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The Image of Women in Hart Crane's *The Bridge*

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Abstract

The American poet Hart Crane has published his masterpiece *The Bridge* in 1930. This long poem which consists of fifteen lyric poems is considered a modern epic. Crane, who can be compared with Walt Whitman in the 19th century and T.S. Eliot in the 20th century, mixes between mythology and modernity and the poem could be considered an example of how modernist forms could be used to express uplifting ideas. *The Bridge* bridges the gaps between America's past, present and future by imagining a journey through America's past. The American land is seen as a female embodied in the poem as the most famous Indian woman.

The study focuses upon the image of women in Hart Crane' poem *The Bridge* and is divided into three sections. Section one is introductory with two parts: Biographical and Crane's Poetics. Section two discusses the image of women in *The Bridge*. Section three is the conclusion that summarizes the findings.

Keywords: Hart Crane, The bridge, women.

الخلاصة

لقد نشر الشاعر الامريكي هارت كرين رائعته (الجسر) عام ١٩٣٠. تعتبر هذه القصيدة الطويلة التي تتكون من ١٥ قصيدة غنائية مثالا للملحمة الحديثة. لقد مزج الشاعر هارت كرين(والذي يقارن مع كل من ويتمان من القرن التاسع عشر ومع اليوت من القرن العشرين) بين الاسطورة والمعاصرة. حيث تعتبر هذه القصيدة مثالا لكيفية استخدام رموز معاصرة للتعبير عن افكار نهضوية. ان قصيدة (الجسر) تربط الفجوات بين ماضي امريكا وحاضرها ومستقبلها من خلال رحلة خيالية في ماضي امريكا. لقد صور الشاعر الارض الامريكية كأنثى تجسدت بأحد اشهر الشخصيات النسائية الهندية. تقسم الدراسة الى ثلاثة اقسام : القسم الاول هو مقدمة من جزأين الاول عن حياة الشاعر والثاني عن شعره.القسم الثاني يناقش صورة النساء في قصيدة (الجسر). اما القسم الثالث فهو الاستنتاج الذي يلخص نتائج البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هارت كرين، الجسر، المرأة.

I. Introductory:

i: Biographical:

Hart Crane's poetry is evidence of the miraculous power of art. Its expression of longing and grief saddens the reader; yet its artistry is awesome and arouses joy. His work is an outcry of unsatisfied yearning for absolute beauty and love that by its eloquence gives rise to hopefulness. (Quinn, p. 19)

The source of Crane's grief is no mystery, for his personal life was a thirty-two years' ordeal. The only child of estranged parents, he became the foil for their mutual antagonism. He was always involved in their troubles but never confident of their love. (Ibid.) When only eighteen years old, he wrote to his father:

> Please, my dear father, do not make the present too hard – too painful for one whose fatal weakness is to love two unfortunate people, by writing barbed words. I don't know how long we three shall dwell in purgatory. We may rise above, or sink below, but either way it may be, the third shall and must follow the others, and I leave myself in your hands. (Quoted in ibid.)

Unable to trust his family, he relied upon friends. However, his need was too great and his anxiety too sharp for the easy terms of friendship. Slights, real and imagined, were suffered in agony and followed by outrageous displays of petulance. (Quinn, p.19) As his biographer Philip Horton has written, "the words 'betrayal' and 'humiliation' began to appear more and more frequently in the slowly increasing vocabulary of his suffering." (Horton, p.80) At odds with others, Crane also felt at odds with society. In the midst of the prosperous 1920's he found himself without a high school diploma, unable to hold a job, and often forced to turn to his parents and friends for support. He pitied himself and lamented: "I am tied to the stake – a little more wastefully burnt every day of my life while all America is saying, 'every day I am growing better and better in every way.'" (Quoted in Quinn, pp. 19-20)

The combination of these circumstances and a passionate, violent temperament precipitated his addiction to alcohol. By the spring of 1932, while living in Mexico on a Guggenheim fellowship, he reached the climax of self-destructiveness. (Quinn, p. 20) The novelist Katherine Anne Porter, who was living nearby, described an outburst of his despair:

> He broke into the monotonous obsessed dull obscenity which was the only language he knew after reaching a certain point of drunkenness, but this time he cursed things and elements as well as human beings. His voice at these times was intolerable; a steady harsh inhuman bellow which stunned the ears and shocked the nerves and caused the heart to contract. (Horton, p. 286)

A few weeks later he leaped to his death from an ocean liner bound for New York. (Quinn, p. 20)

ii. Crane's Poetics:

Despite all that might be said about Crane's despair at his failing poetic creativity, he was a poet conscious of his art. And although he did not leave behind him a complete corpus of critical writing that live up to the standard of that of Pound or Eliot, he was very careful to line out his aims and principles as far as his poems are concerned.In his "General Aims and Theories", he writes:

> When I started writing Faustus & Helen it was my intention to embody in modern terms (words, symbols, metaphors) a contemporary approximation to an ancient human culture or mythology that seems to have been obscured rather than illumined with the frequency of poetic allusions made to it during the last century. The name of Helen, for instance, has become an all-too-easily employed crutch for evocation whenever a poet felt a stitch in his side. The real evocation of this (to me) very real and absolute conception of beauty seemed to consist in a reconstruction in these modern terms of the basic emotional attitude toward beauty that the Greeks had. And in so doing I found that I was really 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 for classic poetic reference or for religious exploitation. (Horton, p. 323)

Despite the fact that Crane here is referring to "The Marriage of Faustus and Helen", his first major poem, what he says is applicable to The Bridge. After all, The Bridge is a poem "building a bridge between so-called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today", and out of which he hoped to "lend a myth to God." He continues:

> So I found "Helen" sitting in a street car; the Dionysian revels of her court and her seduction were transferred to a Metropolitan roof garden with a jazz orchestra; and the *katharsis* of the fall of Troy I saw approximated in the recent World War. (Horton, pp. 323-24)

This section aptly accounts for all the transformations Pocahontas witnesses throughout the course of the poem, simply because

> I am concerned with the future of America, but not because I think that America has any so-called par value as a state or as a group of people. . . . It is only because I feel persuaded that here are destined to be discovered certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere. And in this process I like to feel myself as a potential factor; certainly I must speak in its terms and what discoveries I may make are situated in its experience. (Horton, p. 325)

Which is the final outcome Crane hoped his poem would arrive at.

