

Hart Crane in Akron and Cleveland 1919-1923: Ohio Roads and Bridges to *The Bridge*

OLIVIER ALEXIS

Foreword

1 “Porphyro in Akron”: the beginning of the Road

2 “Euclid Avenue” and the Road to the Bridge

3 “The Bridge of Estador” and the Cleveland Bridges

Afterword

Introduction

It is the 1920's. A young poet stands on a bridge at midnight. Below him the river slides black and mysterious, beyond him the lights of the city sparkle. He looks up and raises his arms towards the sky in speechless communion. His fingers "spread among stars." He is consumed with the visions which in a few years will culminate in *The Bridge*. Who might the poet be? Hart Crane, of course. And the bridge and city? The Brooklyn Bridge in New York, right? No, wrong! The bridge is the Detroit-Superior Bridge and the city is Cleveland.

If, three-quarters of a century since Crane's death and after four biographies the assertion of a specific material link between the poet's major symbol and his hometown comes as a surprise, it is partly due to a natural reticence on the part of the poet to reveal his sources, but also because, of the two cities with which he is primarily associated, there is little doubt which takes precedence in evocations of the man and his work. New York looms large in the Crane myth, and has often been the main focus of attention for good reason. Much of his work was written there, and many poems or parts of poems explicitly evoke the city. Fuelling the myth with a critical verdict many would endorse, Robert Lowell voiced the opinion that "Crane somehow got New York City"¹ intimating the earlier poet had achieved the near-impossible and setting authoritative seal on the idea that he had some special affinity with the place. This perception reaches its peak in Paul Mariani's foreword to his biography of Crane, *The Broken Tower*: "There was only one city for Hart Crane, and that was New York ... it was his city."² But was this an exclusive affinity, voiding other cities of the power to move Crane to poetry? The poem which links Crane to New York most strongly, *The Bridge*, was conceived and initially nurtured—occasionally in the states of feverish inspiration which are also intrinsic to the myth—in and by Cleveland.

But if Crane's work was nourished by Cleveland, where is the evidence? There can be no doubting his affair with the eastern city. Crane adopted New York as his own and lavishly scattered its signposts through *The Bridge*: "Brooklyn Bridge," "Wall [Street]," "Manhattan," "Broadway," "South Street," "[The] Bowery," "Statue of Liberty," "[New York Stock] Exchange," "Winter Garden [Theater]," "Prince Street," "Bleecker [Street]," "Times Square," "Columbus Circle," "Floral Park[,] Flatbush," "East [River]." If *The Bridge* is searched for corresponding signs of Ohio, just two references to "Ohio" are found, one coupled with "Indiana" as a generalized signifier of mid-western states, the other referring to the Ohio River as it joins the Mississippi and is "borne down Tennessee."³ These are lofty, panoramic views of the region gleaned from atlas and textbook, but two of Crane's earlier poems show a more street-level acquaintance with the state. "Porphyro in Akron"—while also referring to "rolling Ohio hills"—names Akron's "South Main [Street]," and the cryptic "Euclid Avenue," a spirited precursor of Crane's notoriously dense mid-period lyrics, names Cleveland's historically famous avenue. The two poems date from the beginning and end of an important three-year period Crane spent in Cleveland 1919-1923, and prove that he observed and responded to Ohio's urban environment and used it in his work. They argue strongly for the possibility of Cleveland's infrastructure informing other texts written during this period.

The three essays collected here suggest a prehistory to *The Bridge* which coincides with the 1919-1923 Cleveland period. The unifying premise is that Crane initially conceived a poem based on a Bridge symbol at some point in late 1919 or 1920, and that the Bridge is actually one element of a three-part symbol system—Road, Bridge and Artist—whose components had all appeared in the poetry by late 1920. At this time, however, Crane knew he was not ready to fully elaborate his still inchoate conception and the idea gestated for another two years until in February 1923 he informally announced his intention to write *The Bridge*.

