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Harold Hart Crane

- poems -

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Harold Hart Crane (21 July 1899 – 27 April 1932)

Harold Hart Crane was an American poet. Finding both inspiration and provocation in the poetry of T.S. Eliot, Crane wrote modernist poetry that is difficult, highly stylized, and very ambitious in its scope. In his most ambitious work, The Bridge, Crane sought to write an epic poem in the vein of The Waste Land that expressed something more sincere and optimistic than the ironic despair that Crane found in Eliot's poetry. In the years following his suicide at the age of 32, Crane has come to be seen as one of the most influential poets of his generation.

Life and Work

Hart Crane was born in Garrettsville, Ohio. His father, Clarence, was a successful Ohio businessman who invented the Life Savers candy and held the patent, but sold it for $2,900 before the brand became popular. He made other candy and accumulated a fortune from the candy business with chocolate bars. Crane's mother and father were constantly fighting, and early in April, 1917, they divorced. Hart dropped out of high school during his junior year and left for New York City, promising his parents he would attend Columbia University later. His parents, in the middle of divorce proceedings, were upset. Crane took various copywriting jobs and jumped between friends' apartments in Manhattan. Between 1917 and 1924 he moved back and forth between New York and Cleveland, working as an advertising copywriter and a worker in his father's factory. From Crane's letters, it appears that New York was where he felt most at home, and much of his poetry is set there.

Career

Throughout the early 1920s, small but well-respected literary magazines published some of Crane's lyrics, gaining him, among the avant-garde, a respect that White Buildings (1926), his first volume, ratified and strengthened. White Buildings contains many of Crane's best lyrics, including "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," and "Voyages", a powerful sequence of erotic poems, was written while he was falling in love with Emil Opffer, a Danish merchant marine. "Faustus and Helen" was part of a larger artistic struggle to meet modernity with something more than despair. Crane identified T. S. Eliot with that kind of despair, and while he acknowledged the greatness of The Waste Land, he also said it was "so damned dead," an impasse, and a refusal to see "certain spiritual events and possibilities." Crane's self-appointed work would be to bring those spiritual events and possibilities to poetic life, and so create "a mystical synthesis of America."

Crane returned to New York in 1928, living with friends and taking temporary jobs until moving back to Brooklyn, first to 77 Willow Street. He had a love affair with Emil Opffer, a ship's purser. Emil invited Crane to live in his father's home at 110 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn Heights, New York. Crane was overjoyed at the views the location afforded him. He wrote his mother and grandmother in the spring of 1924:

"Just imagine looking out your window directly on the East River with nothing intervening between your view of the Statue of Liberty, way down the harbour, and the marvelous beauty of Brooklyn Bridge close above you on your right! All of the great new skyscrapers of lower Manhattan are marshaled directly across from you, and there is a constant stream of tugs, liners, sail boats, etc in procession before you on the river! It's really a magnificent place to live. This section of Brooklyn is very old, but all the houses are in splendid condition and have not been invaded by foreigners..."

His ambition to synthesize America was expressed in The Bridge (1930), intended to be an uplifting counter to Eliot's's The Waste Land. The Brooklyn Bridge is both the poem's central symbol and its poetic starting point. Crane found what a place to start his synthesis in Brooklyn. Arts patron Otto H. Kahn gave him $2,000 to begin work on the epic poem. When he wore out his welcome at the Opffers, Crane left for Paris in early 1929 but failed to leave his personal problems behind.

While in Paris in February 1929, Harry Crosby, who with his wife Caresse Crosby owned the fine arts press Black Sun Press, offered Crane the use of their country retreat, Le Moulin du Soleil in Ermenonville. They hoped he could use the time to concentrate on completing The Bridge. Crane spent several weeks at their estate where he roughed out a draft of the "Cape Hatteras" section, a key part of his epic poem. In late June that year, Crane returned from the south of France to Paris. Harry noted in his journal, "Hart C. back from Marseilles where he slept with his thirty sailors and he began again to drink Cutty Sark..." Crane got drunk at the Cafe Select and fought with waiters over his tab. When the Paris police were called, he fought with them and was beaten. They arrested and jailed him, fining him 800 francs. After six days in prison at La Sante, Harry Crosby paid Crane's fine and advanced him money for the passage back to the United States where he finally finished The Bridge.

The Bridge received poor reviews, but Crane's sense of his own failure became crushing. It was during the late 1920s, while he was finishing The Bridge, that his drinking, always a problem, became notably worse.

Death</B>

Crane visited Mexico in 1931–32 on a Guggenheim Fellowship and his drinking continued as he suffered from bouts of alternating depression and elation. When Peggy Cowley, wife of his friend Malcolm Cowley, agreed to a divorce, she joined Crane. As far as is known, she was his only heterosexual partner. "The Broken Tower," one of his last published poems, emerged from that affair. Crane still felt himself a failure, though, in part because he recommenced homosexual activity in spite of his relationship with Cowley.

While on board the steamship SS Orizaba enroute to New York, he was beaten after making sexual advances to a male crew member, seeming to confirm his own idea that one could not be happy as a homosexual. Just before noon on April 27, 1932, Hart Crane jumped overboard into the Gulf of Mexico. Although he had been drinking heavily and left no suicide note, witnesses believed his intentions to be suicidal, as several reported that he exclaimed "Goodbye, everybody!" before throwing himself overboard. (The legend among poets is: He walked to the fantail, took off his coat quietly, and jumped.) His body was never recovered. A marker on his father's tombstone in Garrettsville includes the inscription, "Harold Hart Crane 1899–1932 lost at sea".

