rather than an immediate connectedness or intimate reciprocity between poet and reader, or between experience and language itself. Despite Crane's insistent wish for a direct connection with the reader / lover through the "natural idiom" of his poem (*CPSL* 326), the reader and the poem's speaker cannot be brought nearer except through a doubly mediated form of the evident absence of the author's personal subjectivity, and of the reader's self-subtraction to an intermediary figure (such as an anonymous, "distraught man"). Moreover, Crane's way of completing Eliot's metaphor does not so much connect "lamp" with "drum" in terms of fusional identification as discloses their "relation," which is spaced by the intervening terms of the man's "*unmentioned* throbbing of the heart and nerves" (*CPSL* 167). Since the textual effect of Crane's poetics foregrounds the in-between space that is an ineradicable constituent of the relations between the co-responding figures, Crane's "logic of metaphor" should be reconsidered as the logic of spacing rather than of bridging.

Put to a textual practice, as we will see in the following chapters, Crane's poetics is materialized as an evidence of the decentering moments of ecstasy or *jouissance* which permeate the text with figures of interruption and incompleteness. Regardless of the years of composition, each section of *The Bridge* tends to reject a various kinds of proximity

and union in favor of the relation constituted by difference, interruption and death. At the same time, though, Crane arranges an intricate networks of co-responding figures across the poem's sections and subsections. Though Crane does not comment on this structural ambiguity, I would like to argue that the figures of incompleteness, including disjunctive and elliptical metaphors, call the desired other to engage in and thereby reenact the various versions of "the real connective experience" (*CPSL* 436). In the following section, we shall examine Crane's letter to his father Clarence Arthur in which Crane talks about "a pure relationship" (*CPSL* 370). In doing so, I would like to clarify Crane's vision of the ideal relationality as a gratuitous communication of ecstasy.

IV. "Simply a Communication between Man and Man": A Relation of the Heterogeneous Purity

As we have seen so far, the form of communication Crane seeks to activate through poetry is predicated on interruption of the consistency of a personhood rather than on its sustainability and accumulation of the personal information. In this sense, it belongs to the economy of gift-giving^{3 3} which is habitually thought as being outside of a productive economy of exchange in modern capitalist state. In the 1924 letter to his father, a

successful businessman, who is unsympathetic with Crane's aesthetic ambition, Crane writes that he has "been through some pretty trying situations . . . with less than two dollars in [his] pocket and not definitely located in any sort of a job." Responding to Crane's predicament, his father offered his son a job at his own company. While expressing the sense of gratitude for the "favorable offer," Crane confesses that he "would not regard it as honest to accept [his father's] proposition," because his "principal ambition lies completely outside of business." Having rejected his father's offer thus, Crane makes use of this epistolary communication as an opportunity to "explain [himself] in more detail than [he] may have gone into with [his father] ever before." As we will see, Crane's following plea to his father recalls his invested demonstration of reading the metaphorical passage from Eliot's poem:

In what follows, father, I hope that you will take my word for it that there is no defense of my personal pride involved against any of the misunderstandings that we may have had in the past. I have come to desire to talk to you as a son ought to be able to talk to his father, that is, in a *pure relationship*, without prejudices or worldly issues interfering on either side. That was the basis of my first letter to you in three years—that I wrote a little over two months ago, and I hope it may be the basis of your interpretation of

what I am writing you now. (*CPSL* 369-70; emphasis added)

Modest as his polite phrasing might sound, Crane subtly regulates the subject's position of his father as a reader by asking him to adopt "a pure relationship" as "the basis of [his] interpretation of" Crane's words. Divested of the "interfering" elements like "personal pride," "the misunderstandings that [they] have had in the past," "prejudices" and "worldly issues" except the "desire to talk to" the other, such a "relationship," if actualized, would surely be "pure" and non-relational, because the only bond left between the two is an utterly biological one between a father and his son. Resonating with his letter to Monroe, where Crane performs his reading practice to "complete" the Eliot's metaphor (*CPSL* 167), this "pure relationship" involves an attenuated form of the ascetic renunciation of the one's acquisitive impulse that usually draws people into a sustainable relationship like a family unit. Without any personal ties or the privileged object of desire involved, the mode of relationship Crane talks about in this letter reveals Crane's wish to be free from, at least for the duration of the correspondence, the burden of his patriarchal lineage *without* disconnecting the bond between the two men. Due to their mutual self-subtraction, however, both of them can be interchangeable with other persons besides Crane and his father Clarence Arthur.

By implicitly demanding his father to "interpret" his son's words in the same way

as Crane reads Eliot's metaphor, Crane tries to make his father suspend his psychological, social, and familial interests. Seen from a different perspective, the position that Crane asks his father to assume can be interpreted as something similar to a pre-natal state in which an infant communicates with its mother through the extra-linguistic inflections or rhythms of their bodies. Given the fact that Crane's father is an ardent believer in the American work ethic, we can recognize that Crane's address to his father is transgressive in a secret way, because his demand can be equivalent to the displacement of the Symbolic of the father-dominated realm into the pre-Oedipal realm of the infant / mother dyad.^{3 4} If the unsympathetic figure of his father can be taken as a symbol of the paternal Law in a heteronormative, capitalist society, we can go as far as to say that this letter reads as Crane's subversive attempt to draw the father's patriarchal control into the imaginary realm of poetry which his father might dismiss as an immature stage to be outgrown.

It is true that Crane's wish to communicate with his father in such a purified relationship is vulnerable to the charge of youthful naiveté. Yet, we have to remember Crane's letter to Monroe, where, in dealing with Eliot's metaphor, Crane turns his readerly subjectivity into the intermediary figure of the extra-linguistic "rhythmed being" (Bersani, *Rectum* 48) not to be indulged in an imaginary fusion with Eliot's speaker but to disclose the mediated relation between the disparate figures (streetlamp and drum). By

doing so, in that letter, Crane turns his imaginative enactment of the connective experience into the highly intellectual form of *ars poetica*.^{3 5} In the same vein, far from rebelling against the father's realm, Crane asks his father to reimagine Crane's "writing and [his] devotion to that career in life" as an equally serious and worth pursuing profession as his father's business (*CPSL* 371):

And in closing I would like to just ask you to think some time,—try to imagine working for the pure love of simply making something beautiful,—something that maybe can't be sold or used to help sell anything else, but that is simply a communication between man and man, a bond of understanding and human enlightenment (*sic*)—which is what a real work of art is. If you do that, then maybe you will see why I am not so foolish after all to have followed what seems sometimes only a faint star. I only ask to leave behind me something that the future may find valuable, and it takes a bit of sacrifice sometimes in order to give the thing that you know is in yourself and worth giving. I shall make every sacrifice toward that end.

Affectionately, your son (*CPSL* 372)

By emphasizing the gratuitous status of poetry and his own vocation as a poet that are "completely outside of business," Crane equates his idea of poetry with the "beautiful"

gift that is grounded on the principle of loss and expenditure without return nor investment. Seen from this perspective, Crane's formulation of a poet's work recalls Georges Bataille's theory of "expenditure" which David Graeber summarizes as "the creation of meaning through destruction that [Bataille] felt was ultimately lacking under modern capitalism." As Graeber points out the "endless ironies" about Bataille's theorization of the gift economy like potlatch, the captivating allure of the non-returnable expenditure found in, for instance, "the image of Indians setting fire to thousands of blankets," did not actually represent "some fundamental truth about human society that consumer capitalism had forgotten, but rather because it reflected the ultimate truth of consumer capitalism itself" (395). Deconstructing the binary opposites (i.e. the consumer capitalism in an advanced society and the "forgotten" gift economy in a primitive community) on which Bataille's speculation on gift is founded, Graeber's observation can be applicable to Crane's defense for his profession. Rather than eschewing the vocabularies of consumer capitalism, Crane manifests his idea of poetry as a gift by making recourse to the system of monetary exchange: "something that maybe can't be sold or used to help sell anything else." While surely suggesting that the realm of poetry is dominated by the principle of the Bataillean gift rather than that of use value and accumulation, Crane does not dismiss his father's business or the vulgarity of capitalist

society at all. Rather, owing to the capitalist society that evaluates the product of a poet's work as uselessness or nonreturnable, so Crane implies, poetry can be "valuable," because it functions as the nonsalable, therefore, inexhaustible matrix of "simply a communication between man and man,"—a free expenditure of making "something beautiful."

Reading the above passage, in which Crane links his vocation with the act of "sacrifice," we are tempted to oversimplify the image of Crane as a self-sufficient aesthete whose commitment to the nonproductive beauty runs against with moral paradigms of a heteronormative cultural framework. Yet, we should not fail to remark Crane expressing the sense of ethical obligation toward "the future" in his own way: "I only ask to leave behind me something that the future may find valuable" (*CPSL* 372). This passage echoes with his letter to Munson in which Crane manifests his concern with "the future of America," suggesting the responsibility Crane felt toward others to come. However, as we will see in the close reading of the lyrics in *The Bridge* Crane composed around 1926, Crane's "faith" in the "future" is instantiated in the queer time both suppressed from, and supplementing, the linear temporality of what Lee Edelman terms a reproductive futurity, with "its insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning" (*No* 26).

Before reading the four lyrics Crane composed in his most productive period ("The

Dance,” “Southern Cross,” “Cutty Sark,” and “The Tunnel”) in terms of the poem’s exploration of the issue of community, I will formulate in what follows the interpretive method to be used in the following chapters by applying our examination of Crane’s poetics to the first section of *The Bridge* titled “Ave Maria.”

V. Becoming an Un-Faithful Witness of the New Wor(l)d

According to Crane’s definition of poetry as “the concrete *evidence* of the *experience* of a recognition,” a poem is supposed to present itself as an “*evidence* of the *experience*.” But this “evidence,” as its root meaning (“to see”) connotes, always keeps *in sight* the present absence of the authorial subject who had the “experience of recognition” (*CPSL* 436). Lining up with this definition that downgrades the privileged status of the author in relation to a poem, Crane’s ideal relationality through poetry is “*simply* a communication between man and man” that is supposed to entail the renunciation of one’s personal, acquisitive demand for the authenticity of a content to be delivered (*CPSL* 372; emphasis added). As the adverb “simply” indicates Crane’s privileging of a form or movement of communication, such an exchange can never establish a stable ground on which a sustainable connection, be it a familial, national, or

psychological sense of the term, can be grounded.

Having thus examined Crane's idea of poetry so far, we find it easier to see why, despite Crane's epic concerns and "nationalist aspirations" in *The Bridge* (Reed, *After* 153), there is few textual manifestations of the high-flung gesture of embracing "America." As the opening stanza of "Ave Maria" prefigures, Crane's stated concept of *The Bridge* as "a new cultural synthesis of values in terms of our America" is not apparent in the finished text (*CPSL* 424):

Be with me, Luis de San Angel, now—
Witness before the tides can wrest away
The word I bring, O you who reined my suit
Into the Queen's great heart that doubtful day;
For I have seen now what no perjured breath
Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay;—
To you, too, Juan Perez whose counsel fear
And greed adjourned,—I bring you back Cathay! (*CPSL* 35)

The speaker of "Ave Maria" is Columbus in the mid-ocean, returning from the voyage when a storm nearly sinks his ship. While Crane's Columbus is given the privileged role to bear the "word" of the New World, his soliloquy conveys a sense of anxiety: "before

the tides can wrest away / The word I bring.” Caught in the liminal space between the Old World and the New World, Columbus is portrayed not as a celebratory discoverer of the New World nor as a cruel conqueror of Native Americans. In the very beginning of the poem’s first section, Crane introduces Columbus as a lone figure that embodies the profound solitude: “*Columbus, / alone, gazing / toward Spain*” (CPSL 35). As represented by the Old Testament or Homer’s *The Odyssey*, epic as a genre has been traditionally a book of exiles who are banished from their native soil. It seems pertinent, then, Crane’s modern epic is initiated by the solitary voice of Columbus representing the primary moment of an exilic voyager bearing the news of the New World. Read along this context, indeed, Edward Brunner’s observation is right in arguing that Columbus’s “opening speech” is “needed to be heard as bombastic, vaunting, egotistic” (179).

At the same time, though, we cannot overlook the fierce storm pounding his ship that can be read as a parallel to the tempest within Columbus, who is struggling with the tumultuous anxiety about the destination of his “word.” We have to pay attention, in this context, to the referent of Columbus’s addressee. As suggested by the title “Ave Maria,” Crane interweaves in the dramatic monologue a volley of passionate prayers for the divine figure of Virgin Mary (“O Madre Maria, still / One ship of these thou grantest safe returning”). However, as Crane’s marginal gloss denotes, Columbus’s words are directed,

first of all, to “*the / presence*” of his “*two faithful / partisans of / his quest*” (namely, Luis de San Angel and Juan Perez) waiting for his return to Spain (*CPSL* 35). Reading “Ave Maria” in tandem with this marginal gloss, we find that Columbus’ voice implicates within itself the desired response from his “*faithful*” comrades, who could support, despite its then subversive status (the world is spherical), his vision of the New World. Whereas Columbus’ soliloquy does have the epic perspective, Crane’s mode of address generates a coterie-like, intimate sphere which is, in the meta-poetic context, equivalent to the relation between poet and reader.

As evident in a 1926 letter he wrote in Cuba to his grandmother, Crane associates his own venture to write *The Bridge* with the testing voyage of Columbus (*Letters* 234). With Crane’s figuration of Columbus as a voyager returning to transmit his “word,” then, the “word” can signify not only the news of the New World but also “a single, new *word*” (*CPSL* 163) which Crane talks about in “General Aims and Theories” along with the “new hierarchy of faith” in his vision of “America” (*CPSL* 161). In “General Aims and Theories,” as we have seen, Crane manifests his ambition to transmit to the reader a “single, new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader’s consciousness henceforward” (*CPSL* 163). As observed earlier, the newness of a poem’s “*word*” lies not in a poem’s function as the

conduit of a preexisted, symbolic meaning. Rather, in Crane's view, its novelty can be attained by involving the reader's participation in the connective act of discovering among the words in a poem new "inter-relationships," which must be "implicit," "associational," and "emotional" (*CPSL* 163). In this context, Crane's poetics surely informs the very opening of "Ave Maria," in which Crane's Columbus pleads the desired form of response from his "*faithful / partisans*" who could "[w]itness" his "word" as the evidence of the New World (*CPSL* 35).

Concerning the opening of "Ave Maria," it is important also to remember that what Crane meant by "*two faithful / partisans*" (*CPSL* 35) are Luis de San Angel and Juan Pérez, the latter of whom is one of the friars remaining faithful to Columbus (the former is, reminiscent of Crane's patron Otto Kahn, the financier to King Ferdinand II). It is difficult then not to reconsider Crane's inscription of the name of Columbus' spiritual supporter in a relation with Waldo Frank. In 1926 when Crane managed to finish about two third of *The Bridge*, Crane, writing from Cuba, asked Frank to keep the manuscripts of *The Bridge* by addressing Frank as "Dear repository of my *faith*": "will you also serve as sanctum of some of my 'works' ? . . . One never knows what may happen, fires burn the house here, etc., and mss. be burnt or otherwise lost—and in the case of this Bridge I feel enough honor-bound to desire preserved whatever evidence of my industry and effort

is forthcoming” (*CPSL* 475; emphasis added). With this epistolary evidence in mind, we are allowed to recall from Columbus’s address to his “*faithful / partisans*” “an act of faith,” about which Crane writes to Frank in conjunction with his idea of the symbolical significance of “the bridge.” In seeing “certain as yet undefined spiritual qualities” of America as the “new hierarchy of faith,” as we have observed, Crane defines “the very idea of a bridge” as “an act of faith besides being a communication.”

Rather than a symbol of reciprocal communication or spiritual conjugation, as I have explicated, Crane’s concept of “the bridge” is “an act of faith,” which is supposed to be a praxis for the poet (and his readers) to act out. In Crane’s idea of poetry that problematizes the privileged role of an author, a poem as “the concrete *evidence*” of an ecstatic experience remains incomplete unless the reader witnesses the “new,” therefore ineluctably deranged, and non-validated network of associations between the words in a given poem (In the end of “General Aims and Theories,” Crane reinforces his readiness to be “at the risk of speaking idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic”) (*CPSL* 164). Understanding this “single, new *word*” as “the rhetorical scheme of *cataphoresis* [unconventional and improper use of words],” Edelman notes that this trope permits Crane “to extend meaning through the radical mixing of metaphors and through the improper naming of objects or actions that lack

proper names of their own” (*Transmemberment* 7-8). Given the figurative exchangeability between Columbus’ address to his partisans and Crane’s to his readers, it is no surprise that in presenting the “word” that Columbus bears across the Atlantic ocean, Crane tellingly offers the reader, who is structurally inscribed within the text as the witness of the poet’s “word,” the deceptive moment in which Columbus misrecognizes the Caribbean islands as “The Chan’s great continent” (“I bring you back Cathay!”) (*CPSL* 35).

In assessing the affinity between Crane as the poem’s author and the figure of Columbus, we have to be well aware of the doubled signification of the word “faithful.” Since we (and Crane) cannot completely forget about Columbus’ miscalculation about the distance between Europe and India (or what Crane’s Columbus calls “Cathay”), a type of partisan we can become is nothing but “unfaithful” ones who *pretend* to be “faithful” as Columbus’ accomplices, embracing his erring vision as the “true”: “Utter to loneliness the sail is true” (*CPSL* 37). At the same time, what operates in this lyric (and throughout *The Bridge*) is the meta-poetic strand, according to which “Columbus” can be read as a self-referential figure for Crane as the poet, who self-knowingly commits, in his poetic voyage, to the generative possibility of linguistic misuse or deliberate error (catachresis). In this context, becoming the Columbus’ “unfaithful” partisans, who *pretend* to receive

his “word” of the New World as the “true” one, and who carry his erring vision in directions beyond Crane’s intentions, turns out to be equivalent to becoming “faithful” partisans to Crane’s rhetorical strategies. In this manner, the interaction between the main text of “Ave Maria” and the marginal glosses to this lyric provides us with the doubled perspective that deconstructs faithful / unfaithful binary. And with this deconstructive insight in mind, I propose in what follows a method of accessing the co-responding figures dispersed across the sections and subsections of *The Bridge*.

Inscribed within the in-between space of the text as the supposed addressee of Columbus’s / Crane’s “word,” the reader as his “[un]faithful partisan” is allowed to participate performatively in the speaker’s deranged act of misidentifying or mixing the one figure with the other, thereby finding a *new* relation between discrete wor(l)ds, while being aware of the mediated distance between them. By self-consciously misidentifying one figure with another throughout the poem, and by discovering a new, unauthorized relation between them, the reader as a witness of the generative web woven across *The Bridge* can perceive a dense network of thematic and rhetorical figures of loss, incompleteness, and interruption. And each figure can function as a platform for us to discover the multi-directional connections between discrete words and images across each section and subsection of the poem. For instance, Crane concludes “Ave Maria”

thus:

The sea's green crying towers a-sway, Beyond

And kingdoms

naked in the

trembling heart—

Te Deum laudamus

O Thou Hand of Fire (*CPSL* 37)

By offering us this inconclusive conclusion, Crane does not present a celebratory scene of Columbus's return to the harbor. With no land of Spain in sight, "Ave Maria" defers the redemptive moment and keeps Columbus's figure suspended in the mid-ocean, leaving his "trembling heart" (a pun on the poet's name) still craving for his partisans' reception of his "word." Indeed, Columbus' recollection that he was an exile in the streets of Genoa implies he is now free from the sense of alienation: "I thought of Genoa; and this truth, now proved, / That made me exile in her streets . . ." (*CPSL* 35). However, caught between catastrophic loss and hope, Crane's Columbus remains imprisoned in the position of an exile who is impotent ever to reach to the shore.

In this manner observed above, for all the intimations of attaining a sense of desired

communality, almost all of the speakers are situated alone with nobody to exchange his / her words, and some of them (notably in “The Dance” and “Cape Hatteras”) violently dismantle their personal identities by committing themselves to the destructive self-shattering. Viewed from the rhetorical perspective as well, Crane’s “natural idiom” (*CPSL* 326), which is aimed to transport an embodied presence of the poet’s desiring body to the reader, often functions as a rhetorical violence to the syntax of normal sentence. Since the rhetorical violence is the violence to language as the instrument of social understanding, it can be continuous with a relational violence between poet and reader.

However, because of those anti-relational elements in the poem, the fragmentary text of *The Bridge* works in mobilizing our desire to explore the non-validated connections between the discrete words and images dispersed in the poem. As the (un)faithful partisans to Crane’s rhetorical strategies, we are led to misrecognize that each figure of the thwarted desire in one section *seems* to be transmitted across time and place to the other desiring figure in another section. In “Ave Maria,” for example, Columbus’ desire to reunite with his partisans at the harbor in Spain *seems* to be responded by the anonymous speaker of the succeeding lyric titled “Harbor Dawn,” sleeping in twentieth-century New York, through the associational link between the legal terms: “Witness” (*CPSL* 35) and “*deeds*.” The word “*deeds*” in “Harbor Dawn” is used by Crane to ensure,

though in vain, the stability of an amorous handclasp between the lovers in a “*waking dream*”: “*your hands within my hands are deeds*” (CPSL 39). Indirect and tenuous as this associative link surely is, the “trembling heart” of Columbus can be witnessed, arranged and re-arranged by the reader who (mis)recognizes the transfiguring process of one desire being relayed to another throughout *The Bridge*. To put it shortly, the episodically dissociated but rhetorically inter-related structure thus found in *The Bridge* can be understood as the extension of Crane’s logic of metaphor, which challenges the reader to inhabit in an in-between space within the text and make metaphorical interrelationships on the basis of associational, therefore, un-certifiable connections.

Since this kind of co-responding relationship between the words and images is predicated on the irreconcilable distance and difference, we cannot read into the poem a narrative of reincarnation in which the specific identity of one individual persists by changing its vehicle to another’s. The speaker in each section ends up with singing his / her solitary song of desire without an awareness of answering the calling from the other speaker(s) on the textual level of a multi-directional relation in the network of the co-responding figures. As no one, including Crane as the poem’s author, can testify the authenticity or durability of each connection in the text, the observations I have to make in reading *The Bridge* cannot help but sound paranoiac *à la* Crane’s Columbus as an erring

visionary. And yet, the self-confessedly deranged perception of the intricate network of co-responding figures enables us to *witness* the strife of an unmentioned figure of the connective agent. Partially partaking of, yet ultimately alien to the authorial subject of the poet, the figure's impersonality cannot be claimed as the reader's as well. This third, intermediary perspective which reminds us of the "distraught man" in Crane's letter to Monroe (*CPSL* 167) will enable us to rearrange the fragments of thwarted desires into a textual form of community.

Mediated by the spatio-temporal or psychological divisions, the form of community does not grow into a unitary order in which many are integrated into one totalized whole. Rather, it happens as a series of singular events, leaving the reader with a figure of the half-built (or the half-broken) bridge such as Columbus's "trembling heart" (*CPSL*37). It is not until we read *The Bridge* as the witness to the movements of the words in the poem who performs to trace and arrange the manifold network of each "heart" "trembling" between the possible connections with the other "heart[s]," that this mode of community of desiring figures comes to be perceived.

The form of network in which the thwarted desire of an individual is obliquely co-responded with other desires does offer us a perspectives for thinking about various aspects of community alternative to a totalitarian, fusional community. In reading the

intricate network of the co-responding figures as the allegory of an alternative community, as I repeat, the arguments in the following chapters cannot help performing the role of Columbus's self-deceiving "*partisan*," misrecognizing and mixing the one figure with another. Though each aspect of community mobilized in the text cannot go beyond the "hypothetical" "assumption" (*CPSL* 436), the knowing act of misrecognition can be continuous with a form of "the real connective experience" which leads us to find the new arrangement of relational forms. Employing the un-faithful act of arranging Crane's words as an interpretive method, my hypothesis goes as follows: regardless of the compositional years, the text of *The Bridge* compels us to misrecognize and thereby explore the new modes of community in which the desiring and desired voice of one speaker is both differentiated and multiplied by being passed from one section to another like a gift , thereby resisting the reduction of their relation to the fusional communion of an intersubjective relationship.

Chapter 5: “I, Too, Was Liege to Rainbows”: “The Dance” and Shattering the Mirror’s Pledge

In “Legend,” the introductory poem of *White Buildings*, Crane likens the self-destructive thrust of the speaker’s desire to a “[b]ending” figure of “the moth” toward “the still / Imploring flame.” Characteristic of Crane, who mobilizes through the image of narcissistic specularity a densely-packed cluster of metaphorical associations (“As silent as a mirror is believed”), the moth is incinerated by fire into “white falling flakes,” whose flickering trajectory is superimposed upon the ecstatic quiver of “kisses.” Crane regards this evanescent union as the most rewarding experience: “And tremorous / In the white falling flakes / Kisses are,— / The only worth all granting”(CPSL 3). Besides introducing an emblem for *Liebestod* that is a quintessential motif of Crane’s poetry, the narcissistic figure of the poet who looks at his mirror image dissolving into white fragments has served to perpetuate the association of Crane with whiteness, narcissism and death drive.^{3 6} Whereas Crane’s use of whiteness may point toward the inability for him to inscribe anything but his narcissistic self-consciousness, Crane should also be remembered as a poet driven by the connective impulse to reconcile historical, racial and sexual cleavages.^{3 7} Despite his hermetic use of words and difficult metaphors that Allen

Tate criticizes as an indicator of “the locked-in sensibility, the insulated egoism” (228), Crane’s poetry, most notably *The Bridge*, stands as a testimony to the poet’s exploration for relational possibilities of narcissism. This chapter focuses on “The Dance” in “Powhatan’s Daughter” section, in which Crane attempts to rewrite a national and personal identity by “becom[ing] identified with the Indian and his world” (*CPSL* 556). First, I will examine the poet’s violent appropriation of the ethnic others. Then, our focus shifts into the eventual failure of Crane’s ethnocentric project. By following the way in which Crane’s imaginative enactment of making a new national identity collapses, I will examine an alternative possibility for the speaker to relate with others through the very violence of his narcissistic imagination.

Foregrounding Crane’s project to reconceive the Pocahontas myth, Jared Gardner specifies one of “*The Bridge*’s central concerns” as the issue of “national and sexual identity” which draws a parallel with the society’s “energetic recruitment of American Indians and the simultaneous campaign to expel homosexuals from the armed forces in World War I” (27). Around the 1920s, according to Gardner’s survey, the restoration of the Native American to a position of centrality in American identity was not only “a literary conceit” exploited by such writers as Vachel Lindsay and Waldo Frank, but also “a social project that sought to claim an inheritance for America that would be purified

of European parents.” Delineating the new model of citizenship that is based on the notion of a non-biological genealogy, Gardner maintains that the society’s claim to an alternative national identity makes Crane’s homosexual myth possible. Gardner concludes his argument by regarding *The Bridge* as “the most successful modernist text of all by founding a notion of race that fully bypasses the body in favor of an incorruptible machinery of cultural transmission” (46). Inarguably, Gardner’s historical re-contextualization of *The Bridge* in the citizenship discourse has been an indispensable contribution to Crane scholarship, to which I owe a great deal. Yet, a close reading of “The Dance” will reveal a critical incompatibility between Crane’s figuration of Native Americans and the idea of “incorruptible machinery of cultural transmission.” Echoing back to the specular configuration of the “moth” and “the still / Imploring flame” in “Legend” (*CPSL* 3), the union between Crane’s speaker and the Native American leads to the dissolution of a consistency of the speaker’s personhood on which an alternative national identity is supposed to be founded.

I. “Loth, Disturbed, and Destined”: Crane’s Imperialist Nostalgia

In a 1927 letter to his patron Otto Kahn, Crane describes the outline of “The Dance” as follows:

Here one is on the pure mythical and smoky soil at last! Not only do I describe the conflict between the two races in this dance—I also become identified with the Indian and his world before it is over, which is the only method possible of ever really possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor. I think I really succeed in getting under the skin of this glorious and dying animal, and in terms of expression, in symbols, which he himself would comprehend. Pocahontas (the continent) is the common basis of our meeting, she survives the extinction of the Indian, who finally, after being assumed into the elements of nature (as he understood them) persists only as a kind of “eye” in the sky, or as a star that hangs between day and night—“the twilight’s dim perpetual throne.” (*CPSL* 556)

Besides “becom[ing] identified with the Indian and his world,” Crane addresses his aim in “The Dance” to “describe the conflict between the two races.” Although “conflict” signifies a state of strife between opposed camps of equal strength, such a suspended

power relation is barely noticeable in this lyric. Concerning Crane's grand design of *The Bridge*, Tate writes that "Crane lacked the sort of indispensable understanding of his country that a New England farmer has who has never been out of his township." As a result, so Tate complains, Crane "covers the ground with seven-league boots and, like a sightseer, sees nothing" (235). Tate's dismissal of Crane in *The Bridge* as "a sightseer" of America "with seven-league boots" who "sees nothing" holds true to "The Dance," in which Crane sees "the Indian" as a "glorious and dying animal." Instead of the actual Native Americans who have their identities of specific groups with distinct, ethnic traditions, "The Dance" presents what Gordon A. Tapper sees as "Crane's uncritical replication of the well-worn ideological construct in which the 'disappearance of' Native Americans is deemed the tragic but inevitable destiny that paves the way for the national cultural identity of the United States" (102). Whereas Tapper's explication of "Crane's version of that modernist phantasm known as 'The Primitive'" is highly informative, what can be worth re-complicating about Tapper's view is that Crane's nativist "phantasm" is "a complex mixture of an idealizing universalism and a skeptical relativism." As will become clear in what follows, it is hard to notice "the skeptical relativism" operating, at least, in Crane's imagining of Native Americans in the poem.

"The Dance" begins by the speaker envisioning a ritualistic courtship between

Pocahontas and Maquoqueeta, who is introduced in the marginal gloss as Pocahontas's

"kin, / her chieftain / lover":

The swift red flesh, a winter king—

Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?

She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;

She spouted arms; she rose with maize—to die. (*CPSL* 45)

Thomas Yingling reads this stanza to note that "the poem rehearses a sky-god-earth-goddess fertility rite, the dance of the title, and is a primal scene in both a Freudian and anthropological sense" (219). With the image of the male escort who "squired" Pocahontas to bring out the vernal regeneration, the vision of their union appears to promise the success of the fertility ritual. With the speaker's sense of uncertainty that is legible in the second line ("Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?") (emphasis added), however, the following gloss Crane added to the text's margin blocks such a reassuring interpretation: "*Then you shall / see her truly / —your blood / remembering / its first / invasion of / her secrecy, / its first / encounters / with her kin, / her chieftain / lover*" (*CPSL* 45). Corresponding with the ominous word ("*invasion*"), the lyric starts recalling the white settlers' invasion into the intimate realm of the Native American lovers:

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral weariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring—loth,
Disturbed and destined, into denser green.
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:
Now lie incorrigibly what years between . . .

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
There was veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride—
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride. (*CPSL* 45)

Evoking the imperialistic urge of the early explorers in the continent, Crane robs the figures of indigenous people of their specific identities. Just as Pocahontas is mythologized into a superficial image of an earth goddess (“she rose with maize—to die”), so the male escort is turned into a mythical figure with the esoteric knowledge of nature

(“mineral weariness”), which is eventually transformed into the evening star (“He holds the twilight’s dim, perpetual throne”). In the letter to Kahn, Crane boasts about his manipulation of words that “the Indian” could feel familiar with (“in terms of expression, in symbols, which he himself would comprehend”) (*CPSL* 556). But “The Dance” is characterized by the traditional high diction in pentameter quatrains, whose grand tonality would not sound more effective for reenacting the Euro-Americans’ appropriation of indigenous cultures. Certainly, there is the passages that suggest his white guilt (“Mythical brows we saw retiring,—loth, / Disturbed and destined, into denser green”). Given Crane’s association of Pocahontas’s “lap” with “Virgin May” (punning on Virgin Mary), however, we cannot help perceiving Crane’s romanticizing impulse to sublimate the white guilt into a universal lamentation for the loss of the Eden-like felicity, in which the actual cruelty of the invaders is magically deemphasized.

While it is necessary to cast a critical gaze toward Crane’s ethnographically problematic representation of Native Americans,^{3 8} what we should also bear in mind is Crane’s veiled project of appropriating the citizenship discourse in 1920s America. In the next section, I will interpret Crane’s politically incorrect use of the Native American imagery in conjunction with his attempt to reimagine a nation’s founding moment from which the blood-free national identity could originate with “the Indian” as its symbol.