The essays focus on three pre-*Bridge* texts featuring the Road and Bridge symbols. The first essay suggests that Crane's brief period in Akron following his return to Cleveland from New York in 1919 was pivotal and that the resulting poem "Porphyro in Akron" is the first of the Road and Bridge symbol texts, configuring the Road symbol with the figure of the Artist and showing continuity with the slightly later "The Bridge of Estador," Crane's earliest use of the Bridge symbol. The second essay shows how "Euclid Avenue" inaugurates Crane's identification of his artistic and erotic mission with celebrated urban infrastructure and proposes the Road as a symbol in its own right. The third essay argues for the organic integrity of "The Bridge of Estador" with *The Bridge* writings proper by linking it to the early drafts of the long poem, and shows the importance of Cleveland's bridges to these early imaginings of the Bridge symbol. A brief history of the Bridge symbol is outlined.

¹ Robert Lowell interviewed by Frederick Seidel, "The Art of Poetry No. 3" *The Paris Review* (Issue 25, Winter-Spring 1961).

² Paul Mariani, *The Broken Tower: A Life of Hart Crane* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), pp. 11-12.

³ For a brief account of unnamed references to Ohio in Crane's poems see John Unterecker, "Introduction" in Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, ed. Marc Simon (Liveright, 1986), pp. xviii-xx.

“Porphyro in Akron”: the beginning of the Road

The consequence of Hart Crane's return to Cleveland in late 1919 to work for his father's candy manufacturing business after sojourning for over two years in New York as an apprentice poet¹ is something of a paradox: the retreat from his desired lifestyle in his city of choice proved to be a positive turning point in his artistic development. Having moved in the world of the “little magazines,” his sudden contact with the raw world of commerce came as a challenge to which he responded by developing a system of symbols which would promote the ascendancy of his own aesthetic values. But this was hardly his plan and he accepted his father's offer of employment with subdued (though not entirely absent) artistic expectations, making a pragmatic adjustment to the economic reality he had proposed earlier that year to his Cleveland friend William Wright:

[...] for such as ourselves business life is not to be scorned. The commercial aspect is the most prominent characteristic of America—and we must all bow to it sooner or later. I do not think, though, that this of necessity involves our complete surrender of everything else nobler and better in our aspirations.²

While accepting the necessity of the move Crane evidently regretted departing “the big city,” insisting to his New York friend Charmion von Wiegand that they write regularly and remain “as metropolitan as possible.”³ The loss was considerable, for headed back toward the endless “expanses of cornfields” Crane was leaving behind the city which provided him with personal and aesthetic experiences of unrivalled intensity, as he noted to Wright:

To one in my situation (N.Y. is a series of exposures intense and rather savage which never would be quite as available in Cleveland etc.) New York handles one roughly but presents also more remedial recess,—more entrancing vistas than any other American location I know of.⁴

But Crane's return to Ohio would give a new urgency to his conception of “commerical America.” Within three weeks of his arrival in Cleveland he was despatched to work at his father's store in the rubber-tyre producing town of Akron where—although he couldn't help comparing the “main and show street of the place” to “Sixth ave. without the elevated,”—he encountered a differently “savage” aspect of American life which had an impact unlike anything he had experienced in New York. In the small but rapidly industrializing Ohio town he saw the fierce destructive-productive energy of commerce operating at full strength and would be compelled to take stock of this harsh reality and consider his relation to it.

The place is burgeoning with fresh growth. A hell of a place. The streets are full of the debris from old buildings that are being torn down to replace factories etc. It looks, I imagine, something like the western scenes of some of Bret Harte's stories.⁵

The tenor of this experience continued when after six weeks in Akron Crane returned to Cleveland to work at his father's factory, an employment he found irksome and which convinced him, contrary to his natural inclination—and perhaps only temporarily—that “the modern artist has got to harden himself” rather than live in an “ivory tower.”⁶ The job nevertheless provided a moment of sublimated eroticism, described in “Episode of Hands,”⁷ in which “factory sounds and factory thoughts” are banished by an “unexpected” interaction with a co-worker. The poem’s references to “factory” and “wheels” saw Crane breaking away from his customary examinations of anxious, wistful moods in more conventionally poetic settings, but it was a few months later when he came to write up his Akron notes into a new poem that he gave proper notice of the new and complex breadth of his concerns.