Poetics

Crane's critical effort, like Keats and Rilke, is most pronounced in his letters: he corresponded regularly with Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, and Gorham Munson, and shared critical dialogues with Eugene O'Neill, William Carlos Williams, E.E. Cummings, Sherwood Anderson, Kenneth Burke, Waldo Frank, Harriet Monroe, Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein. Most serious work on Crane begins with his letters, selections of which are available in many editions of his poetry; his letters to Munson, Tate, Winters, and his patron, Otto Hermann Kahn, are particularly insightful. His two most famous stylistic defenses emerged from correspondences: his Emersonian "General Aims and Theories" (1925) was written to urge Eugene O'Neill's critical foreword to White Buildings, then passed around among friends, yet unpublished during Crane's life; and the famous "Letter to Harriet Monroe" (1926) was part of an exchange for the publication of "At Melville's Tomb" in Poetry.

The "Logic of Metaphor"

As with Eliot's "objective correlative," a certain vocabulary haunts Crane criticism, his "logic of metaphor" being perhaps the most vexed. His most quoted formulation is in the circulated, if long unpublished, "General Aims and Theories": "As to technical considerations: 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) significance 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.

There is also some mention of it, though it is not so much presented as a critical neologism, in his letter to Harriet Monroe: "The logic of metaphor is so organically entrenched in pure sensibility that it can't be thoroughly traced or explain outside of historical sciences, like philology and anthropology." L. S. Dembo's influential study of The Bridge, Hart Crane's Sanskrit Charge (1960), reads this 'logic' well within the familiar rhetoric of the Romantics: "The Logic of metaphor was simply the written form of the 'bright logic' of the imagination, the crucial sign stated, the Word made words.... As practiced, the logic of metaphor theory is reducible to a fairly simple linguistic principle: the symbolized meaning of an image takes precedence over its literal meaning; regardless of whether the vehicle of an image makes sense, the reader is expected to grasp its tenor.

Difficulty

The publication of White Buildings was delayed by Eugene O'Neill's struggle (and eventual failure) to articulate his appreciation in a foreword to it; and many critics since have used Crane's difficulty as an excuse for a quick dismissal. Even a young Tennessee Williams, then falling in love with Crane's poetry, could "hardly understand a single line—of course the individual lines aren't supposed to be intelligible. The message, if there actually is one, comes from the total effect." It was not lost on Crane, then, that his poetry was difficult. Some of his best, and practically only, essays originated as encouraging epistles: explications and stylistic apologies to editors, updates to his patron, and the

variously well-considered or impulsive letters to his friends. It was, for instance, only the exchange with Harriet Monroe at Poetry when she initially refused to print "At Melville's Tomb" that urged Crane to describe his "logic of metaphor" in print. But describe it he did, then complaining that: "If the poet is to be held completely to the already evolved and exploited sequences of imagery and logic—what field of added consciousness and increased perceptions (the actual province of poetry, if not lullabies) can be expected when one has to relatively return to the alphabet every breath or two? In the minds of people who have sensitively read, seen, and experienced a great deal, isn't there a terminology something like short-hand as compared to usual description and dialectics, which the artist ought to be right in trusting as a reasonable connective agent toward fresh concepts, more inclusive evaluations?"

Monroe was not impressed, though she acknowledged that others were, and printed the exchange alongside the poem: "You find me testing metaphors, and poetic concept in general, too much by logic, whereas I find you pushing logic to the limit in a painfully intellectual search for emotion, for poetic motive." In any case, Crane had a relatively well-developed rhetoric for the defense of his poems; here is an excerpt from "General Aims and Theories": "New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation. ...the voice of the present, if it is to be known, must be caught at the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic."

The "Homosexual Text"

As a boy, he had a sexual relationship with an older man. He associated his sexuality with his vocation as a poet. Raised in the Christian Science tradition of his mother, he never ceased to view himself as a social pariah. However, as poems such as "Repose of Rivers" make clear, he felt that this sense of alienation was necessary in order for him to attain the visionary insight that formed the basis for his poetic work.

Recent queer criticism has asserted that it is particularly difficult, perhaps even inappropriate, to read many of Crane's poems – "The Broken Tower," "My Grandmother's Love Letters," the "Voyages" series, and others – without a willingness to look for, and uncover, homosexual meanings in the text. The prominent queer theorist Tim Dean argues, for instance, that the obscurity of Crane's style owes itself partially to the necessities of being a semi-public homosexual – not quite closeted, but also, as legally and culturally necessary, not open: "The intensity responsible for Crane's particular form of difficulty involves not only linguistic considerations but also culturally subjective concerns. This intensity produces a kind of privacy that is comprehensible in terms of the cultural construction of homosexuality and its attendant institutions of privacy."