Crane was also aware of the complexities this synthesis entails and in the following section he sounds very much like Eliot in his adoption of both Elizabethan blank verse and modernist techniques of writing:

> But to fool one's self that definitions are being reached by merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time is merely to paint a photograph. I think that what is interesting and significant will emerge only under the conditions of our submission to, and examination and assimilation of the organic effects on us of these and other fundamental factors of our experience. It can certainly not be an organic expression otherwise. And the expression of such values may often be as well accomplished with the vocabulary and blank verse of the Elizabethans as with the calligraphic tricks and slang used so brilliantly at times by an impressionist like Cummings. (Horton, p. 325)

He assigns the "certain initial difficulties in understanding my poems" to "technical considerations" which are:

> 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. (Horton, p. 327)

He was also aware of the risks of "much criticism by defending such theories as I have", and yet was ready to "risk not only criticism – but folly – in the conquest of consciousness I can only say that I attach no intrinsic value to what means I use beyond their practical service in giving form to the living stuff of the imagination." (p. 328)

He concludes his essay saying that

> New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation. And while I feel that my work includes a more consistent extension of traditional literary elements than many contemporary poets are cable of appraising, I realize that I am utilizing the gifts of the past as instruments principally; and that the voice of the present, if it is to be known, must be caught at the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic. Language has built towers and bridges, but itself is inevitably as fluid as always. (Horton, p. 327)

In a letter to Otto Kahn dated September 12th, 1927, Crane explains his use of Pocahontas as a symbol and its relation to his poem, *The Bridge*:

> … Pocahontas, is the mythological nature-symbol chosen to represent the physical body of the continent, or the soil. She here takes on much the same role as the traditional Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology. The five sub-sections of Part II are mainly concerned with a gradual exploration of this 'body' whose first possessor was the Indian. It seemed altogether ineffective from the poetic standpoint to approach this material from the purely chronological historic angle--beginning with, say, the landing of *The Mayflower*, continuing with a résumé 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. Consequently I jump from the monologue of Columbus in Ave Maria--right across the four intervening centuries-into the harbor of 20th-century Manhattan. And from that point in time and place I begin to work backward through the pioneer period, always in terms of the present--finally to the very core of the nature-world of the Indian. What I am really handling, you see, is the Myth of America. (Horton, pp. 335-36)

He then explains the development of the symbolism in the different parts of "Powhatan's Daughter":

> The love-motif … carries along a symbolism of the life and ages of man (here the sowing of the seed) which is further developed in each of the subsequent sections of Powhatan's Daughter, though it is never particularly stressed. In 2 (Van Winkle) it is Childhood; in 3 it is Youth; in 4, Manhood; in 5 it is Age. This motif is interwoven and tends to be implicit in the imagery rather than anywhere stressed. (Horton, 337)

The dance, which is, in Crane's words, "one is on the pure mythical and smoky soil at last!" is

> 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, 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.' (Horton, 338)

Pocahontas goes through another transformation as Crane explains in the section "Indiana", which carries further the relationship between "the two races":

> This monologue of a woman of the 50's is a farewell to her son who is leaving their Indiana farm for the sea. By her story of the encounter with the half-breed squaw woman and her child, passed on the road back from the western gold-fields, I hope to signalize the transference of the role of Pocahontas to the pioneer white woman, or, from another angle, the absorption of this Pocahontas symbolism by the pioneer white woman. The significance of the anecdote is perhaps clearer without further explanation. This section is psychologically a summary of Powhatan's Daughter in its entirety. The entire section is "framed" by the sea again. In the beginning, Columbus and the Harbor Dawn,-- finally the departure of the first-born for a life before the mast. (Horton, pp. 338-339)

From these brief extracts, it is clear that Crane was a poet who is conscious of his art. He was also in continual pursuit of perfecting it. Had he lived longer and under better circumstances, psychological, social and financial, he might have developed to be of a stature similar to the giants of modern American poetry.

II. The Image of Women in *The Bridge*

Crane's search in *The Bridge* is a search for the real American past and also for the lineaments in America's present that will determine her future. *The Bridge* is appropriately divided into two sections in which each of these aspects of quest is dramatized. The first part of *The Bridge* from *"Ave Maria"* through *"Cutty Sark"* presents the poet's westering search from *"Far Rockaway to Golden Gate"* for landmarks of America's past, in the land itself as well as in cities, rivers, and ports. Going backward in time as he goes westward in direction, the poet assumes the identities of Columbus, Rip Van Winkle, railroad tramps, and derelict sailors to equate his restless quest with seekers of the past and present. (Hazo, p. 68)

The second part of *The Bridge* from *"Cape Hatteras"* to *"Atlantis"* dramatizes the poet's quest for a synthesis of the conflicting forces within America's present in an effort to create an apocalyptic vision of America's future. From this synopsis it can be seen that the poet's quest in the first part of *The Bridge* is essentially a spatiotemporal one while his quest in the second part is a spiritual one. Both, however, are realizations not of a historically authentic America but of the real and mythic past as Crane envisioned it, not of the textbook America of the twenties but of an America transformed in Crane's poetic imagination, not of the clairvoyantly accurate America of the future but of an America realized in the consciousness of the poet. *The Bridge*, therefore, is not a poem about an

America common to all men; it is a vision of America unique to one man. Crane's America has significance in *The Bridge* as *a part* of his vision and not as something *apart* from it. *The Bridge* is primarily important as the testament of a poet and not as a chronicle. (Ibid., pp.68-9)

Although the *"Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge"* prefigures the quest of the poet at the spatiotemporal level and the spiritual level, its principal value is that it forges the symbol that unites the two levels of reality. This symbol is the bridge itself, which joins the shores of the temporal world to the invisible shores of the spiritual just as the Brooklyn Bridge that Crane used as his model spanned the East River from Brooklyn to lower Manhattan. (Ibid., p. 69)

In addition to the bridge's architectural meaning and its significance as a manifestation of man's timeless need to wrest the material world to his purposes, the bridge for Crane is symbolic of everything that joins or unifies. This is the third level of its symbolic meaning. Whether Crane is alluding to continents linked by sea lanes or years linked only by memory, it is the symbol of the bridge at this level of its meaning that is evoked. (Ibid., p. 72)