“Porphyro in Akron,”⁸ a tentatively ambitious three-sectioned work which anticipates the multi-sectioned “For The Marriage of Faustus and Helen” and *The Bridge*, is Crane's first poem to project his personal aesthetic into a wider, identifiably contemporary scene. Modestly described by him as a “set of sketches connected with Akron life now,”⁹ the poem contains his first fully contextualized treatment of the Machine¹⁰ and is an early tour-de-force of subtle metaphors organized around the Road symbol preparatory and complementary to the Bridge, symbol of realized poetic vision.¹¹ “Porphyro in Akron,” however, is anything but triumphalist, proposing the redundancy of the poet in a modern, industrialized America, represented by a “City [whose] axles need not the oil of song,” and conceding that in such an environment poetry must remain a private activity, a “bedroom occupation.” Crane's conclusion there is no demand for his poetic product has been viewed in terms of personal defeat,¹² but the poem has a strong underlying intent and makes significant advances towards forging a personal poetic based on a resolution of the major opposition in his life.

In his “Akron sketches” Crane invents productive connections between industry and poetry, but first, following a line of thought advanced by T. S. Eliot, he frees his hand by overhauling the relationship between American and European culture. He was beginning his engagement with the work of the older poet around this time—“more and more am I turning toward Pound and Eliot and the minor Elizabethans for values,”¹³ he told Gorham Munson—and it has been widely noted that the poem is indebted to Eliot's poetics in respect of its fragmented style and mood.¹⁴ But Crane can be credited for identifying and confronting the particular difficulty which Eliot's essay of 1919, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,”¹⁵ implies for an American poetry: how to address the present cultural situation and maintain continuity with a tradition based in a distant and different culture (the title itself, “Porphyro in Akron,” succinctly formulates the predicament). Crane examines the nationalistic implications of Eliot's declaration that the poet “is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past.”¹⁶ In grounding that “past,” Eliot makes an ambiguous construction which can be construed as taking a Eurocentric attitude effacing cultural difference: “[The poet] must be aware that the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country [...]”¹⁷ Whether the dash elides “which is,” suggesting that for any Western poet Europe is necessarily his country of the mind, or whether it elides “or,” which allows for cultural difference, the effect on Crane is to focus his attention on the fact that he is a native not of Europe, but America. He honors the Anglo-European tradition by quoting from Keats's “The Eve of St Agnes,” but pointedly follows this with a foreign language lyric, “Connais[-]tu le pays?”—“do you know the country?” Crane is asking, sceptically, whether an American can properly know a European culture, but also, more constructively, whether he really knows his own country, the place where he himself “had started to grow.” Appropriately then, the “front yard” setting of the “rose,” a figure for home-grown beauty that itself struggles with connotations of Englishness (“English rose”), puts American-ness foremost,—in “front”—asserting American “yard” over English “garden.”

Crane sees the conflict between organic Americanism and academic Europeanism mirrored in “Akron life now” by the community of European immigrants who provide labor for American industry, using this anomaly to allude to the paradox of a literary tradition which both enriches him and encumbers him with an inappropriate history. The first section’s “South Main” and “road” propose the Road as a metaphor for tradition, the “shift of rubber workers” suggesting the individuals who convey that tradition and extend it by a series of “shift[s].” In this context “rubber workers” images the tradition’s practitioners who have lost their identity and power of self-definition, and are burdened by “the weight of many cars,” a figure which is primarily an index of industry but which transfers its load to the workers in poetic tradition by suggesting a past with no motive force trailing behind. Echoing this figure, Porphyro will later “hitch” himself to a book. The procession of workers is contiguous with “muddy water,” the contemporary vitiated essence of a tradition whose source, recalled by the streetfight between “Greek [and] Swede,” is European, the “Fjords and the Aegean,” two bodies of water which trope Norse and Greek myth.¹⁸ Impeded by the “cross-line[s]” of commerce, the efficacy of these “stubborn[...]” but over-extended waters “dwindles” to the point where the road is reduced to “dust.” “Mud” and “dust” point to earth both as the physical substrate of the Road and as the nurturing medium essential for cultural growth such as the “rose,” but the non-germane European source of that growth is a problem of which Crane is all too aware. Reversing the economic American host-capitalist/ European guest-labor relationship, an immigrant restaurateur becomes “our host” figuring the cultural relationship in which America is a scion of European stock, a dependent epiphytic form that makes no direct connection with native soil.