Thomas Yingling objects to the traditional, New Critical and Eliotic readings of Crane, arguing that the "American myth criticism and formalist readings" have "depolarized and normalized our reading of American poetry, making any homosexual readings seem perverse." Even more than a personal or political problem, though, Yingling argues that such "biases" obscure much of what the poems make clear; he cites, for instance, the last lines of "My Grandmother's Love Letters" from White Buildings as a haunting description of estrangement from the norms of (heterosexual) family life:

The critic Brian Reed has contributed to a project of critical reintegration, suggesting that an overemphasis on the sexual biography of Crane's poetry can skew a broader appreciation of his overall work. He has also contributed a study of Crane's gay lyrical series, "Voyages", to the Poetry Foundation.

Influence

Some poet-critics such as Yvor Winters, have been ambivalent about Hart's work. Winters's review in The Bridge in Poetry grants Crane's status of a "poet of genius" as a matter of course, before going on to say that the poem augurs a "public catastrophe". Crane was admired by artists such as Allen

Tate, Eugene O'Neill, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Wilson, E. E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams. Although Hart had his sharp critics, among them Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound, Moore did publish his work, as did T. S. Eliot, who, moving even further out of Pound's sphere, may have borrowed some of Crane's imagery for Four Quartets.

Over the next two generations, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg read The Bridge. John Berryman wrote him one of his famous elegies, and Robert Lowell published his "Words for Hart Crane" in Life Studies (1959): "Who asks for me, the Shelley of my age, / must lay his heart out for my bed and board." Perhaps most reverently, Tennessee Williams wanted to be "given back to the sea" at the "point most nearly determined as the point at which Hart Crane gave himself back." One of Williams's last plays, a "ghost play" titled "Steps Must Be Gentle," explores Crane's relationship with his mother. Such important affections have made Crane a "poet's poet". Thomas Lux offers, for instance: "If the devil came to me and said 'Tom, you can be dead and Hart can be alive,' I'd take the deal in a heartbeat if the devil promised, when arisen, Hart would have to go straight into A.A." Beyond poetry, Crane's suicide inspired several works of art by noted artist Jasper Johns, including "Periscope" and "Diver," the "Symphony for Three Orchestras" by Elliott Carter (inspired by the "Bridge") and the painting by Marsden Hartley "Eight Bells' Folly, Memorial for Hart Crane." Neil Young wrote The Bridge, a song on the Time Fades Away album, which was inspired by the poetry of Crane, and after which The Bridge School and Bridge School Benefit are named.

Works:

White Buildings (1926)
The Bridge (1930)
The Complete Poems of Hart Crane, Marc Simon, ed. New York: Liveright (1986; Centennial edition with intro. by Harold Bloom, 2000)
O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane. intro. and commentary by Langdon Hammer, forward by Paul Bowles. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows (1997)
Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters, Langdon Hammer, ed. New York: The Library of America (2006)
Hart Crane and Yvor Winters: Their Literary Correspondence. Thomas Parkinson ed. and commentary. Berkeley: University of California Press (1978)
The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, Boriswood, 1938 (First UK edition edited by Waldo Frank)

A Name For All

Moonmoth and grasshopper that flee our page
And still wing on, untarnished of the name
We pinion to your bodies to assuage
Our envy of your freedom—we must maim

Because we are usurpers, and chagrined—
And take the wing and scar it in the hand.
Names we have, even, to clap on the wind;
But we must die, as you, to understand.

I dreamed that all men dropped their names, and sang
As only they can praise, who build their days
With fin and hoof, with wing and sweetened fang
Struck free and holy in one Name always.

Harold Hart Crane

At Melville's Tomb

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

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

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

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

Harold Hart Crane

Carmen De Boheme

Sinuously winding through the room
On smokey tongues of sweetened cigarettes, --
Plaintive yet proud the cello tones resume
The andante of smooth hopes and lost regrets.

Bright peacocks drink from flame-pots by the wall,
Just as absinthe-sipping women shiver through
With shimmering blue from the bowl in Circe's hall.
Their brown eyes blacken, and the blue drop hue.

The andante quivers with crescendo's start,
And dies on fire's birth in each man's heart.
The tapestry betrays a finger through
The slit, soft-pulling; -- -- -- and music follows cue.

There is a sweep, -- a shattering, -- a choir
Disquieting of barbarous fantasy.
The pulse is in the ears, the heart is higher,
And stretches up through mortal eyes to see.

Carmen! Akimbo arms and smouldering eyes; --
Carmen! Bestirring hope and lipping eyes; --
Carmen whirls, and music swirls and dips.
"Carmen!," comes awed from wine-hot lips.

Finale leaves in silence to replume
Bent wings, and Carmen with her flaunts through the gloom
Of whispering tapestry, brown with old fringe: --
The winers leave too, and the small lamps twinge.

Morning: and through the foggy city gate
A gypsy wagon wiggles, striving straight.
And some dream still of Carmen's mystic face, --
Yellow, pallid, like ancient lace.

Harold Hart Crane

Carrier Letter

My hands have not touched water since your hands, -
No; - nor my lips freed laughter since 'farewell'.
And with the day, distance again expands
Between us, voiceless as an uncoiled shell.

Yet, - much follows, much endures… Trust birds alone:
A dove's wings clung about my heart last night
With surging gentleness; and the blue stone
Set in the tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

Harold Hart Crane

Chaplinesque

We will make our meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
A famished kitten on the step, and know
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
Facing the dull squint with what innocence
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.

