

HART CRANE'S *THE BRIDGE* AS AN EXAMPLE OF MODERNIST POETRY

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SUMMARY

This particular poem of Hart Crane is a good example of American modernist poetry. Crane's The Bridge has been the subject of a lot of debate since its publication. Crane comes from a wealthy family and is an American Romantic poet who observes the richness of life in his poetry. In this long epic poem, the poet is inspired by the Brooklyn Bridge. For him, the bridge stands for the creative power of man. The poet considers the poem as an epic synthesis of the country and its structural identity. There is a kind of a search in the poem and this search of the poet is the one for the real American past and the characteristics of present America that will determine her future. The poet tries to come up with a view of what he calls the American experience in the poem. He adopts the Brooklyn Bridge as the poem's supporting symbol and talks about and celebrates various people and places.

Keywords: *Modernist, Brooklyn Bridge, Poetry, Criticism, America.*

ÖZET

MODERN ŞİİRE BİR ÖRNEK OLARAK HART CRANE'İN THE BRIDGE ADLI ÇALIŞMASI
Hart Crane'in sıra dışı şiiri olan The Bridge Amerika modern şiirinin güzel örneklerinden biridir. Yayınlandığı tarihten günümüze kadar çok yerde tartışma konusu olmuştur. Varlıklı bir aileden gelen Crane, şiirinde hayatın zenginliğini gözlemleyen romantik bir şairdir. Bu uzun şiirde şair Brooklyn köprüsünden esinlenmiştir. Ona göre bu köprü insan gücünü gösteren bir yapıttır. Şair bu şiiri ülkenin epik bir sentezi ve yapısal kimliği olarak görmektedir. Şiirde bir arayış vardır, bu arayış Amerika'nın geleceğini belirleyecek olan gerçek geçmişi ile günümüzdeki özellikleriyle ilgilidir. Şair şiirinde Amerika deneyimi dediği kavrama ulaşır. Brooklyn köprüsünü şiirin taşıyıcı sembolü olarak kullanırken çeşitli kişi ve yerler hakkında da konuşur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Modernist, Brooklyn Köprüsü, Şiir, Eleştiri, Amerika.*

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Among all of his poems, Hart Crane's particular one *The Bridge* has been the most talked about and a continuous subject of controversy since its appearance in 1930. This long epic poem was firstly considered to be a failure of its author by many critics, especially of Crane's generation, while some thought that it was a great success and a remarkable achievement of Crane. Critics who deemed the poem a failure insisted that it only reflected the chaotic and driven personality of its author and of the age in which it was written, to name a couple of their accusations. But even the same critics, together with the proponents of Crane, expressed respect for his creative undertaking, and many of the individual lyrics of the poem were judged to be among the best American poems of the twentieth century, and thus *The Bridge* in its entirety.

Born into a prosperous Ohio family in 1899 and committed suicide at age of thirty-three in 1932, Crane is an American Romantic poet who celebrated the richness of life including the life of the industrial age in his art. Probably the most famous poem *The Bridge* was an attempt of its author to create an epic myth of the American experience. As a legendary figure in American poetry, Crane shows a surprising optimism in his poems despite his windy and psychologically depressive life. Inspired by the Brooklyn Bridge which stands for the creative power of man uniting the present and the past, Crane seeks an expression of the American experience in his work *The Bridge*. He tries to provide a panorama of what he called "the American experience" in this long poem (Crane, 1930: 20). Adopting the Brooklyn Bridge as the poem's sustaining symbol, Crane mentions and celebrates various people and places such as Christopher Columbus, the legendary Rip Van Winkle, the contemporary New England landscape and the East River tunnel throughout the poem. In a sense, claims Coffman, "the bridge serves as the structure which unites and represents all that is America as a source of inspiration and patriotic devotion while it functions as the embodiment of American optimism as well. Crane himself considered the poem as an epic synthesis of America and its structural identity" (Crane, 1930: 135).