Crane’s project of developing an American poetic identity is paralleled with the immigrants’ project of acquiring American nationality, the repetition of the auxiliary “will” (20, 22, 24) aligning the two projects and linking the poem’s first two sections, which, in broad terms, thematize industrial production and consumerism respectively. But Crane’s motive is creative expression rather than economic analysis, and making the poem’s initial statement, the first section’s last-stanza lament relates the world of industrial production to the poet’s desire. “O City, your axles need not the oil of song,” a complex construction metonymically linking a metaphoric “oil of song” to the metonymic “axles” of industry, is a negative assessment revealing the poet’s unrequited desire that he be needed by his country’s industry to be its singer. But the lines following emphasize resolve (“I will” 20, 22), the poet continuing to plan the production of poetry, even if he only “whispers” to himself and his “words” are stored, for future use, in his “pockets.” The monosyllabic anticlimax which appears to signal a defeatist evasion of poetic endeavor is actually a grittily determined statement of creative intent:

I will go and pitch quoits with old men
In the dust of a road.

Using “quoits” to play on “quotes,” Crane declares his intention to persevere, to develop his art by competitively studying with his masters, the “old men”—whether the Elizabethans, or Keats, or indeed the Eliot of “Prufrock”—of the poetic tradition of which he wants to become part.

The second section opens and closes with images of uncritical consumption—of both material goods and cultural goods—and contrasts the immigrants who take up all things American with the “others” who intend to return to their country of origin. The would-be Americans, eagerly “using the latest ice-box and buying Fords” are referred to passingly by comparison to the restaurateur who plans to return to his home country “rich” and proud, his enterprise having brought him status, a “black horse,” and wealth, “many sheep.” In fact the restaurateur actually and figuratively (“setting

down a glass”) reflects Crane's idea of how he should relate to another culture, i.e. utilize its content for national enrichment. Crane does not deny that one culture can add value to another, but tells a cautionary anecdote describing how he and a companion listened to “some Sunday fiddlers,/ Roumanian business men” and “overpayed them because we felt like it.” This indulgence evokes the “gentle[manly]” largesse of well-to-do representatives of the economic host nation, but in the context of the relative values of the two cultures the overpayment parallels a sentimental, uncritical overvaluation of European tradition.

The poem's third section moves to the scene of poetic production, the poet sitting in bed reading, reminiscing and finally discovering a positive counterpart to the axial-circular figure established in the first section by the “oil of song” circulating (or not) around the “axles” of industry. This axial-circular construct linking art and the Machine is a key synthesis of the poem whose essential form recurs in the subsequent image of the quoits game (in which rings of wood or metal are thrown at a stake fixed in the ground): the thrown quoits figure attempts at poetry that acquire value when they encircle the axial stake—embedded, of course, in American soil—at which they are aimed. The third section's remembered image of the “rose on the bush” also repeats the figure; “bush,” in its industrial meaning of axle-hole lining, representing circularity, and “rose” signifying a poetry which is the corollary of industry.

But it is in the following, penultimate, stanza of the poem that Crane, the aspiring singer, connects himself to the axially of industry in a present personal reality. The “spindles” against which Porphyro’s “toes/ Are ridiculously tapping” figurally and phonetically echo the industrial “axles,” while the “tapping” suggests rhythm, a creative impulse which, however incongruous, is still hopeful of spinning the strands from which song may be woven.¹⁹ The poet is taking a position from which he can “tap” the aesthetic potential of industry, and now the stake at which the quoits were aimed can also be seen to tap down, root-like, in search of American springs and ground water in place of the Fjords or Aegean. But in terms of the poet's self-consciousness, he also taps the “spindles”/ “axles” musingly and optimistically—“look up” suggesting a dawning optimism—as though becoming aware that they hold what is at least a logical solution to his problem: when he finds a way to reverse the flow between the two cultures, and apply what, given the nation's history, must inevitably be a naturalized European sensibility—an American poetic—to an (endemic) American subject matter—Industry—he will be able to write an American poetry, and so find an American audience for his work.