Harold Hart Crane

Exile

My hands have not touched pleasure since your hands, --
No, -- nor my lips freed laughter since 'farewell',
And with the day, distance again expands
Voiceless between us, as an uncoiled shell.

Yet, love endures, though starving and alone.
A dove's wings clung about my heart each night
With surging gentleness, and the blue stone
Set in the tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

Harold Hart Crane

Fear

The host, he says that all is well
And the fire-wood glow is bright;
The food has a warm and tempting smell,-
But on the window licks the night.

Pile on the logs... Give me your hands,
Friends! No,- it is not fright...
But hold me... somewhere I heard demands...
And on the window licks the night.

Harold Hart Crane

For The Marriage of Faustus and Helen

'
And so we may arrive by Talmud skill
And profane Greek to raise the building up
Of Helen's house against the Ismaelite,
King of Thogarma, and his habergeons
Brimstony, blue and fiery; and the force
Of King A baddon, and the beast of Cittim;
Which Rabbi David Kimchi, Onkelos,
And A ben Ezra do interpret Rome.
'
-THE ALCHEMIST.
I

The mind has shown itself at times
Too much the baked and labeled dough
Divided by accepted multitudes.
Across the stacked partitions of the day-
Across the memoranda, baseball scores,
The stenographic smiles and stock quotations
Smutty wings flash out equivocations.

The mind is brushed by sparrow wings;
Numbers, rebuffed by asphalt, crowd
The margins of the day, accent the curbs,
Convoying divers dawns on every' corner
To druggist, barber and tobacconist,
Until the graduate opacities of evening
Take them away as suddenly to somewhere
Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool.
There is the world dimensional for
those untwisted by the love of things
irreconcilable…
And yet, suppose some evening I forgot
The fare and transfer, yet got by that way
Without recall,-lost yet poised in traffic.
Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,
Still flickering with those prefigurations-
Prodigal, yet uncontested now,
Half-riant before the jerky window frame.

There is some way, I think, to touch
Those hands of yours that count the nights
Stippled with pink and green advertisements.
And now, before its arteries turn dark
I would have you meet this bartered blood.
Imminent in his dream, none better knows
The white wafer cheek of love, or offers words
Lightly as moonlight on the eaves meets snow.

Reflective conversion of all things
At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread
The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread

Impinging on the throat and sides
Inevitable, the body of the world
Weeps in inventive dust for the hiatus
That winks above it', bluet in your breasts.

The earth may glide diaphanous to death;
But if I lift my arms it is to bend
To you who turned away once, Helen, knowing
The press of troubled hands, too alternate
With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.
I meet you, therefore, in that eventual flame
You found in final chains, no captive then
Beyond their million brittle, bloodshot eyes;
White, through white cities passed on to assume
That world which comes to each of us alone.

Accept a lone eye riveted to your plane,
Bent axle of devotion along companion ways
That beat, continuous, to hourless days-
0ne inconspicuous, glowing orb of praise.

II

Brazen hypnotics glitter here;
Glee shifts from foot to foot,
Magnetic to their tremulo.
This crashing opera bouffe,
Blest excursion! this ricochet
From roof to roof-
Know, Olympians, we are breathless
While nigger cupids scour the stars!

A thousand light shrugs balance us
Through snarling hails of melody.
White shadows slip across the floor
Splayed like cards from a loose hand;
Rhythmic ellipses lead into canters
Until somewhere a rooster banters.

Greet naively-yet intrepidly
New soothings, new amazements
That cornets introduce at every turn-
And you may fall downstairs with me
With perfect grace and equanimity.
Or, plaintively scud past shores
Where, by strange harmonic laws
All relatives, serene and cool,
Sit rocked in patent armchairs.

0, I have known metallic paradises
Where cuckoos clucked to finches
Above the deft catastrophes of drums.

While titters hailed the groans of death
Beneath gyrating awnings I have seen

The incunabula of the divine grotesque.
This music has a reassuring way,

The siren of the ' springs of guilty song-
Let us take her on the incandescent wax
Striated with nuances nervosities
That we are heir to: she is still so young,
She cannot frown upon her as she smiles,
Dipping here in this cultivated storm
Among slim skaters of the gardened skies.

III

Capped arbiter of beauty in this street
That narrows -darkly into motor dawn,
You, here beside m/e, delicate ambassador
Of intricate slain numbers that arise
In whispers, naked of steel;
religious gunman!
Who faithfully, yourself, will fall too soon,
And in other ways than as the wind settles
On the sixteen thrifty bridges of the city:
Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity.

We even,
Who drove speediest destruction
In corymbulous formations of mechanics,-
Who hurried the hill breezes, spouting malice
Plangent over meadows, and looked down
On rifts of torn and empty houses
Like old women with teeth unjubilant
That waited faintly, briefly and in vain:

We know, eternal gunman, our flesh remembers
The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,
The mounted, yielding cities of the air!

That saddled sky that shook down vertical
Repeated play of fire-no hypogeum
Of wave or rock was good against one hour.
We did not ask for that, but have survived,
And will persist to speak again before
All stubble streets that have not curved
To memory, or known the ominous lifted arm

That lowers down the arc of Helen's brow
To saturate with blessing and dismay.

A goose, tobacco and cologne-
Three winged and gold-shod prophecies of heaven,
The lavish heart shall always have to leaven
And spread with bells and voices, and atone
The abating shadows of our conscript dust.