One of the major causes that lead the critics think that the poem is a failure may be its length. On the other hand, some of the passages of the poem demand a concentrated work and thinking. It is a well written poem and the reader may need to read and explicate it carefully for a full understanding and appreciation at times. The sections of the poem appear to be disorganized and unrelated to each other. But the fact that the appearance of disorganization, that is to say, the appearance of unrelatedness of sections to each other may be the very basic form of the poem. It may be the one Crane may have thought as a significant one in the tradition in which

he was working. The poet seems to be exploiting all possibilities of fragmentation in the poem. He certainly moves backwards and forwards in time and we see him shifting suddenly from third person to first or to second while reading the poem. He examines the bridge from every angle and sees it from above and below. His diction constantly changes from jargon and slang to lyrical elegance and the tone of the poem ranges from elegiac and satirical to sentimental. As the poet circles his subject gradually, he lets the reader see it from different angles, and by doing so, the bridge emerges. Crane hints his technique at the very beginning of the poem by an epigraph from *The Book of Job*: “From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it” (qtd. by Unterecker, 1982: 83). Crane deliberately leads the reader up and down, in and out, and to and fro until the reader builds his or her own bridge. The same kind of thesis applies to the total organization of the entire poem since it was often criticized as being a volume of unrelated loosely related lyrics. Particularly the “Indiana” section has been a target of such a criticism since it is a sentimental one, and considered to be an independent poem from the whole context of the entire poem. On the contrary, this specific section opposes the whirlwind of “The Dance” and also anticipates the subject matter of “CuttySark” (qtd. by Unterecker, 1982: 83).

Although the poem has many radically different sections, it still maintains the coherence and unity, for the sections are locked together in all kinds of ways and some of its integrating devices have certain associations with works such as “The Waste Land,” *Mauberry* poems, “Passage to India,” “Ulysses” and Blake’s prophetic books in the tradition in which Crane was writing. For example, the plot of the poem resembles very much that of Joyce’s “Ulysses.” We have a character in the poem that wakes up in dawn, looks out over the city, spends a day wandering through the streets and he gradually becomes involved in the corruption of the city. After agonizing himself with disillusionment and drunkenness, the hero of the poem comes to an illuminating vision of order in which he can accept himself and his world at the very end of the poem (Unterecker, 1982: 83). During his strolls in the city, the sights and sounds make him remember memories of both his own youth and the youth of the country, its history and mythology. Just like Joyce’s young man, Crane’s character is too, concerned with the artists who have shaped his world. We see that artists from different nations and ages such as Whitman, Plato, Dickinson, Marlowe, Melville, Shakespeare and Hopkins are involved in the entirety of the poem (Unterecker, 1982: 83).

Crane’s reliance on Joyce or Whitman is obvious, but it does not mean that he imitated exactly these writers. As any writer borrows from others Crane borrows

from the writers whom he thought inspiring, but his borrowings are successfully woven into a poem uniquely of his own. The second hand images or themes are not new in literature; furthermore, what Crane eventually found in the writers he borrowed from was material which could be adapted to the mythic structure that he was creating.

It is necessary to read the poem with more senses rather than only the eye reading, for Crane uses language for multidimensional purposes in his poetry. Many of the critics' failure to understand Crane's aesthetic and explicate the poem resulted in several misinterpretations. Critics such as Allen Tate, Brom Weber, and Yvor Winters agreed that the poem was a failure. Even though their objections varied, they came to have one idea in common about the poem. Tate thinks that the poem is a failure of its author since Crane is unable to handle a theme that transcends single moments in the stream of consciousness, even though he declares the beauty of certain passages for having lyrical excellence. Likewise, Weber finds fault with the poem as Crane, according to him, underestimates the expression of personal emotion as a legitimate phase of art and attempts to create a philosophical and sociological myth in which personal emotion predominates while it should not. Yvor Winters asserts that the poem is a failure as it is loosely constructed and that incomprehensibility and looseness of construction are the natural results of the theme which is inherited from Whitman and Emerson. So, as a result, the style is careless and pretentious, obscure and although it is both sound and powerful it is not at its best, according to Winters (Hazo, 1963: 120). These critics definitely assault Crane for what he did not do or what they feel he could not do instead of dealing with the matter of what he actually did in *The Bridge*. However, critics like Hyatt Waggoner, Sister Bernetta Quinn, Bernice Slote and L. S. Dembo object the propositions of Tate, Weber and Winters by providing a positive evaluation of the poem (Hazo, 1963: 121). Although all of the critics of the poem agree that it is one of quest, the basic point of disagreement comes from their conceptions of what the poet was seeking. So, this kind of disagreement among the critics has led to misinterpretations about the very nature of the poem which consequently cause to distort the real value of it.