*

In “Porphyro in Akron,” Crane, having witnessed the impact of commerce at first hand in Akron and Cleveland, started to confront this “most prominent characteristic of America” and began his habit of naming the items of urban infrastructure which would model the elements of an antithetical redemptive symbol system. Akron’s South Main Street, “South Main,” is the precursor of Euclid Avenue, Broadway and Brooklyn Bridge, and indicates his poetic journey to *The Bridge* has begun. “Porphyro in Akron’s” complex structure of diverse, dynamically interrelated symbols is also a new departure, the Road being the grounding symbol to which the network of other figures (notably the axles, cars and Fords) are related, and the first of the two main symbols that would later be used in *The Bridge* to emerge in Crane’s poetry. By late 1920, when Crane started the composition of “The Bridge of Estador,” both symbols, Road and Bridge, have appeared, along with the third fundamental component, the Artist (later Crane will call him the “protagonist”²⁰), represented in “Porphyro in Akron” by Porphyro, and in “The Bridge of Estador” by “Beauty’s fool.” Together, the symbols form

a system whose function is the evolution of the Artist. Road and Bridge comprise a continuum between the world and the ideal along which the Artist progresses towards transcendental self-realization: on the Road he is a Quester, and on the Bridge he is a Singer.

The relationships of Quester to Road and Singer to Bridge which structure *The Bridge* can already be seen in the pre-*Bridge* texts. *The Bridge* contains many images of questing,—whether Columbus “hearing the surf near,” the Indian brave Maquokeeta running “on paths [he] knewest best” or the contemporary “protagonist ... walking to the subway” and later striding a “brisk ten blocks or so” before making the return journey,—but Crane-Porphyro standing on Akron’s South Main Street watching gangs of rubber workers on their way to the factories, or pitching quoits on a dusty road elsewhere in the town, are the first images of the Quester thoughtfully considering his Road. These are followed a few months later by the somewhat starstruck Quester who walks onto the Bridge of Estador anticipating, with a mixture of hope and doubt, the “vision” that will make him a Singer. Crane mocks his aspirational self as “Beauty’s fool” but his Bridge cannot exist without its Singer—or *vice versa*—this reconciling union of opposites being a fundamental aim and poetic challenge of the entire enterprise of *The Bridge*. Prior even to the Bridge of Estador and its visionary walker, “Porphyro in Akron’s” song-oiled axles and toe-tapped spindles are Bridge-Singer constructs which connect the antitheses of art and industry, man and machine, into the very earliest “orphic machines,”²¹ song-producing systems of which the Brooklyn Bridge and its “floating singer” will be the ultimate instance. Crane’s immediate contact in Akron and Cleveland with his great antagonist, Industry, is the spur for these prototypic constructions, and indeed “Episode of Hands” shows him beginning to assemble images in accordance with this reconciling synthesis motivating *The Bridge*. The “shaft of sun/ That glittered in and out among the *wheels*” (italics added) of the factory machinery anticipates the axial-circular figures of “Porphyro in Akron,” though with a significant difference. The felicitous intermeshing of the natural and the mechanical—the “shaft” of sunlight flickering through metal “wheels”—maintains the natural order, keeping the natural world at the axis with the mechanical as its corollary whereas in the subsequent poem this relationship is reversed. In “Porphyro in Akron” the machine has moved to the center and is driving the organic, human world, a situation which demands the re-ordering intervention of a visionary consciousness, who appears in the form of Porphyro, the artist who will begin the quest to instate beauty in the industrial landscape, ultimately revealing the implicit meaning of a sublime example of engineering.