Anchises' navel, dripping of the sea,-
The hands Erasmus dipped in gleaming tides,
Gathered the voltage of blown blood and vine;
Delve upward for the new and scattered wine,
0 brother-thief of time, that we recall.
Laugh out the meager penance of their days
Who dare not share with us the breath released,
The substance drilled and spent beyond repair
For golden, or the shadow of gold hair.

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

Harold Hart Crane

Forgetfulness

Forgetfulness is like a song
That, freed from beat and measure, wanders.
Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled,
Outspread and motionless, --
A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly.

Forgetfulness is rain at night,
Or an old house in a forest, -- or a child.
Forgetfulness is white, -- white as a blasted tree,
And it may stun the sybil into prophecy,
Or bury the Gods.

I can remember much forgetfulness.

Harold Hart Crane

Interior

It sheds a shy solemnity,
This lamp in our poor room.
O grey and gold amenity, --
Silence and gentle gloom!

Wide from the world, a stolen hour
We claim, and none may know
How love blooms like a tardy flower
Here in the day's after-glow.

And even should the world break in
With jealous threat and guile,
The world, at last, must bow and win
Our pity and a smile.

Harold Hart Crane

Legend

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

I am not ready for repentance;
Nor to match regrets. For the moth
Bends no more than the still
Imploring flame. And tremorous
In the white falling flakes
Kisses are,--
The only worth all granting.

It is to be learned--
This cleaving and this burning,
But only by the one who
Spends out himself again.

Twice and twice
(Again the smoking souvenir,
Bleeding eidolon!) and yet again.
Until the bright logic is won
Unwhispering as a mirror
Is believed.

Then, drop by caustic drop, a perfect cry
Shall string some constant harmony,--
Relentless caper for all those who step
The legend of their youth into the noon.

Anonymous submission.

Harold Hart Crane

My Grandmother's Love Letters

There are no stars to-night
But those of memory.
Yet how much room for memory there is
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother's mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space
Steps must be gentle.
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:

'Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes:
Is the silence strong enough
To carry back the music to its source
And back to you again
As though to her?'

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand;
And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

Harold Hart Crane

North Labrador

A land of leaning ice
Hugged by plaster-grey arches of sky,
Flings itself silently
Into eternity.

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

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

Harold Hart Crane

O Carib Isle!

The tarantula rattling at the lily's foot
Across the feet of the dead, laid in white sand
Near the coral beach—nor zigzag fiddle crabs
Side-stilting from the path (that shift, subvert
And anagrammatize your name)—No, nothing here
Below the palsy that one eucalyptus lifts
In wrinkled shadows—mourns.

And yet suppose
I count these nacreous frames of tropic death,
Brutal necklaces of shells around each grave
Squared off so carefully. Then

To the white sand I may speak a name, fertile
Albeit in a stranger tongue. Tree names, flower names
Deliberate, gainsay death's brittle crypt. Meanwhile
The wind that knots itself in one great death—
Coils and withdraws. So syllables want breath.

But where is the Captain of this doubloon isle
Without a turnstile? Who but catchword crabs
Patrols the dry groins of the underbrush?
What man, or What
Is Commissioner of mildew throughout the ambushed senses?
His Carib mathematics web the eyes' baked lenses!

Under the poinciana, of a noon or afternoon
Let fiery blossoms clot the light, render my ghost
Sieved upward, white and black along the air
Until it meets the blue's comedian host.

Let not the pilgrim see himself again
For slow evisceration bound like those huge terrapin
Each daybreak on the wharf, their brine-caked eyes;
—Spiked, overturned; such thunder in their strain!
And clenched beaks coughing for the surge again!

Slagged of the hurricane—I, cast within its flow,
Congeal by afternoons here, satin and vacant.
You have given me the shell, Satan,—carbonic amulet
Sere of the sun exploded in the sea.

Harold Hart Crane

Passage

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

Sulking, sanctioning the sun,
My memory I left in a ravine,-
Casual louse that tissues the buck-wheat,
Aprons rocks, congregates pears
In moonlit bushels
And wakens alleys with a hidden cough.

Dangerously the summer burned
(I had joined the entrainments of the wind).
The shadows of boulders lengthened my back:
In the bronze gongs of my cheeks
The rain dried without odour.

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

The evening was a spear in the ravine
That throve through very oak. And had I walked
The dozen particular decimals of time?
Touching an opening laurel, I found
A thief beneath, my stolen book in hand.

''Why are you back here-smiling an iron coffin?
' 'To argue with the laurel,' I replied:
'Am justified in transience, fleeing
Under the constant wonder of your eyes-.'

He closed the book. And from the Ptolemies
Sand troughed us in a glittering,, abyss.
A serpent swam a vertex to the sun
-On unpaced beaches leaned its tongue and
drummed.
What fountains did I hear? What icy speeches?
Memory, committed to the page, had broke.

Harold Hart Crane

Quaker Hill

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.

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!

High from the central cupola, they say
One's glance could cross the borders of three states;
But I have seen death's stare in slow survey
From four horizons that no one relates . . .
Weekenders avid of their turf-won scores,
Here three hours from the semaphores, the Czars
Of golf, by twos and threes in plaid plusfours
Alight with sticks abristle and cigars.