Having regarded the bridge as a symbol of permanence, liberty, and vitality, Crane then raises the symbol to yet another dimension of meaning. This is the dimension of faith. The bridge, which in its "curveship" (p. 8) faintly echoes the symbol of a rainbow for the will of God, is transformed in this passage into a symbol of divinity itself. By ascribing divinity to the bridge, Crane may have overburdened his symbol. As a symbol of faith, the bridge has an archetypal justification. As a symbol of the object of faith, the bridge can be accepted only as an extension of the rainbow image of God's will. It is difficult to accept the plausibility of the bridge as a symbol of God in any other sense. (Hazo, p. 74)

After describing the bridge as "obscure" (p. 8) as the promise of paradise, Crane ascribes to it the attributes of divine kingship. The divine king symbolized by the rainbow of the bridge is capable of rewarding and forgiving. These notions of reward and forgiveness embrace both the Old and New Testament. Reward or "guerdon" is related to the "heaven of the Jews," (p. 8) and "reprieve and pardon" (p. 8) are suggestive of the Christian tradition. In addition to its other levels of meaning in this stanza, the bridge has been subtly used to join or "bridge" the pre-Christian and Christian conceptions of divinity. (Hazo, pp. 74-5)

> 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. (p.8)

The spiritual significance of the bridge is then extended into the following stanzas. It becomes a joint symbol of aspiration and elevation or transcendence; it is the very fusion of praise ("harp") (p. 8) and sacrifice ("altar") (p. 8) eternally joined in a moment of inspiration or creative power ("fury"). (p. 8) Just as the bridge in Roebling's

imagination was what carried the actual construction of the Brooklyn Bridge to its completion, so are all men capable of transforming the world of fact and transcending it with bridges of praise, sacrifice, and creative energy. (Hazo, p. 75)

> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,-- (p. 8)

In the following stanza this symbol of the bridge as a unity of praise, sacrifice, and creative energy ("unfractioned idiom") (p. 8) is suddenly transformed into a personification of the bridge as a woman. It is the first indication that we have of the bridge considered in this way. In subsequent poems this symbol of the bridge as a woman will be particularized through the Virgin Mary, Pocahontas, a pioneer mother, and others. But the symbol in this stanza of the *"Proem"* refers to no particular woman by name unless the image of maternity invoked by "night lifted in thine arms" (p. 8) can be related to the Mother of God whom Columbus petitions in *"Ave Maria."* If so, the bridge's symbolism at this level would be strengthened since Mary has been traditionally revered as the mediatrix or bridge between God and man. There is nothing in the poem that tends to obviate such an interpretation. Moreover, this would help to justify the note of petition in the concluding stanzas and provide an appropriate transition to *"Ave Maria"* (Hazo, p. 75)

> Under thy shadows 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. (p.8)

These two final stanzas not only recapitulate much of the preceding imagery but suggest in miniature some of the themes that will be developed in subsequent poems. The allusion to the river, for example, is related to the long poem from *"Powhatan's Daughter"* entitled *"The River,"* and the references to sea and prairie prepare for poems like *"The Dance""Indiana,"* and *"Cutty Sark"* in the same section. But these concluding stanzas also summarize what has already been stated in the *"Proem."* While the poet sees "in darkness" the true contour of the bridge as he waits "by the piers," he imagines that he sees an unbroken arc of power in its "sweep."This enduring "sweep" will outlast the transient arc of the gull mentioned in the first stanza. The bridge, like the gull, suggests freedom to the observer, but, unlike the gull whose wings were "apparitional as sails," the bridge combines liberty with permanence. The bridge also is capable of spanning "sea" and "sod." It testifies to the integrative power of human vision to transcend the world of fact. Finally, as a symbol of man's faith, the bridge suggests the human inclination to communicate with divinity—"lend a myth to God." (Hazo, p. 76)

The opening poem of *The Bridge* is a soliloquy by Christopher Columbus. Traditionally, Columbus has been associated with quest and discovery. As such he not only introduces the theme of quest in *The Bridge*, but he symbolically incarnates in his real and archetypal identity the aspirations of the poet as searcher. Columbus is thus the first in a series of searchers chosen by Crane to symbolize his own sense of quest. This is in keeping with the basic argument of the first half of *The Bridge*, which is to explore the world of fact and myth in a poetic voyage backward in time to find the real American past. Crane must have seen in Columbus' indomitable desire to revise the traditional concepts of oceanic travel a counterpart of his own desire to rediscover America. In subsequent poems in the first half of *The Bridge* Crane will identify his quest with the quests of Maquokeeta in *"The Dance,"* Larry in *"Indiana,"* and the derelict sailor in *"Cutty Sark."* Crane has chosen his counterparts from different periods of America's past as he sees it, but the sense of quest is common to each of them and ultimately meaningful in terms of his own rediscovery of America. (Ibid., pp.76-7)

If Columbus is cast as Crane's first symbol of quest, the *"Ave Maria"* emerges as a further elaboration of some of the symbolic meanings of the bridge already introduced in the *"Proem."* The title of Columbus' soliloquy is not only a somewhat recondite variation of the name of the ship that brought Columbus to the new world, but it specifically identifies the Virgin Mary as the one to whom Columbus directs his thoughts. It may be, as Dembo has suggested, that "Mary to Columbus is more human and accessible than Christ," but it is also true that Mary is the traditional mediatrix between God and man. In this role she is involved in the symbolism of the bridge as a woman. Mary is thus the bridge or means of mediation between Columbus and the God whom he both invokes and fears. (Ibid., p.77)

At the conclusion of *"Ave Maria"* the stage is set for the poems to come. The new world, whose rediscovery is Crane's object in *The Bridge*, has been found; Columbus has bridged the Atlantic from the Spanish to the American shores. But here a fundamental irony intrudes. In his discovery of the new world Columbus has brought with him not only the aspirations of the old world but also the original flaws of man that are as old as Eden itself. The future, therefore, can bring either glory or desolation, depending upon man's capacity for good or evil. (Ibid., p. 81) It is with this in mind that Dembo's comment on the place of *"Ave Maria"* in the total structure of *The Bridge* assumes its most definitive meaning:

> *"Ave Maria"* presents all the elements of tragedy that the quest of the hero for Pocahontas contains. The discovery of an Indian Cathay becomes the narrator's discovery of Pocahontas in *"The Dance"*; Columbus' fear that chaos and indifference prevail in the universe becomes the narrator's fear that both he and his dream will be destroyed by an insensitive world; finally, Columbus' reaffirmation of faith in his vision of the sunset becomes the narrator's reaffirmation in his final vision of the Bridge. Columbus' voyage is both the epitome and the beginning of the Western tragedy. The arrival of the white man brings the ruin of Eden on the continent, but, paradoxically, it is

> precisely through men like Columbus--voyager and poet--that redemption is possible. (Quoted in ibid.)