The Bridge is evidence of the exercise and evolution of the poets’s imaginative consciousness: as the Artist walks, rides along or otherwise travels the Road to the Bridge, the poem’s constitutive symbols and images are transformed by the new perspectives gained,—the Brooklyn Bridge, in Crane’s words, “becoming a ship, a world, a woman, a tremendous harp.”²² These imaginative transformations occur not only within the frame of the finished poem, but between the final text and the preceding drafts, and between the final text and the pre-*Bridge* writings. For example, the early, still rather self-consciously ideological Quester “Porphyro” dismisses “Fords” as mere consumables, but when several years later (in “To Brooklyn Bridge”) they arrive on Brooklyn Bridge forming a string of “traffic lights” the Singer values them as the means by which the “path” of the bridge, a “condense[d] eternity,” is disclosed. The effect of the achieved symbolic Bridge held in the mind of the poet is to confer “vibrant reprieve and pardon” on both automobiles and the nation which pioneered their mass production. In life and in poetry axles and feet brought Crane to his ultimate poetic destination, the vision of a Bridge brought forth by the sight and full historical consciousness of the Brooklyn Bridge, but he first envisioned the Road that would eventually lead to the Bridge, not in Cleveland or New York but on South Main Street in the “smoke-ridden” industrial town of Akron, set among “rolling Ohio hills.”

Part of this essay first appeared in *The Explicator*, Vol 62, No 1, Fall 2003.

¹ Crane lived in New York from December 1916 to June 1918 and again from February to November 1919.

² Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 23.

³ Hart Crane, *The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932*, ed. Brom Weber (Hermitage House, 1952) p. 22.

⁴ Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 23.

⁵ Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 24.

⁶ Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 33.

⁷ Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, ed. Marc Simon (Liveright, 1986). p. 173.

⁸ Crane, *Poems*, pp. 150-2.

⁹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 40.

¹⁰ "Episode of Hands," started a few months before "Porphyro in Akron," does not look beyond its "factory" setting, whereas "Porphyro in Akron" situates industry within city, state and nation.

¹¹ For a fuller discussion of the Road symbol, see " 'Euclid Avenue' and the Road to the Bridge."

¹² R. W. B. Lewis, *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* (Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 51; Sherman Paul, *Hart's Bridge*, (University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 50.

¹³ Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 30.

¹⁴ Warner Berthoff, *Hart Crane: A Re-Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 12; Lewis, p. 51; Paul, pp. 48, 49.

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 37-44.

¹⁶ Eliot, p. 44.

¹⁷ Eliot, p. 39.

¹⁸ of Crane's description of language as a medium "inevitably as fluid as always," "General Aims and Theories," in Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 223.

¹⁹ The "spindles" introduce one of Crane's signature motifs for poetic industry, spinning. e.g. "the beautiful skeins of this myth of America" (*Selected Letters*, p. 272), "O arching strands of song!" (*Poems*, p. 105).

²⁰ Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 346.

²¹ See Allen Grossman, "Hart Crane and Poetry: A Consideration of Crane's Intense Poetics" in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. David R. Clark (G. K. Hall and Company, 1982), p. 233.

²² Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 227.

“Euclid Avenue” and the Road to the Bridge

In the sixty-odd years since its first publication,¹ Hart Crane’s “Euclid Avenue”² has been ignored or dismissed—most damningly (and illogically), as “impenetrable nonsense”³—by the majority of his commentators, but though undeniably difficult, this is an explicable and significant work whose rescue from critical oblivion is long overdue.⁴ Written around the time that Crane announced his intention to write *The Bridge*, the poem takes its title from Cleveland’s grand avenue, even then past its prime but still magnificent, and is one of a series of works in which the poet articulates his visionary program with reference to two particular features—roads and bridges—of the contemporary urban environment. The sequence begins in 1920 with “Porphyro in Akron”⁵ and continues over the next three years with “The Bridge of Estador,”⁶ “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”⁷ and “Euclid Avenue” all of which use the figures of a road or bridge, or both. “Porphyro in Akron,” “The Bridge of Estador” and “Faustus and Helen” have all been linked to *The Bridge*, and to this group can now be added “Euclid Avenue” which resonates strongly with “To Brooklyn Bridge,”⁸ the proem to *The Bridge*, by naming an illustrious example of civic infrastructure. “Euclid Avenue,” in fact, reveals with special clarity the characteristic dual orientation—towards the personal and the national—of the Road and Bridge symbol texts in general, and *The Bridge* in particular, by its deliberate identification of a personal narrative with an existing historical narrative.