Hart Crane's search is the one for the real American past and the characteristics of present America that will determine her future. By going backwards in time and westward in direction he assumes the identities of Columbus, Rip Van Winkle, railroad tramps and derelict sailors to equate his quest with seekers of the past and present, for instance. The poem also dramatizes the poet's quest for a synthesis of the conflicting forces within America's present and he strives to create

an apocalyptic vision for its future. The poem is not just about America common to all people but it is a vision of America unique to one person. It is important as the testament of the poet. As the main symbol of the poem, the bridge joins the shores of the temporal world to the invisible shores of the spiritual one. The essential point about the bridge as the central symbol of the poem is that it suggests a multidimensional meaning. It becomes the symbol of a triumph of human vision for Crane. As ancient people built the pyramids as their testament, and as medieval people tried to realize their vision in the great cathedrals, so did the inventiveness of modern people make the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge possible in the twentieth century. Here comes the importance of the bridge for having the architectural meaning and for being a manifestation of man's need to utilize the material world into his purposes, in addition to its symbolic meaning of everything that joins or unifies, for Crane. "It is an emblem of man's reach from time to eternity. The bridge as faith, hope and aspiration all suggest the transcendent aspect of it. Crane treats the bridge as the symbol of permanence, liberty and vitality while raising the symbol to the dimension of faith at the same time" (Piculin, 1982: 185).

The Bridge has been a subject of a long period of criticism both negatively and positively since its publication, and the interpretations of critics have contributed not only valuable information about the poem and its author, but also they have caused the poem to have a distorted view among the readers and the literary world. A reasonable number of critics and readers refused to see the poem as one single entity. Instead, they preferred to read it piece by piece until the time it has been anthologized in its entirety. Besides, most of the critics insisted that the poem should be read independently of its author. Among the critiques of the poem that of Winters was partly founded on his evaluation of Crane. As a strict moralist, he naturally regards Crane an immoral man. And as a consequence of his thought of and attitude towards Crane Winters's judgment both of the author and the poem is blurred. The earlier critics of the poem generally focused on the individual poems and rejected to see the unity between the sections since some of them came out one by one in literary magazines. After the publication of the poem in its entirety they found difficulty in connecting the sections and the materials of the poem. In fact, what Crane did was that he wrote the poem in many modes and linked the units by several interrelated images. Instead of using plot and character linkage he used the linkage of time and the interconnecting images. He tries to establish a voyage through time and space as a unifying device starting with Columbus, moving through history and ending with an anticipation of the future in the poem. Hart Crane was a poet who believed in the continuous growth of human history in which each period was a source of the next. He had the idea that

the modern and industrial American period was to lift people into a greater future. The purpose of the poem, according to him, was to link the reader and the poet to their own past, present and future. So, each of the human achievements that are mentioned in the poem such as the voyage of Columbus for discovery, the accomplishments of industrial science seen in the highways, railways and the airplanes may symbolically be bridges.

Crane considered the poem as the one representing the peak point of his literary career. The success and value of *The Bridge* rests very much on the fact that Crane had the ability to write in the opposite direction unlike his contemporaries. In a way, he certainly broke from the literary tendencies of his time. In a letter to Gorham Munson in 1923, Crane said that *The Bridge* “concerns a mystical synthesis of ‘America’. History and fact, location, etc., all have to be... gathered up toward the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is included also our scientific hopes and achievements of the future” (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 77).

The structure of the poem and its main symbol is indicated by the title itself. Brooklyn Bridge was actually the most beautiful one in the world and represented the finest employment of modern ingenuity of people, according to Crane. He lived close to the bridge and never lost his admiration and respect for the design of it. It was almost a holy thing to him. As a construction linking the two shores, the bridge represents Crane’s intentions of making connections between the past and the present moving fast from one episode to another in American history.

The poem opens with an invocation to Brooklyn Bridge. This introductory section “Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge” celebrates the bridge as a symbol of man’s desire to go beyond the ordinary experience in order to reach the spiritual accomplishment. It suggests that people long for a spiritual exaltation and aspire for permanence and purity since there is a dissatisfaction with the actual situation of time. Man is always in search of an appearance or a sign of his higher fulfillment to lift his spirit from its mundane slavery to its freedom.

Shedding white wings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty- (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 80).

In a sense, the poem reveals the intention of the entire poem. It is hinted that man needs an idealistic faith and the power of the bridge helps him achieve it. It is certainly a span between time and the timeless. This section includes several notions

that the poet will talk about in the following sections.