II. "I Learned to Catch the Trout's Moon Whisper": Mirroring the Native

Land

Crane's project to reimagine the way in which the early settlers explore the wilderness shares a lot with William Carol Williams's *In the American Grain* (1925). According to Linda A. Kinnahan, Williams's book "asks us to recognize the frame of classical patriarchy through which we are taught to view the country's history." By approaching the motif of the masculine insemination of the New World "not as a central, celebratory moment in the text, but as a dangerous mythos in need of revision," so Kinnahan writes, Williams's essays "reveal this frame partially through obsessive images of male sexual potency and patrilineage that characterize the quests of the early explorers and settlers as phallogentric attempts to possess and master the New World" (86). Chiming with Williams' book, the quest of Crane's speaker also takes the form of the colonizers' phallogentric endeavor to master the virginal wilderness. As the speaker leaves "the village," a "[f]irst moth of evening" emerges, and the land assumes a feminine atmosphere as though tempting her lover to step into and explore her body:

I left the village for dogwood. By the canoe

Tugging below the mill-race, I could see

Your hair's keen crescent running, and the blue

First moth of evening take wing stealthily.

What laughing chains the water wove and threw!

I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I

Drifted how many hours I never knew,

But, watching, saw that fleet young crescent die,— (*CPSL* 46)

The object of the speaker's quest is "dogwood" that is associated, in the Christian myth, with Christ's resurrection in the spring time. Instead of a Christ-like father figure, though, what is resurrected here is Pocahontas, whose image echoes back to Lindsay's poem titled "Our Mother Pocahontas." Included in "For America at War" in *Poetry* magazine (July, 1917), "Our Mother Pocahontas" mythologizes Pocahontas into the symbol of a national identity by conceiving a bloodless genealogy whereby she becomes the symbolic mother of America. Although we cannot find in Crane's letters the evidence that Crane read "Our Mother Pocahontas," many inter-textual echoes between "Powhatan's Daughter" and Lindsay's poem are hard to be overlooked. For instance, just as Lindsay's poem imagines the birth of "[t]he newest race" ("John Rolfe is not our ancestor. / We rise from out the soul of her / Held in native wonderland") (116), so Crane's engagement with Pocahontas

seems to prefigure the birth of a myth of the alternative America that begins with Crane's speaker as its founding father.

Rather than imagining the newest landscape, however, Crane situates the speaker in the familiar wilderness not so different from Lindsay's "native wonderland," where Pocahontas "heard the forest talking" and "westward chased the painted moon" (116). Derivative of the "Indian" figures in Lindsay's poem,³⁹ Crane's wilderness is ostentatiously the magical domain of Pocahontas, who gives his speaker access to the communion with natural elements: "What laughing chains the water wove and threw! / I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper." Memorable as Crane's metaphors for flirting with nature may sound, the lesson he "learned" does not go beyond the one that passes as "the Indian" behavior.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Crane's recourse to the synaesthetic trope, which is closely associated with the expertise of the French visionary poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, suggests that he reduces the image of a Native American to a figurative mirror in which he sees his self-image as a Rimbaudian *voyant*.⁴¹ Seen in this light, Crane's invocation of Pocahontas around the specular images of "lakes" and "mill-race" (*CPSL* 45-46) implies that what operates in Crane's "pure mythical and smoky soil" (*CPSL* 356) (this phrase comes from Winters' poem "The Streets") is the speaker's narcissistic subjectivity that excludes the unknown from his imaginary realm

of the familiar.

Reading “The Dance” as a version of “the quest narrative of romantic poetry,” Tapper rightly observes that “the Indian” in this lyric is not an accurate representation of the Native American but Crane’s “extremely elusive, mercurial object of desire” (128). Tapper’s interpretation is helpful for us to point toward the “extremely elusive” and “mercurial” quality not only of “the Indian” imagery but also of the self-satisfying subjectivity of Crane’s speaker. As my reading of this lyric will make evident, Crane’s speaker is driven by a contradictory impulse at once to expand itself and to consolidate its boundary by domesticating the primitive other in the realm of the familiar. Since the passages to be cited below suggest a boundless expansion of the speaker’s ego, his exploration of the feminized landscape appears to be the phallogentric endeavor: “I took the portage climb, then chose / A further valley-shed; I could not stop”; “O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge” (*CPSL* 46). Reminiscent both of Williams’s book and Lindsay’s poem, these lines seem to lead to what Bryce Conrad sees in *In the American Grain* as “the birth of a poet out of fertilizing contact with the female body” (107). Yet, unlike the works of those predecessors, as I will examine in the following section, the speaker’s desire deviates from the female body of Pocahontas, bending in a queer manner toward the brave chieftain, who turns out to be the speaker’s narcissistic double.

III. "Lie to Us": Impersonating "the Indian"

As the speaker finds himself "within some boding shade" where "[g]rey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead," Crane uses the synaesthetic trope again of hearing "a thunder-bud" that signals the coming of the spring. While the "thunder-bud" morphs into the sound of the Native American's "padded foot," Crane implies the sense of self-purification by noting that its tribal "rhythm" "[s]iphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root." Commenting on the phrase "heart's hot root" that puns on the poet's name, Catherine A. Davies observes that Crane enacts here "the regeneration of the poetic phallus." Thereby, Davies continues, "Crane defends himself against Winters' accusation of homosexual impotence with this aggressive assertion of virile masculinity" (65-66). Indeed, conforming to Lindsay's poem where Pocahontas's father Powhatan is imagined as the son of "the red lightning stroke / And the lightning-shivered oak" (Lindsay 115), Crane's association of the chieftain with "thunder" appears to show off his aggressive masculinity. As it turns out, however, Crane's seemingly derivative enactment of the chief's dance deviates from a system of gender that locates the phallus at its central position:

A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest,

Swooping in eagle feathers down your back;
Know, Maquokeeta, greeting; know death's best;
—Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!

A birch kneels. All her whistling fingers fly.
The oak grove circles in a crash of leaves;
The long moan of a dance is in the sky.
Dance, Maquokeeta: Pocahontas grieves ...

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

Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before,
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore—
Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn! (*CPSL* 46-47)

Unlike the lyric's opening, in which the vision was reported in past tense by the collective pronoun ("Mythical brows we saw") (*CPSL* 45), these stanzas show the chieftain's dance occurring "[n]ow" through Crane's speech acts. Attuned to the enraptured dance of Maquokeeta, Crane puts on an act of releasing his verbal restraint and employs a plethora of alliterations and assonances in quick tempo ("toward the twangs"; "deltaed down"; "thinly busy the blue") to aurally enchant the speaker / the reader. While these passages suggest the speaker's identificatory impulse to become Maquokeeta, Crane's use of language simultaneously articulates his aesthetic detachment in the manner of a stage director arranging the acts of a dancer ("Dance, Maquokeeta"; "Sprout, horn! / Spark, tooth!"). Rapt in the disenchanting self-awareness, as it were, Crane's enactment of the chieftain's dance begins to transgress the racial, and sexual boundaries.

The first point to be made about the dancing figure of Maquokeeta is that the chief's appearance is captured mainly by the detachable accessories, whose burlesque combination of "turbine" and "crest" displays Maquokeeta's status as dependent on the theatrical artifices (such a theatrical figure clad in "the Indian" costume reappears in the guise of a burlesque dancer in the lyric titled "National Winter Garden"). This point encourages us to observe that Crane's performance to get "identified with the Indian" results in a parodic impersonation of the racial stereotype (*CPSL* 556), reminding us of

Judith Butler's argument. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). Though Butler's focus is on the issue of gender, the idea of performativity can be applicable to Crane's figuration of Maquoqueeta, because what is foregrounded through Maquoqueeta's dance is not only the typically "Indian" accoutrements such as "eagle feathers" (*CPSL* 46), "buzzard-circleted," and "anklets" (*CPSL* 47), but the racial discourse that constitutes "the appearance of substance" of "the Indian." For instance, the above stanzas contain what Tapper sees as the "death sentence" of Native Americans: "Know, Maquoqueeta, greeting; know death's best" / —Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!" (*CPSL* 46). Understanding this passage as the "rhetoric of destiny," Tapper writes that "Maquoqueeta's death is not a random event; like the noble tree to which he is compared, he is to die 'strictly,' that is, by design, according to the destiny mapped out for him by the violent course of American history" (110). In other words, owing to Crane's figuration of Maquoqueeta that shows itself as the composite fabrication of "the Indian" costume and racial discourse, Maquoqueeta can appear in front of us (the present readers) to acknowledge his inauthentic status as a "natural" Native American. Furthermore, as the denaturalized appearance of Maquoqueeta serves retroactively to

produce in our mind the binary opposites between the fictitious “Indian” and “natural” Native American, Crane’s enactment of the tribal dance comes to have a subversive possibility to unsettle the notion of a race as naturally given.

Besides the issue of “race,” the same can be said about the gender of Maquoqueeta, whose appearance, as Yingling maintains, can represent a “*berdache*” or an Amerindian transvestite. Though Yingling does not elaborate the transgressive effects of Maquoqueeta’s appearance, Yingling’s observation that Maquoqueeta’s “power is both coded as and derived from their transgression of gender systems” (219) invites us to reconsider the figure of Maquoqueeta wearing the “turbine crest” and “eagle feather” as a drag-like dancer. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler formulates an idea of drag that “fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.” Butler’s argument helps illuminate the subversive quality of the chieftain’s dance. Because, as I have suggested the lyric’s queer appropriation of the preceding writings, Crane’s enactment of the dance appears to parody the copy of what is only a copy in the first place. To explicate how drag disturbs the distinction between surface and depth, Butler cites Esther Newton’s definition as follows:

At its most complex [drag] is a double inversion that says, “appearance is an

illusion.” Drag says [Newton’s curious personification] “my ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ [the body] is masculine.” At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; “my appearance ‘outside’ [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ [myself] is feminine.”

(137)

Bearing in mind Crane’s boast that he “really succeed[s] in getting under the skin of this glorious and dying animal” (*CPSL* 556), we can use Newton’s definition to understand the relation between Crane’s speaker and Maquokeeta as an embodiment of the “double inversion.” Given Yingling’s view that the decorated appearance of Maquokeeta can represent an Amerindian transvestite (219), Maquokeeta looks feminine, though his body is masculine. Seen from an inverted perspective, though, Maquokeeta’s appearance (his body) is masculine, whereas his inside (Crane’s speaker “getting under [Maquokeeta’s] skin”) contains an anti-masculine, queer desire, thereby challenging the naturalness of gender binaries. In dramatizing the chieftain’s doom, for example, Crane addresses Maquokeeta as “Sachem,” who is destined to share the fate of the tree collapsing in the thunderstorm (“Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack”). While Crane confirms Maquokeeta’s masculinity by entitling him as “Sachem,” the positions like “fall” and “kneel” that Crane commands Maquokeeta to take draw Maquokeeta’s figure closer to a

passive object to be mastered. To be certain, such a phallic attribute as “horn” may ensure Maquokeeta’s virility. But as the very utterance of the speaker’s direction (“Sprout, horn!) (*CPSL* 46-47) indicates that Maquokeeta cannot wear his horn unless the speaker utters the command, Crane’s speech act functions not so much to “regenerate” as to denaturalize “the poetic phallus” (Davies 66).

Appreciating Crane’s contribution to the “collection of ‘treasured invention[s]’ of the Indian in the tradition of American literature, Tapper concludes his compelling reading of “The Dance” by reemphasizing the point that Crane “was also deeply divided by two contradictory impulses: to represent what [Louis] Owens calls “the actual Indian,” and to evoke Native Americans as the embodiment of animality, the elusive quality of the body that he sought to reclaim in his poetry” (148). Rather than manifesting his ambivalence between “the two contradictory impulses,” however, Crane’s figuration of Maquokeeta queerly deviates from “the actual Indian.” As connoted by Maquokeeta’s expertise of telling a “lie” as “Medicine-man” (“Lie to us”), the grotesque signifiers of Maquokeeta’s appearance (“splay tongues”; “red fangs”) hint us that no original signified of “the Indian” exists except in terms of the imitation, or drag (*CPSL* 47). Just as drag is about legible signifiers without the original signified, Maquokeeta’s dance, which is animated by Crane’s incantatory speech acts, does not represent the authentic male Native

American but copy the simulacra of a queer “Indian.”

Seen in this context, what becomes worthy of consideration is Crane’s laudatory self-assessment in a letter to Kenneth Burke that “The Dance has “got real Indians in it” (CPSL 486). Given the substance-less figure of Maquokeeta that can unsettle the gender / sexual binaries, we may take Crane calling Maquoketa the “real Indians” as a hollow gesture of bravado. Or, in re-appreciating the queer potential of Crane’s surficial figuration of “the Indian,” we can draw on Jonathan Dollimore’s observation of the “post-modern” aspect of Oscar Wilde’s aesthetic which “suggests a culture of the surface” (72). Reminiscent of Butler’s comment on the “double inversion” of drag, “The Dance” has the postmodern aspect that “displace[s] the entire enactment of gender significations from the discourse of truth and falsity” (137). Yet, resonating with Dollimore’s consideration of Wilde’s ambiguous status as a prefiguration of “the modern and the post-modern,” Crane’s negotiation with the ethnic other should be interpreted also as the typically modernistic one. To borrow Dollimore’s view of Wilde, Crane, too, has a “transgressive aesthetic” that is “not just hostile to, but intently concerned with . . . depth and exclusive integration as fundamental criteria of identity” (72-73). As we will see below, Crane’s choice of the adjective “real,” instead of “true” or “actual,” to refer to “the Indian” implies that there can be something *beneath* the superficial figuration of “the Indian.”

When he begins to set the dance in motion, like a stage director advising his actor, Crane displays his self-awareness that the white speaker's merger with the other is impossible, for what Maquokeeta offers him is nothing more than a "lie" or mere fabrication made from the "collection of 'treasured invention[s]'" of the Indian in the tradition of American literature (Tapper 148). Starting to impersonate the suffering of Maquokeeta burning in the fire, however, the very opposition between the speaker as the appropriative explorer and Maquokeeta as the object to be possessed is liquefied. In surrendering his subjectivity to the masochistic pleasure pain in Maquokeeta's dance of death, the exploitative gaze of the speaker is turned back on itself. While the figure of Maquokeeta is cast into a series of violent aggressions, the speaker finds himself shedding his white skin to take part in the doom of Maquokeeta, and of the tribal community.

IV. "The Tribal Morn" as "Our" Burial Ground

By exaggerating and thereby denaturalizing the "Indian-ness" of Maquokeeta, "The Dance" fails to represent the "actual" Native American. In the context of Crane's secret project, however, the inauthentic representation of "the Indian and his world" (*CPSL* 556) functions as an opportunity for Crane to reimagine the "tribal morn" of an alternative

America. In its imagined temporality of purified origination, Crane could graft his “myth of homosexual origins” (Gardner25) into the mythical body of Pocahontas—“the natural body of America—fertility” (*CPSL* 440). Instead of dramatizing the birth of a new national identity, though, Crane envisions their “tribal morn” in the burial ground of a losing war:

Spears and assemblies: black drums thrusting on—

O yelling battlements,—I, too, was liege

To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:

Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!

And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;

I could not pick the arrows from my side.

Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake—

Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide. (*CPSL* 47)

The first two lines are filled with the metonymies of war, reminding us of the nativist strand, of which the writers such as Lindsay and Frank took part in the early twentieth-century. Summarizing Lindsay’s step “towards an understanding of American identity as a spiritual inheritance,” Gardner observes that “in Lindsay’s terms, those who fought in

the war (and fought like Indians) could now be Americans; those who did not would never escape their “racial marks” and thus could never be Americanized” (31). In the similar nativist line, as though attesting his own readiness to be an active participant in this imagined war (“I, too, was liege / To rainbows”), Crane makes his oath of allegiance to “the Indian.” By making use of the figure of “rainbows” evocative of the ecstatic sensations of the tribal dance, Crane makes the self-congratulatory gesture of survival (“Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!”). As foreshadowed by an ominous implication of “rainbows” that puns on the rain of bows, however, the climactic phase in these stanzas finds the speaker becoming a conquered object to be shot by the arrows. And it is in this moment that he casts off the identity of a white explorer, “scream[ing] from the stake” with and as Maquokeeta: “And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake; / I could not pick the arrows from my side.” Following Robert Martin’s view that the image of the speaker’s body skewered with the arrows recalls the “sodomasochistic vision of a Sebastian-like Libestod” (“Review” 124), Tapper observes that “St. Sebastian had been, since at least the Victorian period, the favorite saint of gay men” (140). Through this homoerotic identification with the suffering body of Maquokeeta, in other words, Crane reveals his own queer desire along with the masochistic death drive.

To retrace the narrative progression of “The Dance” in the light of queer theory, I

will make recourse here to Leo Bersani's speculation on narcissism. As we will see, Crane eroticizes Maquokeeta's body to an extent that the speaker's appropriative desire turns into the sexual impetus to shatter the consistency of his personhood. This process seems to embody Bersani's interpretation of Freudian narcissism that a narcissistic, and sadistic subjectivity is masochistically bounded for its self-shattering, and is compelled to repeat the identity's ecstatic dissolution called *jouissance*. Summarizing "the fundamental tenets of the framework Bersani draws from psychoanalysis," Patrick Ffrench points to "the notion that the appropriative violence of desire, or, to put it differently, the sexual impetus toward mastery over the other is also a movement toward the dissolution of the desiring self." Ffrench continues to write that the "movement of desire is double; the pleasure and violence of appropriative mastery over the other involves the shattering of the self into the field in which the objects of desire appear." This "paradox inherent in desire and in sexual pleasure," so observes Ffrench, "presupposes at once mobility and immobility; any desiring movement toward the other, while it may be fundamentally narcissistic or autoerotic, is also a movement toward the sexual shattering of the self" (127). In exploring an enabling potential of such narcissism, Bersani aims to reorient the masochism that is conventionally tied to the pleasure in pain by imagining the non-suicidal masochism that is bound not for "pleasure in pain" but for "the pleasure at once losing the self and

discovering it elsewhere, inaccurately replicated”: “I have begun to think in a nonbiological, perhaps even nonpsychological, way. It is a more spatial conception that brings masochism together with narcissism” (*Rectum* 174).

Unlike the notion of such “a productive masochism” explored by Bersani (*Rectum* 174), the masochism found in “The Dance” is drenched in the death-dealing, physical pain. Nevertheless, Crane’s attempt to enact the union between the speaker and Maquokeeta can be continuous with Bersani’s exploration of the alternative masochism in the way that the self-shattering of one’s ego leads to its self-multiplication into a community of inaccurately replicated figures.

Through the ecstatic pleasure pain that the speaker suffers with and as Maquokeeta, the contained integrity of the speaker’s identity is momentarily dissolved, and he finds himself *multiplying* (not doubling) into a promiscuous assemblage of anonymous “escorts” that are “wak[ing]” to erotically compel him toward the periphery of his subjectivity: “Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake— / Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide” (*CPSL* 47). As the phrase “more escorts” denotes, Crane imagines the figure of the speaker / Maquokeeta as a part of those “escorts,” each of whose identity remains unspecifiable. What is more, his oath of the tribal affiliation is followed by a violent version of ecdysis in which the recognizable characters of Maquokeeta, and of the speaker

by extension, are to be further extinguished:

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

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
At last with all that's consummate and free
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent. (*CPSL* 47)

Here Maquokeeta is transfigured serially into the “pure serpent, Time itself, and moon / of his own fate” all of which, along with the apostrophic “O,” are concatenated in terms of a circular form like the “lizard” that “drops his legs and colors in the sun.” In this manner, Crane enacts the elimination of the physical attributes of Maquokeeta (“legs and colors”) that would consolidate his specifiable identity, be it ethnic or sexual. Though how Maquokeeta died remains obscure due to Crane’s compressed use of metaphors, Crane’s association of Maquokeeta’s death with “one white meteor” reminds us of his design for “possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor” (*CPSL* 556) to

assimilate it into the white inheritance. As Langdon Hammer writes, however, the color white in Crane's poetry is "a sign not of their innocence but of the process of purification—the acts of reduction and erasure." As suggested in the seagull's flight in the proem, Hammer argues, Crane's whiteness can be equated with "an ascetic action" in which "the extravagance of upward flight is achieved by stripping away, or throwing off, the gull's ties to earth" (*Janus* 192). In "The Dance," too, Maquokeeta's metamorphoses entails the death-dealing process of shedding not only his "red" skin but the "white" skin of the speaker, who is willing to take part of the anonymous community of the unidentifiable escorts.

Reminiscent of "the white falling flakes" in "Legend" (*CPSL* 3), the whiteness attributed to Maquokeeta ("one white meteor") does not bear the privileged racial strain (*CPSL* 47). Rather, Maquokeeta's whiteness can be equated with a blank slate seemingly purified of any traces of the racial conflict or reconciliation. Reading in "The Dance" the successful union between the speaker and Maquokeeta, Gardner writes that "[i]t is in this union, through the bridge of the female body of Pocahontas, that our America is born" (26). Rather than enacting the productive union, though, what Crane's nativist vision of "the tribal morn" brings to sharp relief is the speaker's masochistic intimacy with a number of the sexually promiscuous companies, *mourning* the annihilation of the nascent

origins of an alternative America on which a new nation's identity could be based (*CPSL* 47). In the following section, we will sidestep from the main text of "The Dance" to reconsider this failure to envision the alternative nation-building by examining how Crane's real life informs the queer mode of relationality between the speaker and Maquokeeta.

V. On a "NY Taxi Driver": Crane's Poetics of Cruising

Throughout the compositional process, Crane seeks to attain the purified beauty of *The Bridge* that could be created by "transfigur[ing]" "History and fact, location, etc. . . . into abstract form that would almost function independently of its subject matter" (*CPSL* 321). Needless to say, the very urge toward abstraction suggests how hard it was for Crane to insulate the poem from his autobiographical sources. As prefigured by the trope for purification in "The Dance" ("Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root") (*CPSL* 46), Maquokeeta is depersonalized into a blank figure equivalent to "all that's consummate and free" (*CPSL* 47). As we have observed, though, the figure of "the heart's hot root" is self-referential, since it puns on the eroticized sexuality of the poet, Hart. Correspondingly, the process of radical abstraction connotes an inextricable link between

the speaker's relation with Maquokeeta and a certain kind of relationality found in Crane's life. Valuable in examining the impact of Crane's life on his poetry is Hazel Smith's idea of "uneven and unstable parallelism between [the real life of the poet and the text] which allows for the fact that they might sometimes converge." Discussing the complex role of the autobiographical materials of Frank O'Hara, Smith observes as follows:

It is in the spirit of such parallelism that offer biographical information at a number of different points in the text, and it is often pertinent to see how the theoretical concept (splintered subjectivity, morphing sexuality) lines up with a biographical equivalent—O'Hara's emotional ambivalence, his unusual sexuality. O'Hara's life, then should be seen as a counter-melody to the poetry, or as yet another series of links in the hyper textual web. (53)

Smith's view of the poet's life "as a counter-melody to the poetry, or as yet another series of links in the hyper textual web" is helpful for us to reconsider the queer sexuality, embodied by Crane's speaker, in terms of the poet's biographical materials. As obvious is the fact that the poet is different from the speaker in the poem, Crane's indifference to the accurate representation of a Native American, along with his eroticization of Maquokeeta followed by the self-shattering of the speaker's personhood, is to be elaborated as Crane's "biographical equivalent." Whereas Maquokeeta's dance is

constituted by the external signs without the original referent, the name “Maquokeeta” is traceable to the text of Crane’s “real” life.

According to Crane’s letter to Frank, the name “Maquokeeta” comes from a “NY taxi-driver,” who claimed “Maquokeeta” as his Native American name (Weber 337). Concerning the meaning of this name, Crane wrote to Winters wondering if Winters could “let [him] know the name is ‘sufficient’ to the role it plays in the poem” (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 31). As Winters was not able to identify the specific origin of “Maquokeeta,” Crane responded to Winters thus: “Even if it has no existence as a name it’s quite practical for my purposes, as it certainly *sounds* Indian enough to apply to a redskin” (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 60). Tapper reads in this passage Crane’s “concern with cultural authenticity that one finds so frequently among ethnographers, translators, and literary acolytes of American Indians during this period” (117). Given Crane’s unwillingness to provide the name with a definite background, however, we should doubt how much Crane cared about the name’s “cultural authenticity.” Far from being doubtful, on the contrary, is that we can recognize the “uneven and unstable parallelism” (Smith 53) between Maquokeeta in the poem and the “real” Maquokeeta, the latter of whose influence permeates “The Dance,” informing the dynamics of the speaker’s queer desire.

Besides being a male escort of Pocahontas, Maquokeeta becomes the speaker’s

object of desire, whom Crane associates with the imagery of fire (“flint”; “hush of lava”; “Flame cataract of heaven”) (*CPSL* 47). Reminiscent of Maquokeeta in “The Dance,” the “NY taxi-driver” is described admirably in one of Crane’s letters to Frank as a “beautiful, rum-drinking, firewater wassailing friend of mine” (Weber 337). Furthermore, Maquokeeta in the poem and the taxi-driver share the role of an escort carrying the speaker / Crane toward the experience of an intimate exchange in the closed space of a vehicle (poem / taxi). Read in this connection, the following letter to Winters becomes more than significant, as Crane comments on a merit of the unspecifiable provenance of the name in relation to the “Indian’s” sexual promiscuity:

I think that the Indian chieftain’s name is all the better for not being particularly definite—especially as Pocahontas had a thousand Indian lovers for the one white marriage license to the English planter. I shall continue to depend on taxi drivers for all matters of folklore. And thank you much for the invaluable check-up, which at least reassures me that the name didn’t mean Rosenphallus or Hot Tomaly. . . . (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 74)

More than his indifference to the name’s authenticity, Crane shows here his determination that the name had better remain as an unidentifiable referent. And he opposes this near-indefinability (“not being particularly definite”) of the name’s origin that never claims a

single, proprietary subject with the monogamous “English planter,” namely, John Rolfe, who married and monopolized Pocahontas. Tellingly enough, the “NY taxi driver” (Weber 337) Crane talks about in the letter to Frank is pluralized in the letter to Winters into anonymous “taxi drivers,” which draws a parallel not only with the tribal community of Pocahontas’s escorts (“a thousand Indian lovers”) but also with the speaker’s self-multiplication into “more escorts” (*CPSL* 47) in “The Dance.” Since there is no evidence to specify Crane’s relationship with the cabdriver, whose very existence Tapper considers dubious (195), it is impossible for us to certify the man called Maquokeeta as Crane’s lover as some critics do.^{4 2} Yet, if we could presume that Maquokeeta in the poem can be considered as a metonymy for Crane’s object(s) of desire in his experiences of cruising, we can explain why the speaker at once eroticizes and subtracts the details of Maquoketta’s identity along with his own.

In the essay called “Sociability and Cruising,” Bersani considers gay cruising as “an apprenticeship in impersonal intimacy” and writes as follows:

Like the sociability described by Georg Simmel, the anonymity and the multiplicity of sexual partners involve a certain self-subtraction, a diminishing of our subjectivity—or, in other terms, a suspension of the psychological, social, and professional interests that constitute a person’s individuality. (*Rectum* 69)

The characteristics of what Bersani calls “impersonal intimacy” concur with the speaker’s relation with Maquokeeta, with whom he becomes identified only to be multiplied into the transient form of a community of “escorts.” And these escorts are envisioned in the process of eroticizing each other in their promiscuous non-specificity (“[“escorts”] sprint up the hill groins like a tide”) (*CPSL* 47). While conceding that “the taxi driver from whom Crane learned the name ‘Maquokeeta’ contributes to the poem’s pre-history,” Tapper notes that “[the taxi driver] is completely occluded from the text itself” (108). Given the uneasy parallel between the two versions of Maquokeeta, both of whom can be tied to the queer subjectivity of Crane’s speaker, however, Maquokeeta in “The Dance” can be read as a trace of the intimate strangers Crane must have met in his real or fantasized experiences of cruising. Read in this context, then, Crane’s decision not to assign the ethnological traceability to the origin of the very subject he chose to identify with can be understood as the purposeful strategy to initiate the speaker / Maquokeeta into a transpersonal community of the multiplying “escorts,” relaying the vision of Pocahontas in the personally unidentifiable yet sexually intimate relational field.

The above parallel leads us further to examine the role of Pocahontas both in and as “Powhatan’s Daughter.” As Davies observes, Pocahontas “is not only the bridge to the American soil, but also the mediating force that brings together the ecstatic union of the

Indian and the poet” (73). However, according to Michael Trask’s argument, Pocahontas functions less as “the mediating force” to facilitate “the ecstatic union” than as “the infector of the promiscuous desire.” Focusing on the “lurid description” of Pocahontas in the epigraph to “Powhatan’s Daughter” that comes from *A Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia* (1849) by William Strachey, Trask interprets Crane’s version of Pocahontas as “a ‘wheel[ing]’ vehicle which initiates the ‘perverse’ and equivocal desire” and “infects virtually every erotic moment in the poem” (125). The epigraph begins by illustrating the dance of “*wanton*” Pocahontas and her “*boyes*”:

—*Pocahuntus, a well-featured but wanton young girle...get the boyes forth with her into the market place, and make them wheele, falling on their hands turning their heels upwards, whom she would followe, and wheele so herself, naked as she was, all the fort over. (CPSL 38)*

This epigraph reads as the section’s overture, prefiguring Crane’s transgressive enactment of Maquoqueeta’s dance that disturbs heteronormative gender roles. Emphasizing Pocahontas’s anonymity coupled with her promiscuity, Trask argues that “the upsetting effect she has on her admirers” lies in the point that “the cartwheeling Pocahontas reduces the ‘boyes’ to prostrate bodies, their upturned heels priming them for a sexual encounter that is misplaced in several senses” (125). Trask’s argument is pertinent for our

examination of the impersonal mode of intimate relationship activated in “The Dance.” Crane’s idea of “impersonal” is exchangeable with “promiscuous,” whose effects can be found, for instance, in Crane’s decision to omit the author’s name (William Strachey) in the epigraph, thereby multiplying the possible source of this passage (Strachey? Williams? or Kay Boyle?).^{4 3} In the similar vein, as evident in their rapturous transportation “*into the market place*,” not only the individual distinction between Pocahontas’s escorts / lovers but their differences from Pocahontas, who “*would follow*” their wheeling movement, become less discernible in the mutual subtraction of their identities.

Dealing with the anti-monogamous relationship based on “impersonal intimacy,” Bersani writes that the “renunciation of the couple’s oval-like intimacy may be the precondition for a community in which relationality is a function of sameness rather than of hierarchical or antagonistic differences, a community in which we might be indifferent to difference, in which difference, instead of being the valued term, would be the nonthreatening supplement of sameness” (*Rectum* 33). Despite the contextual difference from Crane’s eroticization of “more [tribal] escorts” (*CPSL* 47), we can see the poetic instantiation of the relationality explored by Bersani, in Crane’s enactment of the anonymous community of the depersonalized “Indians,” of whom Crane’s speaker would

seek to partake.

Coda: *Post Festum*

According to Crane's outline, Pocahontas "survives the extinction of the Indian, who finally, after being assumed into the elements of nature (as he understood them) persists only as a kind of "eye" in the sky, or as a star that hangs between day and night" (*CPSL* 556). Though Crane's assertion about Pocahontas' survival cannot be confirmed in the finished text, the following stanzas affirm that the dance goes on in a different guise, yet still in the same promiscuous intensity:

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid—

Though other calendars now stack the sky,

Thy freedom is her largess, Prince, and hid

On paths thou knewest best to claim her by.

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free

Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,

She is the torrent and the singing tree;

And she is virgin to the last of men ...

West, west and south! Winds over Cumberland

And winds across the llano grass resume

Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned

O Stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom! (*CPSL* 48)

Having transformed Maquoqueeta into an “‘eye’ in the sky” that would “gaze” beyond the whites’ violence (“bivouacs of thy angered slain”), Crane still regards Maquoqueeta as “Prince,” who escorts him to an ever-renewing vision of Pocahontas (“immortal in the maize”) and her lovers (*CPSL* 48). Corresponding with Crane’s association of Maquoqueeta with the “freedom that is her largesse,” the “sun strikes *free*” (emphasis added) and melts the “dream of snow” of Pocahontas, whose “hair” blends into “winds” among “grass,” while her “breasts” are amorously “fanned” by “slope and vineyard—into bloom.” With an awareness of the immense interplay between natural elements, Crane reimagines the “folklore” of Pocahontas and “a thousand Indian lovers” as the thawing process of the American continent in an ever-expanding promiscuity (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 74). In this process, each dancer / natural element can relate with others without being blocked by any monopolizing interest. As suggested by Crane’s depersonalization of Pocahontas, whose name vanishes in these stanzas, Pocahontas and

her escorts are imagined both as lost and present everywhere in the imagined world of erotic interplay in which relations can multiply as co-responding networks of the inaccurately replicated figures.

As the concluding stanza indicates, however, what is eliminated, due to this visionary achievement of the non-possessive relationality, is the opportunity for the poet to make the tribal identity of an alternative America based on a biology-free genealogy:

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,

In cobalt desert closures made our vows ...

Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,

The serpent with the eagle in the boughs. (*CPSL* 48)

Despite the speaker's bravado of repeating the phrase "we danced," his self-applause for their brave performance contradicts Crane's stated intention. Far from describing the "conflict between two races" (*CPSL* 556), the lyric's "closures" acknowledge that the dance was enacted within a hermetically closed space of Crane's narcissistic imagination, which isolates the speaker from the society governed by the normative family economy of Euro-American colonizers ("we danced beyond their farms"). The same holds true to the "strong prayer" of a totemic emblem which is supposed to symbolize the tribal identity to bind the speaker with Maquokeeta with the feminized body of the nation's fertility:

“The serpent with the eagle in the boughs” that is “folded in thine arms.” Gesturing toward the motif of narcissism, again, the manifold image of self-enclosure leads us to detect the speaker’s self-centered desire to immerse himself in his fantasy of dancing with the brave chieftain.

At the same time, though, what should be equally emphasized about those concluding stanzas is that the emblematic image, conveyed by the “prayer” (*CPSL* 48), can be taken as a fabricated souvenir of the impersonally intimate relation between the speaker and Maquokeeta(s). Since the emblem of the serpent and the eagle has been shared over a long period of histories by people in different cultural communities,⁴⁴ a range of possible meanings and significance offered by this image can be too wide and too rich to be pinned down. Owing to its near-empty quality of this signifier that causes us to imagine in it the inundation of its possible identities, what this emblem stands for can vary in the eye of each beholder. Reminiscent of Crane’s affinity with whiteness, the annihilation of a specific tribal identity in this emblematic image can be considered as a liberating sort of blankness which relativizes in a critical way the exploitative whiteness of the Euro-American colonizers.

Whereas “The Dance” is suffused with the self-conscious tropes for narcissism that evoke the poet’s inability to represent the Indian “accurately,” Crane’s speaker evades

at least the mirror-like narcissism in which a subject seeks to master the other as “the English Planter” had monopolized Pocahontas by the “one white marriage license” (*Hart Crane and Ivor Winters* 74). In this respect, “The Dance” suggests a possible way out of the subject’s narcissistic appropriation of the otherness of the other. As we have seen so far, though, the toll of achieving this relational mode is heavy, because the imagined community of “the Indians” assembles and disappears in “the pure mythical and smoky soil” (*CPSL* 556) without adding up to a cultural or ethnic specificity solid enough to sustain the notion of an alternative “race” based on a non-biological inheritance. Although the declaration of “vows” “made” between the speaker and Maquoqueeta reminds us of a marital vow, Crane’s radical purification of their relationship results in pluralizing (if not shattering) the “vow” into “vows,” through which the polyamorous relations could be recurrently tied with the other figures of escorts, both within the “closures” of this lyric and across the other sections of *The Bridge*. By rendering their union gratuitous, yet unproductive and asocial, “The Dance” reveals in various ways the impossibility of preserving the symbolic national identity that not only the contemporary nativist writers but also the society sought to claim. In accord with Pocahontas’s wheeling movement in the epigraph, the concluding repetition of “we danced” does not reconfirm but reinitiate the nascent moment of founding an alternative national identity.

Chapter 6: “Close, Cool, High”: “Southern Cross” and Mobilizing a Distant Closeness

Constituting the fifth section of *The Bridge*, “Three Songs,” a group of three lyrics—“Southern Cross,” “National Winter Garden,” and “Virginia”—remains the less examined part in the whole sequence of *The Bridge*. This will not indicate that each song has not been given due critical attention. Yvor Winters, who is one of the earliest and fiercest detractors of *The Bridge*, praises “Southern Cross” as “a poem which very nearly, though not quite, equals the two most perfect poems, to my mind, that Mr. Crane has written” (29). Gordon A. Tapper chooses “National Winter Garden” as one of the main subjects of his recent revisionary investigation of Crane’s poetics to analyze the poet’s “most direct confrontation with the eroticized body” (71). As regards with “Virginia,” which is the shortest lyric in *The Bridge*, has not lacked its admirers. Edward Brunner for instance remarks that although “Virginia” seems to be a merely “frivolous lyric,” it is actually “one of [Crane’s] most successful poems (147).

Despite those appreciative evaluations given to each lyric, “Three Songs” has often been considered as the representative section of both thematic and structural deficiencies of *The Bridge*. Not to mention Crane’s “disquieting, uncritical embrace of U.S. racial

myths” including the figurative conflation of the continent and the mythical body of Pocahontas, “Three Songs” is built on the sorry yet typically early twentieth-century sexist configurations (Reed, *After* 139). Above all else, “Three Songs” has been notorious for increasing “the logical disintegration of *The Bridge*” (Weber 367).^{4 5} If we took for granted Crane’s grand design of *The Bridge* as “a new cultural synthesis of values in terms of our America,” we would conclude that “Three Songs” or any other sections, regardless of the years of their composition, fail to contribute a teleological progression toward the dialectical “synthesis” (*CPSL* 321; 424).^{4 6}

According to Thomas Yingling, however, *The Bridge* should be read as “the unmarried epic” that embodies the inability for Crane to attain such “synthesis” of variegated contraries into one, harmonious field of wholeness.^{4 7} Examining the relationship between Crane’s sexual identity and the queer textuality of *The Bridge*, Yingling points out a variety of “dialectical tensions” to argue that Crane’s so-called “failure to achieve a successful poetic synthesis” of America is to be reconsidered as “the product of the ideological impossibility” (200). According to Yingling, the “text’s myriad incompletenesses” reflect not the poet’s “artistic failure” but the “structural impossibility” (199) for Crane as a displaced homosexual writer to play a role of the epic poet who seeks to represent “a single, authoritative, ‘tribal’ understanding” of the nation-state (195).

Since various deficiencies of *The Bridge* are constructed by the ideological conflict between the poet's bardic performance and his private homosexual desire, so argues Yingling, it is inevitable that any attempt to have a successful union is left "variously disallowed" in *The Bridge* (215).

Yingling's reading of *The Bridge* as a record of the poet's struggle with the homophobic oppression in the 1920s is the basis upon which our reading of "Southern Cross," the first lyric in "Three Songs," is founded. Yet, my purpose in this chapter does not lie in merely reconfirming Yingling's approach that associates Crane's use of negative tropes with gay textuality. As though foreshadowing the following two lyrics, indeed, "Southern Cross" is built around a series of negative imagery of heterosexual love affair, which is evoked by Crane's catachrestic use of words. Given Crane's employment of tropes for sterility, alienation, and failure of language prevalent in the lyric, indeed, "Southern Cross" seems to contradict Crane's program to present *The Bridge* as a long poem of affirmation which runs counter to the "pessimism" and "perfection of death" accomplished (so Crane insists) by T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (CPSL 308). Instead of understanding the "ideological impossibility" (Yingling 200) as a mere disabling element, I will analyze "Southern Cross" to reconfigure the seemingly wasted, sterile field of the lyric as the resourceful one for another mode of connection alternative to a heterosexual

reproduction. In Yingling's view, "Southern Cross" represents a "complaint of a barren man" who expresses the "enforced and disempowering liminality" (217). Bearing Yingling's interpretation in mind, I would like to highlight the rhetorical and thematic sterility of "Southern Cross" as the generative element that empowers Crane to explore various forms of bridging, networking and transmission.

I. "No Wraith, but Utterly": Revising a Distance

Before reading "Southern Cross," it will be helpful to recapture what kind of "America" Crane sought to embody in *The Bridge*. In a 1927 letter to Otto Kahn in which he talks about the general outline of *The Bridge*, Crane takes the figure of Pocahontas as a trans-historical center of his "Myth of America" to organize its thematic structure (*CPSL* 554). Accordingly, in the second and the longest section called "Powhatan's Daughter," which is conceived as a "basic center and antecedent of all motion" of *The Bridge* (*CPSL* 479), Crane's faith in his "Myth of America" appears to be grounded upon the vision of Pocahontas as the "physical body of the continent, or the soil" (*CPSL* 554). Even in "Cape Hatteras," which concludes the first half of *The Bridge*, as we have seen in the third chapter, Crane sticks to this nativist figure of Pocahontas, whose "depth of red, eternal

flesh” is imagined continuous with “our native clay” (*CPSL* 54). If peoples shared such mythical awareness as registered in those sections, so Crane seems to insist, they can still have an intimate communal experience with each other by partaking of the symbolic vision of Pocahontas as “the common basis of our meeting” (the “our” means the poem’s speaker and his object(s) of desire) (*CPSL* 556), as the shared sense of belonging, and as the crossing point of affective exchanges.

“Southern Cross,” which succeeds “Cape Hatteras” to start the second half of *The Bridge*, introduces the speaker who is situated alone in the mid-ocean, supposedly (from the reader’s point of view) bringing back to modern America the mythical vision of Pocahontas. In Crane’s outline of “Powhatan’s Daughter,” Pocahontas “survives the extinction of the Indian,” who is one of her promiscuous lovers and who “persists only as a kind of ‘eye’ in the sky, or as a star that hangs between day and night” (*CPSL* 556). Corresponding with “The Dance,” in which Pocahontas “grieves” over her lover’s sacrificial death (*CPSL* 46-47), Crane introduces the voyager-speaker of “Southern Cross” looking up at the evening sky in the southern celestial hemisphere to trace a figure of the lost lover while the emerging stars of the Southern Cross perform the act of making love to the night:

I wanted you, nameless Woman of the South,

No wraith, but utterly—as still more alone

The Southern Cross takes night

And lifts her girdles from her, one by one—

High, cool,

wide from the slowly smoldering fire

Of lower heavens,—

vaporous scars!

Eve! Magdalene!

or Mary, you? (*CPSL* 61)

If we recall that Pocahontas is derived from the colonial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, Crane's association of the "nameless Woman" with "the South" hints at her connection with Pocahontas. What is registered here, however, is an irreconcilable distance that separates the speaker from his object of desire reflected in the Southern Cross, which is located "[h]igh, cool, / wide from the slowly smoldering fire / Of lower heavens." Pointing toward Crane's use of spatiotemporal perspective that distinguishes the higher, ideal realm of "you" from the "lower" realm the speaker belongs to, John T. Irwin claims "Three Songs" as the "low point in the quester's pursuit of a personified feminine ideal

symbolizing an inexhaustible, because ultimately inviolable, national origin” (124; emphasis added). More often than in the other sections, indeed, critics have read in “Three Songs” Crane’s faltering confidence in the vision of Pocahontas as “the natural body of America—fertility” (*CPSL* 440).^{4 8} With the speaker’s evocation of her “vaporous scars” along with the melancholic tone in his voice, to be certain, the lyric appears to reinforce Crane’s bitter recognition that his poetic voyage of seeking after the “[h]igh,” transcendental ideal ends up in a disastrous shipwreck in the “lower heavens.”

We could argue, as many critics have routinely done, that the irreconcilable distance drawn between the speaker and the “nameless Woman” is deployed by Crane so as to maintain a dialectical exchange between the higher realm of the poet’s ideal and the lower, corrupted actuality of twentieth-century America.^{4 9} In his letters, indeed, Crane often uses the typically modernistic binaries to suggest that *The Bridge* is built upon such high / low, late / new dialectics. However, we have to be cautious of relying too much on this kind of dialectic scheme, which, as I suggested in Interlude, is disturbed not only in the 1929 additions but also in the lyrics Crane wrote around 1926, including “Southern Cross.” To examine how Crane negotiates the irreconcilable distance from the speaker’s object of desire, in what follows, we will dwell on the revision he made in the stanza quoted above.

In the earlier version of “Southern Cross,” which was published in *The Calendar*

in 1927, Crane expressed the sense of distance from the “nameless Woman” by using the adjective “close” in addition to “high,” (“Close, cool, / high from the smoking lice / Of slower heavens, / vaporous scars!”) (*The Bridge Uncollected* 53). Insignificant as this alteration seems to be, Crane’s later replacement of “close” with “high,” the adjective which is diametrically opposite to the former, should be taken seriously. If, as the earlier version implies, the unbridgeable distance from the “wraith”-like vision of the depersonalized woman can be conceived as being interchangeable with the sense of “utter” closeness (*CPSL* 61), a series of negative tropes for disconnection and sterility dominating “Southern Cross” cannot be read as an indicator of the fluctuation of the poet’s faith in his epic ambition to translate into the modern world the vision of Pocahontas as the communal heritage of “the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554). As we shall see in the next section, the sense of distance mobilized in “Southern Cross” is not predicated on the ordinary dialectic between the high, idealized past and the low, corrupted present. As long as the untouchability of the “nameless Woman” encloses a peculiar kind of intimacy, what is interrupted in this lyric is not so much the poet’s attempt to communicate the vision of an alternative national inheritance as the very perspectival distinctions upon which some critics base their dialectical readings of *The Bridge*.

II. “Homeless Eve, Unwedded”: Two Solitudes Consolidated

Without having left any authorial intention or comment about the revision, Crane replaced the adjective “close” in the earlier version with “high” in the finished text. Therefore, we cannot understand the reason of Crane’s alteration. Yet, the sense of closeness Crane must have felt toward the object of desire in the compositional process can be traceable throughout the resultant lyric. As suggested by such an oxymoronic trope as “vaporous scars,” Crane’s description of the “nameless Woman of the South” indicates that the speaker is aware at once of the “wraith”-like elusiveness of her spectral figure and the “utterly” embodied presence of her body. Reading the following passage, for instance, we find Crane enacting the sense of distant closeness through which the speaker and the “nameless Woman” share a strange kinship:

Whatever call—falls vainly on the wave.

O simian Venus, homeless Eve,

Unwedded, stumbling gardenless to grieve

Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever;

Finally to answer all within one grave! (*CPSL* 61)

As every “call” fails to be answered, frustration becomes the dominant timbre in the

speaker's voice, reinforcing the sense of the unbridgeable abyss which separates him "wide" from the "nameless Woman." On the one hand, indeed, a series of the biblical names ("Eve! Magdalen! / or Mary, you?") with which he tries to recapture the "nameless Woman" and bring her over to the modern world "falls vainly on the wave." As Margaret Dickie writes, "[n]ames, both as links and as points of differentiation, had concerned Crane from the beginning of his work on *The Bridge* . . . To name is to possess whole . . . but he was to discover the fragility of such aspirations" (67). To be certain, the act of naming in "Southern Cross" becomes an issue of crucial importance. As connoted in a distant rhyme between "wave" and "grave," each "call" that "falls vainly on the wave" is figured as the drowned body of a failed voyager buried "within one grave" of the dark sea water. And despite the speaker's attempt to capture the object of desire and attain the close connectedness with it, the figure of the desired other only marks the text as a "wraith," or a spectral (M)other ("homeless Eve"). On the other hand, however, it is through this self-defeating act of continual misappellation that Crane tries to establish a connecting link between the speaker and "nameless Woman of the South."

Just as the speaker is bereft of his access to the lost ideal that does still fascinate him, so the "nameless Woman" is deprived of her stable belonging. While Crane's use of such a misogynist epithet as "simian Venus" indicates that she is, like his configuration

of Pocahontas as “*a well-featured but wanton yong girle*” driven by promiscuous desire (CPSL 38),^{5 0} she is envisioned also as an embodiment of profound alienation (“homeless Eve, unwedded”) of whose attribute the speaker partakes in his “vain” attempt to set up a verbal bridge to his object of desire. And the “stumbling” figure of “homeless Eve” incites in him the keen sense of empathy that seems to work to dissolve the distance from “nameless Woman,” whose dispossessed status is echoed by the metonymic image of the poet-speaker (“Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever”). Despite the irreconcilable division that separates the speaker “[h]igh” and “wide” from the “nameless Woman,” they are wedded closely by their shared status of an uprooted exile.

Having said that, however, the speaker’s seemingly heterosexual desire does not yield any promise of a successful union which would give birth, for instance, to a dialectical sublation of the masculine and feminine principles. As implied by Crane’s replacement of “close” with “high,” the speaker’s desire for the “nameless Woman” is predicated on his recognition of the impossibility for him to establish a sustainable relationship. Put it differently, the lyric maintains this irreconcilable distance in order to activate what can be called non-relational relationality that at once binds the speaker to the “nameless Woman,” and preserves her opaque alterity.

If the speaker’s failure to set up a verbal link with the “nameless Woman” works

paradoxically in revealing the strangely “[c]lose” kinship between the two, we may be invited to presume that the significance of Crane’s project for *The Bridge* does not lie in the poet’s self-avowed bridge building to restore the lost, harmonious connectedness with Pocahontas, “the physical body of the continent, or the soil” (*CPSL* 554). Rather, it can be the process of spacing enacted by a series of negative imagery (evocative of abortion, disconnection, distance, shipwreck, futility, repetition, etc.) that we have to foreground in reexamining Crane’s exploration of an alternative way of bridging.

Dwelling on the ideological pressure that Crane suffers in his contemporary homophobic society, Yingling argues that Crane as a self-proclaimed bard of America is situated at “an inadmissible center from which to write about American life” (27). Indeed, Yingling’s discussion is highly valuable in reminding us of Crane’s self-understanding that he is a poet marginalized both by his profession in a capitalist economy and by his homosexuality in 1920s America. Simultaneously, however, it can be the case that Crane found in the “inadmissible center” where the epic project to connect his authorial identity with the center of national origins was ideologically doomed to fail, an opportunity for activating an alternative sort of networking through which the common heritage of his “America” can be transmitted in an oblique and multi-directional manner.

III. “I Bring You Back Cathay”: Misnaming, Repetition, and Transmission

Given Crane’s deployment of the thickly interwoven tropes of binary opposites, we might be tempted to join Irwin and other critics in reading *The Bridge* in a dialectical framework. For example, Irwin reads “Southern Cross” to claim that “Crane’s purpose in having the quester sight [the Southern Cross] is to contrast his situation in the twentieth century with Columbus’s in the fifteenth” (194). Indeed, when we look at the following stanzas from “Ave Maria,” the first section of *The Bridge*, we may interpret the melancholic speech of the voyager in “Southern Cross” as an antithetical voice to the dramatic monologue of Columbus in “Ave Maria”:

I thought of Genoa; and this truth, now proved,
That made me exile in her streets, stood me
More absolute than ever—biding the moon
Till dawn should clear that dim frontier, first seen
—The Chan’s great continent. . . . Then faith, not fear
Nigh surged me witless. . . . Hearing the surf near—
I, wonder-breathing, kept the watch,—saw
The first palm chevron the first lighted hill.

And lowered. And they came out to us crying,

“The Great White Birds!” (O Madre Maria, still

One ship of these thou grantest safe returning;

Assure us through thy mantle’s ageless blue!) . . . (*CPSL* 35-36)

Commenting on “Ave Maria,” from which *The Bridge’s* quest motif unfolds, Sherman Paul sees this section as “a historical starting point.” Paul goes on to note “not only that here, with Crane’s discovery, American history begins but that here is the beginning of ‘history’ in America” (190). It is true that Crane seems to emphasize in Columbus’s monologue the primal originality of his voyage to the New World (“that dim frontier, *first* seen”; “I, wonder-breathing, kept the watch,—saw / The *first* palm chevron the *first* lighted hill”) (emphasis added). Unlike “Southern Cross,” in which the sense of irrevocable loss prevails (“I wanted you”; “Whatever calls—falls vainly on the wave”) (*CPSL* 61), “Ave Maria” surely captures the elation of Columbus, who has just discovered the “great continent” of the New World. And Columbus’s invocation of Virgin Mary figured in her “mantle’s ageless blue” seems to betray no uncertainty about her eternal presence as the voyager’s tutelary divinity.

Drawing a certain contrast with “Ave Maria,” indeed, the following passage from

“Southern Cross” invites us to read the lyric as a degraded version of Columbus’s voyage of discovery:

And this long wake of phosphor,

iridescent

Furrow of all our travel—trailed derision!

Eyes crumble at its kiss. Its long-drawn spell

Incites a yell. Slid on that backward vision

The mind is churned to spittle, whispering hell. (*CPSL* 61)

While Crane’s Columbus envisions on the sea’s surface Mary’s “mantle’s ageless blue” (*CPSL* 36), the speaker of “Southern Cross” finds the dark sea water turning into a phantasmagoric screen upon which a flickering image of his “derision” toward “all our travel” is reflected. The “iridescent” light of “phosphor” may fascinate him with its delicately changing gamut of colors, yet it does not produce any impassioned view of the sea Columbus envisages as the “steep savannahs, burning blue” (*CPSL* 37). Correspondingly, the speaker’s soliloquy in “Southern Cross” is devoid of the enthusiasm that Columbus evinces in proving the authenticity of his discovery of the New World.

Unlike Columbus, who seems to sustain his “faith” in the discovery of the New World (*CPSL* 35), the speaker of “Southern Cross” is engaged in a self-knowingly futile

attempt to provide a name with the “nameless Woman” to an extent that his vain struggle brings out the aphasiac moment. The words that are uttered by the speaker are liquefied into such extra-linguistic utterances as “yell,” “spittle,” and “whisper,” all of which fail to yield any solid meaning but the monosyllabic “hell” (*CPSL* 61). Columbus’s invocation of “Elohim,” which “relates / From Moon to Saturn in one sapphire wheel” suggests that the voyager keeps intact his awareness of the dynamic harmony of the universe (*CPSL* 37). Surrounded by the “phosphor[us]” images, in contrast, the speaker of “Southern Cross” cannot maintain his visionary perspective: “Eyes crumble at its kiss.” Its illusory, “iridescent” play of lights lures him to “vainly” reach out to the “nameless Woman,” but each attempt leaves his words drifting in the “waves” / “graves.” What drives “Southern Cross,” in a word, is the poet’s sterile dissemination of “unwedded” words delivered in the rhetoric of heterosexual love, which does not capture but “[s]lid[e]” on the surface of the image of his desired object (*CPSL* 61).

Seen in this context, the interwoven tropes for disenchantment, alienation, and sterility in “Southern Cross” appear to work in countervailing Columbus’s ardent monologue in “Ave Maria.” As it turns out, however, those contrasts do not constitute the dialectic exchange between the original, authentic voyage of the discovery and its degraded version. Nor those tensions can be synthesized into a final covenant that will

bind the speaker to the all-unifying vision of America. Rather, by focusing on the referent of Crane's use of "we" identity whose "travel trailed derision," we come to notice that Crane includes not only the speaker of "Southern Cross" but also Columbus in "Ave Maria" in a spectral community of failed voyagers. Far from serving as an antithetical voice to "Ave Maria," which turns out to be a version of the primal moment of misnaming the New World vision, "Southern Cross" *repeats* in a different guise Columbus's voyage, whose repetition constitutes, so implies the lyric, the history of Crane's "America."

Rereading "Ave Maria" as a dramatization of Columbus's misidentification of the New World, we remember that the poet introduces Columbus not as a triumphant national hero who is satisfied with his discovery. In the opening stanza of "Ave Maria," as we have read in Interlude, we find Crane's Columbus captured in the moment of misrecognizing that the "word" he is bringing back to Spain is that of "Cathay":

Be with me, Luis de San Angel, now—

Witness before the tides can wrest away

The word I bring, O you who reined my suit

Into the Queen's great heart that doubtful day;

For I have seen now what no perjured breath

Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay;—

To you, too, Juan Perez whose counsel fear

And greed adjourned,—I bring you back Cathay! (*CPSL* 35)

As the marginal gloss indicates (“*Columbus, / alone, gazing / toward Spain, / invokes the / presence of / two faithful / partisans of / his quest . . .*”), Columbus is given the role of an “exile” from the land of Spain. Crane’s emphasis on the uprooted status of Columbus is reinforced by Columbus’s remembrance that his unorthodox ideas made him an “exile” once in the streets of Genoa: “I thought of Genoa; and this truth, now proved, / That made me exile in her streets.” Seen in this light, the roaring storm which nearly sinks his ship can be taken also as the tempest of the inner-struggle of Columbus, a lone visionary who feels a desperate need to bear his “word” across to the others. As observed in Interlude, the “bombastic, vaunting, egotistic” tone of Columbus’ monologue about the discovery (Brunner 179) is inextricably linked with his intense desire to have his “word” received, especially, by his two sympathetic advocates.

Another point we have already seen in Interlude is that Columbus’s “word,” besides meaning the news of the discovery, can be read as the meta-poetic “word” of *The Bridge* that the poet urges his readers to “[w]itness.”⁵ ¹ The opening passage of “Ave Maria” implies in this context that what Crane prioritizes throughout *The Bridge* is not the authenticity of “[t]he word” of his “America” but a retroactive recognition of the

connection with others that is initiated in the moment of disconnection, alienation, and misidentification. Therefore, that Crane begins his long poem about “America” both with Columbus’s misidentification of North America and with his deranged invocation of “*the / presence*” of his “*two faithful / partisans*” to receive his false “word” implies Crane’s conviction as follows: whether one’s vision can be proved by an authoritative testimony does not count as long as it is born across to others to be witnessed. (*CPSL* 35). Put it differently, Crane is less interested in naming and possessing the object of desire than in translating it into an inaccessible, phantasmal vision, thereby making it operative as a medium to relate with the other desiring subjects both in and beyond *The Bridge*.

This can also be said of “Southern Cross,” in which the speaker knowingly engages himself with the futile act of naming the “nameless” object. In addressing the sense of “derision,” as noted above, the speaker experiences through the illusory flicker of “iridescent / Furrow of all our travel” the deprivation of a spatiotemporal perspective: “Eyes crumble at its kiss. Its long-drawn spell / Incites a yell.” Given the eroticizing aspect of this vision that touches or “kiss[es]” the speaker’s eyes, though, we find that it is this ecstatic deprivation of the ordinary perspective that binds the speaker to the other voyagers in *The Bridge* including Columbus. Uprooted from the sense of stable belonging, in other words, the speaker is tied closely with the others, whom Crane provides with a

spectral network woven by their shared experience of the impossibility to name and grasp the “nameless,” therefore, unknown, new object. Although the bridge between the speaker and his vision of Pocahontas as the “common basis of our meeting” is disintegrated (*CPSL* 556), “Southern Cross” proposes this very experience of disconnection as “our” communal heritage.

Seen in this context, Crane’s difficult metaphor for the speaker’s “mind” that is “[s]lid on that backward vision” gradually comes to make sense. On the one hand, what Crane registers by this phrase can be nothing but an ordinary sense of nostalgia. Since the root meaning of nostalgia contains *algos* [pain] of imagining *nostos* [homecoming], it is no wonder that the “backward vision” is evoked in tandem with the figure of a “[s]lid[ing]” movement evocative of the deracinated state of the speaker’s subjectivity. On the other hand, however, his “backward vision” looking back toward “this long wake of phosphor” does not involve a dialectic, binary opposites such as the idealized, authentic past and the debased present. As implied by the fact that the speaker’s voyage in “Southern Cross” is undertaken not to counteract or parody but repeat in a variegated avatar the “original,” failed act of naming the desired other in *The Bridge*, what this “backward vision” entails is a different kind of nostalgia that functions not to totalize or valorize but to dissolve the hierarchical distinction between the past voyage and present one. The nostalgic gaze of

the speaker thus “[s]lid[es]” on the “iridescent / Furrow of all our travel,” multiplying the primal moments of misidentification and disconnection. In this manner, the exilic language in “Southern Cross” demystifies the very concept of the origins of the New World, which are reflected on “this long wake of phosphor” as the always and already “[u]nwedded” phantasms like the “nameless Woman of the South” (*CPSL* 61). If this movement can still be called as dialectic, it is the dialectic without synthesis which takes the form of a constant oscillation between transient moments of envisioning an alternative homeland.

IV. “The Cross Climbed by Aslant”: An Oblique Strategy of Bearing a Cross

As Paul Giles aptly observes, Crane’s self-defeating act of naming the “nameless” vision seems to be a “kind of masochism and self-aggrandizement through suffering” that “might be seen by some readers as less heroic than pitifully adolescent” (208). And yet, I would like to suggest that Crane’s seemingly “adolescent” use of language in “Southern Cross” can be actually considered artful, or even crafty. Because it foregrounds the irreconcilable distance from the desired object to mobilize an imaginary network that serves to bind, in a co-responding relation, all the failed questers dispersed in different

places and times. With Crane's ventriloquism of Columbus, which emphasizes an aspect of the voyager as a self-defeating visionary, the seeming contrast between "Ave Maria" and "Southern Cross" comes to be dissolved into the compressed moment of misidentification in which Columbus and the speaker of "Southern Cross" correspond with the other's act of misnaming the desired object (*CPSL* 35). This process also involves the other voyagers including the reader of *The Bridge* who is challenged to discover the unauthorized network of co-responding figures throughout the lyrics and thereby performatively follows Columbus' misrecognition of the one thing as the other.

In the rest of "Southern Cross," the negative tropes for futility, disconnection, and displacement are eroticized as though a disastrous shipwreck itself were the desired end of the voyage:

I wanted you . . . The embers of the Cross

Climbed by aslant and huddling aromatically.

It is blood to remember; it is fire

To stammer back . . . It is

God—your namelessness. And the wash— (*CPSL* 61)

Reading "Southern Cross" as "the complaint of a barren man, of a homosexual," Yingling notices in the lyric "the permanent dislocation, the dissemination that defines [Crane's]

social existence” (216). Recalling Yingling’s reading, indeed, a series of metaphors registered here is evocative of exhaustion of desire, (“embers”), failure of language (“fire / To stammer back”), and futility of envisioning a promise of redemption (“And the wash —”). At the same time, however, as reminiscent of the Passion of Christ, the rhythm of the speaker’s monologue is accelerated to an extent that his melancholic soliloquy becomes a volley of anaphoric outcries. (“It is blood to remember; it is fire / To stammer back . . . It is / God—your namelessness. And the wash—”). In accord with his use of anaphora that evokes the biblical atmosphere, Crane’s invocation of the body of the “nameless Woman” in terms of “the Cross” on which Christ died intimates his desire for “huddling” those metaphors and transforming them into something communally redemptive as Christ’s “blood to remember.”

Having said that, however, we have to question whether Crane’s use of the metaphor of the Passion might not undermine the implicit potential of “Southern Cross.” If, as we have presumed so far, what the lyric explores is a type of relationality which is activated by the preservation of the unbridgeable distance from the desired object, Crane’s use of the dominant metaphor of Christ’s “blood” flowing on “the Cross” might fail an opportunity for initiating the alternative bridging. With the paradoxical reversal of death and life, indeed, the figure of “the Cross” appears to be crystalized into a privileged role

of the totalizing trope for Crane's ideal of *The Bridge* as a collectively binding medium, —“the Myth of America” (*CPSL* 554).

Before the image of the Crucifixion is established as the binding metaphor of the poem, though, it dissolves along with other calls into the “wash—” (with the dash following to imply the ever-incomplete nature of this dislocating process). While “the Cross” could work as an apt metaphor for the speaker's attempt to be related to the desired object, it is deprived of its supposed symbolical privilege, since its phallic verticality is undone by being “[c]limbed by aslant” by Crane's catachrestic use of metaphors (*CPSL* 61). As the adverb “aslant” implies the ever deviating movement of metaphor itself, even the name “God” along with the other attributes of Christ remains tangential to the speaker's object of desire. Generally speaking, the “namelessness” of “God” is used in terms of negative theology to pin down the object's transcendental essence. But Crane uses its “namelessness” rather to liquefy the supposed singularity of “the Cross” into a process of the exuberant multiplication of “overdetermined” metaphors. Here I use the psychoanalytic term “overdetermined” in the way Ron Silliman appropriates it to discuss the linguistic devices employed by Jack Spicer.^{5 2} In Silliman's definition, overdetermination means to be “the failure (or refusal) of an idea or image to add up (or reduce down) to any single entity.” Silliman employs this term to highlight Spicer's

method to let in his poems what the poet calls the “unknown,” thereby keeping his work open to “some effacing otherness” (149). Drawing a parallel with Silliman’s view of Spicer’s use of language, Crane’s use of metaphors for the Southern Cross is surely overdetermined, as he deploys them not so much to erase the distance from the desired object as to unveil the intervening gulf between the speaker and his object of desire. Connoting at once the southern constellation, Pocahontas, the Passion, and the poet’s idea of metaphor itself, Crane’s “Cross” can never serve as “the common basis of our meeting” (*CPSL* 556) as the Christ’s “blood” is supposed to do. Throughout the lyric, the speaker’s “[w]hatever call” is uttered only to foreground the mediated distance that is inherent in the materiality of language. Mirroring the uprooted state of the “nameless Woman,” who is “stumbling” and “gardenless,” the speaker’s calls to cross the distance are (over)determined to remain “[u]nwedded” to his object of desire (*CPSL* 61).

As cited above, Yingling argues that the notorious incoherency of *The Bridge* is to be read as the ideological product in the homophobic society where the poet’s homosexual desire for unity and communion was forced to remain unsatisfied. Indeed, “Southern Cross” repeats the futile process in which chains of metaphors are set up as verbal bridges only to be “[s]lid” into the all-liquefying “wash” (*CPSL* 61). As we have observed, however, what “Southern Cross” discloses is not so much the impossibility for the speaker

to unite with his object of desire as the inherent gap at the heart of the metaphorical bridging. In the following section, I will demonstrate that the lyric holds a potential to convert the recognition of this unbridgeable distance and the attendant inundation of “unwedded” metaphors for the “nameless Woman” into an enabling element to mobilize an ecstatic form of community.