This was the Promised Land, and still it is
To the persuasive suburban land agent
In bootleg roadhouses where the gin fizz
Bubbles in time to Hollywood's new love-nest pageant.
Fresh from the radio in the old Meeting House
(Now the New Avalon Hotel) volcanoes roar
A welcome to highsteppers that no mouse
Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.

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 . . .
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 . . . .

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 forsees the end—
Leaf after autumnal leaf
break off,
descend—
descend—

Harold Hart Crane

Recitative

Regard the capture here, 0 Janus-faced,
As double as the hands that twist this glass.
Such eves at search or rest you cannot see;
Reciting pain or glee, how can you bear!

Twin shadowed halves: the breaking, second holds t,
In each the skin alone, and so it is
I crust a plate of vibrant mercury
Borne cleft to you, and brother in the half.

Inquire this much-exacting fragment smile,
Its drums and darkest blowing leaves ignore,-
Defer though, revocation of the tears
That yield attendance to one crucial sign.

Look steadily-how the wind feasts and spins
The brain's disk shivered against lust. Then watch
While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away,
And gradually white buildings answer day.

Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us-
Alike suspend us from atrocious sums
Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant
The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream.

The highest tower,-let her ribs palisade
Wrenched gold of Nineveh;-yet leave the tower.
The bridge swings over salvage, beyond wharves;
A wind abides the ensign of your will . . .

In alternating bells have you not heard
All hours clapped dense into a single stride?
Forgive me for an echo of these things,
And let us walk through time with equal pride.

Harold Hart Crane

Repose Of Rivers

The willows carried a slow sound,
A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Till age had brought me to the sea.

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
Asunder ...

How much I would have bartered! the black gorge
And all the singular nestings in the hills
Where beavers learn stitch and tooth.
The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
I remember now its singing willow rim.

And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
After the city that I finally passed
With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts
The monsoon cut across the delta
At gulf gates ... There, beyond the dykes

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

Harold Hart Crane

Southern Cross

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?

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!

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.

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—

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.

Harold Hart Crane

The Air Plant

Grand Cayman

This tuft that thrives on saline nothingness,
Inverted octopus with heavenward arms
Thrust parching from a palm-bole hard by the cove⎯
A bird almost⎯of almost bird alarms,

Is pulmonary to the wind that jars
Its tentacles, horrific in their lurch.
The lizard’s throat, held bloated for a fly,
Balloons but warily from this throbbing perch.

The needles and hack-saws of cactus bleed
A milk of earth when stricken off the stalk;
But this,⎯defenseless, thornless, sheds no blood,
Almost no shadow⎯but the air’s thin talk.

Angelic Dynamo! Ventriloquist of the Blue!
While beachward creeps the shark-swept Spanish Main
By what conjunctions do the winds appoint
Its apotheosis, at last⎯the hurricane!

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: Atlantis

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

And through that cordage, threading with its call
One arc synoptic of all tides below—
Their labyrinthine mouths of history
Pouring reply as though all ships at sea
Complighted in one vibrant breath made cry,—
"Make thy love sure—to weave whose song we ply!"
—From black embankments, moveless soundings hailed,
So seven oceans answer from their dream.

And on, obliquely up bright carrier bars
New octaves trestle the twin monoliths
Beyond whose frosted capes the moon bequeaths
Two worlds of sleep (O arching strands of song!)—
Onward and up the crystal-flooded aisle
White tempest nets file upward, upward ring
With silver terraces the humming spars,
The loft of vision, palladium helm of stars.

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
—Tomorrows into yesteryear—and link
What cipher-script of time no traveller reads
But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,
Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.

Like hails, farewells—up planet-sequined heights
Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy.
And you, aloft there—Jason! hesting Shout!
Still wrapping harness to the swarming air!
Silvery the rushing wake, surpassing call,
Beams yelling Aeolus! splintered in the straits!

From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage, tensely spare—
Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
Of deepest day—O Choir, 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 . . . !

We left the haven hanging in the night
Sheened harbor lanterns backward fled the keel.
Pacific here at time's end, bearing corn,—
Eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel.
And still the circular, indubitable frieze
Of heaven's meditation, yoking wave
To kneeling wave, one song devoutly binds—
The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings!

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

Swift peal of secular light, intrinsic Myth
Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound,—
O River-throated—iridescently upborne
Through the bright drench and fabric of our veins;
With white escarpments swinging into light,
Sustained in tears the cities are endowed
And justified conclamant with ripe fields
Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment.

Forever Deity's glittering Pledge, O Thou
Whose canticle fresh chemistry assigns
To wrapt inception and beatitude,—
Always through blinding cables, to our joy,
Of thy white seizure springs the prophecy:
Always through spiring cordage, pyramids
Of silver sequel, Deity's young name
Kinetic of white choiring wings . . . ascends.

Migrations that must needs void memory,
Inventions that cobblestone the heart,—
Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love.
Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower,
O Answerer of all,—Anemone,—
Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold—
(O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)
Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!

So to thine Everpresence, beyond time,
Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
That bleeds infinity—the orphic strings,
Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge:
—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.

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: Cutty Sark

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—

    O Stamboul Rose—dreams weave the rose!

        Murmurs of Leviathan he spoke,
        and rum was Plato in our heads . . .