The first section of the poem “Ave Maria” is a soliloquy by Christopher Columbus. Crane makes use of the idea for Columbus has been associated with quest and discovery in the traditional sense. It fits very well to the whole context of the poem as he not only introduces the theme of the quest in *The Bridge* but also symbolically incarnates the aspirations of the poet as a seeker. In doing so, Columbus becomes the first of the searchers to symbolize the poet’s own sense of quest. This is to suggest the exploration of the world of fact and myth in a poetic voyage backward in time to find the real American past. Crane chooses his counterparts from different periods of America to whom the sense of quest is common and meaningful in terms of his own rediscovery of America. The beginning and the concluding images of this section are interwoven with the basic theme of quest. On the other hand, the quest of Columbus not only parallels that of the poet but also the search of everyman. The conclusion of “Ave Maria” sets the stage for the following poems, because the New World, whose rediscovery is Crane’s object, has been found and Columbus bridged the Atlantic from the Spanish to the American shores. But a fundamental irony appears here since Columbus brought with him both the aspirations of the old world and the original flaws of man by discovering the New World. Therefore, the future may bring either glory or desolation depending on man’s capacity for good or evil. There is a transition made to the birth of the nation in this section. Columbus’s journey should be seen as a possibility from the old world to the new one as well as a spiritual one. He had a hope for higher human experiences deeper than the desire for the riches of the new continent, he desired for a pure and fresh start for the human spirit. Columbus was aware of the fact that his fulfillment was primarily a spiritual one made possible by a strong faith. Cathay is more than just a place, because it represents the new opportunities for the human spirit and its riches are to be used for the purposes of love instead of greed. As he knows very well the greed of his patrons he cries out:

-Yet no delirium of jewels! O Fernando,
Take of that eastern shore, this western sea,
Yet yield thy God’s, thy Virgin’s charity!

-Rush down the plenitude, and you shall see
Isaiah counting famine on this lee! (Quinn, 1963: 82).

“Columbus’s route traced from the old world to the new one is the symbol of the passage of the soul to God. So, the passage of Columbus stands for the ascension of the spirit from time to eternity” (Brunner, 1973: 120).

“Powhatan’s Daughter” is composed of five sub-sections. Powhatan’s daughter is Pocahontas who symbolizes the beauty of the American continent, for Crane. Each of the sub-sections is the examination of one area of the American continent or the phase of the American history. The poet’s journey westward in direction from New York and backward in time from the present gives him the opportunity to discover the body of Pocahontas, which is the American continent, in other words. Being a transformation of Mary in “Ave Maria,” Pocahontas continues the symbol of the bridge as a woman and she is destined to receive the attention and love of the poet when he finally discovers her just as the woman in Manhattan apartment.

And you beside me, blessed 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! (qtd. by Hazo, 1963: 84).

Crane locates “The Harbor Dawn” in present time as he also indicates in the poem by “400 years and more...or is it from the soundless shore of sleep that time...” (Crane 17). The virgin continent, which was first discovered by Columbus, is assaulted by industry now. The poet comes face to face with the reality of modern city life and he tries to stay loyal to his spiritual aim in the middle of the problematic modern life.

And then a truck will lumber past the wharves
As winch engines begin throbbing on some deck;
Or a drunken stevedore’s howl and thud below
Comes echoing alley-upward through dim snow (Crane, 1930: 17).

In “Van Winkle,” the second sub-section of the poem, it is Rip Van Winkle himself who becomes Crane’s symbol of the bridge between present and past. As Columbus sailed for Cathay in the fifteenth century, now a twentieth century searcher, who is prompted by a moment of self-discovery, travels in search of his

own Cathay from “Far Rockaway to Golden Gate” (Hazo, 1963: 86). We see the poet’s conflict between the constraint of adulthood, and the freer, more exciting time of his youth. He extends this contrast to the earliest and recent years of the country. He links his personal experience and that of the nation which are fundamental to the structure of the poem. His day, starting from the morning and going up to evening, resembles the history of the country from its discovery to the present time. He remembers the hopes and ambitions of his youth in images of the early explorers and settlers he learned in school.

There was Priscilla’s cheek close in the wind,
And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty,
And Rip Van Winkle bowing by the way,-
‘Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend-?’ And he- (Crane, 1930: 19).