V. “Yes, Eve—Wraith of My Unloved Seed”: Crane’s Wasteful Productivity

In the concluding passages of “Southern Cross,” we find an opportunity for the speaker’s imagination to re-member the failed voyagers / metaphors in a fraternal group of the spectral children of the “nameless Woman”:

All night the water combed you with black

Insolence. You crept out simmering, accomplished.

Water rattled that stinging coil, your

Rehearsed hair—docile, alas, from many arms.

Yes, Eve—wraith of my unloved seed!

The Cross, a phantom, buckled—dropped below the dawn.

Light drowned the lithic trillions of your spawn. (61-62)

By introducing the image of Medusa as another metaphor for the “nameless Woman,” the lyric invites us again to read this female figure as a demonized version of Pocahontas, whose serpentine “body” is invoked in “The River” with “Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark” (*CPSL* 43). Dwelling on this metaphor, for instance, R. W. B. Lewis writes that the sterility of “homeless Eve” is the very attribute of “fallen female humanity,” because, as Lewis goes on to argue, the image of Medusa suggests that “[a]s against the pure Pocahontas, the inhabitant of nature, Eve is artificial (‘rehearsed’), lust-driven (‘simmering’), and promiscuous (she is ‘docile, alas, from many arms’)” (342). Bearing in mind the covert, spectral kinship between the “nameless Woman” and the speaker, however, we can recognize that Crane’s figuration of the woman as Medusa activates another ecstatic moment or what Gerald L. Bruns terms the experience of “fascination.” Dwelling on Maurice Blanchot’s idea of “the fascination of images,” Bruns writes as follows:

Seeing is conceptual: it grasps the world, holds it up for scrutiny as if at arm's length; but in fascination distance (and therefore aesthetics) collapses and the eye suffers a seizure. It is transfixed or fixed in place by the image and can see nothing else. A visionary experience is always a condition of confusion in

which the eye is absorbed or consumed by what is seen; hence the avid or the vacant stare, the stony, liquidated look. I am no longer myself but another. A true image is not a likeness but a *Medusa-event* in which I no longer know what I am looking at. Although still part of the world, I experience the world as a surface to be *crossed* rather than a place to be occupied. Ecstasy means that (starting with myself) I am outside of and uncontainable within any order of things, an exile or nomad. (*Anarchy* 80; emphasis added)

Sharing a lot of images and motifs with “Southern Cross,” Bruns’ speculation on the visionary experience in terms of the “Medusa-event” or the ecstatic collapse of the boundary between the viewer and what is seen can function as a pertinent gloss on Crane’s enactment of the visionary experience in “Southern Cross.” Far from seeing such a visionary moment as the solitary experience of a privileged seer, moreover, Bruns opens this ecstatic occasion into a form of “delirious Dionysian communities”:

Fascination is a condition of participation in which one is no longer separated but is caught up in an ecstatic movement, which is always a movement from one to another that produces a gathering or string, that is, not a dialogue or conversation . . . but what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a *partage*, a sharing or division of voices in which the divine voice or "voice itself" is multiplied by being

passed from one singularity to another like rumor or panic. . . . (*Anarchy* 80-81)

Bruns' understanding of the ecstatic moment as an opportunity to take part in the community as an event of at once sharing and dividing the desiring voice recalls not only the co-responding relationship between the speaker of "Southern Cross" and Columbus in "Ave Maria" but also the speaker's strange kinship with Pocahontas in "Powhatan's Daughter." Lewis emphasizes the purity of Pocahontas to draw a contrast with the "lust-driven," "promiscuous" "nameless Woman" (342). As my readings of "The Dance" and "Indiana" have demonstrated, though, Crane's idea of "purity" can be interchangeable with the state of promiscuous heterogeneity which is prefigured by the epigraph to "Powhatan's Daughter" (Pocahontas is described as a "*wanton yong girle*") (*CPSL* 38). Although Crane might have conceived Pocahontas as "the origin of American identity" (Michaels 12),^{5 3} this privileged figure has already been promiscuous and homeless from the beginning, and cannot yield a singular genealogy of hers (and that of "America"). Crane's invocation of the "nameless Woman" by the image of Medusa thus functions not to emphasize the distance between the pure, mythical past and the degraded present but to remember her shared kinship not only with the visionary speaker of "Southern Cross" but also with the other figures in *The Bridge*, all of whom are derived from the original,

“*wanton*” heterogeneity of Crane’s vision of America.

What is observed above holds true to the rest of the lyrics in “Three Songs.” Whether the speaker praises the burlesque dancer called “Magdalene” in “National Winter Garden,” or courts the office worker called “Saturday Mary” in “Virginia,” each of the lyrics never fails to suggest that there are other objects of desire(s) and the other desiring subjects, whose personal identities are different from one another; but they can be consolidated with each other by the shared distance from their objects of desire: “Always you wait for someone else though, always—” (“National Winter Garden”) (*CPSL* 62); “Keep smiling the boss away / Mary (what are you going to do?) / Gone seven —gone eleven,— / And I’m still waiting you—” (“Virginia”) (*CPSL* 63).

To reorient this originally uprooted nature of Crane’s myth as a generative ground, I would like to emphasize in the lyric’s conclusion the transfiguration of the “spawn” of the “nameless Woman” into the figure of a phantasmal community of the speaker’s aborted brothers which are reflected on the specular surface of the sea. In doing so, we can find the lyric striving for another form of bridging that entails a non-genealogical transmission. As suggested by the Medusa’s image (“lithic trillions of your spawn”), Crane seems to try to appropriate the non-reproductive wastefulness as a sort of imaginary heritage that can be shared between the speaker and other voyagers in *The Bridge*. Far

from representing the prescriptive history of America, this form of transmission serves to enfold separated members of the spectral community into a textual space of the lyric in order to initiate a communal history of its own. In emphasizing this point, we should not dismiss the sign of Crane's self-awareness that this kind of transmission of the spectral heritage can happen as a transient, visionary moment witnessed by the poet-speaker (and the reader) alone. As the speaker admits in the passage such as "Yes, Eve—wraith of my unloved seed," these "lithic trillions of your spawn" are imagined as the flickering reflections on the water which take shape nocturnally in the ripples made by the speaker's "[w]hatever call." Thus, they must vanish when each dawn breaks, leaving the "unloved" driftage of his disseminated words. The sharing of this communal heritage cannot be envisioned in terms of a usual form of kinship. Instead, each voyager is consolidated only by the imaginarily shared awareness of the absence of his / her specific, communal heritage.

Of course, we could argue that the alternative bridging explored in "Southern Cross" is nothing but a product of Crane's narcissistically closed imagination that seems to work against his self-avowed design of *The Bridge* as the modern public poem subsuming "organic and active factors in the experience and perceptions of our common race, time and belief" (*CPSL* 466). Crane must have been well aware of this point, since the speaker

of “Southern Cross” recognizes that “the Cross,” the supposed center of his poem, is nothing but “a phantom,” which is fabricated by his own seeds / words. Viewed from our present perspective, however, the speaker’s failure (and the lyric’s refusal) to capture “utterly” his object of desire can be re-appreciated (*CPSL* 61). Because it encourages us to reread *The Bridge* not only as a record of Crane’s doomed struggle to rescue and transmit the vision of Pocahontas as “the common basis of our meeting” (*CPSL* 556), but also as a record of the lyric’s exploration for a possibility to generate an alternative network of crossing points for affective exchanges in and through the text.

So far, I have shed greater light on the way in which “Southern Cross” explores the alternative bridging that is founded on disconnection, alienation, and failure of language. Manipulating the negative imagery conveyed in the rhetoric of heterosexual love, Crane transforms the wasted field of the poem into the wastefully productive (if not re-productive) ground for networking in which each voyager’s solitude serves as a qualification for attaining the solidarity with others, whose voices are cast into the communal process of *partage*, at once sharing and dividing the space that separates each of them from their desired other(s). Before concluding our reading of “Southern Cross,” we should not forget to note that Crane’s deprivation of the name of Pocahontas in this lyric, whose basic attributes are still preserved in the figure of the “nameless Woman of

the South,” can be reconsidered as his deliberate program for keeping his myth at once fluid and solid enough to be re-adjustable to the changing situations of modern America. By compressing the “long-drawn spell” of American history into a singular yet repeatable structure of desire (*CPSL* 61), “Southern Cross” links a number of sacrificial moments dispersed in different times and spaces. And what this bridging reveals (and preserves) is the irreconcilable otherness of the New World vision that is located alone in the distance. But as Crane feels the Southern Cross simultaneously high *and* close, that distance enfolds in itself the strange sense of intimacy.

Chapter 7: “Where Can You Be *Nimbus*?”: A Hauntological Revisit to

“Cutty Sark”^{5 4}

“I can’t resist saying that I have got more fun out of this little ‘regatta’ than almost any poem I ever wrote” (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 14). This passage comes from Crane’s 1926 letter to Yvor Winters in which Crane enclosed “Cutty Sark,” the third section of *The Bridge*. Crane spent the six months from May to October of 1926 at his grandmother’s estate in the Isle of Pines, Cuba, and that summer was his most productive period when he wrote approximately two-thirds of *The Bridge*. Rooted in “the happiest of his childhood memories” (Bloom, *Daemon* 452), the Caribbean environment served Crane as a refuge from the alienating household in Patterson, New York that he had shared with Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon. Consistent with the title, which refers simultaneously to the British clipper ship, the enchantress in Robert Burns’ “Tam o’ Shanter,” and Crane’s favorite Scotch whiskey, “Cutty Sark” emanates a free-wheeling atmosphere evocative of the ship running on the sea of alcohol. This does not indicate, of course, that the lyric is merely a “skillful dance of [the clippers’] shadows” (Winters 29), nor the speaker’s chance encounter with an anonymous sailor is “something of a diversion” from his quest for a Whitmanian “Elder Brother” (Munro 110). As prefigured by the

epigraph taken from Herman Melville's "The Temeraire," "Cutty Sark" reads as a notably elegiac section materialized by Crane's "poetics of loss" (Gabriel 119). Bidding farewell to the speaker's (and the nation's) dream of exploring the continent, so Sherman Paul writes, Crane's "valedictory" is directed to "the golden era of clipper ships" with "the poet's emphasis to the 'no more' of the epigraph" (230). That the lyric revolves around a vision of Atlantis rising from the sea also recalls an elegiac convention of moving "from grief to consolation; and concluding images of resurrection" (Kennedy 6).

While reading "Cutty Sark" as an elegy has been a critical commonplace, what has escaped any serious attention is Crane's idiosyncratic twist on the temporal structure which is at once inherent within, yet alien to an elegiac narrative of loss, recovery, and futurity. Summarizing various modes of elegiac conventions, David Kennedy observes that "[m]any elegies, canonical and otherwise, are founded on historical reconstruction of the relationship between elegist and elegized subject" (49). In this chapter, I will examine the way in which "Cutty Sark" encrypts within itself an elegized subject that would resist a socially sanctioned form of "historical reconstruction." In another letter to Winters, Crane says that the "essential thing" about "Cutty Sark" is that it "touch[es] not only on the sea . . . but the depth and hazards of the psyche, as well—a plumb line" (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 21). Reminiscent of the Freudian unconscious, what Crane's "plumb

line” explores in the “depth and hazards of the psyche” is unspecified.^{5 5} But one of the subjects the lyric ties itself to is Crane’s lost loves whose names and memories were obscured in the compositional process. As Langdon Hammer points out, the spectral clippers in “Cutty Sark” are bound to Crane’s memories of “gay friends and lovers,” one of whom is Harry Candee (*Janus* 186).^{5 6} By re-examining Hammer’s point about the lyric’s connection with Crane’s “gay friends and lovers,” I will develop the idea of how such an affective connection informs or deforms the temporal structure of “Cutty Sark.” If, as Freud writes in “Mourning and Melancholia,” “the loss of a loved person” can be equivalent to “the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal” (243), it is no wonder that Crane’s struggle to integrate that loss into the poem undermines his initial conception of *The Bridge* as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’,”—the “symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity” (*CPSL* 321).

I. “Another Poor Soul, Like Myself”: Harry Candee

In 1919 Crane met Harry Candee, whom he called “another poor soul, like myself, in Akron exile from N. Y.” (*CPSL* 221). Twelve years older than Crane, Candee was “a

member of an established gay community.” With another member of the community Wilbur Underwood, who “enabled Crane to feel a part of a vibrant group of marginalized people” (Browne 314), Candee offered Crane a sense of belonging and shelter from his familial disturbances. Though all of Crane’s correspondence with Candee was destroyed by Crane’s mother, the surviving letters to Underwood record Candee’s nomadic character. Being a U. S. citizen, Candee is a restless traveler. Though Crane was anxious about Candee’s “disposition to take desperate chances” (*CPSL* 248), his letters avow Crane’s lasting affection for Candee, with whose “capacity for fun” Crane has a lot in common (*CPSL* 325). In “Wind-blown Flames: Letters of Hart Crane to Wilbur Underwood,” Warren Herendeen describes Underwood as “an apt mirror for Crane’s problems and passions” (345). But “an apt mirror” is rather a fit term for Harry Candee, whose name inaccurately mirrors Hart Crane (they even share the given name Harold). Unlike the sedentary life of Underwood, who was a “lifelong resident of Washington” (“Wind-blown” 339), Candee’s erratic life reminds of Crane’s. Older and more sophisticated, yet desperately romantic (“Harry is so dammed romantic about everything”) (*CPSL* 286), the image of Candee can be considered as a living embodiment of Crane’s double.

According to Crane’s biographer Clive Fisher, Candee died of pneumonia in

England in 1925. Fisher writes that Candee's death was "a great shock to [Crane]. After all, he had had almost no exposure to death so far and it was doubly distressing to think that this decease had come to one so terribly young and temperamentally vital" (254).

The impact of Candee's death is manifested in Crane's 1927 letter to Underwood:

Do write me more about the brass-buttoned tattooed vision that you carried with you from the metropolis to the capital! My faithful has forsaken me, at least I have no postal for many weeks.

O, the navies old and oaken,

O, the Temeraire no more!

As Melville says . . .

I ran across some London letters of Harry's the other day; it seems hard to realize that he's gone. Life was a frightful torture to him after all, though . . . and we all end up rather mad. (*CPSL* 505)

Two years have passed since Candee's death, but Crane's grief seems inconsolable. What is significant about this letter, though, is the quote from Melville's "The Temeraire," which suggests a latent connection between Candee's death and "Cutty Sark." Besides

the fact that Crane uses the quote as the epigraph to this lyric, the name *Temeraire* resonates with Candee's *temerarious* character. Bearing in mind Crane's announcement of *The Bridge* as "the Myth of America" (*CPSL* 554), moreover, the name of the British ship as the section's title can be taken as a coded allusion to Candee, who was a U.S. citizen but settled in England.

While those connections tempt us to search in "Cutty Sark" the shadow of Candee, the letter to Underwood blocks our easy reduction of its tacit subject to Candee alone. Because the above passage displays Crane's sense of community in which the fate of each member is interchangeable with one another. As though his community is realized through the loss of its members, Crane draws together around Melville's passage Underwood's erotic adventure ("the brass-buttoned tattooed vision"), his lost love ("My faithful has forsaken me"), and Candee's death. By turning themselves into a communal "we" identity, Crane connotes that what is "frightful" is not only Candee's fate but the shared doom of his gay friends and lovers (*CPSL* 505). In this context, moreover, what becomes audible in Crane's use of the passage from Melville is the tone of a monody, mourning his own doom in a proleptic manner.

In foregrounding Crane's "secret motive" (Unterecker 378) to transcode his private memories into "Cutty Sark," we cannot downlight the poem's public strain as well.

Included in *Battle-Pieces*, “The Temeraire” shows Melville choosing the figure of the eponymous ship to deplore the replacement of the oaken vessel by the newer, ironclad battleships. Melville’s elegiac longing for the ship that is “[b]uilt of a thousand trees” (*Poems* 79) operates as a thematic thread to reinforce Crane’s epic concern in *The Bridge*, in which he stages the nation’s conflict between the nostalgia for the idealized past and the alienating modernity. When reading it in tandem with the letter to Underwood, though, we cannot see the lyric’s opening without investigating the trace of Crane’s own “Temeraire”:

I met a man in South Street, tall—
a nervous shark tooth swung on his chain.
His eyes pressed through green glass
—green glasses, or bar lights made them
so—
shine—
GREEN—
eyes—
stepped out—forgot to look at you
or left you several blocks away—

in the nickel-in-the-slot piano jogged

“Stamboul Nights”—weaving somebody’s nickel—sang— (*CPSL* 51)

In a letter to Otto Kahn, Crane states that this “erratic” typography is “meant to present the hallucinations incident to rum-drinking in a South Street dive, as well as the lurch of a boat in heavy seas, etc” (*CPSL* 556-57). Put it differently, the words on the page are composed so as to behave the action or feeling both described and implied in the text. Corresponding with the “sw[inging]” motion of the sailor’s pendant, for instance, the lines are designed to mime the boozier’s staggering steps. But the assumption of “Cutty Sark” as Crane’s guarded expression of mourning may encourage us to see this typographical arrangement as a pictogram of a Melvillean vortex (Σ), into which Crane’s private memories are drowned and through which the anonymous sailor floats up as an avatar of their absence. Jean Guiguet interprets this man as an “old Melvillean sailor—and perhaps Coleridgean also,” adding that he can be “a double of the poet” (qtd. in Paul 225). Indeed, Crane alludes to Melville and Coleridge (“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”) to conjure echoes of the nineteenth-century transatlantic voyages, providing the poem with a pertinent epic scope. Presented as a drunken migrant who “can’t live on land” (*CPSL* 52), however, the sailor’s figure draws us back to the specular relationship

between Crane and Candee, who was, like Crane, an “ever-restless,” “heavy drinker” (Fisher 178; 93).

Many critics have noted that Crane in “Cutty Sark” negotiates with various levels of loss. But Crane’s practice of “poetics of loss” should be reassessed in a different light (Gabriel 119), because types of loss Crane engages with include the loss of “rights to loss.” In giving an exposition of Édouard Glissant’s idea of the Caribbean history, John Drabinski notes that “[l]oss registers as, in a rather conventional sense, the loss of something nameable (homeland, tradition, autonomy).” Unlike the usual loss in which the name remains and provides “an important contour to loss,” the “drowning of memory” in the Middle Passage is different because “what is lost is the name itself.” Drawing on Derek Walcott’s “The Sea Is History,” Drabinski speculates that if “the sea is the trauma of the middle passage’s drowning of memory, then history is a total vanishing of memory and name; fragments and traces, in this catastrophic effect, bear no threaded relation to the past, nor to an original” (153-54). Aside from an accidental link with Crane’s exile to Cuba coupled with his “suicidal embrace of a Middle Passage-like death” (Reed, *Phenomenal* 133), the pertinence of Drabinski’s observation lies in the point that “Cutty Sark” too, though in a different context, bespeaks the difficulty for Crane both to evoke and to preserve the drowned memories of his gay friends and lovers. As deprived of an

immediate access to them, Crane's commemorating strategy is to fabricate the "trace of the erasure of the trace" such as located in the pictogram of the vortex (Derrida, *Margins* 24). Neither present nor absent, yet still occupying the lyric as the non-presence of their specific names and memories, their ghosts waft in and around "Cutty Sark," torquing the lyric's temporal structure.

II. "His Bony Hands Got to Beating Time": An Obscured Potential

To revitalize a critical potential dormant in the lyric's spectral temporality, I will start in what follows reframing the twisted structure of "Cutty Sark" by examining how the finished text runs against with Crane's outline of this lyric. We find in the 1927 letter to Kahn Crane delineating the outline of "Cutty Sark" as follows:

"Cutty Sark" is built on the plan of a *fugue*. Two "voices"—that of the world of Time, and that of the world of eternity—are interwoven in the action. The Atlantis theme (that of Eternity) is the transmuted voice of the nickel-slot pianola, and this voice alternates with that of the derelict sailor and the description of the action. (*CPSL* 557)

This passage illustrates Crane's intention to deploy the two modalities of temporality.

Certainly, Crane juxtaposes the italicized lines with those in roman type: “*O Stamboul Rose dreams weave the rose!* / Murmurs of Leviathan he spoke, / and rum was Plato in our heads . . .” (CPSL 51). As the lyric unfolds, “*Stamboul Rose*” is morphed into “*ATLANTIS ROSE*” (CPSL52), evoking the world of “Eternity.” By contrast, the other lines seem to represent the chronological world of “Time.” With these two modes alternated, the resultant text appears to line up with Crane’s “plan of a *fugue*.”

As Reed contends, however, “fugue” is “imprecise, potentially misleading designation.” Citing the musicological definition, Reed elaborates that the voices in “Cutty Sark” “are hardly presented as engaged in a game of mimicry, nor does Crane give one any sense of what poetic principle of recombination might be substituting for counterpoint.” When we examine the sailor’s speech quoted below, though, the temporal structure formulated in the outline turns out to be more misleading than Crane’s “rather loose uses of musicological jargon” (*After* 133):

“It’s *S.S. Ala*—Antwerp—now remember kid
to put me out at three she sails on time.
I’m not much good at time any more keep
weakeyed watches sometimes snooze—” his bony hands
got to beating time . . . “A whaler once—

I ought to keep time and get over it—I'm a

Democrat—I know what time it is—No

I don't want to know what time it is—that

damned white Arctic killed my time . . ." (*CPSL* 51)

According to the outline, the sailor's voice is supposed to represent the sequential temporality. Unlike the italicized lyrics of the pianola-song, indeed, the sailor's obsessive use of the word "time" suggests that his consciousness is governed by the quantitative sense of time: "now remember kid / to put me out at three she sails on time." As it turns out, however, the sailor's experience of time is so much twisted by the temporal displacement that his voice cannot contribute to a harmonized interplay of the voices based on the clearly demarcated temporal binary. Far from representing the world of chronological time, the sailor's speech rather stages the disruptive impingement of the two modes of temporality. Interrupted by a number of dashes and ellipses, his words cue us to the temporal interstice he is locked in: "—I know what time it is—No / I don't want to know what time it is—." Hence, Crane's incorrect use of "fugue" turns out to be insightful, as its root meaning (flight) corresponds with the sailor's desire to escape from the fractured temporality. Signaling his inability to settle in the confine of the normative temporality, the sailor's speech draws nearer to the psychiatric meaning of "fugue" cited

in *OED*: “A flight from one’s own identity, often involving travel to some unconsciously desired locality” (“Fugue, n. 2”). As I will elaborate below, the sailor’s disjunctive speech functions not only to disturb the temporal binary but also to gesture toward the third, spectral kind of a temporal space for a haunting experience.

By taking into account the process of Crane’s revision, moreover, we can reassess the motif of temporal displacement operating as a queer element in the sailor’s physical appearance. On the one hand, the sailor looks like an impotent castaway. He is “weakeyed” and his hands are “bony,” implying the weathering effect of time (*CPSL* 51). On the other hand, his wrecked appearance flashes a ghostly potential for captivating the speaker’s mind. In the earlier version of “Cutty Sark,” Crane used “fragile” instead of “bony” to depict his hands (*The Bridge Uncollected* 33). This alteration is remarkable, because, in the context of our argument, “bony” can signify not only his decayed state but also the eroticized phallic masculinity, echoing back to the ecstatic scene of dancing with the “Indian” chief in “The Dance”: “O yelling battlements,—I, too, was liege / To rainbows currying each pulsant *bone*” (*CPSL* 47; emphasis added). Bearing in mind the corresponding relation between the figure of the strange sailor and that of the chieftain called Maquokeeta, for instance, it is not hard to interpret the sailor’s following speech in terms of a gay semiotic: “—that spiracle!’ he shot a finger out the door . . . / ‘O life’s a geyser

—beautiful—my lungs—” (*CPSL* 52). Emblematic of his latent vitality, furthermore, the sailor’s “lungs” can also evoke the subaqueous ghost of Candee (died of pneumonia), traversing and thereby disorienting the temporal distinction.

The moment of spectral possession is initiated with an aid of the pianola-song. Watching the sailor, the speaker finds that the sailor’s “bony hands / got to beating time” (*CPSL* 51). This gesture may merely denote the sailor’s response to the “beat” of the music at the bar. Read against the earlier versions of “Cutty Sark,” however, the phrase can be construed in a different way. In the first version (published in June, 1927), the epigraph is taken from the Book of Isaiah: “*And he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea*” (*The Bridge Uncollected* 33). With a number of allusions to Melville in “Cutty Sark,” this epigraph takes us back to *Moby-Dick*. In “Extracts,” Melville uses the same passage in an extended form: “In that day, the Lord with his sore, and great, and strong sword, shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea” (*Moby-Dick* xii). Serving as an allusion to *Moby-Dick*, then, the epigraph betokens Crane’s original design to associate the sailor with Ahab, with whose figure we can associate the biblical fantasy of the God conquering the tyrannical force in the universe. In the second version (published in October, 1927), though, Crane replaced it with the quote from “The Temeraire.” As the letter to

Underwood was written in January, 1927, we can presume that the revision was made to underscore the elegiac longing for what has been lost including Candee and other gay comrades of Crane.

It is difficult, of course, to argue that the sailor embodies the Ahab-like influence by reading the finished version alone. Though the sailor's "[m]urmurs of Leviathan" and reminiscence that he was a "whaler once" lead back to the replaced allusion to *Moby-Dick* (CPSL 51), his potential for exerting the captain's influence is obscured in the final version. But what we should not overlook concerning "the dragon" in the biblical passage is that "the Leviathan" is called not only as "the dragon" but also as the "serpent" (*Moby-Dick* xii), the latter of whose figure Crane uses throughout *The Bridge* as the symbol of time (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 39). The figurative intertwinement between "dragon" and "serpent" enables us to restore the motif of a dragon-slayer in the sailor's "bony hands," which are captured in the moment of "beating" or conquering "time," in whose fractured interstice he finds himself locked in: "I know what time it is—No / I don't want to know what time it is—that / damned white Arctic killed my time" (CPSL 51).

Musing over the complexity of "time" in the modern nation experienced by migrants and metropolitans, Homi Bhabha writes that the lived experience of their time should be represented in the spatio-temporal "doubleness." Such "doubleness in writing,"

Bhabha observes, is necessary to seize on the non-totalizing movements “between cultural formations and social processes” which “disperse the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society.” Given the context of the sailor’s obscured potential, Bhabha’s reasoning incites us to rethink the sailor’s experience of fractured temporality as the enabling “doubleness.” The sailor’s speech does generate in “Cutty Sark” the spatio-temporal ambiguity. To borrow Bhabha’s phrase, such ambiguity could empower Crane as a poet of modern epic to “inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic ‘modern’ experience of the Western nation” (Bhabha 141). With the erased association of the sailor with the slayer of the serpent, which can symbolize the predominant mode of time, the fleeting remark of the sailor’s “bony hands” insinuates his dormant capacity to challenge “the homogenous, visual time of the horizontal society,” whose norms, with the pressure of a homophobic society, are in fierce tension with Crane’s unstated attempt to graft into the poem his memories of gay friends and lovers.

However, introducing Bhabha’s thought does not necessarily follow that Crane’s manipulation of the sailor’s voice succeeds in constituting an alternative, or counter-normative mode of temporality. As examined above, the sailor’s experience of time is not so much doubled in an empowering manner as split between the two different

temporalities. Owing to this unrealizable potential, though, the figure of the sailor's "bony hands" works at least in fissuring the speaker's (and, by extension, the lyric's) sense of time, allowing Crane to interweave in that temporal interstice the drumbeat of Atlantis, which is the name of the supposed ideality of his "America."

III. "*ATLANTIS ROSE*": The New (and Mournful) World

In this section, we will see in detail the way in which the temporal destabilization is followed by a spatial displacement. As the sailor's speech disturbs the lyric's temporal structure, the speaker finds his spatio-temporal perception abducted into "somewhere" simultaneously nostalgic and new: "I saw the frontiers gleaming of his mind /or are there frontiers—running sands sometimes / running sands somewhere sands running" (*CPSL* 52). The image of "running sands" suggests the speaker's awareness of passing time which rendered obsolete the geographical idea of frontiers. But Crane's manipulation of the loose syntax, itself imitative of the "running sands" as of ever-changing boundaries of a desert, performs his unwillingness to dismiss the possibility for "frontiers" to be discovered "sometimes" and "somewhere." To use Bhabha's observation again, the way in which "frontiers" are implicated in the sailor's "mind" guides us to reconsider the

strange figure of this sailor himself as a synecdoche for the nation's shifting margins. Concerning migrants and other "wandering peoples" whose polyphonic voice doubles the unisonous, "patriotic voice" of the national community, Bhabha writes that they "will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture . . . but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (164). Bhabha's idea is relevant to "Cutty Sark," not least as the middle part presents the New World vision which is both enmeshed in and unsettled by Crane's imagining of his alternative homeland. Resonant with Bhabha's view of a migrant as "the outside who is inside" (Drabinski 108), Crane's dramatization of the encounter with the sailor, who is a U. S. "Democrat" yet "can't live on land," works in estranging the bar-lights district in "South Street" (*CPSL* 51-52). Whereas the frontiers have been thoroughly explored, so Crane's quasi-fugal use of language encourages us to presume, something residual of the New World persists to be encapsulated in the sailor's *fugitive* steps.

While the speaker's consciousness is imagined partaking of the sailor's "mind," the lyrics of "Stamboul Nights" (the song is Crane's invention), whose melody comes from the pianola at the bar, is cast into the process of transmutation, leading us to the visionary moment.

Or they may start some white machine that sings.

Then you may laugh and dance the axletree—

steel—silver—kick the traces—and know—

ATLANTIS ROSE drums wreath the rose,

the star floats burning in a gulf of tears

and sleep another thousand—

interminably

long since somebody's nickel—stopped—

playing— (*CPSL* 52)

Rearranging the song's lyrics, Crane correlates here a series of actions repeated in *The Bridge* including an invocation of the New World vision ("frontiers gleaming"), abstraction of modern technology (the pianola as "some white machine"), and somatic pleasures ("laugh and dance the axletree"). Functioning as the "axletree" of the lyric as a whole, this part demonstrates the two pivotal activities. First, this passage articulates the speaker's fugal attempt to flight ("kick the traces") from the normative temporality. Secondly, the scene enacts the moment of transmission in which the sailor's fractured temporality is transferred to the speaker, who in turn envisions Atlantis in the trans-

historical sense of time (“*and sleep another thousand*”). What Crane is engaged in here, in other words, is to reimagine the spatial idea of frontiers as a temporal event of recognition (“—and know—”) that is occasioned when a vision of the New World is imaginarily passed from one hand to another in the manner of “somebody’s nickel,” which started the pianola music. Though the pianola-song stopped, as we will see below, the image of “somebody’s nickel” gives Crane access to the spectral music, whose echo or ghost serves to “*wreathe*” the vision of “*ATLANTIS ROSE*.”

As foreshadowed by the reference to Plato in the opening part (“and rum was Plato in our heads”) (*CPSL* 51), the glory and catastrophe of Atlantis are recounted by Plato in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, from which Crane borrows the imagery of sunken cultures and civilizations. However, just as the word “*wreathe*” (*CPSL* 52) that shows Crane’s synaesthetic superimposition of the drum onto the vision of the rose suggests an act of interweaving different texts, so Crane’s Atlantis is made up of such sources as Edgar Allan Poe’s “The City in the Sea” and the story of the sunken city off San Salvador that Crane’s lover Emil Opffer told to him (Unterecker 378). Besides these materials, moreover, Crane appropriated Lewis Spence’s *Atlantis in America* that he read in the Isle of Pines in 1926.^{5 7} Excited by Spence’s argument that the traces of Atlantis can be found in Native American cultures, Crane decides to entitle the final section of *The Bridge* as

“Atlantis.” Crane’s fascination with Spence’s book does not derive from the scientific authenticity of Spence’s contention. Rather, the very impossibility for anyone to testify Spence’s claim provides Crane with the inspiration. In a letter to Waldo Frank, for instance, Crane writes that “it’s easy to believe that a continent existed in mid-Atlantic waters and that the Antilles and West Indies are but salient peaks of its surface. Impossible forever to prove, however” (*Letters* 255-56). Such an intensity of Crane’s excitement can be easily understood if we recall that the Isle of Pines offered him the rarely obtained sense of belonging. Furthermore, since the West Indies relates to Columbus’s voyage that is dramatized in the first section of *The Bridge*, we can presume that Spence’s theory encouraged Crane to reconceive the Caribbean not only as his alternative homeland, but also as the metaphorical site to re-write “America” as the birthplace of *The Bridge* for him both to start from and to return to.