"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 . . . "

    O Stamboul Rose—drums weave—

"I ran a donkey engine down there on the Canal
in Panama—got tired of that—
then Yucatan selling kitchenware—beads—
have you seen Popocatepetl—birdless mouth
with ashes sifting down—?
                and then the coast again . . . "

    Rose of Stamboul O coral Queen—
    teased remnants of the skeletons of cities—
    and galleries, galleries of watergutted lava
    snarling stone—green—drums—drown—

Sing!
"—that spiracle!" he shot a finger out the door . . .
'O life's a geyser—beautiful—my lungs—
No—I can't live on land—!'

I saw the frontiers gleaming of his mind;
or are there frontiers—running sands sometimes
running sands—somewhere—sands running . . .
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 wreathe the rose,
the star floats burning in a gulf of tears
and sleep another thousand—

interminably
long since somebody's nickel—stopped—
playing—

A wind worried those wicker-neat lapels, the
swinging summer entrances to cooler hells . . .
Outside a wharf truck nearly ran him down
—he lunged up Bowery way while the dawn
was putting the Statue of Liberty out—that
torch of hers you know—

I started walking home across the Bridge . . .

. . . . .

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!

Thermopylae, Black Prince, Flying Cloud through Sunda
—scarfed of foam, their bellies veered green esplanades,
locked in wind-humors, ran their eastings down;

at Java Head freshened the nip
(sweet opium and tea!)
and turned and left us on the lee . . .

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?

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: Quaker Hill

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.

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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!

High from the central cupola, they say
One's glance could cross the borders of three states;
But I have seen death's stare in slow survey
From four horizons that no one relates . . .
Weekenders avid of their turf-won scores,
Here three hours from the semaphores, the Czars
Of golf, by twos and threes in plaid plusfours
Alight with sticks abristle and cigars.

This was the Promised Land, and still it is
To the persuasive suburban land agent
In bootleg roadhouses where the gin fizz
Bubbles in time to Hollywood's new love-nest pageant.
Fresh from the radio in the old Meeting House
(Now the New Avalon Hotel) volcanoes roar
A welcome to highsteppers that no mouse
Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.

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 . . .
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 . . . .

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 forsees the end—
Leaf after autumnal leaf
                break off,
                descend—
                descend—

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: The Dance

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.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness 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 a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride—
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.

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,—

And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,
Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass—
Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.
I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass . . .

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

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

Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped!
—And knew myself within some boding shade:—
Grey tepees-tufting the blue knolls ahead,
Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade . . .

A distant cloud, a thunder-bud—it grew,
That blanket of the skies: the padded foot
Within,—I heard it; ’til its rhythm drew,
—Siphoned the black pool from the heart’s hot root!

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!

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.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;
Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms

Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.

0, 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.

. . . .

Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,
Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze—
Across what bivouacs of thine angered slain,
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid—
Though other calendars now stack the sky,
Thy freedom is her largesse, 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 liana grass resume
Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned
O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom!

And when the caribou slant down for salt
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault
Of dusk?—And are her perfect brows to thine?

We danced, 0 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.

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: The Tunnel

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

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

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

Be minimum, then, to swim the hiving swarms
Out of the Square, the Circle burning bright—
Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right,
Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright
—Quite unprepared rush naked back to light:
And down beside the turnstile press the coin
Into the slot. The gongs already rattle.

And so
of cities you bespeak
subways, rivered under streets
and rivers. . . . In the car
the overtone of motion
underground, the monotone
of motion is the sound
of other faces, also underground—

"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—”

Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.
This answer lives like verdigris, like hair
Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;
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—

The phonographs of hades in the brain
Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love
A burnt match skating in a urinal—
Somewhere above Fourteenth TAKE THE EXPRESS
To brush some new presentiment of pain—

“But I want service in this office SERVICE
I said—after
the show she cried a little afterwards but—”

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
In interborough fissures of the mind . . . ?

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?

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

The intent escalator lifts a serenade
Stilly
Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then
Bolting outright somewhere above where streets
Burst suddenly in rain. . . . The gongs recur:
Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door.
Thunder is galvothermic here below. . . . The car
Wheels off. The train rounds, bending to a scream,
Taking the final level for the dive
Under the river—
And somewhat emptier than before,
Demented, for a hitching second, humps; then
Lets go. . . . Toward corners of the floor
Newspapers wing, revolve and wing.
Blank windows gargle signals through the roar.

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?

Daemon, demurring and eventful yawn!
Whose hideous laughter is a 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 . . . !

. . . . .

A tugboat, wheezing wreaths 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. . . . Hereby 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—

Harold Hart Crane

The Bridge: To Brooklyn Bridge

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty--

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
--Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

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

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

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,--

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path--condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,

Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Harold Hart Crane

The Broken Tower

The bell-rope that gathers God at dawn
Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell
Of a spent day - to wander the cathedral lawn
From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell.

Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps
Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway
Antiphonal carillons launched before
The stars are caught and hived in the sun's ray?

The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;
And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave
Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score
Of broken intervals… And I, their sexton slave!

Oval encyclicals in canyons heaping
The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!
Pagodas campaniles with reveilles out leaping-
O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain!…

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

My world I poured. But was it cognate, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thighs embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledges once to hope - cleft to despair?