The characters Pizarro, Cortez, Priscilla, Captain Smith and Rip Van Winkle are to be his companions in the times of excitement and promise. Now people hurry to work and the opportunities of America have been channeled into commerce and business (Quinn, 1963: 85).

The third poem of the sequence “The River” advances the poet’s quest to Mississippi River which Crane converts into a deeper symbol, the river of time itself. This section is particularly significant in establishing the theme of the entire poem. The river suggests that man has a goal in his spiritual participation of the ideal and he has no further end than to join the passage of all things in time. All experience of America is united in its waters, distinctions and separations are joined together. In the concluding stanzas of the poem, the full significance of the river as the symbol of time is revealed as it flows eternally toward the gulf.

And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
All fades but one thin skyline’round...ahead
No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
The River lifts itself from its long bed (Crane, 1930: 27).

At this point, the stanzas become rhymed quatrains. The regularity of the meter and rhyme schemes suggests the unruffled flow of the river. The river of time flows forever into the gulf of eternity.

In the fourth poem “The Dance” the poet is carried back to America’s past. He strives to possess the world of Pocahontas by identifying himself with a tribal chief Maquoqueeta. This section is Crane’s one of the most beautiful and difficult

poems. The poem begins with a meditation of the Pocahontas of the past. The poem celebrates the Indians and their nature rituals who saw the continent as lover. The poet contrasts the first possessors of the country to modern people who prefers machinery to the land. He tries to associate himself with the ritual by valuing the natural lives of the Indians, and regrets its loss in modern times. Even though he wants to participate in their actions he realizes that he is too far from being an Indian. The Indian figure Maquokeeta performs the ritual dance of death and achieves the liberation from time, death gives him the freedom of eternity. The poet fails and comes to admit his alienation from the myth he has been celebrating:

... Medicine-man, relent, restore-
Lie to us, -dance us back the tribal morn! (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 89).

The poet completes his travel westward in direction and backward through time which was to find the peace of the Indian to make it his own as “The Dance” ends.

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
In cobalt desert closures made our vows...
Now is the strong prayer folded in thinearms,
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs (Crane, 1930: 32).

“Indiana” is the last poem of the sequence in which the poet continues in his quest. The woman-bridge symbol is now carried on by the dramatic monologue of a pioneer mother whose son is about to leave the farm for a life at sea. Even though the poem has been criticized for its sentimentality, it is certainly noteworthy as an epilogue to other poems of “Powhatan’s Daughter.” The pioneer mother and her husband Jim seek a Cathay in the West but what they only find is disappointment. So, the legacy of the quest passes on to their son Larry. As he is dissatisfied with life on an Indiana farm, he decides to lead his life as a seaman. We have an identification of Larry as the wanderer who perpetuates the sense of quest in the mother’s last words to him:

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- (qtd. by Hazo, 1963: 95).

The woman has also traveled for a long time like the poet and Columbus in

quest. She remembers the times and recites of the past to his son:

How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too-
Waved Seminary Hill a gay good-bye...
We found God lavish there in Colorado
But passing sly (Crane, 1930: 33).

Crane uses a method of poetic narration in “CuttySark” which is totally different from any other methods used in *The Bridge*. The next step of American experience is the sea. The poet meets an old drunken sailor who remembers his adventures in the sea and the terrors that ruined his life. He becomes more aware of the mingling of time and eternity as he is obsessed with the notion of time. It is suggested that people who have the knowledge of timelessness are very few. According to the poet, the sailor is a survivor from a period in which the sea was not subdued yet by machine, a survivor from the times when the sea challenged all the courage and skills of people. The title of the poem presents a difficulty for “CuttySark” means both “short shirt” and a name of a whisky, but we come to understand that the title probably refers to a particular British clippership after a close analysis (Hazo, 1963: 96).

Pennants, parabolas-
clipper dreams indelible and ranging,
baronial white on lucky blue!
Perennial-Cutty-trophied-Sark! (Crane, 1930: 41-42).