Besides functioning as the topological intersection between the geography of the Caribbean and the vision of Crane’s “America,” the importance of *Atlantis in America* lies in Spence’s idea that the traces of Atlantis can be found in the cultures of the pre-Columbian Amerindians. In the second section titled “Powhatan’s Daughter,” which Crane composed mainly in the summer of 1926, he conjures the spectral tribe of Native Americans, whose members Crane’s speaker seeks to join by dancing with the tribe’s

chieftain called Maquokeeta. Crane's sympathy with Native Americans partly derives from his personal exodus from the United States that he once aspired to represent in *The Bridge*. "Ending in expatriation," Hammer writes, "Crane's flight from Patterson extends the meaning of his break with Tate: he is symbolically excluded not only from the heterosexual household, but also from the nation" (*Janus* 171-72). Hammer's observation about Crane's evacuation from the heteronormative nationhood to Cuba draws a parallel to the speaker's willingness in *The Bridge* to take part in the tribal community. As though corresponding with this entanglement between Crane's biography and poetry, as I will examine in what follows, the apparently redemptive image of Atlantis turns out to be taken neither as an ideality of the nation's future nor as a nativist vision of national origins. It is true that Spence's theory helped Crane interweave the imaginary threads of his alternative America with the received history of the United States. But what is reinforced in "Cutty Sark" is the impossibility of Atlantis to serve as the site for re-writing the nation's identity.

Conceived in the fragments of the fabricated lyrics, the city's "*teased remnants*" do not yield any specific ties to the place but the invented tokens of its ruination and loss. While the resurrection is envisaged in the image of Atlantis that *rose* from the sea, the capitalization of "*ROSE*" makes us recall Crane's surreptitious endeavor to elegize his

lost loves by “*wreath[ing]*” flowers. Accordingly, the traces of Atlantis are scattered into fragments, all of which evoke the cliché-laden stereotypes of a city in the sea (“*teased remnants of the skeletons of cities*”). Deprived of the specificity of the city’s identity, furthermore, Atlantis is invoked as an ungraspable image of the star reflected on the water (“*the star floats burning in a gulf of tears*”), signaling the unfathomable abyss in which the memories of Candee and other gay friends and lovers were “*drown[ed]*” (*CPSL* 52). Revealed as “an appearance-as-disappearance” (Barthes 10), as it were, Crane’s Atlantis does not allow for an atavistic appeal for the return to a community in a foundation of the shared identity. Echoing Glissant’s conception of the catastrophic loss of the Middle Passage, the “*remnants*” of Atlantis leaves “no threaded relation to the past, nor to an original” (Drabinski 154) except the trace of its original absence. Despite Crane’s initial ambition for *The Bridge* to represent “our constructive future, our unique identity” (*CPSL* 321), “Cutty Sark” enacts the imaginative re-ruination of his ideal community, turning the supposedly forward-looking vision of a nation’s future into a simulacra of the lost communal belonging. This future-negating valance found in the lyric’s visionary moment suggests the difficulty for Crane to ground the poem in the “historical reconstruction of the relationship between elegist and elegized subject” (Kennedy 49). In the next section, we will consider how and to what extent “Cutty Sark” succeeds in negotiating the poet’s

secret attempt to mourn his lost, gay comrades within the normative temporality of the national, maritime history.

IV. “Pennies for Porpoises”: And for Purposes

What we will investigate in this section is the scattered traces of the poet’s attempt to explore another way to memorialize on a public scale the loss of gay friends and lovers. Detecting in Crane’s queer figuration of the hobos in “The River,” the third subsection of “Powhatan’s Daughter,” the “doubling of pedagogy and pederasty,” Michael Trask contends that “[p]ederasty forms the means by which an otherwise ephemeral and barren, ‘wifeless’ group perpetuates its kind” (126). The adjectives “ephemeral and barren” that are used to characterize the nation’s marginals are also applicable to “Cutty Sark,” which critics have associated with Crane’s experience of cruising.^{5 8} As the speaker’s encounter with the sailor is rendered as accidental and transitory without leaving any sign for their future reunion, Crane’s rendition of this quasi-homosexual contact seems sterile and even infantile from the dominant perspective of “reproductive futurism” that, as Lee Edelman maintains, entails “compulsory abjuration of the future-negating queer” (*No* 26). Nonetheless, Crane makes use of the very evanescent quality of their communication to

fabricate the signifier of the lost community whose near-empty substance leads us to rethink the topological idea of Atlantis as an unexpected event of transmission.

As implied in the latter part of “Cutty Sark,” spectral traces of the encounter have persisted in the dawn air to return and haunt the speaker’s mind. Having “started walking home across the Bridge,” he sees on the East River the phantoms of the bygone clippers:

Blithe Yankee vanities, turreted sprites, winged

British repartees, skil-

ful savage sea-girls

that bloomed in the spring—Heave, weave

those bright designs the trade winds drive . . .

Sweet opium and tea, Yo-ho!

Pennies for porpoises that bank the keel!

Fins whip the breeze around Japan!

Bright skysails ticketing the Line, wink round the Horn

to Frisco, Melbourne . . .

Pennants, parabolas—

clipper dreams indelible and ranging,

baronial white on lucky blue!

Perennial-Cutty-trophied-Sark! (CPSL 53)

Unlike the first half of the lyric, where the emphasis is put on the mechanical principle of labor (“she sails on time”) (CPSL 51) and thwarted desire (“*the star floats burning in a gulf of tears*”) (CPSL 52), what Crane calls “airy regatta of phantom clipper ships” (CPSL 557) is animated by the ravishing sound play (note the chain of long vowel sounds in the passage quoted above), evoking the sense of freedom, fertility, and affectionate bond between sailors. As replete with the fantastic air, Crane’s enactment of this “airy regatta” seems to be contained in the self-enclosed zone of the poet’s nostalgic phantasy. As we will see, however, an invested attention to the image of the coin (“somebody’s nickel”) will disclose channels of this phantasmatic reverie that finds its way into the monetary network of modern society (CPSL 52).

As Lawrence Kramer observes, the nickel in Crane’s day “would have been the so-called Indian Head. This coin (minted between 1913 and 1938) had a buffalo etched on the reverse with the head of an Indian on the obverse” (The Bridge: *An Annotated* 61). This information helps us notice a number of veiled connections intricately woven

throughout *The Bridge*. For instance, we find that the seemingly insignificant figure of the “nickel” in “Cutty Sark” and that of another “nickel” Rip Van Winkle is asked to “keep” in the ending of “Van Winkle” are co-responded with each other (“Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,— / Have you got your ‘Times’—?” (CPSL 41). With the historical information about the buffalo nickel in mind, it is difficult for us not to find another cross-sectional link between those coins with the image of “Indian Head” and the Native American chief in the mythical lyric, “The Dance.” Given Spence’s theory that the traces of Atlantis can be found in Native American cultures and that Atlantis was in and around Central America, furthermore, we are navigated to conjoin the figure of “nickel” not only with Crane’s fantasy of Atlantis but also with the strange sailor in “Cutty Sark,” whose reminiscences include his voyage to Central America (“I ran a donkey engine down there on the Canal / in Panama . . . then Yucatan selling kitchenware—”) (CPSL 51-52). Also, we cannot fail to note in this context the figural kinship between this sailor and the would-be sailor in “Indiana” called Larry, who is related, in Crane’s vision, to the “folks” of “Pocahontas” (CPSL 50). From this perspective, the image of a nickel can be taken as a nodal linkage in the network of co-responding figures in *The Bridge*.

Besides the “nickel-dime tower” in “Virginia” (CPSL 63), for example, a Buffalo nickel reappears, in a slightly modified figure, as the “bison thunder” in “Indiana” (CPSL

49), and in “The Tunnel” (“And down beside the turnstile press the coin / Into the slot”) (*CPSL* 67). In addition to Krammer’s information of the buffalo nickel, another historical fact that the Indian Head cent was minted between 1859 and 1909 also allows us to imagine that the coins with the image of the Indian Head can be among the “pennies” in “The Tunnel” (“O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam”) (*CPSL* 70). And the figures of these coins link back to the “pennies” in the spectral vision in “Cutty Sark,” where the coins are offered to porpoises for a good omen (“*Pennies for porpoises that bank the keel*”) (*CPSL* 53).

As each singularity of Amerindian tribes are abstracted into a stereotype (not a portrait) of an “Indian,” whose model has remained unspecified to this day,^{5 9} the image of the “Indian” on the coins can be regarded as another figure of loss, reminiscent of the banished tribes and mariginals in the nation’s history in *The Bridge*. But those coins also function as catalysts, at once imaginary and symbolic, to disseminate the tangible tokens of Atlantis in twentieth century America. Since “Cutty Sark” does not deal with the issue of Native Americans at all, we have to presume that the speaker’s memory in “Cutty Sark” is cut apart totally from the mythical world of “Powhatan’s Daughter.” Nevertheless, when somebody (the reader) concentrates on such a tiny detail as “nickel,” the eradicated figures in “Powhatan’s Daughter” can be reanimated in the network of traces of the lost,

tribal communality. Rather than dismissing the monetary system, Crane draws on the coin's materiality and its anonymous, abstracting power to imaginarily circulate in the present-day capitalist society the birthplace and vanishing point of his alternative America.

Crane's superimposition of the vision's ephemerality on the coin's tactility shows that his phantasy is not inimical to, but hard-wired into the society he lives in. In the same manner, the reverie of ghost clippers is also embedded in the Tea Trade history. By mentioning the exotic commodities in the cargoes ("*Sweet opium and tea*"), Crane employs the affective register of capitalism that both serves to materialize "dreams" of the other world and spreads desire in the consumer culture. As suggested by his reference to "the trade winds" (*CPSL* 53), Crane manipulates what Timothy Morton terms "trade-wind topos" that was used to "exoticis[e] the lands from which the spices flowed and the flows of trade themselves" (42). With the emergence of consumer societies around eighteenth-century Britain, Morton observes, this topos, which aligns the alluring commodities with the far-off territories, was used to criticize or legitimize the transnational commercial trade. Alongside the image of coins, then, the tea trade imagery enables Crane to seek to conflate his elegiac longing for the lost loves into the nation's collective desire for a faraway world. In the following section, we will further explicate

Crane's presentation of those "turreted sprites" by focusing on his use of the clippers' names (*CPSL* 53). Whereas Crane's imaginative enactment seems disarmingly illusive, what will be illuminated in this "airy regatta" (*CPSL* 557) is the way in which one's individual desire for a then anti-normative intimacy is closely, if not harmoniously, intertwined with the concrete historicity of capitalist competition.

V. "For These Lovely Ghosts": An Engagement with a Poly-Rooted Kinship

Calling "Cutty Sark" as "the phantasy on the period of the whalers and clipper ships," Crane writes Kahn as follows: "It was a pleasure to use historical names for these lovely ghosts. Music still haunts their names long after the wind has left their sails." (*CPSL* 557). As we know from this passage that these "lovely ghosts" are meant to stand for something other than the "historical" ships, we find that Crane's "pleasure to use historical names" works on two levels. First, these names permit Crane to ground the poem in the "historical" authenticity that prevents the vision of those "lovely ghosts" from dissolving into a rootless "phantasy." Secondly, as Crane's reference to "[m]usic" connotes, these names provide "*ATLANTIS ROSE*" (*CPSL* 52), which is implicitly dedicated to his gay friends and lovers, with a socially sanctioned access to the Tea Trade

history.

In highlighting Crane's appropriation of the public strain of the clippers' names, what is worth observing is the partial extensibility of those "winged" ships (*CPSL* 53) to the figure of the sailor, who left the speaker and "lunged up Bowery way" (*CPSL* 52) to board the ship "*Ala*" (wing) (*CPSL* 51). Just as his "wicker-neat lapels" that "wind worried" (*CPSL* 52) reappears as the sails of the wooden vessels that were "[l]ocked in wind-humors, ran their eastings down," so the figures of those ships, "veer[ing] green esplanades" (*CPSL* 53) echo back to the sailor, whose "mind" flashes out "frontiers" in the "green" color of his eyes (*CPSL* 52). This chiasmatic configuration is significant to an extent that the regatta scene can be reframed as the imagined reunion of the lost members of the Atlantean community. Though their specific names are reduced to such impersonal registers as "*Thermopylae*," "*Black Prince*," "*Flying Cloud*" (*CPSL* 53), "[m]usic still haunts their names" (*CPSL* 557), because those names are claimed (but not anchored) at once by the national maritime history, by the revisionary history of America in *The Bridge*, and by Crane's private memories.

As composed in the masquerade-like dispersion of intermingled identities, the concluding part of "Cutty Sark" forbids us to nail down their references in a single context:

Buntlines tusseling (91 days, 20 hours and anchored!)

Rainbow, Leander

(last trip a tragedy)—where can you be

Nimbus? and you rivals two—

a long tack keeping—

Taeping?

Ariel? (CPSL 53)

Commenting on this regatta scene, Crane wrote to Malcolm Cowley that “all the clippers mentioned were real beings, had extensive histories in the Tea trade—and the last two mentioned were life-long rivals. Rather touching...” (CPSL 476). Besides their “touching” reunion on the page, though, what we cannot fail to note is the sense of inability for the speaker to certify these ships’ presences: “Where can you be / *Nimbus?* . . . and you rivals two / *Taeping?* / *Ariel?*” As *Nimbus* is the imaginary clipper invented by Crane (Irwin 170), his addition of the *real* ghost to the names of the factual ships recalls the affinity between Candee’s death and Melville’s “The Temeraire.” In the poem, Melville addresses the eponymous ship by using such terms as “clouds,” “Splendors” and “ghost,” all of which correspond with the word “nimbus”(splendid cloud”) (*Poems* 78-80). Bereft of its

visible presence, yet bestowed with persistence of the virtuality to reappear (“Where *can* you be”) (emphasis added), *Nimbus* serves as the name of a ghost ship that embarks Crane’s memories of *temerarious* Candee and the others, who had actually or figuratively died.

In accord with the image of the ships’ “buntlines tusseling,” the regatta scene shows Crane weaving the tracery of different levels of memories. Whereas those clippers compete with each other driven by the capitalist desire for riches, *Taeping* and *Ariel* are harmoniously aligned as though they are not only the historically renowned rivals but also a couple of the enchanted lovers (the name *Ariel* entices this association). Even in Crane’s boundary-crossing way of invoking the name of *Cutty Sark* (“perennial-*Cutty*-trophied-*Sark*”), we can perceive his attempt to combine the public performance of transmitting the “trophied” maritime history to the future with his private motive to render “perennial” the memories of his lost loves. However, echoing Burns’ “Tam o’ Shanter,” in which a boozer is fatally attracted by the enchantress dancing in a cutty sark (*short* chemise in Scottish dialect), Crane’s enactment of the apparitions of those “sea-girls” ends with the question mark without yielding a solid sense of temporal continuity (*CPSL* 53).

Coda

Seeing the ending of “Cutty Sark” as “Morse code” to signal the “presence of [Crane’s] gay friends and lovers (under code names, as it were),” Hammer reads the regatta scene as a prefiguration of “Atlantis,” where “all ships at sea / Complicated in one vibrant breath made cry / ‘Make thy love sure—to weave whose song we ply!’” (*CPSL* 72). As these “ships separated at sea are nonetheless bound together by the fate they share,” so Hammer writes, their fate becomes explicit in the draft of “Atlantis,” which contains the following line: “Make thy love sure, to lift whose song we die” (qtd. in Hammer, *Janus* 185-86). Although Hammer’s observation does not touch on the cross-sectional network of the co-responding figures, Hammer’s reading is helpful for us to reconfirm the obscured substance of Crane’s alternative America which is a spectral community of the nation’s marginals fashioned only by their shared doom. As we have seen so far, the stray details in and around “Cutty Sark” invite us to re-member the traces of Crane’s strife to perpetuate in a public discourse the evanescent yet tactile repercussions of the lost communal intimacy. As is the case for the connection between the death of Harry Candee, the (replaced) epigraph, Spence’s *Atlantis in America*, coins and clippers’ names, their coruscations are insistent but never instantiate themselves. And yet, it is precisely their

insistent ephemerality that provides Crane's otherwise disastrous vision with the spectral durability.

We could argue, from an ethical standpoint, that Crane's use of the coin's imagery and names of the real clippers does not disturb but reinforces the self-enclosed structure of his desiring fantasy. Crane's appropriation of the ships' names, for instance, might merely end up reducing each singularity of the lost friends and lovers, including that of Harry Candee, to a manageable figure of ghosts subservient to the poet's imaginary realm. But as these names are used semi-publicly to traverse and intermingle the diverse levels of memories, this elegiac lyric (fortunately) fails to acknowledge, interiorize, and thereby consume the singularity of the elegized subject. With his figuration of Atlantis as the tellingly cliché-laden artifact, moreover, the community dreamed by Crane cannot bear more than an always disappearing mark of the myth as a vehicle for communication which could be founded on the poet's awareness of the irreconcilable distance from the desired intimacy.

Flickering as an almost empty and therefore open signifier of a lost communal intimacy, Atlantis in "Cutty Sark" consists of the unexpected, and momentary act of communication between the two (intimate) strangers. As enacted in the middle part, the meaning of "the frontiers" (*CPSL* 52) is rendered less important than the movement

through which the New World vision is indirectly transmitted from one hand to another, and, as a consequence, the event itself can be reconceived by the reader, who re-experiences through the act of reading this process of quasi-transmission, as a dynamic of partaking of a communal form of collectivity. In the wake of incomplete exchanges and unexpected encounters, Crane's "America," as his imaginary supplement to what was actually there, remains at once mournful and foreign, interlacing the other versions of "America" displaced and replaced both throughout and beyond the text of *The Bridge*.

Chapter 8: “Kiss of Our Agony Thou Gatherest”: “The Tunnel” and Allegorizing the Radical Fragmentariness

“The sight of a few dozen tired New Yorkers, staring bleakly at dirty girders, foul skylights, and chewing-gum paved floors,” wrote a writer for the *New York Post* on December 15, 1936, “is enough to turn a normal man into a sad minor poet of despair” (qtd. in Fineman 110). This passage resonates with “The Tunnel,” the penultimate section of *The Bridge*. In “The Tunnel,” Crane assumes “a sad minor poet of despair” to dramatize the subway ride as a modern purgatorial experience. As “The Tunnel” recalls a traditional epic descent to the underworld, critics have read Crane’s gloomy presentation of the cityscape as the precondition for “Atlantis,” the last section of Crane’s “mystical synthesis of ‘America’” (*CPSL* 321). However, reading “The Tunnel” through a binary lens such as Hegelian logic dictates would cause any reader to dismiss the section’s radical fragmentariness that interrupts any critical judgement based on binary opposites such as “positive” and “negative.” As I will argue in this chapter, it is precisely this radical fragmentariness that highlights Crane’s implicit, and persistent, concern throughout *The Bridge* with an alternative idea of community.

Although many books and articles have been written about *The Bridge*, the term

“community” has found little place in Crane scholarship.⁶⁰ This lack of critical attention should come as no surprise, because Crane does not use the word “community” in *The Bridge*. Quite the contrary, *The Bridge* is permeated with figures of loss or absence of community, the familial (“Indiana”), tribal (“The Dance”), fraternal, or religious (“Quaker Hill”). According to Jean-Luc Nancy, though, “community” has existed in the history of Western thought as nothing but a figure of “the lost, or broken community” that “was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds” (*Inoperative* 9). Understanding community as the event of incompleteness rather than as a group based on the shared identity, Nancy maintains that “such a ‘loss’ is constitutive of ‘community’ itself” (*Inoperative* 12). Reminiscent of the writer’s words from the *New York Post*, a significant proportion of encounters in “The Tunnel” can be labeled “negative,” and its cityscape is fragmentary. Despite—or rather, because of this “negative” and fragmentary quality—“The Tunnel” can be read as the most important section of *The Bridge* for understanding how the poem negotiates with the problem of community and social bonds.

I. “Performances, Assortments, Résumés”: A Surface Experience

Repeated

Crane begins “The Tunnel” by situating the speaker’s viewpoint at Times Square, looking over the buildings, theaters and clubs steeped in the river of electric lights:

Performances, assortments, résumés—

Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights

Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,

Refractions of the thousand theaters, faces—

Mysterious kitchens. . . . You shall search them all. (*CPSL* 67)

Regarding the first line that evokes the famous advertising column, Jack C. Wolf remarks that Crane presents “a concept referring back to ‘To Brooklyn Bridge’ (‘cinemas, panoramic sleights’)” (131). Just as the root meaning of “panorama” is to “see everything,” so this opening articulates an aspect of the city that turns everything into an available image in front of the dwellers. Though each image is fragmentary and distorted on the glass windows (“refractions”), the bits and pieces of “the thousand theaters, faces— / Mysterious kitchens” nonetheless generate a desire for “search[ing] them all,” and thereby attaining the idea of city itself as a whole.^{6 1}

Instead of celebrating the throbbing metropolitan environments of the nocturnal city, however, the speaker prefers to withdraw into his home:

Someday by heart you'll learn each famous sight

And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite;

You'll find the garden in the third act dead,

Finger your knees—and wish yourself in bed

With tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight. (*CPSL* 67)

“Having seen these crowds and buildings countless times,” so Robert Combs interprets, the speaker connotes that “they lose their capacity to surprise him.” Concerning Crane’s association of city life with the theatrical performance, Combs adds that the speaker “sees life as a tedious and repulsive play” (162). Indeed, Crane suggests the speaker’s interest in the theaters only to deflate it: “You’ll find the garden in the third act dead.” Imagining what can be called the anterior future in which the promising vision (“garden”) is seen as already boring (“dead”), the speaker hopes to shut himself in his room where he can read the “tabloid crime-sheets” instead of tapping his feet impatiently with the theater audiences. To explicate the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Kathrin Yacavone mentions “the kind of surface experience that, owing to a sensual overload of stimulation, predominates in the context of modern city life.” Yacavone writes that such “surface experience” in city

life “supersedes the deeper, more resonant and often more authentic one described as *Erfahrung* conjoined with Proust’s more profound form of memory” (100). Aside from Proust’s idea of memory to which we will return later, Yacavone’s observation about the effect of “a sensual overload of stimulation” is relevant to the poem’s opening. Shortly after thinking about walking (“A walk is better underneath the L a brisk / Ten blocks or so before”), he decides to take the “subway that yawns the quickest promise home” (*CPSL* 67). Despite the hyperactive commercial complex that would stimulate him to explore the city fully, what he wants after a day’s work is to avoid as much as possible any communication with anyone.

While the speaker evades close contact with other citizens (“Be minimum, then, to swim the hiving swarms”), the second stanza contains an allusion to a bond of the religious community. After leaving the office to go home, the speaker greets the twelve citizens who come across him going downtown: “As usual, let you—also / walking down —exclaim / to twelve upward leaving / a subscription praise / for what time slays” (*CPSL* 67). As R. W. B. Lewis has argued, “twelve” suggests “the twelve apostles, which the poet can praise and even subscribe to for what it once was and accomplished.” Lewis notices the lack of “vigor” in Crane’s portrait of city life (357), thus “a subscription praise for what time slays” implies that the possibility to tie such a communal bond has been

“slayed” by the “time” of the technological advancement in the field of transportation in the 1920s. Indeed, the earlier part of “The Tunnel” illustrates the way in which the advancement in the connective technologies paradoxically dissociates people from each other, urging them to lead an alienated social life. Needless to say, it is what Edward Brunner calls “self-imposed isolation” (175) in city life that generates a longing for reaching out to find a redemptive “answer” through the urban purgatory (*CSPL* 68). As we will see in what follows, though, such a metaphoric interpretation of city life has been an object of criticism.

II. “Like Hair beyond Extinction”: Formless Materials

Overviewing the critical history of “The Tunnel,” Sunny Stalter contends that critics “tend to ignore the actuality of the subway as a part of city life; they leap too quickly to a metaphoric reading of the subway as underworld or hell, instead of first considering the setting as a culturally, historically and spatially located environment.” With a subtle reservation that she “would not commit the interpretive violence required to call Crane’s depiction of the subway a totally affirmative one,” Stalter attempts “to balance out the negative readings by focusing on the subway as an ordinary habit, one

that modern subjects use to get to know the city.” Emphasizing its mundane aspects, Stalter reconsiders the subway as “a vehicle by which even frightening fragmentation can be made sense of through repeated material encounters” (71). Though highly instructive in reminding us that New York writers of the 1920s regarded the subway as a familiar, non-sublime object, it is still difficult *not* to read “The Tunnel” as a quest for transcendental redemption.

According to Daniel Gabriel, “The Tunnel” “duplicates *The Waste Land*’s despair, but it is salvaged by the implicit redemption of ‘Atlantis’” (153). Gabriel’s view that “The Tunnel” is “salvaged by” the “redemption” is worth re-complicating. But that Crane himself invites such a metaphoric interpretation is evident in his transfiguration of the subway into “phonographs of hades” (*CPSL* 68) where the train’s “hideous laughter” is equated with “the muffled slaughter of a day in birth” (*CPSL* 70). By following the speaker, who takes the train running beneath Brooklyn Bridge, we are led to the unhesitatingly sublime vision of “Hand of Fire” “gather[ing]” “Kiss of our agony” (*CPSL* 71). But such binary opposites as mundane and sublime or affirmative and negative may mislead us to understand the verbal fragments in “The Tunnel” as subservient parts that are integrated into a higher form of “Atlantis.” As it turns out, “The Tunnel” is enmeshed by a kind of imagery which cannot be reduced to the antithetical “meaning” subsumable

into the larger machine of the dialectic synthesis.

From the fifth stanza, Crane starts disrupting the syntax to represent the speaker's perception disturbed by the noise in the subway: "In the car / the overtone of motion / underground, the monotone / of motion is the sound / of other faces, also underground."

The overheard conversations are captured only to let the speaker make the gloomy reflection: "Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes. / This answer lives like verdigris, like hair / Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone" (*CPSL* 68). Crane's association of the "answer" with "verdigris" or "hair" that continues to grow on a corpse hints the immortal endurance of the redemptive sign even in dislocated communications.

At the same time, though, these similes foreground the utter uselessness of the answer's persistence. Growing after the death without purpose, the hair on a corpse can embody a radical form of uselessness that interrupts the systematic construction of meaning. Connecting the abstract words of event ("extinction"; "surcease") with the concrete images of fragment ("hair"; "bone"), Crane presents this passage as the fragment *as* a fragment, not as the fragment of the lost whole.

Materialized as the negativity without purpose, those verbal fragments recall Georges Bataille's concept of "base matter," which opposes Western culture's endeavors to repress the formless materiality of the human in favor of spirit, logos or rigorously-

constructed meaning. According to Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, who introduce Bataille's ideas, "base matter persists as a 'virulent manifestation' of material resistance or interruption to human completion" (9). Botting and Wilson present Bataille's concept of "formless" as "something outside sense, a declassifying effect that is none the less countered and provisionally contained by philosophical systems whose primary goal is to establish form" (10). Their explanation can be helpful for us to highlight the "base" and "formless" imagery in "The Tunnel" that remain, in a disturbing manner, within the architectural structure of the subway network, and by extension, of the poem itself.

In talking about his poetics, Crane often compares poetry with "an architectural art" (CPSL 170). Writing to his patron Otto Kahn, Crane associates the structure of *The Bridge* with "the Sistine Chapel," and says that "[e]ach is a separate canvas, as it were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others." In the same letter, he calls this design as "my architectural method" (CPSL 554-55). By "architectural," Crane must have meant the harmonious organization of the "separate" sections, each of whose fragmentary elements are to be reconciled eventually in the poem's structure as a whole. However, "The Tunnel" contains various indices of what Bataille would call "formless" materials, including "hair / Beyond extinction" (CPSL 68), Poe's "retching flesh" (CPSL 69), spittle and phlegm ("cuspidors") (CPSL 70), all of which cannot be subject to the

unifying force of “the major design of the entire poem” (*CPSL* 554). In the middle part of “The Tunnel,” as we will examine, Crane imagines the tunnel as “phonographs of hades,” like labyrinthine webs (*CPSL* 68) woven out of useless, inexplicable lines with semantic gaps. Like spittle and phlegm in the “cuspidor,” those images and phrases are expectorated as the nonreturnable bodily fluid, exuding and spreading within the tunnel. Perceiving in “Quaker Hill,” which precedes “The Tunnel,” Crane’s “expression of suffering unredeemed that is the last sublation of experience,” Combs insists that to “understand ‘The Tunnel’ we must see the full extent of this pessimism” (161). Resisting to be formed even into the symbols of “pessimism,” those formless imagery unsettles the rigid binaries of the dialectic logic (affirmation / negation or formation / deformation). By simultaneously soliciting and denying the metaphorical interpretation that seeks to achieve a fusional identification of one thing with the other, those images redirect our attention to the poem’s allegorical structure which we will examine in the light of Jonathan Culler’s understanding of allegory.

III. “And Somehow Anyhow Swing”: Reconsidering the Weakened Links

In a 1926 letter to Waldo Frank, Crane describes “The Tunnel” as “rather ghastly, almost surgery—and, oddly almost all from the notes and stiches I have written while swinging on the strap at late midnights going home” (*CPSL* 484). As evident in the middle part, “The Tunnel” has a collage-like textuality made up of the verbal fragments:

“Let’s have a pencil Jimmy—living now
at Floral Park
Flatbush—on the fourth of July—
like a pigeon’s muddy dream—potatoes
to dig in the field—travlin the town—too—
night after night—the Culver line—the
girls all shaping up—it used to be—” (*CPSL* 68)

Since this stanza is followed by the speaker’s somber reflection on the “answer” that “lives like verdigris,” critics tend to interpret it in the context of the alienation in city life. Comparing “The Tunnel” with *The Waste Land*, Gabriel argues that these lines “are shards of speech, emblematic of an age cut off from the natural springs of language” (155). Though Gabriel’s interpretation is convincing in the context of his argument, the above

stanza can be “emblematic” of *anything* evocative of alienation of one image from its ultimate referent. As Lawrence Kramer rightly observes, “The Tunnel” is “littered with decontextualized fragments. Even the main text is not always decipherable with any assurance.” In the context of our argument, then, it is more productive to examine how Crane’s fragmentary arrangement of the verbal “found objects” affects the reader’s perception of the relationship between those fragments (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 116).

Seeing the city’s “loose conglomeration of disparate parts” as “a model for Crane’s incorporation of overheard conversation,” Stalter argues that “the voices of these subway passengers are no longer signs of presence. Instead, they allow the narrator (and the reader) to imagine the absent, ungraspable whole self of which conversation and habits play only a part” (76-77). Among other aspects of “The Tunnel,” certainly, it is Crane’s indirect evocation of the “absent, ungraspable whole self” that leads us to draw on an interpretive frame such as *Verfallsgeschichte*, or a history as a narrative of a fall from the past glorious era. Viewed from this frame, for example, the place names like “Floral Park / Flatbush” can represent the demystified version of the New World that Columbus has discovered in “Ave Maria.” Given the etymology of “Columbus,” furthermore, “pigeon’s muddy dream” can be taken as the deprived counterpart to the promising ideal of the white settlers (“the fourth of July”). In this context, we can note that the name of a rapid

transit line “Culver” (also meaning “pigeon”) is linked to Columbus’s voyage (*CPSL* 68). Simply put, what tempts us to link each verbal fragment with the larger motif and thereby restore the broken wholeness is Crane’s rhetorical loosening of the connections between phrases and sentences. In the letter to Frank, Crane asks if Frank found “how throughout the poem motives and situations recur—under modifications of environment, etc,” adding that the “organic substances of the poem are holding a great many surprises for me” (*CPSL* 484-85). In other words, as Crane partially renounces his authorial control over the poem’s rhetorical coherence, these verbal fragments are cast into a network of allusions and images, revealing a possibility to generate unexpected links between “motives and situations” that “surprise” Crane himself.

The following passage can be considered as a blue-print for Crane’s rhetorical strategy to occasion such provisional interrelations between the verbal fragments that entail a disruptive series of conversational flows. In the midst of the moody reflection on the purposelessness of “our tongues,” his thought is suddenly interrupted by a woman’s voice:

And repetition freezes—“What

“what do you want? getting weak on the links?”

fandaddle daddy don't ask for change—IS THIS

FOURTEENTH? it's half-past six she said—if

you don't like my gate why did you

swing on it, why *didja*

swing on it

anyhow—”

And somehow anyhow swing— (*CPSL* 68)

Carrying over the “What” to the following stanza, Crane seems to consider the idea of repetition as hard-wired into the poem’s formal and thematic structure. Besides the phrasal repetition of “swing,” which associates the routinized subway ride with the ceaseless sexual wars, we are invited to note the repetition of “gate” figures, including the woman’s physical threshold (“my gate”) and William Blake’s “*Gates*” in the epigraph: “*To Find the Western path / Right thro’ the Gates of Wrath / —BLAKE*” (*CPSL* 67). However, Crane’s use of the quotation marks which leaves the first “What” unquoted emphasizes the division rather than the continuity of “what.” Even in the woman’s speech, the semantic cohesion is disrupted by the question about the station’s name (“IS THIS / FOURTEENTH?”), which is followed by another dislocated response: “It’s half past six

she said.” The bold letters may stand for the way she raises her voice in the train’s commotion. Or Crane might have disconnected each sentence to mime some emotional intensity such as panic at possibly missing her station. But the passage can also be read as the polyphonic shifting of voices in the subway. To use the woman’s phrase, the stanza itself is “getting weak on the links,” since it consists of a disunified arrangement of voices, both bringing together and drawing apart each more or less contiguous alignment of images and phrases.