It remained for Crane to work out the ramifications of tragedy and redemption in the poems that followed the *"Ave Maria."* (Hazo, p. 81)

The section called *"Powhatan's Daughter"* is the longest as well as the central one of the three sections that compose the first half of *The Bridge*. Powhatan's daughter, of course, is Pocahontas, and Pocahontas is Crane's symbol for the beauty of the American continent. (Ibid., p. 81-2)

This central section of *The Bridge* is divided into five parts: *"The Harbor Dawn, "Van Winkle, "The River, "The Dance,"* and *"Indiana."* Each of these poems is an examination of one area of the American continent or one phase of American history. In addition to perpetuating the spatiotemporal directions of *The Bridge*, *"Powhatan's Daughter"* is built upon what Sister Bernetta Quinn has called "a human replica of the Bridge." This "human replica" is Pocahontas herself, who continues the woman-bridge symbol already introduced in *"Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge"* and *"Ave Maria."* (Ibid., p. 82)

In *"Powhatan's Daughter"* the poet becomes a twentieth-century Columbus. His journey westward from New York and backward in time from the present gives him the opportunity to discover for himself the body of Pocahontas. Sister Bernetta Quinn thus identifies him as Pocahontas' "modern lover." (Ibid., p. 82) But unlike Columbus, who was voyaging to a strange land, this "modern lover" is returning to the "land of his origin and loyalties." (Ibid., p. 82) While Columbus had the bridge of the sea to travel from the old world to the new, the poet is able to make his journey from the new to the old and from the present to the past only by means of the bridge of his own vision. And Bernice Slote writes that "In history, the complete realization of the body of America is through its exploration in space and time, and the narrative line is traced in the five sections of *'Powhatan's Daughter,'* but with a fusion of present and past so that all of this happens in a simultaneous grasp of consciousness." (Ibid., p. 82)

"Harbor Dawn," the first of the five poems in this sequence, begins with no reference at all to the closing alleluias of Columbus' soliloquy. Its epigraph, which is a description of Pocahontas as a young girl, certainly cannot be regarded as a transitional device. We might ask: Is the transition not too abrupt? In *"Ave Maria"* Crane used Columbus to reveal the promise of the new world and at the same time to suggest its relation to the old. In *"Harbor Dawn"* Crane focuses on a scene removed by "400 hundred years and more" (p.17) from the year of Columbus' discovery. Was Crane asking too much of his readers in expecting them to make such an imaginative leap without injuring the continuity of the poem? (Hazo, p.82)

Paradoxically, it is the very nature of the opening scene of *"Harbor Dawn"* that keeps the transition from *"Ave Maria"* to *"Powhatan's Daughter"* from being disturbingly abrupt. The poem begins with a description of the waking poet. Horton has perceptively called the poem's opening lines a dramatization of the "poet's

consciousness" as it "wavers between sleep and waking, as though between past and present." In this halfway state between consciousness and sub-consciousness or even unconsciousness, time is literally in abeyance. The waking poet has no sense of time at all, at least for the moment. This is the method Crane used to keep *The Bridge* free of, and in a sense above, the demands of conventional, chronological transitions. (Ibid.)

Still involved in his daydream, the poet becomes gradually aware of the woman sleeping by his side. While he contemplates her, she is slowly transformed in his mind into a counterpart of Pocahontas. In effect, this woman becomes the poet's bridge back to Pocahontas, and Pocahontas eventually becomes the symbol of the American earth. Thus is the progression of images established for the rest of the sequence. Pocahontas, who is a metamorphosis of Mary in the *"Proem"* and the *"Ave Maria,"* continues the symbol of the bridge as a woman. She is also a symbol of America. Just as the woman in the Manhattan apartment receives the attentions of the poet, Pocahontas is destined to receive the attention and love of the poet when he finally discovers her. (Ibid, p. 848)

> And you beside me, blessèd now while sirens
> Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day--
> Serenely now, before day claims our eyes
> Your cool arms murmurously about me lay.
>
> While myriad snowy hands are clustering at the panes--
>
> *your hands within my hands are deeds;*
> *my tongue upon your throat--singing*
> *arms close; eyes wide, undoubtful*
>
> *dark drink the dawn —*
>
> *a forest shudders in your hair!* (p. 18)

Having thus forged the link between past and present through the Pocahontas-lover association, the poet reverts to the moment of his waking in Manhattan where the "window goes blond slowly" (p.18) with the glare of the morning sun.

He speaks of echoes of the tribal past and realizes that in Pocahontas he has found a bridge through time and space that will take him farther back into the virginal wilderness of the continent. In passages like the following he lays the groundwork for the Dionysian rites of Maquokeeta in *"The Dance."*

> Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
> Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
> --Dead echoes. But I knew her body there,
> Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
> And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair. (p.25)

The poet, having been precipitated into the past of his own and his country's youth, proceeds to contrast the land of the past with the same land at present. In a passage where

poetic emphasis comes quite close to oratory, the poet speaks of the debt owed the "old gods of the rain" (p. 25) as recompense for the white man's ravishing of the continent. When Crane speaks of the "timber torn/By iron, iron--always the iron dealt cleavage," (p. 25) we cannot help being reminded of Columbus' apocalyptic warning in *"Ave Maria."* But the old gods "doze now, below axe and powder horn" (p. 25) while "Pullman breakfasters" (p. 25) speed across the land from "tunnel into field." (p. 25) Beseechingly, the poet asks the passengers on the Twentieth Century Limited to "lean from the window" (p. 25) in order to discover the beautiful mystery of the land (Pocahontas) already and always known to the tramp-poet-Indian. (Hazo, pp. 88-9)

The fourth poem in the sequence of *"Powhatan's Daughter"* is called *"The Dance,"* and in it the poet is carried further back into America's past. As the poet strove through the symbols of Columbus, Van Winkle, and the hobos to discover the bedrock of the American past, so in *"The Dance"* does he strive to possess the world of Pocahontas by identifying himself with a tribal chief named Maquokeeta. In this poem more than in any other in the sequence, Pocahontas assumes the symbolic role that Crane destined for her when he defined her as "the mythological nature symbol chosen to represent the physical body of the continent, or the soil. She here takes on much the same role as the traditional Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology." (Ibid, p. 90)

"The Dance" is one of Crane's most beautiful and yet one of his most difficult poems. Sections remain opaque even after the most careful and sympathetic explication. This difficulty can be attributed in part to Crane's customary techniques of rapid transitions, transfiguration of images, and symbolic associations. But in addition, there is Crane's mythmaking power to reckon with in *"The Dance."* Frequently in the poem Crane will identify himself with a figure without giving the reader the benefit of a simile or an appositive. The reader must accustom himself to this Shelleyan propensity before he can truly appreciate the poem. (Ibid.)