Crane examines the disruption of the continuity from the American past to the American present as his major concern in the last five poems of *The Bridge*. Each of the five poems serves as both an exploration into discontinuity in American culture and as the affirmation of the poet’s hope for the final regeneration of that culture. “Crane implies that only the poet can return our culture to its true course and sustain it there, in the concluding poems of *The Bridge*. The basic element in understanding “Cape Hatteras” is Crane’s insistence that only the man of poetic imagination can direct man’s timeless impulse for discovery toward truly human achievement” (Vogler, 1965: 390). Modern man should not think that the technological progressions are necessarily advances. Modern man, then, should benefit the wisdom of the poet. He should take into consideration the warnings of the poet in order not to progress only toward his ultimate undoing. The symbol of the man of poetic imagination is Whitman for Crane. He seems to dedicate himself and his poem to Whitman’s transcendentalism, a mysticism inclusive of both science, the machine and intuition. “Cape Hatteras” is a tribute to Walt Whitman

who was especially hospitable to modern inventions and believed in the power of technical advances. So, Crane expresses his indebtedness:

Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;
 And it was thou who on the boldest heel
 Stood up and flung the span on even wing
 Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing! (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 93).

Although the section “Three Songs” has been harshly criticized for not having any thematic justification in the context of the entire poem, it is organically related to the symbol of the bridge as a woman. The breakdown of the Pocahontas symbol in the modern world is dramatized in the way that she is no longer the beautiful lover as seen in the previous poems. Now, Pocahontas is presented as a woman who betrays; she is personified as prostitute, a strip-teaser and a seemingly demure secretary in the sub-sections of “Three Songs,” respectively. “This transformed Pocahontas figure shares the ability to attract with Pocahontas, but she differs from her in the sense that she frustrates rather than satisfies those whom she attracts. She becomes a provocative; she tantalizes man’s lust for and faith in womanhood so that she can make a burlesque of both” (Gregory, 1982: 94).

In “Southern Cross” the poet admits that he experienced only crudity in his search of ideal love. He tries to reach the Southern Cross which is the symbol of the sublime fulfillment. He recognizes the sterility of those who fail to transcend senses, he lives a contrast between his desire and experience.

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! (Crane, 1930: 57).

In “National Winter Garden” Crane tries to show that American myth has become national only in a burlesque house. The dancing fertility goddess turns out to be nothing but a teaser. So, the poet’s eyes pass from vision to lust:

Outspoken buttocks in pink beads
 Invite the necessary cloudy clinch
 Of bandy eyes...No extra mufflings here:
 The world’s one flagrant, sweating cinch (Crane, 1930: 59).
 He searches beyond the fleshly satisfaction, and tries to reject the flesh to

pursue a disembodied ideal;

We flee her spasms through a fleshless door... (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 96).

In “Virginia” the poet shows the fallen image of Pocahontas. As a secretary, she has none of the virginal innocence of Pocahontas but still she is as untouchable as Eve and Magdalene. He calls upon her in a voice appropriate to her superficiality:

High in the noon of May
On cornices of daffodils
The slender violets stray...
Out of the way-up nickel-dime tower shine,
Cathedral Mary,
shine!- (qtd. by Dembo, 1960: 114).

Even though she is a shadow of Pocahontas, she is still capable of blooming in spring time.

In “Quaker Hill” Crane is concerned with dramatizing the discrepancy between the way the world is and the way that he thinks it should be. He contrasts people who are “as cows that see no other thing/ Than grass and snow” with people like himself who “taste the bright annoy/ Of friendship’s acid-wine” (Hazo, 1963: 108). The theme of love is continued in this poem. The difficulty of having an idealistic expression of love in modern times is considered instead of the conflict between love and sensuality. The woman characters Emily Dickinson and Isadora Duncan portray the face of love, they represent the refinement of love. The theme is anticipated by the epigraphs:

“I see only the ideal. But no ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth,”
and
“The gentian weaves her fringes, / The maple’s loom is red”

which are taken from Duncan and Dickinson, respectively, (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 97). These women suffered from loneliness, disregard and pain in a crude society. The poet goes on to depict the cause of their pain in modern vulgarity by describing a country scene in New England where the cows seem to be the only creatures. He feels isolated among the people who cheapen the countryside with their drinking and vulgar interests in antiques, people who are jealous of each other and indifferent to nature.

What cunning neighbors history has in fine!
 The woodhouse mortgages the ancient deal
 Table that Powitzky buys for only nine-
 Ty-five at Adam's 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? (Crane, 1930: 67).