“And somehow anyhow swing” thus sounds as Crane’s own voice that indirectly responds to the woman’s reproach (*CPSL* 68). Dislocated from the sexual context and relocated to the self-referential context, “swing” can operate as a term to epitomize this unstable but still dynamic mode of connection. Denying the possibility of any decisive meaning, those verbal fragments block our search for “the absent, ungraspable whole self of which conversation and habits play only a part” (Stalter 77). But Crane’s loosening of the thematic links does not result in a simple denial of meaning. As the adjective “weak” implies (*CPSL* 68), the bond of these connections is weakened, but still operative as a form of networking that is subject both to contiguity and contingency. As a result, those unhinged metaphorical associations lead to the mobilization of a metonymic network of co-responding figures, fashioned through close and distant connections.

Read in this way, the poem's structure draws closer to Culler's understanding of allegory. Culler describes allegory as "the mode which recognizes the impossibility of fusing the empirical and the eternal and thus demystifies the symbolic relation by stressing the separateness of the two levels, the impossibility of bringing them together except momentarily and against a background of disassociation, and the importance of protecting each level and the potential link between them by making it arbitrary." Considering allegory not as a decisive disconnection but as a rhetorical form that performs the contingency of association and disassociation, we can understand Crane's fragmentary arrangement of verbal objects not as emblematic of the negative aspects of modernity but as an allegorical enterprise which enacts the coincidental, oscillating movement of non-hierarchical connections. Culler elaborates his idea of allegory by writing that "[o]nly allegory can make the connection in a self-conscious and demystified way" (230). Resonating with Crane's self-referential phrase ("somehow anyhow swing") that implies the author's partial subjection of the materials to unexpected conjunctions (*CPSL* 68), Crane's (dis-)arrangement of the verbal fragments never yields to simple synthesis yet allows the reader to reenact in a "self-conscious and demystified way" the allegorical act of linking the disparate objects into an uneasy, provisional hinge of inchoate meanings. As we will see, this rhetorical strategy can be applicable to a form of

connection Crane attempts to forge between the speaker and Poe's ghost.

IV. "To His Own Native Shore": An Inchoate Community

Critics have agreed that the speaker's encounter with Poe on the train establishes a spiritual and inter-textual bond.^{6 2} By alluding to Poe's poems, Crane calls up Poe to facilitate the moment of empathy between the two marginalized visionaries:

And why do I often meet your visage here,
Your eyes like agate lanterns—on and on
Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?
—And did their riding eyes right through your side,
And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?
And Death, aloft—gigantically down
Probing through you—toward me, O evermore!
And when they dragged your retching flesh,
Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore—
That last night on the ballot rounds, did you,
Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe? (*CPSL* 69)

In a letter to Frank, Crane mentions William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, noting that he was surprised to find Williams "put[ting] Poe and his 'character' in the same position as I had *symbolized* for him in 'The Tunnel' section" (*CPSL* 498). In Williams's imagination, Poe's life was devoid of love ("Had he lived in a world where love throve, his poems might have grown differently"), and Poe was "surrounded as he was by the world and unreality, a formless 'population'—drifting and feeding—a huge terror possessed him" (233). Reminiscent of Williams's recapitulation of Poe's figure in the unsympathetic society, Crane associates the passengers' "eyes" with "unwashed platters," thereby privileging the spectral tie between Crane's speaker and Poe. Given the fact that the original title of Poe's "The City in the Sea" was "The Doomed City," it seems reasonable for Crane to seek to eternalize their communal bond by alluding both to "The City in the Sea" and to "The Raven": "Death, aloft—gigantically down" Crane's allusion to "To Helen" ("Your eyes like agate lanterns") also works to evoke their vision of the doomed community, as Poe idolizes a statue with an "agate lamp" in her hands that guides the "weary, way-worn wanderer . . . / To his own native shore" (166).

Despite the apparent opposition between the death-haunted visionaries and the other passengers, however, "The Tunnel" reveals a form of interconnectedness between the two camps. For instance, the image of commuters rising on the escalator helps us

disrupt the opposition between the speaker's tying of the intimate bond with Poe and anonymous, alienating contacts in the crowd.

For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street.

The platform hurries along to a dead stop.

The intent escalator lifts a serenade

Stilly

Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then

Bolting outright somewhere above where streets

Burst suddenly in rain. . . . The gongs recur:

Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door. (*CPSL* 69)

The speaker watches the passengers exiting and rising toward the street while he remains on the train. Corresponding to the dark mood evoked by the place name "Gravesend Manor" and the phrase "dead stop," the passengers are captured as the depersonalized fragments as though they were parts of the mechanized subway system ("Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe . . . Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door"). The musical term "serenade" is used to describe the noise produced from them on the escalator. As Kramer notes, the romantic encounter suggested by "serenade" turns out to

be “the isolation of strangers in the crowd” (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 119). Taken separately, indeed, each passenger is a complete stranger with whom the speaker shares nothing in common except the act of going home. But Crane’s configuration of those commuters encourages us to perceive (not identify) them as an inchoate community of unrequited wooers, unknowingly (“Stilly”) composing a form of “serenade.” Echoing back to Poe’s “To Helen,” their accidentally shared position of going home forms a short-term connection with Crane’s speaker and Poe’s ghost as the “weary, way-worn wanderer[s]” longing for their “native shore” (166). By using the word “serenade” to locate the commuters in the same posture of reaching out to the desired other aloft, moreover, Crane weakly links their act of going home with his own poetic endeavor. “Taking the final level for the dive / Under the river” (*CPSL* 69), “The Tunnel” begins to stage the speaker’s envisioning the maternal origins, one of Crane’s deepest concerns in *The Bridge*.

V. “Toward Worlds That Glow and Sink”

Reading *The Bridge* as the Wagnerian epic of *nostos* (a homeward journey), Brian Reed writes that Crane organized the poem “around a quest-like pursuit of archetypal

woman in her guises of virgin, mother, and whore” (*After* 153). Following Reed’s view, Catherine Davies sees the avatars of this archetypal woman as “a series of incarnations of America.” Davies writes that the “‘feminized beloved’ came to represent a symbolic ‘home’ of sorts for the poet . . . after Crane came to live with his lover, Emil Opffer, at 110 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, in the spring of 1924” (59). Besides Crane’s figuration of the archetypal woman as the national and maternal origins, Davies’s point that the “home” is related to Crane’s desired object is helpful for us to examine the latter part of “The Tunnel,” which draws a parallel to “Van Winkle,” a subsection of “Powhatan’s Daughter.”

At the middle of “Van Winkle,” where the speaker’s remembrance of his childhood is superimposed on the nation’s infancy, he is instigated suddenly by the “hurdy-gurdy” on the street to “remember” his mother’s “smile”: “Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile / My mother almost brought me once from church / And once only, as I recall—?” (*CPSL* 39-40). Like other traces of loss recollected in *The Bridge*, the mother’s smile turns out to be a figure of the lost “answer” (*CPSL* 68): “[the smile] forsook her at the doorway, / it was gone / Before I had left the window. It /Did not return with the kiss in the hall” (*CPSL* 40). Brunner rightly observes that it is the “undelivered” status of her smile that makes the past “not dead but dormant, not complete but incomplete—and what

is more, it appears in the present because it represents a message undelivered” (169). Equally important in “Van Winkle” is the unexpected, therefore passive manner of the speaker’s remembrance which can be linked with Proust’s idea of involuntary memory. Yacavone explicates it as “the chance encounter with a seemingly insignificant object (such as the madeleine), whose properties trigger a remembrance of a past moment that, in turn, renders the coincidental discovery of the object highly significant and places it in the context of a life-narrative” (207). Just as the speaker’s memory is activated involuntarily by the everyday detail as the hurdy-gurdy, which was “associated with Italian immigrants playing on street corners” (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 27), so the latter part of “The Tunnel” allegorizes the Proustian quest for the lost mother in the tunnel.

Happening to see a woman on the same train, the speaker imagines her as an Italian immigrant mother. As there is no evidence to certify her identity, the following stanza suggests Crane’s intention to remind us of the mother’s smile in “Van Winkle”:

And does the Daemon take you home, also,
Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair?
After the corridors are swept, the cuspidors—
The gaunt sky-barracks cleanly now, and bare,
O Genoese, do you bring mother eyes and hands

Back home to children and to golden hair? (*CPSL* 70)

Since Crane's apostrophe to her ("O Genoese") echoes back to Columbus's trial to bring back home "The word" of "Cathay" (*CPSL* 35), this woman can be misrecognized as an unknowing participant in the speaker's endeavor who, as the network of associations leads us to see, may indirectly inherit Columbus's desire to transmit the New World vision in "Ave Maria." Given Crane's peculiar phrasing ("to her children and golden hair") that recalls Crane's blond lover Emil Opffer, moreover, the maternal figure of "mother eyes and hands" can be linked to the text of *The Bridge* itself in terms of their shared status as the communal vehicle of "the Myth of America" (*CPSL* 554). Without crystallizing into a privileged moment, however, the speaker's attention to the anonymous woman is quickly withdrawn, leaving no tangible signs of his further interest in her.

Despite the passing reference to this woman, though, there remains something as an affective surplus that becomes manifest in the following stanzas, where Crane imagines the tunnel as the interior of the mother's body in the process of giving birth:

Daemon, demurring and eventful yawn!

Whose hideous laughter is the bellows mirth

—Or the muffled slaughter of a day in birth—

O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn

With antennae toward worlds that glow and sink;—

To spoon us out more liquid than the dim

Locution of the eldest star, and pack

The conscience navelled in the plunging wind,

Umbilical to call—and straightway die!

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam,

Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;

Condensed, thou takest all—shrill ganglia

Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.

And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,

The sod and billow breaking,—lifting ground,

—A sound of waters bending astride the sky

Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . . ! (*CPSL* 70)

Capturing the train's movement from beneath the East River to Brooklyn, Crane's enactment of the "dive / Under the river" reads as an allegory of purgatorial death to attain a sense of redemption (*CPSL* 69). What makes these stanzas extremely complicated, though, is Crane's use of the over-compressed metaphors to turn the tunnel into a site of

multiple acts of crossing a threshold. By imagining the tunnel as the birth canal in which the communal “we” is bound with the umbilicus (“navelled”; “umbilical”), Crane superimposes the image of an emerging infant upon the train’s movement to the other side of the East River. But the celebratory connotation of the baby’s arrival is undermined by Crane’s pun on the word “motion” (*CPSL* 68). Enumerating the scatological imagery in “The Tunnel,” Gregory Woods argues that “the subway train’s frenzied plunge into and emergence from the bowels of the earth” associates the “convulsive” “motion” of the train with the motion of excrement (158-59). Given Crane’s figuration of “Love / A burnt match skating in a urinal” (*CPSL* 68) as an index of a sexual encounter in a public restroom, furthermore, it is hard to miss in the train’s “lifting” movement to the “sod” (a potential pun on “sodomite”) the rhythm of the sexual excitement leading to the orgasmic climax: “The sod and billow breaking,—lifting ground, / —A sound of waters bending astride the sky.” While prefiguring the promise of some sort of redemption, the tunnel as the birth canal is thus transfigured into the rectum through which the phallic train ejaculates its “hideous laughter,” thwarting the expectation for the arrival of the rising son / sun.

“After the ultimate embrace of the daemon and death,” Gabriel writes, “Crane conjures the redemptive Word, the eternal through the immanent—that transcendent

linguistic sign or opulent utterance” (173). Certainly, the “hideous laughter” of “Daemon” “inoculate[s]” the emerging “dawn” with “antennae,” connoting the protection of the redemptive “Word.” But what these “antennae” foretell is the unrealized New World visions which are the multiple origins of the stillborn “worlds” evaporating in the transitory moment of crossing a threshold or homosexual rite of passage. As this visionary moment is occasioned by the agonistic / ecstatic “inoculat[ion]” from the phallic train’s “hideous laughter,” then, the “Kiss of our agony” can be taken not only as a figurative hinge to hold provisional conjunctions between the fragmentary images of subway commuters; it can also be read as another of Crane’s coded allusions to homosexual experience in which the speaker allows his body to be the communal site to gather the traces of nameless gay men, imaginarily reproducing the coruscations of Atlantis: “worlds that glow and sink.” (*CPSL* 70).

This “inoculat[ion]” from “Daemon” is surely “cruel,” since it implies the intertwining of the two, antagonistic versions of community. Suggested by such images as “birth” and “spoon,” one is the familial and national community founded on the child birth and nurturing. Characteristic of Crane again, the abstract “conscience” is imagined as bound with the umbilicus, implying the conscience’s productive function as in pregnancy. However, since the phrase “umbilical to call” is qualified by “straightway

die,” the “conscience” approaches birth only to be miscarried, thereby segueing into Leo Bersani’s speculation on an imaginary “community” of “barebackers” that could be reducible to “the single individual’s awareness of the interpenetration of fluids within their own bodies” (*Intimacies* 50). Seen in this context, it becomes understandable that the substance of the phallic “inoculat[ion]” yields nothing but the ephemeral vision of unrealizable worlds (*CPSL* 70).

Reminiscent of what Lee Edelman calls the violence of “reproductive futurism” that entails “compulsory abjuration of the future-negating queer” (*No* 26), the connotation of the filial inheritance emphasizes the barrenness of gay cruising which is entangled with the involuntary recollection of the “dim [l]ocution of the eldest star.” Besides reminding us of “Cutty Sark,” in which Crane’s invokes “*ATLANRIS ROSE*” in the image of “*the star*” (*CPSL* 52), the reference to the “star” leads us to Crane’s biographical information that Philip Horton provides. In early 1929 when Crane breaks up with his mother, Crane sent her “a cryptic postcard from Paris,” bearing “the strangely prophetic signature, ‘Atlantis,’ and the hieroglyph of a five-pointed star.” Given Horton’s surmise that Crane “might well sign himself by the name of the sunken island” (251), the “eldest” or original “star,” along with the “worlds that glow and sink,” can signify not only “Atlantis” as the poem’s last section but also Crane’s mournful fantasy of his alternative homeland that is

tacitly tied to the memories of his lost gay friends and lovers. Envisioned in the transient moment of “Kiss of our agony,” Crane’s Atlantis flickers as the empty and emptying myth of the doomed community, prefiguring no future redemption so much as the near void of that signifier: “*some* Word that will not die” (*CPSL* 70; emphasis added).

Coming to the journey’s end, the concluding stanza finds the speaker, who lingers by the East River and sees the city from the Brooklyn side.

A tugboat, wheezing wreathes of steam,
Lunged past, with one galvanic blare stove up the River.
I counted the echoes assembling, one after one,
Searching, thumbing the midnight on the piers.
Lights, coasting, left the oily tympanum of waters;
The blackness somewhere gouged glass on a sky.
And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
Tossed from the coil of ticking towers. . . . Tomorrow,
And to be. . . . Here by the river that is East—
Here at the waters’ edge the hands drop memory;
Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
How far away the star has pooled the sea—

Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,

O Hand of Fire

gatherest— (*CPSL* 70-71)

Crane's apostrophe to the city re-evokes the Blakean motif of redemption after trial: "And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under." But this proclamation of survival is uttered at the cost of his inability to remember the fragmentary pasts and gather them into the temporal vantage point from which he can face the present and the future in a sustained, dialectic progression: "Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory." As Edelman comments on this passage, Crane seems to attain the privileged temporality in which "his hands were able to drop memory—when he finally could go beyond the need to remember much forgetfulness and propose his poetry as if from the space of pure origination" (*Transmemberment* 247). Indeed, as "the river that is East" evokes the starting point both of "The Tunnel" (the epigraph comes from Blake's "Morning") and *The Bridge* ("Ave Maria"), the figure of the "hands" that "unaccounting lie" appears to attain the "shadowless," "Platonic purity" (Gabriel 174). Echoing with "Cutty Sark," in which Crane sought to deal with the loss of "rights to loss" (Drabinski 154), however, "that

abyss” more than likely refers to the catastrophic loss from which he could not transmit the redemptive vision to future generations. And another meaning of “lie” (falsify) reinforces the undoing of the inchoate, promising vision, keeping in suspense the speaker’s reflection on the journey’s achievement. The ending seems synthetic as “the hands” are folded into the unifying “Hand of Fire.” But what this “Hand” “gather[s]” is “Kiss of our agony” that Crane associates with the “pennies beneath soot and steam” (*CPSL* 70). As these coins are dropped through the grates on the street to be scattered throughout the huge tunnel, those “kisses” turn into the traces of failed acts of tying a bond, splitting apart and re-gathering in the unknowable “Hand of Fire.”

Coda

Reading in “The Tunnel” “a series of belated recognitions,” Brunner argues that “with [Crane’s] epic virtually complete, he has not in fact composed the ‘mystical synthesis of values in terms of our America’ that he had proposed for himself.” Therefore, Brunner continues, “Atlantis” “contains all that he did not do; it is the walk home that he did not take, that walk drenched in all the possibilities he looks back upon and sees he may have lost, but recovered here in a blend of memory with imagination, a fantastic

creation, a dream he pledges will never fade” (179). Brunner’s reading of “Atlantis” as the final section that “contains all that he did not do” is right to an extent that “Atlantis” embodies what John T. Irwin calls Crane’s subversive “counter-mimesis” (qtd. in Hammer, *Janus* 179). Still, Brunner’s view that Crane “has not in fact composed the ‘mystical synthesis of values in terms of our America’” becomes debatable. Despite Crane’s authorial intention, the textual performance of “The Tunnel” can be read as the allegory of a concrete, and kinetic mode of “mystical synthesis” of “our America.”

Reminiscent of the root meanings of “mystical” (hidden meanings; secret rites; one who has been initiated), “The Tunnel” secretly enacts various allegories of rite of passage, all of which at once incite and thwart our desire to attain a synthetic view of the intricate network of the peoples going back to their (figurative) homes. For instance, Crane’s transfiguration of the tunnel into the birth canal suggests that his search for the maternal origins is the impossible quest for the community based on the shared essences. Accordingly, “The Tunnel” offers us the dialectical divide between the authentic bond in Crane’s imaginary community and inauthentic contacts in the alienating world of masses. As we have seen, however, the lyric’s radical fragmentariness renders inoperative every appeal to synthesize the fragments into the lost wholeness. Along with the recalcitrant materiality embodied by the “base” imagery, the lyric’s allegorical structure never allows

such binary opposites to remain in a stable condition, reconnecting and divorcing “they” and “we” or everyday and sublime. Yet, this dynamic movement itself can be revalued as an alternative form of “synthesis,” or of the combining of diverse elements into a collective vision of mythic whole that remains open to constant unravelling.

In *The Sense of the World*, which attempts to deconstruct the social bond without abandoning the issue of community, Nancy speculates that the “tying of the (k)not is nothing, no *res*, nothing but the placing-into-relation that presupposes at once proximity and distance, attachment and detachment, intricacy, intrigue, and ambivalence” (111). This state of coexistence is allegorized, though retroactively, by the resultant form of “The Tunnel.” As we have seen, “The Tunnel” is informed by a series of incomplete and non-hierarchical links between the words and motifs, the speaker and the other citizens, and Crane and his maternal / national origins, all of which are eventually cast into the allegorical network of the co-responding figures across the sections and subsections of *The Bridge*. As Crane’s alternative America(s) is envisioned by the transitory moment of surrendering his authorial subjectivity to the unknowable other, “The Tunnel” is made up of the “kisses” or contingent acts, moments, and events of tying a (k)not that simultaneously brings together and draws apart the accidental alignments between peoples and their desires for their own native shores.

Postlude

I. Three Aspects of the Community

While investigating what Crane sought to materialize in *The Bridge*, I also have aimed to elucidate what Crane did not explicitly address yet remains as an insistent issue throughout the poem, namely, the issue of community. As noted in Introduction, the term “community” does not appear in *The Bridge*. Yet, my readings of *The Bridge* and Crane’s other writings have demonstrated that Crane at once envisions and explores various modes of community and communion to relate himself with the collective vision of something similar to “America,” with the world, with others. Understanding Crane’s ideal invested in *The Bridge* as the dream “of uniting his identities as a lover and a poet,” Langdon Hammer writes that Crane’s “dream is of a democratic community that would, like Whitman’s America, include in it the homosexual and his joys” (*O My* xxi). Indeed, we find in “Cape Hatteras” Crane’s poignant invocation of Whitmanian ideal of “a democratic community”: “Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound / Of living brotherhood!” (*CPSL* 58). But this is nothing but one aspect of the community in *The Bridge*. By having examined how the motifs and forms of community are implicated in

The Bridge, now we can see that the basic premises underlying the text's configurations of communal relationality can be isolated and summarized as the three aspects.

First, there is a series of communities presented *in* the text. Whether it is the tribal community in "The Dance," the pioneer family in "Indiana," the obscured gay community in "Cutty Sark," or the community of friendship and the religious community of Friends in "Quaker Hill," they can be considered as a type of group which forms itself around a preexisting foundation such as a shared narrative of origins, essences, interests or destinies. As my readings of those lyrics have attempted to show, this kind of community manifests itself as the trace of its loss ("Quaker Hill"), of its interruption ("The Dance"), of its absence ("Cape Hatteras"), and as a self-confessed artifice ("Cutty Sark"), whose nearly empty frame is, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, nothing but the substance of community. Jane Hiddleston, who explicates Nancy's idea of community, writes that "community" "points to the mythical nature of myth, figuring nostalgia for a perpetual receding origin. Myth, for Nancy, is thus 'interrupted' or broken down by the dissemination of collective identity and the uncovering of the illusory nature of any shared essence" (30). Such equation of "community" with "myth" can be instructive for us to understand Crane's "Myth of America" in the light of deconstruction of "community."

In "To Brooklyn Bridge," the inaugural lyric to *The Bridge*, Crane implores the

“*curveship*” of the bridge to “*lend a myth to God*” that is imagined as in a state of bankruptcy (*CPSL* 34). But a form of myth in *The Bridge* does not constitute a unifying and unified narrative to create a self-contained community. As examined, for example, in the sixth chapter on “Southern Cross” and the eighth chapter on “The Tunnel,” a content of myth is cast into the process of abstraction so that the supposed symbol of its myth remains ever-inchoate, which is to say, at once fluid and solid enough to be re-adjustable to the changing situations of modern America. The community as myth in *The Bridge* is figured as a near empty vehicle of communication in whose fleeting traces the reader is spurred to read and re-enact, on an ad hoc basis, the allegory of binding a communal tie.

What is observed above segues into the second aspect of the community in *The Bridge*. This aspect is related to the writerly event which is activated by us as the “[un]faithful / partisans” of Crane’s vision of bridge building (*CPSL* 35), whose “very idea” is restated by Crane as “an act of faith” (*CPSL* 466). As we have observed in Interlude, Crane has the fantasy that his “natural idiom” could function as a connective medium to extend and transport his desiring body and touch to the reader. And, with an aim to create a hermeneutic community of the readers, Crane’s poetics is designed to take an involving effect on a receiver of his poetry, inviting him / her to exert an intense identificatory impulse to witness and take part in the poet’s exploration of the “implicit”

“associational meanings” in the catachrestic arrangement of words (*CPSL* 163). Imagining such an intra-textual communication as the experience of “communion,” Crane believes that his poetry serves as a ground on which “some community of interest” can be founded (*CPSL* 326). As evident in Crane’s letters to his friends, moreover, Crane hopes, to no avail, that the “sensitizing influence” of recognizing the bond of such an intimate coterie or “community of interest” works as a springboard to achieve “a synthesis of America and its structural identity” (*CPSL* 325). It may be easy to expect that the dream of such a “community” is too impossible to be actualized (at least as a sustainable form of connection). What is more, we might be tempted to criticize the disparity between Crane’s ideality of such an ambitious poetics and the resultant text of its praxis, latter of which has been denounced often as difficult, self-indulgent or, simply, a failure.

Having said that, however, we should never fail to re-appreciate the very disparity between Crane’s desire for a communal identity and the notorious obscurity and fragmentariness of *The Bridge*. As observed in Interlude, Crane’s “logic of metaphor” works in bringing to sharp relief the distancing effects of mediation and interruption rather than the immediate connectedness between the inscribed experience and language itself (*CPSL* 163). This ambivalent dynamics will lead us to reconfigure the second aspect of the community as an intra-textual correspondence between poet and reader that is

mobilized through our awareness of this mediated relationality. To put this simply, the first aspect of the (im)possible community inscribed within the text is supposed to be at work also on the performative level through the reader's interaction with Crane's poetics of spacing. Before dealing with the third aspect of the community, I will recapitulate how such privileging of the intra-textual relationship over a poem's capability to represent something both anticipates and informs the non-dialectic, repetitive form of *The Bridge*.

As noted in the first chapter, the disparity between Crane's stated aspiration for the synthesis of "America" and the resultant fragmentariness has tended to bipolarize the critical evaluation of *The Bridge*. According to Thomas Yingling's overview, on the one hand, some critics, especially the earlier ones, criticized "the poem's lack of aesthetic harmony" by pointing to the "myriad incompletenesses" of *The Bridge* (199). On the other hand, however, other critics have denounced *The Bridge* as being "static" and "complete in itself" (Moss 32-33). Those critics complain that it is difficult to find a dialectic or dramatic progression toward an aesthetic integration of the opposites: "[Crane's] Bridge is metaphysical on one hand and mechanical on the other. It rarely achieves a balance between fact and vision" (Moss 32). Rather than interrogating the relevance of those views, we have to pay attention to the very ambiguous form of *The Bridge* that generates in the readers' responses the mixture of "incompletion" and

“completion.”

It is true that Crane sought to provide the poem with the sense of completion. In Introduction, in which we have dwelled on the circular, repetitive shape of *The Bridge*, the concluding word (“swing”) and image of the dawning sky (“azure”) in the final section “Atlantis” (CPSL 74) are folded back into the first quatrain of the inaugural lyric (“*How many dawns . . . / The sea gull [s wing]*”) (CPSL 33). This kind of rhetorical strategy gestures toward Crane’s authorial desire to encompass the diverse strands of American history in the poem’s self-enclosed structure. But such a structural “completion” does not result in a narratological conclusion. Throughout the poem, indeed, various binary opposites are presented in such a contrasting manner that we are urged to read it in terms of a dialectic progression. However, none of those attain a fusional synthesis in “Atlantis” but remain as the doubled figure of “many twain” that swings back and forth in the non-dialectic, repetitive form, thereby bringing about the sense of inconclusiveness (CPSL 73).

Furthermore, Crane’s collage-like (dis)arrangement of the sections and subsections of *The Bridge* and its opaque linguistic surface also contribute to the sense of incompleteness. Denouncing the apparently ill-sutured structure of *The Bridge*, in which Crane’s “interrelate[ion]” of “moments of emotional vision” is not matched by the

concrete historicity of a “cultural epic,” for instance, R. P. Blackmur criticizes the poem by writing that the finished text may be “enough for [Crane] because he kn[ows] the rest.” However, so Blackmur continues, the readers may well find the text frustratingly incomplete, because it lacks “completely objective embodiment” (21). Nevertheless, as I maintain, the poem’s “incomplete” texture, along with the non-dialectic form of *The Bridge*, serves as the resistance to hermeneutic decisiveness, thereby preventing our interpretive desire for connection from withering away. If the poem moved beyond the malleable symbol of a bridge to some kind of the narrative finality, and succeeded in attaining a coherent identity of the epic story, the poem could not allow for an imagined experience of the ever-mediated, therefore haunted relation with the text.

Given the above effects of Crane’s poetics and its praxis, we now understand that Crane’s epic project had already bespoken the multiple inconclusiveness of *The Bridge*, whose structural fragmentation often has been ascribed to the 1929 additions to the poem (“Quaker Hill”; “Cape Hatteras”; “Indiana”). Throughout my readings of the four lyrics that were written around 1926 (“The Dance”; “Southern Cross”; “Cutty Sark”; “The Tunnel”), I have aimed to show that these earlier lyrics share with the 1929 additions the aesthetic of fragmentation and incompleteness. At the same time, I have examined the way in which Crane’s failure to represent “the myth of America” functions to redirect our

attention to the episodically fragmentary yet rhetorically networked structure (*CPSL* 554).

And it is this kinetic architecture of the poem thus found that encourages us to read the poem as the allegory of the third aspect of the community in *The Bridge*.

The third aspect of the community can be also alternative to an ordinary idea of community as a homogeneous and self-enclosed group of people. As I have said in Introduction, I would like to make recourse to Nancy's idea again, and call the third aspect of the community as the community as *partage*. This aspect cannot be intelligible until the reader assumes a doubled perspective by combining the one eye on the first aspect of the community *in* the text, with the other eye on the second aspect of the community *through* the text. As observed earlier, Crane scholarship has revolved around the term "failure" to this day, and this fact owes largely to the disruptive textuality of *The Bridge*, which appears to fall to pieces, both thematically and textually. However, as Reed and other scholars have painstakingly analyzed, the "chains of association" are woven throughout *The Bridge* as the poem's infrastructure so intricately as to "lend an interconnectedness to a poem that could otherwise seem diffuse and centrifugal in its rather arbitrary, limited selections of settings, speakers, and topics drawn from U. S. history." (Reed, *After* 150). In the sixth chapter on "Southern Cross," the seventh chapter on "Cutty Sark," and the eighth chapter on "The Tunnel," respectively, I have carried

Reed's observation about Crane's "omnivorous zest for linking" (*After* 164) further by focusing on how the inaccurately repeated figures across the sections and subsections challenge the reader to witness the unexpected network of meanings and forms co-responding with each other. Generating in the reader's mind the mixture of completion and incompleteness, such a dynamic network of the poem invites the reader to re-enact the cognitive process in which each figure in *The Bridge* assumes both the strange closeness to, and the intimate distance from, the other figures without entertaining a possibility of any fusional totalization.

As demonstrated in the eighth chapter, where I refer to Nancy's reconfiguration of the communal existence as of "tying of the (k)not" (*Sense* 111), the kinetic network of mediated relations in and through the text of *The Bridge* is generated by the reader as a co-actor in the text, who participates in the writerly activity of arranging the disparate objects into an uneasy, provisional hinge of inchoate connections. Given this sort of rhetorical extravagance that encourages us to read *The Bridge* as an allegorical text of community, we are led to shed further light on postmodern aspects of *The Bridge* in the following section.

II. Postmodern Aspects of *The Bridge*

Samuel Loveman, one of Crane's friends, recalls the exchange with Crane at one of the poet's suicidal moments when Crane tried to throw himself over the roof of Columbia Heights. According to Loveman, Crane, responding to Loveman's rebuke, expressed anxiety about the failure of his poetic project: "And I said, 'You son of a bitch! Don't you ever try that on me again.' So [Crane] picked himself up and said, 'I might as well, I'm only writing *rhetoric*'" (13; emphasis added). As I have pointed out in the beginning of the first chapter, Crane's linguistic extravagance has been an object of harsh criticism. For instance, the rhetorical artificiality of *The Bridge* that obscures the "historical plot of the poem" (Tate 287) has invited such a stricture that *The Bridge* "gave us rhetoric instead of poetry" (Southworth 169). Read as a whole, indeed, *The Bridge* is a disjunctive sequence of the individual, "difficult" lyrics. At the same time, however, the rhetorical network of the words, images, and motifs entices us to stitch or link them in various ways. Besides the allegorical reinterpretation of *The Bridge* as the poem of, and as "community," it is the combination of the poem's rhetorical abundance and the thematic diffusiveness that I would like to reevaluate in terms of its stylistic affinity with the U. S. postmodern poetics.

It is true that each section of *The Bridge* offers us the traditional lyric voice, which leads us to perceive what Albert Gelpi terms “the lyric ego of the Romantic-Modernist poet.” And yet, since any one voice in the poem is not given the privilege to organize the other voices from a totalizing, telos-oriented perspective, the de-centralized structure of *The Bridge* draws nearer to the characteristic styles of the language oriented poets in the later generations, one of whom is Charles Bernstein. In “The Genealogy of Postmodernism: Contemporary American Poetry,” Gelpi dwells on Bernstein’s “Dysgraphism” to observe that Bernstein’s “shapeless poem has no teleology”: “it gets nowhere, and that is its point. It is six pages long, but it could just as easily have been two or twenty or two hundred” (532). In referring to Gelpi’s view of Bernstein, my aim is not to assert the similarity between Bernstein’s poetry and Crane’s. Although Bernstein himself says that he “aspire[s] to” write an “over-boiled” poem like Crane’s (“Discussion”), Crane’s poetry, unlike Bernstein’s, features an unabashedly romantic subjectivity. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to remark their stylistic affinity especially in terms of the critical discourses dealing with those poets.