"The Dance" begins with a meditation upon the Pocahontas of the past. She is pictured as having passed from spring to "autumn drouth," (p. 28) and her chieftain lover is no longer capable of resuscitating her. This Indian lover, like Pocahontas herself in her "autumn drouth," is part of the past and "holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne." (Ibid.)

The poet suddenly resolves to assume the role that the chieftain lover can no longer fill. He decides to leave "the village for dogwood"; (p. 29) he will return to the wilderness. By such a return he hopes to rediscover and revive the lost bride "whose brown lap was virgin May." (p. 28) He looks forward to a new rite of spring. The entire purpose of this quest, therefore, is that the modern poet may come to know the body of Pocahontas as "her kin, her chieftain lover" knew her. "Not only do I describe the conflict between the two races in this dance," Crane wrote to Otto Kahn, "I also become identified with the Indian and his world before it ['The Dance'] is over, which is the only method possible of ever really possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor." (Hazo, pp. 90-1)

The description of the poet's quest for Pocahontas is unfolded in beautifully tooled and lyrical stanzas which are among the best in the poem. Having left the "village," the poet sails by night in a canoe to a rendezvous with the "glacier woman" in the pristine setting of the American wilderness. (Ibid, p. 91)

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! (p. 29)

The imminence and circumambience of the storm and the thunder of the "padded foot" within the "thunder-bud" take complete possession of the poet and hurtle him backward into an earlier era when Indians roamed the continent. He seems to be an inhabitant of a different age, observing not storm winds over "birch" and "oak grove" but Maquokeeta, the "Sachem" or chief of a confederation, in a frenzied dance. When the storm of Maquokeeta's dance suddenly breaks in fury over the earth (Pocahontas), the poet is no longer able to remain an observer. He finds himself involved as a participant. Caught up in the spirit of the storm-dance, he identifies himself with Maquokeeta himself, seeking renewal in the Indian past. (Ibid., p. 91) As the earth will be renewed by the rain, so will the poet be renewed in the echoes of the past evoked by Maquokeeta's dance:

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! (p. 30)

The image of the sprouting horn in this passage is an image of metamorphosis. Sister Bernetta Quinn has noted in this context how "antlers, like the sloughed-away snake skins, are . . . cast off as a sign of rejuvenation." Basing his aspirations for spiritual renewal in such images of transformation, the poet pleads nostalgically for a return to the "tribal morn" of the Indian and the country's past. To achieve such a return Crane seeks to identify his spirit with that of the dancing warrior. The identification is so complete

that, in the subsequent binding and killing of Maquokeeta, the poet sees no difference between himself and the chieftain at the stake. In the martyrdom of the chieftain, the poet also dies. (Hazo, p. 92) The dying Maquokeeta is a representative of Dionysus or possibly St. Sebastian; overtones of Dionysian sacrifice and Sebastian's martyrdom are both suggested in the stanza describing the death of Maquokeeta:

> 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. (p. 30)

Death, however, is not the conclusion of the life of Maquokeeta. "Just as the drowned voyager [of ' Voyages III'] was 'transmembered' into song," writes Dembo, "so the burned Indian-poet is to be transmembered into the rhythm of the goddess-continent." This Dionysian transmemberment of the Indian-poet--"I saw thy change begun!"--has a redemptive effect upon Pocahontas. We must remember that Pocahontas in the first stanza of *"The Dance"* was described in the past tense--"She spouted arms; she rose with maize--to die." After the death of Maquokeeta, which results in the union of the Indian-poet and the "physical body of the continent or the soil," Pocahontas, the earth-goddess, is revivified. (Ibid.)

> Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,
> Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze--
> Across what bivouacs of thin 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 . . . (p. 31)

With Pocahontas redeemed by the Indian-poet, the possibility of reconciling the serpent of time with the eagle of space is assured. As the poet comes to know the real Pocahontas by repudiating the "iron dealt cleavage" and seeking only the virginal beauty of the land through identity with Maquokeeta, he bridges the distance between man and the soil. Moreover, this reconciliation makes possible other reconciliations of equal importance. "The separation of white and Indian culture is a corollary of the cleavage which has denied the natural and primitive reality and thus a spiritual wholeness," writes Bernice Slote. "But in a possible union of nature and man, best demonstrated in the cyclic, generative, fertility principle, time and eternity may also be reconciled, as well as time and space: 'The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.'" (Hazo, p. 93)

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, 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. (p. 32)

With the problems of man-and-nature, time-and-eternity, and man-and-space apparently resolved at the conclusion of *"The Dance,"* Crane would surely seem to have completed his quest for the real American past. As *"The Dance"* ends, the poet has traveled westward from the *"village"* and backward through time to find the peace of the Indian and make it his own. But this is not enough. The principal reason for the inadequacy of this solution is that the reconciliation of two such disparate cultures as the primitive and the modern is really not a permanent possibility for modern man. Despite the fact that the poet asked Maquokeeta to "dance us back our tribal morn," he prefaced this request by saying "lie to us." Apparently Crane recognized that the identification of himself with the tradition of the Sachem could not be achieved without some self-deception. The difference between the two cultures was too severe, and the time-gap itself militated against permanent union. The result of this impermanence is that the poet's quest, like the historical realization of the westering continent to the Pacific coast, is destined to continue. (Ibid., pp. 93-4)

"Indiana" is the next chapter in this quest. The woman-bridge symbol shared by Mary in *"Ave Maria"* and Pocahontas in "The Dance" is carried on in the speaker in this dramatic monologue. She is a pioneer mother, and her son, Larry, who is about to abandon the farm for a life at sea, represents the poet-Columbushobo type. Despite the fact that the poem has been harshly criticized for its sentimentality by critics like Allen Tate and Hyatt Waggoner, among others, "Indiana" is nonetheless noteworthy as an appropriate epilogue to the other poems in *"Powhatan's Daughter."* It is true that Crane wrote the poem when the major work on The Bridge had been completed, and it is also true that "Indiana" is not distinguished by his usual virtuosity. But the poem, nevertheless, justifies its terminal position in the totality of *"Powhatan's Daughter"* by the very fact that it dramatizes the yielding of the civilization of the Indian to that of the pioneer. In "Indiana" the civilization of the Sachem lives on only in the image of a "homeless squaw" whom the pioneer mother recalls having once seen "bent westward, passing on a stumbling jade." The pioneer mother, remembering the spiritual rapport she felt with the squaw as their eyes met and "lit with love shine," becomes the bridge between the "redskin dynasties" mentioned in *"The River"* and the world of the seafarer that is to be the world of her departing son. (Ibid., p. 94)

The pioneer mother and her husband, Jim, sought a Cathay in the West as did Columbus. Finding "God lavish" but "passing sly" in the gold-fields of Colorado, they discovered only the harsh nuggets of disappointment. With nothing to go back to in Kentucky, they left the boom towns and returned to settle in Indiana. (Ibid.)