In "The Tunnel" Crane demonstrates the poetic excellence that he achieved in the previous poems such as "Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge," "Ave Maria" and "The Dance." He uses two lines from Blake as his epigraph to suggest that man should first pass through a spiritual purgation (the Gates of Wrath) before he can reach the paradise of Atlantis-Cathay (The Western Path) (Hazo, 1963: 116). The poet stands on the shores of Brooklyn after he gets out of the subway and watches the tugboat cross the river as Columbus stood on the deck of his ship looking out over the ocean in "Ave Maria." So, the poet emerges into the open air having passed through "the Gates of Wrath" and he feels capable of discovering the "Western Path" to Atlantis (Hazo, 1963: 113). As Cowley states, "modern society is presented as the lower world or hell which is symbolized by the subway in this poem. It is a routine thing of people to visit the lower world everyday in the city. The poet lives all the movement, sound and sight mingled chaotically and he is astonished by the fragments of conversations. Nothing seems to make sense for him and the total effect of all the chaos appears to be nonsense" (Cowley, 1981: 200). He associates his agony with that of Poe, for he was a poet who sought the ideal and suffered too, like Crane. "An ideal must be pursued despite the strongest obstacles to it and if there is a heaven, evidence must be found even in hell" according to Crane, (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 99). When the train reverses its direction and heads for the surface this alteration gives the poet a hope.

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...! (Crane, 1930: 75).

In "Atlantis" the poet sees the bridge as the only arc over the river of time below it as well as over the numberless voyages. The lost continent of Atlantis becomes the aim of the poet as a modern discoverer. Atlantis is the symbol of poetic truth and beauty for Crane. He hopes to reach Atlantis by the bridge of the poetic imagination. If we think that the poem is a dramatization of a search, Crane may

possibly be insisting that the true meaning of search is not in the thing sought, but in the act of seeking. Cathay and Atlantis always invite people with the courage to venture, so man will always try to find the truth and beauty in the world of his own consciousness. This particular poem presents the important image of the entire poem, because the poet feels an ecstasy upon discovering the Brooklyn Bridge as the symbol of his spiritual faith. The epigraph from Plato suggests the dominant features of the transfigured bridge; “Music is then the knowledge of that which relates to love in harmony and system” since there are lots of musical images throughout the section (qtd. by Quinn, 1963: 100). The bridge serves as both the instrument and the harmony played upon it. The cables of the bridge echo like harp to the spiritual rhythms of nature and society responding to the impulses of creation (Quinn, 1963: 100).

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path
upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,-
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.
Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream
As though a god were issue of the strings... (Crane, 1930: 79).

The poem may also be the fulfillment of the quest and the end of tragedy. Even though the poem seems to have a hymnal form it is not a declamation of a dream but rather a proposition. The Word has been revealed to the poet, and now his task is to announce it to the world (Dembo, 1960: 130).

So to thine Everpresence, beyond time,
Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
That bleeds infinity-the orphic strings,
-One Song, one Bridge of Fire!
Whispers antiphonal in azure swing (Crane, 1930: 82).

The importance of Hart Crane’s poetry has been strongly established in the years after his death. His poetry is certainly among the best twentieth century American lyric verse. He has been frequently represented in anthologies and discussed in literary histories as well as studied in University courses. More and more readers find him and his poetry powerful in passing years, but the very fact that his work causes a perplexity still remains despite his large recognition among the readers and critics. The appearance of *The Bridge* was especially a major incident in American Literature. All kinds of critical reactions indicate that critics and scholars were aware of the importance and effect of the poem. As a quest in its entirety, *The Bridge* is obviously a Romantic lyric poem with epic implications. It is affirmative in its final

judgment of society, as Crane said, “The poem, as a whole, is, I think, an affirmation of experience, and to that extent is ‘positive’ rather than ‘negative’ in the sense that ‘The Waste Land’ is negative” (qtd. by Dembo, 1960: 11).

The poem is a magnificent success of Crane because of its lyrical evocation of mood. It is a search for a mythic vision rather than a fixed or symbolic expression of a vision held in the poet’s mind. The vision, which the poet searches, is based upon the glorious knowledge of the past and provides a bridge to the hopeful future of America despite the absence of hopeful signs in the present. The poem is a subjective one in terms of its language and its content as the quest is a personal one; the search of the poet that will satisfy his own needs. If Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” Pound’s “Cantos” and William Carlos Williams’s “Patterson” are placed among the best and the most important poems of the modernist literature, so Crane’s *The Bridge* deserves to have its permanent place as one of the most important and the most beautiful Romantic lyric poems in American modernist literature.

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