The steep encroachments of my blood left me
No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower
As flings the question true?) -or is it she
Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?-

And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes
My veins recall and add, revived and sure
The angelus of wars my chest evokes:
What I hold healed, original now, and pure…

And builds, within, a tower that is not stone
(Not stone can jacket heaven) - but slip
Of pebbles, - visible wings of silence sown
In azure circles, widening as they dip

The matrix of the heart, lift down the eyes
That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower…
The commodious, tall decorum of that sky
Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.

Harold Hart Crane

The Great Western Plains

The little voices of the prairie dogs
Are tireless . . .
They will give three hurrahs
Alike to stage, equestrian, and pullman,
And all unstingingly as to the moon.

And Fifi's bows and poodle ease
Whirl by them centred on the lap
Of Lottie Honeydew, movie queen,
Toward lawyers and Nevada.

And how much more they cannot see!
Alas, there is so little time,
The world moves by so fast these days!
Burrowing in silk is not their way --
And yet they know the tomahawk.

Indeed, old memories come back to life;
Pathetic yelps have sometimes greeted
Noses pressed against the glass.

Harold Hart Crane

The Visible, The Untrue

Yes, I being
the terrible puppet of my dreams, shall
lavish this on you-
the dense mine of the orchid, split in two.
And the fingernails that cinch such
environs?
And what about the staunch neighbor tabulations,
with all their zest for doom?

I'm wearing badges
that cancel all your kindness. Forthright
I watch the silver Zeppelin
destroy the sky. To
stir your confidence?
To rouse what sanctions-?

The silver strophe… the canto
bright with myth… Such
distances leap landward without
evil smile. And, as for me….

The window weight throbs in its blind
partition. To extinguish what I have of faith.
Yes, light. And it is always
always, always the eternal rainbow
And it is always the day, the farewell day unkind.

Harold Hart Crane

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Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,

Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Harold Hart Crane

To Emily Dickinson

You who desired so much--in vain to ask--
Yet fed you hunger like an endless task,
Dared dignify the labor, bless the quest--
Achieved that stillness ultimately best,

Being, of all, least sought for: Emily, hear!
O sweet, dead Silencer, most suddenly clear
When singing that Eternity possessed
And plundered momently in every breast;

--Truly no flower yet withers in your hand.
The harvest you descried and understand
Needs more than wit to gather, love to bind.
Some reconcilement of remotest mind--

Leaves Ormus rubyless, and Ophir chill.
Else tears heap all within one clay-cold hill.

Harold Hart Crane

Voyages

I

Above the fresh ruffles of the surf
Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.
They have contrived a conquest for shell shucks,
And their fingers crumble fragments of baked weed
Gaily digging and scattering.

And in answer to their treble interjections
The sun beats lightning on the waves,
The waves fold thunder on the sand;
And could they hear me I would tell them:

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,
Fondle your shells and sticks, bleached
By time and the elements; but there is a line
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

II

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

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave

The seal’s wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

III

Infinite consanguinity it bears—
This tendered theme of you that light
Retrieves from sea plains where the sky
Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones;
While ribboned water lanes I wind
Are laved and scattered with no stroke
Wide from your side, whereto this hour
The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands.

And so, admitted through black swollen gates
That must arrest all distance otherwise,—
Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,
Light wrestling there incessantly with light,
Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
Your body rocking!
                and where death, if shed,
Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
The silken skilled transmemberment of song;

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

IV

Whose counted smile of hours and days, suppose
I know as spectrum of the sea and pledge
Vastly now parting gulf on gulf of wings
Whose circles bridge, I know, (from palms to the severe
Chilled albatross’s white immutability)
No stream of greater love advancing now
Than, singing, this mortality alone
Through clay aflow immortally to you.

All fragrance irrefragably, and claim
Madly meeting logically in this hour
And region that is ours to wreathe again,
Portending eyes and lips and making told
The chancel port and portion of our June—

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

In signature of the incarnate word
The harbor shoulders to resign in mingling
Mutual blood, transpiring as foreknown

And widening noon within your breast for gathering
All bright insinuations that my years have caught
For islands where must lead inviolably
Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes,—

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

V

Meticulous, past midnight in clear rime,
Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast
Together in one merciless white blade—
The bay estuaries fleck the hard sky limits.

—As if too brittle or too clear to touch!
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.
One frozen trackless smile ... What words
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we

Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword
Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,
Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved
And changed ... "There's

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

"—And never to quite understand!" No,
In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

But now
Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
Draw in your head and sleep the long way home.

VI

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

Steadily as a shell secretes
Its beating leagues of monotone,

Or as many waters trough the sun’s
Red kelson past the cape’s wet stone;

O rivers mingling toward the sky
And harbor of the phoenix’ breast—
My eyes pressed black against the prow,
—Thy derelict and blinded guest

Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,
I cannot claim: let thy waves rear
More savage than the death of kings,
Some splintered garland for the seer.

Beyond siroccos harvesting
The solstice thunders, crept away,
Like a cliff swinging or a sail
Flung into April’s inmost day—

Creation’s blithe and petalled word
To the lounged goddess when she rose
Conceding dialogue with eyes
That smile unsearchable repose—

Still fervid covenant, Belle Isle,
—Unfolded floating dais before
Which rainbows twine continual hair—
Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The imaged Word, it is, that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.

Harold Hart Crane

Voyages II

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