A dream called Eldorado was his town,

It rose up shambling in the nuggets' wake,

It had no charter but a promised crown

Of claims to stake.

But we,--too late, too early, howsoever—

Won nothing out of fifty-nine--those years—

But gilded promise, yielded to us never,

And barren tears . . . (p. 34)

The legacy of quest then passes on to their first-born son, Larry. Dissatisfied with life on an Indiana farm, he decides upon a life as a seaman. In the mother's last words to Larry as he departs, we have an explicit identification of him as the wanderer who perpetuates the sense of quest already symbolized by Columbus, Van Winkle, the hobo, and the Indian-poet: (Ibid., pp. 94-5)

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, traveller—

stranger,

son,

— my friend— (p. 35)

The last of the first three sections of *The Bridge* is *"Cutty Sark."* This poem reveals a method of poetic narration that is entirely different from any other method used by Crane in *The Bridge*. Horton calls *"Cutty Sark"* a "derelict sailor's drunken fantasy of clipper ships in a waterfront dive, which was arranged as a fugue of two parts: the voice of the world of time and that of eternity." The "voice of the world . . . of eternity" is the tune on the pianola. The "voice of the world of time" is the voice of the sailor, who could well be an older and slightly more weathered version of the seafaring Larry in *"Indiana."* But regardless of his origins, the Bowery drunk in *"Cutty Sark"* continues the theme of the sea quest first introduced by Crane in the *"Ave Maria"* and thus concludes the first half of *The Bridge* on the same note on which it was begun. (Ibid., p. 95)

The fugue between the voice of the sailor and the tune on the pianola symbolizes the two levels of meaning at which the dominant themes of The Bridge are developed--the level of time and that of eternity. *"Cutty Sark,"* therefore, can be regarded as Crane's

bridge between the first half of the poem and the second. The first half of *The Bridge* is concerned with the poet's quest in the physical and historical world; it begins with the voyage of Columbus and concludes with the spent wanderlust of a drunken sailor. The second half of *The Bridge*, as will be shown in the subsequent chapter, is more concerned with the relation of the world of time to the world of eternity and the spiritual predicament and destiny of man in the modern world. By introducing these two thematic levels of meaning as a fugue in *"Cutty Sark,"* Crane was able to bring the first half of The Bridge to a harmonious close and simultaneously prepare the way for *"Cape Hatteras"* and the poems that follow it. It is not accidental that some of the images in *"Cutty Sark"* appear transformed in subsequent poems. In the transmutation of *"Stamboul Rose"* to *"Atlantis Rose"* in *"Cutty Sark,"* for instance, there is definitely a preparatory allusion to the title of the final poem of *The Bridge*. (Ibid., p. 95-6)

"Cape Hatteras," *"Three Songs," "Quaker Hill," "The Tunnel,"* and *"Atlantis"* constitute the second half of The Bridge. If *"Ave Maria," "Powhatan's Daughter,"* and *"Cutty Sark"* in the first section of *The Bridge* dramatized the poet's odyssey into the historical and mythic American past in order to create a synthesis that would reconcile and transcend the world of the "eagle" and the "serpent," the poems in the second section are more specifically concerned with relating that synthesis to the world of the present and the future. (Ibid., p. 98)

Crane's principal concern in the last five poems of *The Bridge* is to examine the disruption of the continuity from the American past to the American present. His secondary purpose is to reveal how this discontinuity might affect the years after the "Years of the Modern." Each of the five poems, therefore, in the second half of *The Bridge* is meant to serve both as an exploration into one facet of this discontinuity in American culture and also as a prophetic affirmation of the poet's hope for the eventual regeneration of that culture. The source of this hope exists in the poet himself. Only the truth revealed in his poetic vision can show where the bridge between the past and present has been broken. Only the poet says Crane in the concluding poems of *The Bridge*, can return our culture to its true course and sustain it there. (Ibid.)

The section called *"Three Songs"* is organically related to the symbol of the bridge as a woman. The Virgin Mary, Pocahontas, and a pioneer mother sustained this dimension of the bridge's meaning in the first half of the poem. In the second half of the poem the triptych of *"Three Songs"* dramatizes the breakdown of the Pocahontas symbol in the modern world. Pocahontas is no longer the beautiful lover known in *"Harbor Dawn,"* nor is she the "glacier woman" pursued in *"The Dance."* She is now a woman who inveigles but does not satisfy, and Crane thus personifies her as a prostitute in *"Southern Cross,"* a strip-teaser in *"National Winter Garden,"* and a seemingly demure secretary in *"Virginia."* (Ibid., p. 105)

In the first song, *"Southern Cross,"* the stars of the Southern Cross constellation suggest Pocahontas to the poet. We are reminded of the star in *"Harbor Dawn"* that set under a "mistletoe of dreams" and promised to lead the poet-seeker to his goal "at some distant hill." But the star of *"Southern Cross"* reveals only a "wraith" whom the poet

tentatively identifies as *"Eve"* or *"Magdalene"* or *"Mary,"* but who eventually emerges as a twentieth-century Eve. (Ibid.)