For example, Gelpi’s observation about Bernstein’s non-teleological poem that “gets nowhere” (“Genealogy” 532) resonates not only with Yvor Winters’ criticism of *The Bridge* (Winters 31) but also with the 2007 disparagement made by William Logan

(Logan's essay in *The New York Times* is titled "Hart Crane's Bridge to Nowhere"). Concerning Bernstein's rhetorical strategy that foregrounds the "textual seaming and mis-seaming (seeming and mis-seeming?)," Gelpi writes that "[a] series of characteristically short, direct, discrete statements, unconnected by conjunctions of subordinate clauses, are stitched together less by discursive sense than by verbal repetition (seaming) and counterpoint (mis-seaming)" (531). This observation can function as an apt gloss on the fragmentary shape of Crane's "The Tunnel," around which my analysis has revolved in the eighth chapter. Although several critics including Brian Reed and Sunny Stalter have pointed out the affinity between Crane's poetics and Bernstein's (Reed, *After* 91; Stalter 78), it is still necessary to elaborate postmodern aspects of *The Bridge*, whose rhetorical self-centeredness may be easily obfuscated by Crane's use of traditional meters and regular forms. Besides Gelpi's description of "Dysrhythmism," for instance, we can make recourse to Marjorie Perloff's characterization of Bernstein's poetics in order to reinforce the rhetorical innovativeness of *The Bridge*: "the collaging of items that are not only disparate but have different syntactic orders, shifting voices, sources, and multiple allusions . . . combined with a penchant for punning and word play" (172). Chiming with the fragmentary shape of "The Tunnel" again, Perloff's observation can be applicable as well to the combination of Crane's centripetal use of puns and the centrifugal dispersion

of the lyric voices in *The Bridge*, the latter of which will be examined in what follows in the light of the U. S. queer poetics.

As the narrative plot of *The Bridge* gets to nowhere, the text is made open to the process of writerly re-arrangement of its parts, through which the reader is challenged to concentrate on the connective act of misidentifying or mixing the one figure with the other in the rhetorical network of the poem. Thereby, the reader can arrange a new relation among its polyphonic architecture of provisional links between voices, motifs, and figures. In addition to the affinity between Crane's poetic practice and Bernstein's, in this respect, there is another genealogical line that we can draw between *The Bridge* and the postmodern long poems, which were written in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, along with Robin Blaser, for instance, explored the possibilities of a narratively disjunctive yet allegorically generative form called the "serial poem" or "serial form," which contains, according to Joseph Conte, "strictly postmodern innovations that can easily be distinguished . . . from their romantic and modernist predecessors" (3). Unlike Crane's concept of *The Bridge*, indeed, their ideas of "serial poem" is willingly open-ended as they employ a random process of composition.⁶³ Yet, the affinity between Crane and those poets is still worth investigating. The critics, including Conte, Michael Davidson, Daniel Katz, and others, have already examined the

line of (dis)continuity between those younger poets and their “masculine” predecessors such as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson. Less discussed is the way in which their subversive poetics and styles share a lot with Crane’s poetry.

The relation between the younger poets’ negotiation with the issue of homosexuality and their queer aesthetics can be investigated by focusing on the characteristics of “*écriture gaie*,” which Robert Martin, in dealing with the work of Roland Barthes, proposes as a “parallel to the *écriture féminine*” (“Roland” 282). According to Hazel Smith, who recapitulates Martin’s argument, the radical concept of what Martin terms as the “*écriture gaie*” can be described as follows:

Barthes argues for the radical political potential of text which are multiple rather than unitary, and which free language from conventional structure. Such texts can empower homosexual discourse because they liberate the phallus from teleology in the form of narrative closure. The texts become plural and is open to writerly reconstructions by the reader (105)

Without mentioning that those characteristics are “typical of postmodernist texts” in general (105), the above passage can be helpful for us to explore the less established affinity between Crane’s queer style and those of the U. S. postmodern gay poets. The above description of the “*écriture gaie*” resonates, for instance, with John Ashbery’s

composition of “Litany,” which is written in double columns. In “Author’s Note” to “Litany,” Ashbery writes of the poem’s design as follows: “The two columns of ‘Litany’ are meant to be read as simultaneous but independent monologues” (553). In the left column of “Litany,” for example, we see such thought-provoking lines as “And it is not like the old days / When we used to sing off-key / For hours in the rain-drenched schoolroom / On purpose. . .” (576). Reading these lines, we can find the speaker situated in the in-between temporality (“it is not like old days”), remembering the past, communal intimacy (“we” shared the campy attitude of “sing[ing] off-key,” “[o]n purpose”). In the right column, though, we see the italicized passage that evokes in a confusing and confused manner the sense of uncertainty about the speaker’s subjectivity, about the status of the poem’s addressee, and about the subject stated in the left column: “*To whom? In short, any kind of tame / Manifestation against the straw / Of darkness and the darkening trees / Until the aftertaste claimed it*” (577). Understanding the poem’s form as “a somewhat trying imitation of the bicameral mind,” Helen Vendler observes that “Litany” “is full of perfectly intelligible and heartfelt rumination on soul-making in art, life, and criticism.” “On the whole,” Vendler continues, the poem “wonders why—placed, as we are, on this isthmus of our middle state—we go on living and doing the things we do: inventing, imitating, and transforming life” (232). While Vendler’s comment is highly

convincing in the context of her own interpretation, the resultant text of Ashbery's decentered composition can embrace any kinds of interpretation as long as they touch on the problem of why "we go on living and doing the things we do." By manipulating such a (de)compositional strategy, Ashbery renders his text at once alluringly and annoyingly polyphonic. Bearing Ashbery's technique in mind, I would like to highlight a subversive device that Crane employs in finishing *The Bridge*.

We can detect a prefiguration of Ashbery's polyphonic composition in the marginal glosses in "Ave Maria" and the five subsections of "Powhatan's Daughter." Added to the text of *The Bridge* in 1929, the glosses function as a meta-commentary on the main text, sometimes offering the reader the helpful information about the section's setting ("Columbus, / alone, gazing / toward Spain, / invokes the / presence of / two faithful / partisans of / his quest . . .") (CPSL 35). At some points, despite Crane's stated intention to provide "a great help in binding together the general theme of Powhatan's daughter" (CPSL 626), these glosses ironize or disorient Crane's treatment of sexuality legible in the main text. For instance, while the main text of "Harbor Dawn" finds the speaker making love with his lover in the dawn, the voice of the marginal gloss detachedly poses the deflating question: "with whom?" (curiously echoing with Ashbery's "To whom?" in "Litany") (577). Besides suggesting the spectral status of the anonymous lover who might

be read as the product of the speaker's "waking dream," this marginal voice connotes the possibility that the lover, with whom the speaker is supposed to "merge [his] seed," can be a woman as well as a man ("Who is the / woman with / us in the / dawn? . . . / whose is the / flesh our feet / have moved upon?") (CPSL 39). Thus, the gloss suggests that (s)he represents a feminized figure of a pre-Columbian, anonymous "America": "400 years and / more . . . or is / it from the / soundless shore / of sleep that / time" (CPSL 38).

Read in this mythopoetic context, moreover, the sounds from the harbor in the main text, including "beshrouded wails," which the speaker hears in bed, come to evoke the repressed aspects of a national history permeated with the imperialistic violence. As though implying the relevance of this line of surmise, the word "wail" reappears in "The River," relating the imagined banishment of Native Americans: "Trains . . . / Wail into distances I knew were hers. / Papoose crying on the wind's long mane / Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain" (CPSL 43; emphasis added). In the similar vein, the industrial noises in the harbor that imply the heteronormative productivity of the actual nation-state ("a truck"; the "throbbing" of "winch engines"; "a drunken stevedores howl and thud") is countervailed by the insubstantial "tide of voices" from "soundless shore" of an alternative America (CPSL 38). Those contrasts between the two "Americas" become further intelligible by Crane's amorous yet intangible enactment of the

homosexual or what Samuel Delany sees as “bisexualiz[ed]” love making (201) in which then predominant distinction of the “natural” from the “unnatural” is subverted (Yingling 200-04). In this manner, the marginal glosses add a rich ambivalence to the poem’s negotiation with the linear, reproductive temporality on the levels of the individual’s lived experience as well as of a macro-history of the nation-state.

While generating such a complicated dialogue with the main text, the marginal voice providing those glosses also assumes its consistent singularity that runs sequentially across the subsections of “Powhatan’s Daughter”: “*Like Memory, / she is time’s / truant, shall / take you by the / hand . . .*” (“Van Winkle”) (CPSL 40); “. . . *and past / the din and / slogans of / the year—*” (“The River”) (CPSL 41); “*Then you shall / see her truly . . .*” (“The Dance”) (CPSL 45); “. . . *and read / her in a / mother’s / farewell gaze*” (“Indiana”) (CPSL 48). On the one hand, indeed, those glosses evoke the voice of Crane as the poem’s author, who attempts to provide *The Bridge* with a linear progression of the mythical journey guided by the anonymous female figure. On the other hand, however, the very marginality of the glosses on the pages resists to be assimilated thoroughly into the main text, thereby problematizing the binary oppositions between the singular self of the poet-speaker and the others constituting *The Bridge*. In this way, the voice of these glosses on the text’s margin contributes to the poem’s polyphonic structure, subservient neither to

the authorial subject of Crane nor to the reader's subject yet disclosing the way in which an uneasy state of their coexistence and the form of their ambivalent communality become intelligible.

By taking into account what Crane did not thought or had to leave out of the main design in order to complete the poem, I have tried so far to extrapolate the interpretive displacements into *The Bridge* and foregrounded the ways in which a decentered form of community is arranged by entangling the disconnected episodes and co-responding figures and voices across the sections and subsections. To conclude my study on Crane's long poem and his poetics, I would like to argue that Crane's poetry brings into question not only the individual identity of the speaker's subjectivity and that of "America" but also the very identity of its author. In so doing, I will demonstrate the way in which the boundaries of the community emerging in and through *The Bridge* break open toward the poetics of Frank O'Hara, one of the representative pathfinders of the U. S. postmodern poetics.

III. From Hart Crane's "Community" to Frank O'Hara's "Coterie"

(i) "It Does Not Have to Do with Personality or Intimacy, Far from It!"

In the 2013 essay titled "Hart Crane's Gorgeousness," Wayne Koestenbaum writes about the cultural posterity of Crane as follows:

Crane will never have many adherents. He doesn't represent cheerfully populist or communitarian platform. He offers the thorny spectacle of an erotics that is selfish, transient, contaminated by ambivalence. (72-73)

Intimating his "ambivalent" love of Crane, Koestenbaum's essay subtly equivocates about Crane's "adherents," who will never be "many," yet, so Koestenbaum implies, never be few either. As evident in the newer reviews by Adam Kirsch (2006) and William Logan (2007), both of whom have disparaged Crane and his poetry, Crane's place in the modernist canon has remained shaky to this day. And Koestenbaum's emphasis on Crane's "selfish" and "transient" strain also resonates with the scathing criticisms made by Kirsch and Logan, the latter of whom finds "Crane's language, when not a matter of tangled metaphors (he mixed them almost more often than he mixed drinks)," as "a schoolboy code for which an English-Fustian, Fustian-English dictionary would have

proved helpful.” Nevertheless, Koestenbaum concludes his essay by suggesting that such an anti-“populist” and anti-“communitarian” strand of Crane’s poetry has been inherited by the two big names of the New American poets: “Without Crane, there would have been no Frank O’Hara or John Ashbery, those two great proponents of the impersonality of desire. Isn’t ‘personism’ (chumminess) just another way of being a difficult customer?” (73). I would like to pick up Koestenbaum’s conclusion to suggest a line of Crane’s poetic lineage that can be alternative to a series of the writers and artists, who have been attracted mainly by the mythologized life of Hart Crane, and featured his biographical aspects in their elegiac works (Reed, *After* 4). With Koestenbaum’s remark about “the impersonality of desire” in mind, I will examine O’Hara’s subversive poetics side by side with several passages from *The Bridge*’s final section “Atlantis.”

Not to mention an obvious contrast between the “thorny spectacle[s]” prevalent in Crane’s poems and O’Hara’s “chumminess” (Koestenbaum 72-73), it should be noted first of all that there are conspicuous differences between Crane and O’Hara. Unlike the case of Ashbery, who shares with Crane the aesthetic proclivity for various kinds of traditional forms, aureate diction and elusive rhetoric, O’Hara’s self-proclaimed “‘I do this I do that’ / poems in a sketch pad” that are delivered in a quasi-conversational style does not get along with Crane’s mannerist versification (163). After all, O’Hara is the

poet who nonchalantly declares that he doesn't "like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff," and his motto is "[y]ou just go on your nerve" (xiii). According to Neal Bowers, furthermore, the "fundamental difference between Crane and O'Hara is philosophic rather than aesthetic. While Crane believed language could empower him to transcend the present and arrive at a vision of unity, O'Hara believed, more modestly, that language could render the moment incandescent." Bowers' observation to distinguish O'Hara from Crane can be understood as a general distinction of the U. S. modernist poets from the succeeding, postmodernist writers: "For Crane, there was something beyond the bridge and the city that produced it; but for O'Hara, the city was profoundly important in and of itself as the very moment he was experiencing" (327). Bowers' point about Crane's desire for "something beyond" the mundane can be confirmed in "Atlantis," in which, to borrow the words of Donald Pease, the historical "images and their agents drop away and *longing itself assumes the appearance of a world*" (209). As Harold Bloom insists on a close kinship between Crane's "Atlantis" and Shelley's "Adonais," Crane's invested lyricism draws closest in "Atlantis" to "the Sublime" ("Introduction" 10).

Despite the obvious differences observed above, however, we will find ample evidences to testify that Crane's poetic inheritance was received and developed by O'Hara. Not to mention O'Hara's self-professed love of Crane (he cites Crane's name, along with

Whitman and William Carlos Williams, as the poet who is “better than movies”) (xiii), we can learn from Reed’s study O’Hara’s “many but underappreciated intertextual ties to Crane” (Reed, *After* 197).^{6 4} And yet, except Koestenbaum and Stephen Guy-Bray (105), few critics have suggested and much less examined a connection between O’Hara’s idea of personism and Crane’s poetics. Koestenbaum’s claim that the “chumminess” of O’Hara’s personism is a “way of being a difficult customer” can be challenged by the recent resurgence of O’Hara’s popularity in the age of SNS and the social networking.^{6 5} But Koestenbaum’s observation remains insightful in pointing toward “the impersonality of desire” as a link to bind Crane’s poetry with O’Hara’s personism (73), which I will further elaborate in the following.

To avoid the terminological misunderstanding, O’Hara emphasizes in the eponymous essay titled “Personism: A Manifesto” a non-intimate and anti-personal nature of personism:

Personism has nothing to do with philosophy, it's all art. It does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing

love from distracting him into feeling about the person. (xiv)

Connecting a poet's erotic experience with linguistic one, O'Hara notes that a poem should be written as a love letter to "you," the reader. O'Hara's privileging of the experience of writing and reading a poem rather than the traditional attributes of lyric poetry (a poet's self-expression, tranquil recollection of the past emotion, or confession) can be closely related with Crane's idea of "new hierarchy of faith." As noted in the 1925 essay "General Aims and Theories," the supposed role of a poem as a conduit for delivering a preexisting content is replaced by the poem's connective potential to activate an affective and intellectual interaction between poet and reader (Crane regards this communication as the erotic one by calling it "the real connective experience") (*CPSL* 436).

However, we should not overlook O'Hara's association of "love" with its "life-giving vulgarity," which is supposed to keep his "love" from striving for a transcendental status (xiv). The poem titled "Memorial Day, 1950," for instance, presents O'Hara's idea of love that is the determinedly secular and present-oriented: "Our responsibilities did not begin / in dreams, though they begin in bed. Love is first of all / a lesson in utility" (8). O'Hara's utilitarian definition of love acts as a foil to Crane's grandiose figuration of "Love" in "Atlantis." In the sixth stanza, Crane unhesitatingly renders "Love" as a trans-

historical signifier which is envisioned in a process of “translating time”:

Into what multitudinous Verb the suns

And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast

In myriad syllables,—Psalm of Cathay!

O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm . . . ! (*CPSL* 73).

Reminiscent of “The Dance,” in which Crane likens the consummation of Maquoqueeta’s death to the “one white meteor” without yielding any specific evidence of the inter-racial conflict or reconciliation (*CPSL* 47), Crane’s vision of “Love” in “Atlantis” is imagined as the trans-historical, “white, pervasive Paradigm.” And this “Paradigm” does not construct but repeats an alternating process of liquefying and re-gathering its own identity in a linguistic closure of the “myriad syllables.”

Whereas O’Hara’s emphasis is put on the “love’s *life-giving* vulgarity” (xiv; emphasis added), moreover, Crane’s high-flung treatment of love focuses on its death-dealing aspect that is represented by his figuration of one of the bridge’s attributes as “sound of doom” (*CPSL* 73). As we have examined in Interlude the way in which Crane equates his “natural idiom” with the de-personalized body of the poet to touch the reader (*CPSL* 326), Crane’s poetry is designed to mobilize both in and through a poem the self-subtracting or sometimes self-shattering experience. Commencing with the figure of a

suicidal “*bedlamite*” who “*falls*” off the bridge (“*A jest falls from the speechless caravan*”) (CPSL 33), such a lethal experience is captured recurrently in *The Bridge* through a figural network of co-responding moments that entail dissemination of the identity of a desiring subject. For example, the figure of the “*jest*” falling off the bridge in the proem is co-responded in “The River” by another jest-like figure of the hobo called “Dan Midland,” who is killed by being “jolted from the cold brake-beam” of the freight train: “I could believe he *joked* at heaven’s gate” (CPSL 44; emphasis added). Given the traces of dispersion or death of near-anonymous “Hobo-trekkers” (CPSL 42), the reader is invited to imagine the loose and provisional community of deracinated marginals, who partake, in Crane’s imagination, of the spectral heritage of Pocahontas: “Yet [those hoboes] touch something like a key, perhaps. / From pole to pole across the hills, the states / —They know a body under the wide rain” (CPSL 43).

“Atlantis” repeats the agonizing motif of death or dispersion of an anonymous drifter in a different guise, a “floating singer,” whose drifting status corresponds with Crane’s figuration of the hobos-singers in “The River”: “[hobos] singing low / *My Old Kentucky Home* and *Casey Jones*, / *Some Sunny Day*” (CPSL 42). Given John T. Irwin’s association of the “floating singer” with a poet (along with black peoples) in terms of their shared status of “floaters or drifters” “in “commercial America” (74-75), the figure

of the “floating singer” can be read as another image of the poet’s desiring body as a sacrificial inheritance circulating in the network of the co-responding figures in *The Bridge*: “Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold— / (O thou whose radiance doth inherit me) / Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!” (*CPSL* 74). Reading in these lines the transfiguration of the poet’s body into the reader’s object of desire, Hammer observes that “the floating singer’s song signals the achievement of an ‘abstract form.’” While I have a reservation about Hammer’s strong interpretation of this passage as “the *completion* of the suspension bridge to ‘Love’” (emphasis added), I agree with Hammer’s contention that this kind of “abstract form” “in which Crane’s language, like the singer’s body, is ‘transfigured’—elevated and sustained, that is, by a system of reference functioning without a ground” is the poet’s “fantasy of perfect reception—of a complete and permanent response” (*Janus* 178).

Crane’s ritualistic self-absorption into the poem’s internal structure sounds diametrically opposite to O’Hara’s nonchalant view of the poetic form as a mundane device to trigger a reader’s desire. In “Personism,” O’Hara casually associates a poem’s “measure and other technical apparatus” with “a pair of pants” that “you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you.” Concurring with Jonathan Dollimore’s understanding of the campy aesthetic of Oscar Wilde, such privileging of the

surface over the metaphysical depth can be understood as an embodiment of the postmodern aesthetic (72-73). At the same time, as we will see, O'Hara's postmodern embrace of "a culture of the surface" (Dollimore 73) is traversed by his intense desire for something beyond the surface. As it turns out, O'Hara's anti-metaphysical view of a poem as the practical activator of desire is qualified in a self-contradictory way: "There's nothing metaphysical about [a poetic form]. Unless, of course, you flatter yourself into thinking that what you're experiencing is 'yearning'" (xiii). In the latter part of the essay, O'Hara begins to modify his frivolous tone and starts confessing his romantic longing for the ideal form of poetry which strongly echoes Crane's strife to attain "the real connective experience" by abstracting his personal identity as the poem's author from the very voice he inscribes within the text (*CPSL* 436). In the following section, I will argue that it is Crane's desire for this kind of intense abstraction of the author's personhood that can be very close to the central idea in O'Hara's personism. In the latter half of the essay, O'Hara starts expressing Cranean, ambitious "yearning" to draw a poem toward "a true abstraction for the first time, really, in the history of poetry" (xiv).

(ii) "It May Be the Death of Literature as We Know It"

Maintaining the half-joking manner of address, O'Hara recounts the very moment he came up with the idea of personism. According to O'Hara, it was the day in which he was "in love with someone" and he was writing a poem to this "person":

While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents. It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it. (xiv)

Though the tone remains flippant and humorous, what is implicated here is personism's potential to put his "personal" poem into a transpersonal relational field. Drawing a parallel with Crane's transfiguration of the hermeneutic practice of reading a poem into the correlative of an anonymous sexual encounter, the quoted passage from "Personism" shows O'Hara's queer figuration of his poem as a "Lucky Pierre," who is "gratified" with having a promiscuous intercourse in the middle position between the other "two persons."

Like Crane's poetic ideal, O'Hara's association of an intra-textual communication between poet and reader with anonymous sex articulates his desire to dissolve the boundaries of their personal identities. And O'Hara's vision of eradicating the intervening mediation ("two pages") reminds us of Crane's longing for "some community of interest" by attaining a transparent "communion" with his intimate, coterie friends such as Waldo Frank (*CPSL* 326). What is more, just as Crane's poetic praxis works (despite Crane's stated design) to prevent his poetry as the connective medium from achieving the immediate connectedness between poet and reader, so O'Hara's idea of his poem as "Lucky Pierre," who is simultaneously penetrated by the person behind him and penetrating the other person in front of him, prefigures the failure to attain such communal reciprocity.

Put into practice, just as we have presumed, personism makes a poem function as a wall to thwart such fusional drive to annihilate the distance from the poet's intended reader. Yet, this does not seem to bother O'Hara much. On the contrary, when we consider O'Hara's famous phrase "to move is to love" in "In Memory of My Feelings" (109), we are invited to guess that O'Hara might have sought to transform the traditional idea of love as faithful commitment to one person into an alternative idea of relationality that is mobile, polyamorous, or promiscuous. While a poem is supposed to be written for the

one particular person (in this case, he wrote the love poem to the dancer Vincent Warren) (LeSueur 61), O'Hara's aim is not to have his poem being received by the supposed addressee. And O'Hara does not intend to make much of the privileged singularity of his own self as the author of a *book* of poems: "The poem is at last between two persons *instead of two pages*" (emphasis added). By keeping the poet both from deflating "love's life-giving vulgarity" and from scattering his invested attention to the writing (not to the particular person he loves) (xiv), O'Hara intends his poem to function as an intermediary figure to generate a self-knowingly mediated relation between "two persons," whose referents, as long as the poem as a "Lucky Pierre" intervenes between them, be interchangeable with anybody else. In this context, the opening sentence of his essay comes to be taken at once as O'Hara's campy exaggeration and as sincere manifestation of his "modernistic" longing for all-encompassing totality: "*Everything* is in the poems" (xiii; emphasis added).

Seen from a different light, what O'Hara sought to achieve by this sort of abstraction can be the annihilation of almost all the attributes of lyric poetry, siphoning only the effect of intimacy that gestures toward an anonymous desire to communicate an intensely private atmosphere: "*I will write to you*" (xiii; emphasis added). It is true that the rhetorical styles that Crane and O'Hara respectively employ can be seen as directly

opposite. Nevertheless, O'Hara's seemingly nonchalant manifest turns out to be equally ambitious as of Crane's sublime attempt to create the textual field in which the particular identities both of the speaker and his / her object of desire are divested, and the transpersonal voice of the yearning itself is left to call out: "Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love!" (*CPSL* 74).

Hence, O'Hara's poetics of "true abstraction" (xiv) can be tied with Crane's de-personalization of desire in "Atlantis," where the speaker's attachments are cleared of any specific objects: "Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm / As love strikes clear direction for the helm" (*CPSL* 73). More repetitiously than in "Southern Cross," the speaker's utterance of an epithet for the object of desire is cancelled by another epithet without attaining an ultimate signification of the desired other (a series of epithets includes "Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage"; "Psalm of Cathay"; "Love"; "steeled Cognizance"; "intrinsic Myth"; "River-throated"; "Deity's glittering Pledge," to name a few) (*CPSL* 73-74). As we have examined in the seventh chapter on "Cutty Sark," Crane encodes in the name of "Atlantis" homosexual meanings that are derived from his elegiac longing for the lost gay friends and lovers. However, the speaker's desire in "Atlantis" becomes at once pure and heterogeneous, substance-less and all-encompassing, indicating nothing in particular yet reaching out to embrace "all" possible referents: "Unspeakable Thou Bridge

to Thee, O Love! / Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower, / O Answerer of all,—
Anemone,—.” Seen in this context, the flowery image of *anemone* could be taken not
only as a tenuously erotic figure of a sea anemone but also as a loose pun on “*any man*”
in love (*CPSL* 74). To use Crane’s words in his 1924 letter to his father, “Atlantis” reads
as an astounding materialization of Crane’s poetics of “pure relationship” or “simply a
communication between man and man,” in which the son’s private “desire to talk to” his
father (*CPSL* 370) paradoxically generates an ever-expanding, non-relational field
charged with what Leo Bersani terms as “impersonal intimacy” (*Intimacies* 30).

When we take note of O’Hara’s negotiation with impersonality in “Personism” that
eroticizes and thereby de-hierarchizes the mediated relationship “between two persons”
(neither poet nor reader can be specified there), we can reconsider the affinity between
O’Hara’s personism and Crane’s non-relational poetics of “pure relationship” (*CPSL* 370),
whose impetus for the mutual de-personalization between poet and reader problematizes
the privileged role of a poet as an author to monopolize his / her own poems. Drawing on
Michelle Foucault’s idea of the death of the author, Mark Tursi points toward a similarity
between Foucault’s project and the poetics of O’Hara, who declares in “Personism” that
personism may bring about “the death of literature as we know it” (xiv). Tursi cites a
passage from Foucault’s “What Is an Author” to argue that “O’Hara is participating in a

similar investigation of what it means to be an author, and the consequent dismantling of literary tradition and dominant philosophical paradigms” (“Interrogating”). The passage from Foucault’s article that Tursi quotes resonates not only with personism but with the postmodern aspect of *The Bridge*, which at once spurs us to disburden ourselves from, and entices a further dependence on, a fiction of the privileged subjectivity of an author:

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur.

We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long:

“Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?”

Instead, there would be other questions, like these: “What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions?” And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” (137-38)

Along with his remark on “the stirring of an indifference” with the personhood of an authorial voice, Foucault’s question (“What difference does it make who is speaking”)

can be helpful for us not only to investigate the cultural or historical basis of the semiotics of “impersonality” legible in Crane’s poetry, but also to read closely the way in which Crane transfigures his authorial identity into an anonymous “floating singer” of “Atlantis.” Although the “floating singer” is imagined being “inherit[ed]” by “Atlantis” itself (*CPSL* 74), this sacrificial figure of the poet-singer is not given the privileged status. While “Atlantis” is the last section in the sequence, this is also the first lyric in *The Bridge* to be conceived. And during the long process of composition, “Atlantis” has attained the double-edged quality, functioning at once as the ending and as the beginning of *The Bridge*. Correspondingly, as Crane’s worksheets for “Atlantis” demonstrate (Weber 425-40), the images and phrases in the manuscripts have been altered in each revision and seeped into some sections in variegated forms and recycled in the other sections.

We can locate in “The River,” for instance, the de-personalized subjectivity of the “floating singer,” which is, as John T Irwin astutely points out (74-75), anagrammatized as “floating niggers,” feeding the Mississippi: “You are your father’s father, and the stream— / A liquid theme that floating niggers swell” (*CPSL* 44). As Irwin speculates, the palindromic phrase “You are your father’s father” implies that the paternal figure himself can be a son, being “not his own origin but merely a predecessor caught in the same generational series in which the son finds himself” (75). Pluralized thus into

anonymous “niggers” / “singers” in the de-hierarchizing “liquid theme,” this passage disturbs the paternal priority of the authorial voice to the other voices. Accordingly, the supposed identity of a “floating singer” does not arrive at a fixed terminus but remains in the ever transitional status. A possible referent of this “singer” can be Columbus suspended “between two worlds” in “Ave Maria” (*CPSL* 36), the pioneer woman in “Indiana” who sings about her existence that is imagined as “half of stone” (*CPSL* 50), the subway commuters “lift[ing] a serenade” in “The Tunnel” (*CPSL* 69) or anyone including “Crane” as the poem’s author, who encodes in the name of this sunken city his personal monody for the gay friends, lovers and his own doomed fate (“we all end up rather mad”) (*CPSL* 505).

In this manner, one voice is possessed by another voice and turns out to float in “the anonymity of a murmur” (Foucault 137) in which many “I”s unknowingly co-respond with each other by at once sharing and dividing “One Song, one Bridge of Fire” in “Atlantis.” Indeed, the phrase “One Song” suggests the poet’s desire to provide his poem with the structural and thematic unity. But the identity of this song is also pluralized and ends up morphing into anonymous and undifferentiated “[w]hispers” of the New World vision: “One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay, / Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring / The serpent with the eagle in the leaves ...? / Whispers antiphonal in

azure swing” (*CPSL* 74). As observed above, the sublime mode of address in “Atlantis” is at odds with O’Hara’s nonchalant attitude toward his own poems: “I don’t believe in God so I don’t have to make elaborately sounded structures” (xiii). Nevertheless, Crane’s dis-location of the private, homosexual meaning of Atlantis legend to Columbus’ (and the reader’s self-deceiving rhetorical) question about the discovery of the New World (“Is it Cathay ?”) can segue into O’Hara’s subversion of the binary opposites such as author and reader, or private and public.

According to Lytle Shaw’s study on O’Hara’s poetics of coterie, O’Hara’s “you” is “less a fixed and final reception context (what one associates with the negative implication of coterie) than a way of anchoring the poems in social relations.” Shaw continues as follows:

Noting that “the actual, empirical “you” to whom many of his poems are addressed . . . functions, according to personism, as an impetus for what he calls abstraction, a process whereby the concrete specificity of the second person operates not as a final container or destination for the signification of the poem but as an occasion projecting the poem out into the world. (78)

O’Hara’s subversive project draws a parallel with Crane’s eventual mixing of the narrow, and intimate “community of interest” (*CPSL* 326) with the public and epic “synthesis of

America and its structural identity” (*CPSL* 325). Like O’Hara, Crane was also criticized as a coterie poet, whose un-natural “natural idiom” charges his poems with the notorious obscurity (*CPSL* 326). As observed in Interlude, Allen Tate criticized against Crane’s language as a sign of the poet’s narcissisms, his “locked-in sensibility, the insulated egoism” (228). Yet, by aiming to render his poem as a portal into the self-enclosed private sphere, Crane’s poem paradoxically comes to be outside of itself, constantly opening toward another reading, new interpretation, and the other experience of witnessing an alternative connection. The mixing of the binary opposites between private and public can be confirmed also in Crane’s interweaving of epic motifs into the lyrics in *The Bridge*, whose hybrid shape has incited, but not yet resolved, the debate over its genre.^{6 6} Such deconstructive potential of Crane’s poetry as we have observed so far can be considered as equivalent to O’Hara’s characteristic “elusiveness” that James Breslin notes as follows: “[O’Hara] cannot be caught in the closed versus the open poetry opposition that informed the literary polemics of the late fifties” (212).