> O simian Venus, homeless Eve,
> Unwedded, stumbling gardenless to grieve
> Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever;
> Finally to answer all within one grave! (p. 57)

This modern Eve is a burlesque of the women mentioned in the first half of *The Bridge*. In *"The Dance"* Crane spoke of Pocahontas as having "time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark." In *"Southern Cross"* the contemporary Pocahontas also has a serpent in her hair, but it is a venomous one. Pocahontas has been transformed into Medusa:

> 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. (p. 58)

The poem then concludes as the constellation disappears with the coming of dawn. Light comes like a sea to submerge the "lithic trillions" of the "spawn" of Eve, of whom the poet is one. (Ibid., p. 106)

In *"National Winter Garden"* the "glacier woman" of *"The Dance"* has been metamorphosed into a strip-teaser in Minsky's famous burlesque show in New York. The strip-teaser shares with Pocahontas the ability to attract, but she differs from Pocahontas in that she frustrates rather than satisfies those whom she does attract. She is dedicated to provocation. Her "buttocks in pink beads" (p. 39) arouse delicious lusts – "waken salads in the brain" (p. 39) – in the "bandy eyes" of her admirers until she has tranced them into thinking that the world is "one flagrant, sweating cinch." (Ibid.)

But this twentieth-century "glacier woman" has nothing of the pristine purity of Pocahontas. Nor does she bear the "pure serpent" of *"The Dance."* Instead, her attractive serpentine rings, like the lascivious dances she performs on a stage, are a sham. (Ibid.)

> And shall we call her whiter than the snow?
> Sprayed first with ruby, then with emerald sheen--
> Least tearful and least glad (who knows her smile?)
> A caught slide shows her sandstone grey between.
>
> Her eyes exist in swivellings of her teats,
> Pearls whip her hips, a drench of whirling strands.
> Her silly snake rings begin to mount, surmount
> Each other--turquoise fakes on tinselled hands. (p. 39-40)

The strip-teaser's version of Maquokeeta's dance leads not to regeneration but degeneration. She excites unrequitable lusts rather than true passions until she reaches "the lewd trounce of a final muted beat!" (p. 60) As she denudes herself, the members of her audience "flee her spasm through a fleshless door." (p. 60) This is not an image of

union but of separation. Her flesh is nothing but an "empty trapeze." (p. 60) This emptiness stems from the fact that her configurations lead to no fruitful consummation; the "trapeze" suggests only a futile swing through the lusts she has aroused. She tantalizes not only the lust of man *for* but the faith of man *in* womanhood so that she can ultimately make a "burlesque" (p. 60) of both. In this way she returns her admirers and followers lifelessly back to life after she has cheated them of the life which they hoped to find in her. (Hazo, pp. 106-7)

> Yet, to the empty trapeze of your flesh,
> O Magdalene, each comes back to die alone.
> Then you, the burlesque of our lust--and faith,
> Lug us back lifeward--bone by infant bone. (p. 60)

In *"Virginia"* Pocahontas is a young secretary who coyly repulses the advances of her employer by "smiling the boss away." (p. 61) This secretary, like the prostitute in *"Southern Cross"* and the strip-teaser in *"National Winter Garden,"* has none of the virginal innocence of Pocahontas, but there is nevertheless something about her that is not Eve-like nor Magdalene-like. On the one hand, she is the poet's Saturday date--"blue-eyed Mary with the claret scarf." (p. 61) On the other hand, she is associated with *"Spring in Prince Street."* This is not the Cumberland Spring where Pocahontas' "breasts are fanned/O stream by slope and vineyard--into bloom!" (p. 31) On *"Prince Street"* and *"Bleeker"* the "daffodils," "slender violets," "peonies," and "forget-me-nots" bloom only on "cornices" and "at windowpanes." (p. 62)These associations suggest that, despite her coyness, there is still a vestige of innocence in this Mary. (Hazo, p. 107)

Distracted by the sound of "popcorn bells," the poet is suddenly moved to invoke the Mary of the *"Ave Maria."* He imagines that the Mary who coyly smiles "the boss away" in the "nickle-dime tower" (p. 62) of a modern skyscraper is transformed into the Virgin Mary. Perhaps it is the poet's awareness of her remaining innocence that prompts this association in his mind. Thus *"Saturday Mary"* becomes *"Cathedral Mary,"* who has already been identified in the first half of *The Bridge* as the mediatrix or bridge between man and God and who will crush the serpent's head in final victory. "Recognizing defeat through Eve, who brought death into the world," writes Bernice Slote, "life is reborn by the acceptance of the flesh and generation, begun at its lowest form in Magdalene and rising to the idealized reality of Mary." The positive value that Slote attaches to the *"National Winter Garden"* episode in *"Three Songs"* may be slightly exaggerated, but the ascent from Eve through Magdalene to Mary is unmistakable in the three poems. Moreover, each of these transformations of the Pocahontas-Mary symbol can be related to the image of the bridge as a woman and thus to the dominant symbol of the entire poem. (Hazo, pp. 107-8)

In *"Quaker Hill"* Crane is primarily concerned with dramatizing the discrepancy between the way the world is and the way that he thinks it should be. By using epigraphic quotations from Emily Dickinson and Isadora Duncan, whom he came to admire greatly after he saw her perform in Cleveland in 1922, Crane prefatorily suggests how far the real world diverges from the ideal. The quotation from Isadora Duncan is the more explicit of the two epigraphs in suggesting this theme in *"Quaker Hill"*: "*I see only the ideal. But no*

ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth." (p. 63) The idealism and forbearance that characterize this quotation carry over into the tone of Crane's poem. (Ibid., p. 108)

Crane first contrasts those people who are "as cows that see no other thing/Than grass and snow" (p. 65) with those who, like Crane himself and the two women from whose work he has drawn his epigraphs, "taste the bright annoy/Of friendship's acid wine." (p. 65) The former are the tourists who have come to Quaker Hill's "old Mizzentop." They typify the uncultured culture-seekers of the twenties. Crane is less acerbic than H. L. Mencken actually was toward these Americans, but the values of these people are plain enough without the need of satire or hyperbole. They either squint from the "central cupola" of Mizzentop to see "borders of three states" or distract themselves with bourgeois amusement. The poet remains unimpressed and uninvolved, being concerned with the deeper realities of existence. (Hazo, p. 108)

> 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. (p. 66)

Crane follows this with sarcastic allusions to some of the vices created by Prohibition ("bootleg roadhouses") and to the shallow contemporary concept of notoriety ("Hollywood's new love-nest pageant"). He then notes how the local citizenry of Quaker Hill have changed the unglamorous "old Meeting House" to the "New Avalon Hotel" in an attempt to attract the touring "highsteppers." (p. 66) Dembo's remark about this image suggests an even greater depth to Crane's satire. Dembo claims that the "full irony of this name can be appreciated when one recalls that Avalon was the ocean isle of Arthurian romance associated with earthly paradise; in quest of Atlantis, the poet finds only the paradise of a tourist hotel." (Ibid., p. 109)

In the next section Crane loses his satirical edge and becomes so explicit in his castigation of society's fall from the ideal that the poem almost loses its momentum. Indignation usurps the place of inspiration, and poetry becomes little more than heightened rhetoric. Only when he returns to the symbols of the "sundered parentage" (p. 67) of man (Maquokeeta) and the soil (Pocahontas) does Crane regain his artistic balance, although the poem by then has been seriously flawed. Having recaptured his equilibrium, Crane does well to bring the poem to a close. Despite the overt bitterness of the rhetorical sections, the poet does not slide into despair. Instead he finds enough courage to face the autumn of the real world with both faith and patience even while his "heart is rung" (p. 67) by the same Philistinism 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— (p. 67)

In *"The Tunnel"* Crane demonstrates the sustained poetic excellence that he achieved in *"Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge," "Ave Maria,"* and *"The Dance."* Using as his epigraph two lines from William Blake's *"Morning"* to suggest that man must first pass through a spiritual purgation ("the Gates of Wrath") before he can reach the paradise of Atlantis-Cathay ("the Western Path"), Crane proceeds to find a counterpart for this purgation in a symbolic subway ride through a tunnel under one of New York's rivers. The Dantean implications of this purgatorial subway ride are obvious, but the moral aspect of the poet's purgation in the tunnel and its relation to the theme of the poem that follows *"The Tunnel"* in *The Bridge* are what sound the *"Everlasting No"* before the *"Everlasting yea"* of *"Atlantis."* (Ibid., pp. 109-10)

As the subway train prepares to cross "the final level for the dive" beneath the river, the poet sees Columbus prefigured in a Genoese "washerwoman" and asks rhetorically if she brings love and beauty back to her children after a day of cleaning the "corridors" and "cuspidors" of the "gaunt sky-barracks." This sardonic question becomes a preface to the poem's final notes of despair and the desperate, agonizing hope of the conclusion. Crane sees the tunnel as a "Daemon" that swallows everything in a "demurring and eventful yawn." It muffles the "conscience" of the poet ("umbilical to call") before he can struggle against "the plunging wind." In this image the tunnel assumes the symbolic character that Crane ascribed to it in a letter to Otto Kahn when he described it as an "encroachment of machinery on humanity." Men and women are whirled "like pennies beneath soot and stream" and precipitated blindly through the "shrill ganglia" of the underground networks of the subway. But while the poet himself is caught helplessly in the Dæmon's grasp ("Kiss of our agony thou gatherest"), he still feels, "like Lazarus," the possibility of resurrection as the train climbs the river bottom toward the opposite shore. He looks for a release from the underworld by the intercession of the "Word" of the poetic imagination. In *"Voyages VI"* Crane used the same image and referred to the "Word" as the "unbetrayable reply/Whose accent no farewell can know." In the concluding lines of "The Tunnel" he again invokes the saving power of the same "Word": (Ibid., p. 112)

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 . . . ! (p. 75)

As Columbus stood on the deck of his ship and looked out over the ocean in the *"Ave Maria,"* the poet stands on the shores of Brooklyn after he has debouched from the subway and watches a "tugboat" (p. 75) cross the river and leave in its settling wake an "oily tympanum of waters." (p. 75) Having passed through "the Gates of Wrath" and

emerged into the open air, the poet feels capable of discovering the "Western path" to Atlantis. He resigns himself to the future—"Tomorrow" (p. 76) – and lets his "hands drop memory" (p. 76) into the waters of the river of time. Thus freed of anticipation and retrospect, Crane is able to rebuff the Demonic "kiss of our agony" (p. 76) with the awesome prayer and epithet that Columbus used to conclude the *"Ave Maria"*: (Hazo, p. 113)

> Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
>
> O Hand of Fire
>
> gatherest— (p. 76)

III. Conclusion

Like all Crane's women figures, Pocahontas is a complex and contradictory image. She appears to him first in a dream as a seducer whose promise of a blissful union is delightful but unrealized, perhaps delightful because unrealizable. She is called a woman but her seduction involves only hand-holding and kissing. But she assumes various identities as a woman too: she appears in succeeding poems as the cruel mother, the wanton woman, the virgin bride, the temptress, and finally the possessive and rejected mother. In each role she is inaccessible yet somehow alluring, and the poet's desire for her is always agonizing. Only in his pursuit of her is he energized because only by union with her will he possess the bliss which she embodies and for which he longs. And this bliss involves in Crane's imagination suffering and death because he ultimately envisions it as a state of ecstasy in which he is totally consumed. (Uroff, p. 81)

In her fertility the poet sees the pro-creative urge of the universe. To return to her is to return to the beginnings, to the moment of creativity, in which the world and the poet were born. The poet's consuming desire for the Indian princess carries guilt-ridden longings for the mother figure, but only through a mystical union with her can he achieve the rebirth he desires and the possession of a new identity. Pocahontas represents for Crane the primitive beginnings of America, a time before the coming of the white man with his repressive order, a time when the fertility of the earth was exalted and the fertility of women was a source of joy. This point is made clear by the epigraph to "Powhatan's Daughter," an abridged passage from William Strachey's *History of Travaile into Virginia Britannica*:

> Pocahuntus, a well-featured but wanton yong girle . . . of the age of eleven or twelve years, get the hoyes forth with her into the market place, and made 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. (Quted in Uroff, p. 84)

Although Strachey's wanton girl is far from an image of Mother Earth, her playfulness and seductiveness recall a primitive delight in fleshly pleasure from which modern man has recoiled to his great loss. It is this image of the alluring young girl, of the woman as temptress, that starts the poet's dreaming in "Powhatan's Daughter," and

although she is trans;-formed in the course of his fantasy into various manifestations of the female, it is her continuing seductive tug on his imagination that calls forth his poems. The historical Pocahontas was only a point of departure for Crane's associative imagination; in the five poems of "Powhatan's Daughter", he succeeds in realizing the mythic possibilities of her role. She exerts on the poet's mind the same kind of power exerted by the fertile women of myth. (Uroff, p. 83-84)

Commenting of James Joyce's Ulysses, Eliot said: “In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. ... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” For Eliot, as for Joyce, myth provided a means of ordering an otherwise chaotic mass of materials, but for Crane myth implied no narrative order but rather a power of vision, (Uroff, p. 84) which he manipulated in The Bridge to arrive at the Atlantis of his dreams.

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