As Koestenbaum rightly states, Crane’s poetry “offers the thorny spectacle of an erotics that is selfish, transient, contaminated by ambivalence” (72-73). Owing to the very fact that Crane’s poetics is entangled with the self-shattering dynamics of desire, though, *The Bridge* can break open into the polyphonic form which binds the destruction of the

conventional hermeneutics and the construction of another relational field for multiple, co-responding elements in and through the text. In this very respect, *The Bridge* is to be understood as more familiar to what Gelpi terms “a distinctly Poststructuralist, Postmodernist sensibility” (“Genealogy” 532), one of whose representatives, Bruce Andrews, observes as follows: “Author dies, writing begins. . . Subject is deconstructed, lost, . . . deconstituted as writing rangers over the surface.” Drawing on this passage from Andrews, Gelpi adds thus: “Inevitably loss of subject puts in jeopardy. The word does not designate an object but substitutes for its loss; language signals not reference or presence but disjunction and absence” (“Genealogy” 526). As my analysis of *The Bridge* and Crane’s poetics have shown, those observations from the poet-critics associated with the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school can be applicable not only to O’Hara’s poetics but also to the text of *The Bridge*, in which we can confirm the chiasmic exchanges between the characteristics of modernism and those of postmodernism.

Conclusion: The Ghost Light in *The Bridge*

In comparing “the modern epic” with the postmodern serial poems, Joseph Conte writes as follows:

The modern epic is characteristically concerned with "centering," bringing diverse materials into a synthesis. In contrast, dispersal or separation is more characteristic of serial poetry. The modern epic feels compelled to assert complete control over its materials; the series enjoys its own abandonment to the materials of its presentation. In this sense, the series is more appropriate to an increasingly heterodox culture. Totality in the modern epic represents an attempt to realize a grand design upon the world; the postmodern series accedes to the condition of flux, revels in the provisional state of things. The epic, assertive in principle, gives way to the serial articulation of particulars. The series forsakes mythic permanence in the recognition of cultural transience. (37)

In spite of Crane’s apparent concerns with “centering” and “complete control over its materials,” I have argued so far that the characteristics of Crane’s text concur with those of the postmodern “serial poetry” with its mobilization of multi levels of “dispersal or separation.” In concluding the dissertation, however, I would like to reinforce that for all

the postmodern poetic effects of *The Bridge*, the voice of the speaker delivering “Atlantis” is completely ill at ease with such postmodern sensibility, which “accedes to the condition of flux, revels in the provisional state of thing” and “forsakes mythic permanence in the recognition of cultural transience.” In the 1923 poem titled “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” which can be read as the prototype of *The Bridge*, Crane wrote about “*the love of things / irreconcilable*” that “*twisted*” the speaker’s “mind” (CPSL 20). As though holding to such “twisted” sensibility, the speaker’s vision in “Atlantis” is torqued by the compulsion to assert “mythic permanence,” which is characteristic of a modernist par excellence.

Crane’s strife, and eventual failure to “realize a grand design upon the world” are emblemized in the fourth stanza of “Atlantis”:

Sheerly the eyes, like seagulls stung with rime—
Slit and propelled by glistening fins of light—
Pick biting way up towering looms that press
Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade
—Tommorows into yesteryear—and link
What cipher-script of time no traveler reads
But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,

Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears. (*CPSL* 72-73)

Co-responding with the passage from “Cape Hatteras,” in which the “space” as the “star-glistened salver of infinity” is “sluiced by motion” of the airplanes’ “wings imperious” (*CPSL* 55), Crane’s association of the bridge’s cable work with the translucent imagery evocative of airplanes (“glistening fins of light”) seems to promise the triumphant vision of a bright future. In Crane’s original conception, as we have seen, *The Bridge* is supposed to present the “symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity” (*CPSL* 321). Yet, the “light” emanated from these “fins” is inarguably spectral, co-responding with the “[f]ins” of the phantasmal “*porpoises*” in “Cutty Sark” as well (*CPSL* 53). Despite Crane’s stated interest in a national future, the visionary “eyes” in the above stanza is rather attuned to what Robert Duncan calls “one lonely ghost light” (*H.D.* 214), because we see “the eyes” go through the haunting experience of temporal split. Indeed, “the eyes” are captured in their uplifting movement (“pick biting way up”) ascending through “the arching path / Upward” (*CPSL* 72). At the same time, however, the bridge is envisioned by “the eyes” as the gigantic looming machine that interweaves the threads of “[t]omorrow” into those of “yesteryears,” emphasizing the lyric’s backward movement. By implying that the desired vision of a future will be the issue of re-living a sacrificial death in the “mythic” past, the wounded (“[s]lit”) figure of “the eyes” epitomizes the

ambivalence concerning Crane's negotiation with the temporality of modern epic.

As I have examined throughout this dissertation, "*The Bridge* is instantiated as the spectral text that illuminates how profoundly Crane is haunted by the fragments of the unredeemed past. Not to mention the antiquated, sometimes obsolete vocabularies and archaic dictions prevalent in the poem, *The Bridge* is informed by many figures of what is belated, outmoded or lost, including Crane's tenacious attachment to childhood, "Indians," and other dispersed remnants of what is gone and absent. Given the similar efforts made by Pound and Eliot, of course, we can see that such a motif of rescuing the forgotten past is not unique to *The Bridge*. Like *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, for instance, *The Bridge* features the poet's struggle to restore then obscured literary tradition (though Crane's concern, unlike Pound's and Eliot's, is drawn to the U. S. artists such as Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Isadora Duncan, and Poe). Suggested by Crane's relative disregard of "the ceremonial parade of Founding Fathers and bearded generals of popular culture" (Trachtenberg 146), though, what distinguishes *The Bridge* from the other modernist long poems is its anti-epic willingness to be possessed by the "nameless" peoples, whose identities are obscured in a historical record: anonymous day laborers like "hobos" ("The River"), a "stevedore" ("Harbor Dawn"), a musician on the street ("Van Winkle"), sailors ("Cutty Sark"), a "washerwoman" ("The Tunnel"), intimate strangers

in gay cruising, and other non-specifiable, homeless marginals. Reminiscent of the eyes in “Southern Cross” in which the “backward vision” disintegrates (“crumble[s]”) the speaker’s perspective (*CPSL* 61), the eyes in “Atlantis” are at once “[s]lit” by the “biting” vista of “[t]omorrow” and “propelled” backward into the darker realm of “yesteryears” (*CPSL* 72), for whose “torment[ing]” “history” the speaker eventually implores “Thy pardon”: “We left the haven hanging in the night— / Sheened harbor lanterns *backward* fled the keel” (*CPSL* 73; emphasis added).

Given Crane’s enactment of the spectral vision of “Atlantis,” which is characterized by the wounded and wounding perception of the temporal ambivalence, it is difficult not to recall Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus,” whose eyes are, like those in “Atlantis,” simultaneously fixed on and deviated from a catastrophic past. Inspired by Klee’s drawing, Benjamin writes in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” as follows:

[The angel’s] eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread . . . His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught

in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

(259-60)

Benjamin presents his reading of Klee's angel, which is pressed backward into the future, staring at the past as an unredeemed catastrophe while the "wreckage," "the dead," and "debris" of the history are piled "in front of his feet." In the first line of "Atlantis," Crane envisions the ecstatic sensation of passing "[t]hrough the bound cabled strands" (*CPSL* 72) of the bridge. And its "arching path / Upward" (*CPSL* 72) surely reflects his stated concern "with the future of America" (*CPSL* 161). At the same time, as we have observed, the eyes in *The Bridge* are insistently fixed on the past, corresponding to Crane's personal attachment to what is lost, forgotten and broken apart. In "Quaker Hill," which marks the end of his composition of *The Bridge*, Crane heroically manifests his will to "[s]houlder the curse of sundered parentage," while expressing the sense of inability to be a successful messenger of "[o]ur love of all we touch" (He finds himself as "a guest who knows himself too late, / His news already told") (*CPSL* 65-66). In so doing, Crane places his position in that of an impotent angel (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word for "angel" is "messenger"). Also, just as the future into which Benjamin's angel is pushed backward

is undefined, so Crane's vision of "cipher-script of time" is recurrently proposed only to be dissolved into an unspecifiable temporality of "What," whose potential decoder, as Crane suggests throughout *The Bridge*, must be committed to a sacrificial, self-annihilation by going "through smoking pyres of love and death" (*CPSL* 73). Bereft of an opportunity for fulfillment, Crane's vision of a future is cast into a dialectic without synthesis, or into a conflicting oscillation between moments of searching for an alternative homeland in what cannot last.

Still, as I repeat, Crane's stated will to "leave behind [him] something that the future may find valuable" (*CPSL* 372) is materialized as a form of "myth," and its "vision" is what "not only America" "but the whole world" is in "need" (*CPSL* 326). In explicating Nancy's idea of community, Hiddleston emphasizes that "community can be defined as myth itself, since it is suggestive of essence and origin but was itself never realized." Hiddleston continues to note that "[s]ocial ties, the fluctuating association and dissociation of human beings replace this absence or illusion, the real kernel of which has no name" (29). The idea of "myth" as a near empty, yet alluringly opaque vehicle of communication that allows for "the fluctuating association and dissociation of human beings" helps us reconsider the potential of *The Bridge* to constitute a "myth," minus the name of "America."

Corresponding with “the pile of debris” that “grows skyward” in Benjamin’s passage (260), what *The Bridge* offers us is the remnants of missed connections, imagined absences, and failed relationships, from whose centrifugal structure what is past and lost flickers as the unmaterialized vision of a future, immanent (self-contained) community: “The agile precincts of the lark’s return; / Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing / In single chrysalis the many twain” (CPSL 73). Rather than the viability or sustainability of an actual community as a group of people, it is the sense of an inchoate community, retroactively generated by our dwelling on the fleeting traces of the lost communal intimacy, that at once permeates *The Bridge* with the elegiac atmosphere and enables us to go on imagining possible modes of our coexistence in the present and future.

Taking into account Crane’s uplifting ambition to counter the pessimism of *The Waste Land*, the conclusion with a touch of utopian pathos seems to contradict my purpose to become the poet’s unfaithful partisan. But as my readings of *The Bridge* have hopefully demonstrated, the act of sounding utopian can be a form of faithful betrayal that works to highlight, by contrast, the process in which the melancholic and non-relational strands of *The Bridge* are rearranged to mobilize its polyphonic architecture. Radicalizing the erotics of impersonality to an extreme degree, the poem ends with the sacrificial transfiguration of the poet’s *corpus* into the simultaneously singular and plural gift(s) to the unknowable

other, which is provisionally called Atlantis: “(O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me) / Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!” (*CPSL* 74). Crane’s failure to attain his initial goal and the quester’s failure in the poem at the desired return to the primal unity serve to provide an opportunity for us to reorient the idea of community as an event of breaking open the supposed totality of the work’s self-enclosed identity. Having reanimated the textual gaps and blemishes in *The Bridge*, I conclude this dissertation by suggesting that such extreme yearning for unity and totality can become generative of the recognition of a community as *partage* to an extent that the poet allows his own *corpus* to be haunted by the traces of misrecognitions, lacerations, and broken hearts.

Notes

1 Unless indicated otherwise, all references to Crane's poems and letters are to *Complete Poems and Selected Letters* (abbreviated as *CPSL*).

2 Facing the challenge of Crane scholarship, I agree with Langdon Hammer's statement in his 1993 book: Crane's poetry "must be 'introduced' again, brought it, reclaimed. At the same time, though, these reintroductions repeatedly leave Crane in need of the next critic's advocacy and aid. Crane still does not have a place" (*Janus* 124).

3 Kirsch's article in *The New Yorker* was published in 2006. While acknowledging "the guileless purity of [Crane's] genius," Kirsch eventually reconfirms the negative judgment of Crane's first critics and sees *The Bridge* as "an impressive failure." "By striving so effortfully to turn the Brooklyn Bridge into a religious symbol," Kirsch writes, "Crane forces us to recognize that all he has really created is a vague and problematic metaphor."

4 In *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics*, for instance, Leon Surette write as follows: Fenollosa's notes, which Pound received from Fenollosa's widow in 1914, "set him on a life-long exploration of the poetic power of the Chinese ideogram and of Confucian political thought. (Fenollosa's theory of the

ideogram influenced Pound's political thought as well as his rhetoric, but that is another story.) Confucius provided Pound with a philosophical model compatible with totalitarianism" (71). Pound's "life-long" concern with a centering power can be found not only in his poems but also in his essays. In *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), Pound presents his aesthetic ideal by praising the ordering power of Gerhart Münch, the pianist-composer. According to Pound, Münch's rendition of Janequin's song conveys the "forma, the immortal *conchetto*, the concept, the dynamic form which is like the rose pattern driven into the dead iron filings by the magnet, not by material contact with the magnet itself, but separate from the magnet. Cut off by the layer of glass, the dust and filings rise and spring into order" (152).

5 I borrowed the phrase "the common strangeness" from Blanchot's *Friendship* (292).

6 For Crane's troubles with the heterosexual household of Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, see Hammer 33-35.

7 For Faustian images prevalent in *The Bridge*, see Irwin 32-33.

8 In a 1926 letter to "the Tate family," Crane writes that "I have lived quite alone, without any real social human relations with people for many years . . . I probably ought never to attempt to live with others whom I care for, in any domestic arrangement" (*CPSL* 452). Concerning the "interpersonal incompatibility" between Crane and "the

relatively newly wed Allen Tate and Caroline Tate,” Thomas Yingling urges us to “remember how remote from the idyll of coupledness was Crane’s own sexuality—how alienated he was, in fact, from their lives in Patterson” (250).

9 In the summer of 1926, Crane read Lewis Spence’s *Atlantis in America*. Excited by Spence’s argument that the traces of Atlantis can be found in Native American cultures, Crane decides to change the title of *The Bridge*’s final section (“Finale”) to “Atlantis.”

10 For Crane’s serious fight with his mother over the legacy from his grandmother, see Horton 249-50.

11 For the genealogical trajectory of Crane’s “voyaging pedigree” that “began from England when in 1646 Hart Crane’s paternal grandmother’s Beardsley forebears embarked for America on the Planter,” see Fisher 3-5. As for Crane’s “sense of family” that “he was born into one of the ‘good’ families of the town—a family . . . traced its way back through merchants and farmers to distant English ancestors, to ‘Pilgrim Father,’” see Unterecker 4-5.

12 Both in his poems and correspondences, Crane frequently puns on his name. For instance, Crane sent his friends a photograph taken by Walker Evans, writing “To Charlotte and Richard from the ‘Heart’” (Unterecker 724).

13 In tracing Crane’s ghost in Tennessee Williams’ play *Suddenly Last Summer*, Robert

F. Gross draws attention to “relationship of the gay literary corpus to the physical body of the poet.” As Gross rightly points out, the Eucharistic motif reappears in “Cape Hatteras” section, in which Crane calls his “favored gay predecessor, Walt Whitman” as “Panis Angelicus,” the bread of angel “of the Eucharist.” Gross’s emphasis lies on the redemptive cancellation of “the negativity of death” which “is transcended by the plurality of the [textual] remains, which continue to carry meaning” (250). But my readings of “Quaker Hill” and “Cape Hatteras” highlight Crane’s non-transcendental imagining of the communion that cannot be “communal” and be reconsidered as a possible form of the non-fusional communion.

14 My understanding of Blanchot’s concept of “community” is indebted to Leslie Hill’s *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*. In recapitulating Blanchot’s response to Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Hill reports that “Nancy and Blanchot are agreed in their decisive rejection of any conception of community founded on the nostalgia for fusional, Eucharistic communion and on the integrative, ultimately totalitarian power of nationalist or communitarian myth; community, instead, writes Blanchot, citing Nancy, is ‘the presentation of finitude and of excess without return that founds finite-being’” (200).

15 For instance, Sherman Paul, who is one of the most sympathetic readers of Crane, sees

“Cape Hatteras” as “one of the most ambitious and, in some aspects, one of the least successful” (232).

16 Reading in “Cape Hatteras” the “union of Eucharistic imagery” which suggests the figurative equation between “the gay literary corpus” and “the physical body of the poet,” Robert F. Gross writes as follows: “Crane takes the hand of his favored gay predecessor, Walt Whitman (no Oedipal struggle here) and twice refers to him as “Panis Angelicus,” the “angelic bread” of the Eucharist” (250).

17 According to Munro, “queerness” is characterized by “its capacity to unsettle the normative” (10). Despite (or because of) his voluminous references to (non-)definitions of queerness, Munro turns “queerness” into an unsettling buzzword, which successfully obfuscates the meaning of “the normative.”

18 Despite Frank’s argument that it is necessary for future Americans to absorb the machine, *Virgin Spain* shows the technophobic strain of Frank, who envisions the machine’s demise. By imagining a dialogue between Cervantes and Columbus, Frank has Columbus declare that the “iron-towered America” is the “Grave of Europe.” Frank’s Columbus goes on to say that the “gold lust” and “marvellous machines” belong to the Old World. Having enacted the apocalyptic fall of the “iron-towered” buildings, Frank presents Columbus’ heroic yet unabashedly bucolic statement: “Now

shall be the birth of the World which I discovered” (298-99).

19 Crane alludes to Homer in “[t]he gleaming cantos of unvanquished space” to show his enthusiasm for participating, with Whitman (the bard of America), in a constellation of epic poets. In the following stanza, Crane refers to Homer explicitly: “While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride” (*CPSL* 56). Besides a number of the phrases and imagery evocative of “weaving,” Crane’s puns that combine a loom and modern machines or instruments can be found, for instance, in “Cutty Sark” (“in the nickel-in-the-slot-piano jogged / “‘Stamboul Nights’—weaving somebody’s nickel—sang—” (*CPSL* 51).

20 Crane travelled to Europe in 1929 and worked on “Cape Hatteras.” Finding Paris as “a test for an American,” Crane wrote Frank: “Please don’t forget to send me your re-discovery of America now, as soon as possible. I need it as a balance against the seductions of Europe” (*Letters* 336). For a detailed account of Frank’s influence on Crane’s vision of an alternative America as the “sunken world of the Indians,” see Irwin 143-44.

21 For the influence of Spence’s theory to Crane, see Irwin 135-47.

22 As for the allusions to and quotations from Whitman’s poems, see *The Bridge: An Annotated Edition* 70-86.

23 One of the few is Samuel Delany, to whose fruitful observations I am immensely indebted. For his detailed interpretation of “Cape Hatteras,” see Delany 218-22.

24 I borrowed the phrase “intimate strangers” from the first chapter of *Intimacies* written by Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips. My reading of Crane is much indebted to Bersani’s discussion of the “new relational mode” called “impersonal intimacy” (30). Also, I owe a lot to Bersani’s argument developed in “Gay Outlaws” in *Homos*, especially 145-51.

25 Brunner writes in *Splendid Failure* (1985) that “‘Indiana’ moved Winters and Tate to judgments that border on invective. To this day the poem is still regarded as an embarrassment” (218). Brunner’s observation is still valid in the twenty-first century. Following “the verdict of its first critics” in 2006, Adam Kirsch writes in *The New Yorker* that Crane “can be rankly sentimental, as in his description of a prairie mother in the ‘Indiana’ section.”

26 Summarizing “New Critical sensibilities” that run against with Crane’s style, Peter Lurie observes that such critics as Allen Tate, Malcom Cowley, Cleanth Brooks “identified modernism as conventionally, even stereotypically ‘masculine,’ defined by restraint, irony, and an impersonal stance” (174). On a detailed account of Crane’s position in the contemporary literary communities, see Hammer, *Janus* 3-30.

27 Besides Yingling’s work on Crane’s “unmarried epic,” whose discussion is built

around the tensions between Crane's homosexual experience and his epic aspiration (186-226), the queer readings of Crane I found particularly stimulating in the nativist context include Catherine A. Davies's *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics*.

28 For the idea of a "new way of coming together" based on "our" "homo-ness," see Bersani's *Homos*, especially "Prologue: 'We,'" in which Bersani aims to see that "homo-ness" "designates a mode of connectedness to the world that it would be absurd to reduce to sexual preference" (10).

29 Although Munro maintains that Crane "seeks connection, not disconnection" (62), Munro does not ignore the anti-relational aspect of Crane's poetry. Considering "a kind of negative progress" apparent in his poetry, Munro refers to Edelman's speculation on Crane's use of chiasmus that "comes to figure a progression by means of reversal or negation" (Edelman, *Transmemberment* 7). Drawing on the idea of the visible body as a "chiasm" that is developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, though, Munro eventually emphasizes the textual effect of the presence of the poet's body rather than its absence in the poem, thereby Munro's argument ultimately emphasizes the relational aspect of Crane's poetry: "But in its bending towards or crossing over, chiasmus is also demonstrative of the connection between the speaker and the reader

and the intersubjectivity that Crane has been trying to foster” (59).

30 In the worksheets for the poem’s last section “Atlantis,” the word “faith” appears two times in the trope of generative flowers: “Dreadful, the blossoms of the faith unfold” (Weber 429; 431). In the 1926 letter to Frank, Crane insists that the primary combination between “action” and “faith” should be privileged over the already approved evidence of its validity:

The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in “action” (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith), and I don’t mean by this that his procedure requires any bona fide evidences directly and personally signaled, nor even any physical signs or portents. (*CPSL* 466)

As it turns out, interestingly, Crane’s idea of “the bridge” as well as *The Bridge* itself as “an act of faith” draws toward the idea of “faith” as a pre-voluntary act that Jean-Luc Nancy contemplates to deconstruct the idea of “faith” in Christianity:

[F]aith, in any case, is not about compliance without proof or the leap above proof. It is the act of the faithful person, an act which, as such, is the attestation of an intimate consciousness of the fact that it exposes itself and allows itself

to be exposed to the absence of attestation, to the absence of parousia. . . . (*Dis-Enclosure* 221)

31 Richard P. Sugg, for instance, writes that “*The Bridge* is a poem about the creation of a poem” (4). In the similar vein, Alan Trachtenberg observes as follows: “The bridge is not ‘found’ in ‘Atlantis,’ the final section of the poem, but ‘made’ throughout the poem” (146). The more detailed argument of the poem’s self-reflective aspect can be found in Hammer’s refined reading of “Atlantis” (*Janus* 171-203).

32 For a further resemblances of imagery and theme between Crane and Mallarmé, see Irwin 371-83. In *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony*, Celeste Marguerite Schenck compares in detail Crane’s “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” and Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* (137-56).

33 The idea of “the gift” is inseparable from Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift*. Far from proposing a clear-cut definition of “the gift,” though, Mauss’s book, with its productive ambiguity, has invited a number of critical debates. As to the “ambiguity” of Mauss’s work, for instance, Ilana Silber observes that “there remains a basic (and perhaps a potentially fertile) ambiguity in Mauss’s conception of modern gift giving, due to the uneasy contradictory arguments: one pleading a basic continuity between the gift in modern and premodern contexts, the other upholding the modern *contract* as the contemporary

equivalent of archaic gift exchange” (137).

34 I use “Imaginary” and “Symbolic” in the Lacanian terms of the Borromean knot, which is constructed from the three registers, Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. To put it roughly, Imaginary is the phantasmatic realm that is related with the mirror stage in which an infant understands itself as a single and totalized body different from others. Symbolic is the societal realm that we partake of by accessing to language and the socially shared codes. Inextricably entangled, though, these terms, along with Real, resist to be concisely defined. For a detailed account, see Žižek 96-97.

35 Having read Crane’s argument for the interrelationship between his “illogical” metaphors, Monroe complains not of Crane’s intellectual immaturity but of the excessively intellectualized rationalization of poetry: “Your poem reeks with brains,— it is thought out, worked out, sweated out. And the beauty which it seems entitled to is tortured and lost” (qtd. in Weber 417).

36 Accentuating the close link between Crane’s poetry and narcissism, Allen Tate writes as follows: “Crane’s biographer will have to study the early influences that confirmed him in narcissism, and thus made him typical of the rootless spiritual life of our time” (234). With regard to the importance of “whiteness” in Crane’s poetry, for instance, Herbert A. Leibowitz observes that white is the color which “figures centrally” in

Crane's poetry (111). Throughout *White Buildings*, the imageries of whiteness can be found, including the purified beauty of his own poetic constructions ("white buildings" referring both to New York skyscrapers glittering in the sunlight and to the title of his own book) (*CPSL* 18) to a wide range of figurative whiteness from a meta-poetic *tabula rasa* (*CPSL* 13) to an ecstatic vision of the sexual-textual dissemination of the poet's *corpus* (*CPSL* 14). Robert F. Gross's reading of Crane's whiteness in terms of the Burkean Sublime is also pertinent for our reading of "The Dance" (248). For a detailed discussion on Crane's narcissism, see Edelman's *Transmemberment of Song* 48-50 and Irwin 246-47.

37 In "Black Tambourine" in *White Buildings*, for example, Crane deals with a problem of the black man who is imprisoned in a suspended state between the bipolar, and equally romanticized racial stereotypes of African Americans. Catherine A. Davies understands the "'new cultural synthesis' that Crane spoke of achieving" as "a quasi-reclamatory process that seeks to address the exclusions and omissions of America's national history" (49). For Crane's reconciliatory impulse in "Powhatan's Daughter," also see Brunner 68-69.

38 These passages can be read as Crane's version of what Renato Rosaldo terms "imperialist nostalgia," which "revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody,

and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alerts a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention” (69-70). As Brian Reed aptly argues, we find throughout *The Bridge* Crane’s “disquieting, uncritical embrace of U.S. racial myths” (*After* 139). Seeing Crane praising himself for becoming the “glorious and dying animal” indeed (*CPSL* 556), we cannot help being uncomfortable with his susceptibility to “the sympathy of romantic racism,” which is, as Aldon Lynn Nielsen observes, “the sign post of modernism’s discourse on the nonwhite” (21).

39 For the literary history in which the Pocahontas myth has been treated by American writers, see Philip Young’s “The Mother of Us All: Pocahontas Reconsidered.”

40 Crane’s way of romanticizing “the Indian” is influenced by Waldo Frank’s poetic appreciation of Native American cultures in *Our America*. In this book, Frank celebrates the spiritual saliency of their “lost” world in comparison with “our materialistic age” (110): “[the Indian] must live in harmony with Nature, and its Great Spirit . . . For he has learned that from this harmony comes health” (113).

41 According to *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, synaesthesia “was popularized by two sonnets, Charles Baudelaire’s ‘Correspondances’ (1857) and Arthur Rimabud’s ‘Voyelles’ (1871)” (Brogan 359). Crane’s love of Baudelaire can be confirmed in a lot

of references to Baudelaire in his letters and essays (*CPSL* 148; 162; 251; 255; 274; 281; 308; 412; 484; 655; 674). As for Rimbaud, in a 1926 letter to Frank, Crane writes with a touch of self-derision that “Rimbaud was the last great poet that our civilization will see—he let off all the great cannon crackers in Valhalla’s parapets, the sun has set theatrically several times since while Laforgue, Eliot and others of that kidney have whimpered fastidiously” (*CPSL* 467). As for Crane’s self-affiliation to a group of visionary poets, see the famous letter to Harriet Monroe where he claims William Blake along with T. S. Eliot as his exemplary precursor (*CPSL* 167).

42 Pointing out that Crane’s desire is directed not toward “the legendary Indian Princess” but toward “the dusky Indian Prince,” for instance, Leslie Fiedler writes that Crane’s name for “that dusky Prince comes out of his own private mythological store, Maquoqueeta having been the actual middle name of a cabdriver boy friend; and it is to him, not to Pocahontas, that the poet chants the phallic song in which his verse—elsewhere flaccid and unconvincing—comes to life” (88).

43 Critics have guessed that Crane must have borrowed Strachey’s passage from Williams’ “May-pole at Merrymount” in *In the American Grain*, or lifted from Kay Boyle’s review of Williams’ book in *Transition* (1927) (Berthoff 122).

44 Although Crane’s sources for the emblem have not been well-documented, Lawrence

Kramer suggests a number of inter-textual echoes from other (extra-)literary pieces (*The Bridge: An Annotated* 52).

45 As to Crane's seeming misplacement of "Three Songs," for instance, R. W. B. Lewis claimed that "if 'Three Songs' were removed from *The Bridge*, the reader would observe a smooth and logical development from the end of 'Cape Hatteras' to the beginning of 'Quaker Hill'" (338).

46 Warner Berthoff claims that "Three Songs" is "incidental to *The Bridge*'s main advance but complement[s] its working dialectic of interwoven contraries" (104).

47 For Yingling's reading of *The Bridge* which is titled "The Unmarried Epic," see Yingling 186-226. It must be noted, though, that Yingling's view has been responded and revised by the succeeding queer readers. Arguing that Yingling's politicization of Crane's poems "tends to misrepresent crucial aspects of Crane's poetics," Tapper writes that "in Yingling's determination to use Crane as a means of exposing and resisting the stigmatization of homosexuality, he at times distorts Crane's representation of eroticism into a social critique of homophobia." Due to his "investment in the homosexual as victim" (40), Tapper continues, Yingling's view may fail to register an affinity between Crane's poetry and Georges Bataille's conviction that "underlying eroticism is the feeling of something bursting, of the violence accompanying an

explosion” (36).

48 Noticing in “Three Songs” Crane’s “diminishing reliance on redemptive love as a means of poetic recuperation,” for instance, Daniel Gabriel observes as follows: “[t]he frustration and destructiveness of Crane’s eternal feminine in ‘Three Songs’ in particular can be read as self-imposed punishment for his failure to summon love to the rescue” (66).

49 Reading in “Southern Cross” Crane’s “agony of desiring for a pure ideal,” Edward Brunner argues that the speaker’s “[c]linging to the supernal beauty of the star making love to the night provokes the bitterest contempt for the ‘slowly smoldering fire / Of lower heavens.’ The nostalgia for perfection is based on contempt” (143).

50 According to Lawrence Kramer’s annotation, the phrase “simian Venus” is “both a Darwinian throwback to primitive animality . . . and a reminder that apes were traditionally associated with unbridled desire” (*The Bridge: An Annotated*).

51 Crane’s identification with the embattled figure of Columbus can also be contextualized from the biographical perspective. For instance, Irwin writes about Crane’s “hellishly unpleasant [1926] voyage to Grand Cayman on a crowded, noisy, foul-smelling boat” which “gave Crane firsthand experience of what Columbus’s journey on the Santa Maria must have been like” (274).

52 Regarding Jack Spicer, whose poetics has a lot in common with Crane's, it might be interesting in this context to mention Spicer's discussion about metaphor and pun in *The Heads of The Town up to the Aether*. In that book, Spicer puns on the very word metaphor by transforming its meaning of "bearing across" into another meaning of "bearing a cross" and calling the incarnation of Christ a metaphor for his poetry (qtd. in Katz 93).

53 In a letter to Winters, Crane talks about the promiscuous nature of Pocahontas as follows: "I think that the Indian chieftain's name is all the better for not being particularly definite— especially as Pocahontas had a thousand Indian lovers for the one white marriage license to the English planter" (*Hart Crane and Yvor Winters* 74).

54 "Hauntology" is Jacques Derrida's neologism used in *Specters of Marx*. The term that puns on "ontology" illuminates the spectral space between presence and absence, making us notice the impossibility of pinning down the past as a solid concept.

55 Crane's Freudian phrasing is not accidental. Calling the sailor as "the old man of the sea," he mentions Freud in a 1926 letter to Malcolm Cowley and Peggy Baird: "(page Herr Freud)" (*CPSL* 476).

56 Hammer suggests the poem's connection with Candee to highlight "the loving solidarity across the separations," but his aim is not to develop the idea of how that

“solidarity” affects the poem’s spatio-temporal structure (*Janus* 185).

57 For the influence of Spence’s theory on Crane, see Irwin 135-47.

58 Thomas Yingling, for instance, reads in “Cutty Sark” “a moment of homosexual meanings” that is “reminiscent of Crane’s life in waterfront bars from New York to California to Marseilles” (206-07).

59 See Bowers 38-39.

60 The recent exception is Niall Munro’s *Hart Crane’s Queer Modernist Aesthetic* (2015).

Munro casts a new and productive light on Crane’s poetics of relationality, examining his anti-heteronormative strategies to fashion a queer community.

61 As critics note, “the congresses” and “nightly sessions” bear a sexual connotation (Wolf 131), implying the possibility that some of those passersby turn out to be his potential dates.

62 See Stalter 81-84.

63 In dealing with the concept of “serial poem,” we have to be cautious about discerning the differences between the poets’ approaches. Pointing toward “the fundamental difference between Duncan’s notion of the ‘serial poem’ and Spicer’s,” for instance, Tim Conley suggests the difference “between [Duncan’s] giving oneself up to a ‘Beloved’ (contingent to *agápē*) and [Spicer’s] ‘going to bed with [one’s] own tears’ (*eros*)

collapsing)” (77).

64 See Reed’s “Frank O’Hara’s Crane” (*After*; 195-224).

65 For O’Hara’s online popularity, see Helen Charman’s article “What Frank O’Hara Poems Reveal about Post-Internet Brains.”

66 In his 2006 book, Reed warns against the tendency found in “the present generation of Crane critics.” In order to “limn the long poem’s historically and culturally specific queer sensibility,” so Reed writes, they tend to eschew “genre-based questions altogether.” By suggesting the danger of their approach that “demotes *The Bridge* to a case study within later social debates,” Reed starts the chapter on *The Bridge* titled “How to Write an Epic”: “Genre remains a useful starting point in discussing *The Bridge*” (*After* 127).

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