For a preliminary explication, however, “Euclid Avenue” will be approached as a precursor not of *The Bridge* but of the group of poems identified by Thomas E. Yingling as the “experimental lyrics”⁹ of 1923-26 which include “Possessions,” “Recitative,” “The Wine Menagerie,” “Voyages,” “Lachrymae Christi,” “Passage” and “Repose of Rivers.” Yingling views these works as an autobiographical cycle of “theoretical investigations of the subject” which move toward “an insight into the ways in which [subjective homosexual] experience was mediated by forces and terms bent on constructing it as an unacceptable cultural practice.”¹⁰ “Euclid Avenue” is the taboo-breaking precursor of this cycle which takes the sexual act and concomitant subjective experience as its central subject matter, and comes at the end of the biographical cycle preceding that recorded by the experimental lyrics, a critical stage in Crane’s personal ethical development. While “Possessions,” the first of the lyrics, dating from late 1923 a few months after Crane had moved to New York from Cleveland, was written as an outsider, “the urban homosexual in search of sex,”¹¹ “Euclid Avenue” is about a gay man who is established with a circle of “friends” but as a consequence of his evolving values is conflicted about aspects of his sexual practice. The poem’s sexual narrative (veiled by metaphor except for the literal “jockstraps” and punning “dirty peacock”) constructs its subject as acting both acceptably *and* unacceptably, this conflict over sexual ethics being the occasion of the subject’s zesty, rueful speech.

Crane takes his cue from Shakespeare via T. S. Eliot, his avowed antagonist. Responding to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’s” invocation of Hamlet and his celebrated soliloquy, “I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,”¹² the epigraph trails the poem as a dilemma-text and asks the question to which the first line gives the answer: “And so to be.” Hamlet’s existential bafflement, Eliot’s self-negation and Crane’s scruples are briskly dismissed in favor of the self-actualization promised by the erotic, permissive (“may times”) “Maytimes,” but figures suggestive of pain,

“stingaree,” and disgust, “(grim)aces,” quickly introduce the ethical dimension—awareness of the other—and initiate a critique of egoistic self-assertion. Perception of the partner’s discomfort or dissent at the hands of the “gangster[.]” precipitates the anxious compunction of the subject: the dark ritualistic image of anal violation “blackly drape/ The broken door” barely conceals “rape,” also auditorially present in “folds of crepe” (an image of scrotal or perineal skin), and anagrammatized in “reap.” “Crouch ... Amend ... clinch” suggests copulation as directed by a controlling subjectivity, yet the ensuing ecstatic “Sweep” is disrupted by the sense that not even orgasmic “oblivion” will silence the no-saying “answer” of the partner, or of conscience. To stay in control the subject must repress, or “absent,” any critical voice emanating from within the self; the sexual “pil[...](grim)[’s]” graced revel, his “chosen rant” is repeatedly challenged by “telegrams,” both the telegraphed signals of the partner and the urgent messages of conscience which insist that he “stop” (13, 15). At the poem’s mid-point, echoing the epigraph, Crane articulates his own sexual dilemma: “Does Newton take the Eucharist on rail/ Nor any boulevard no more?” An ethical choice concerning sexual manners is implied by the conflict between “Eucharist,” which sacramentalizes the partner’s flesh, and “rail[road],” figuring mechanical sex, which debases it. Viewing himself as both gangster and pilgrim, Crane’s observation that “there are statues, shapes, your use/ Repeals” suggests that his sexual practice simultaneously contravenes cultural (“statues”) and ideal (“shapes”) form. “Unsupervised” by external authority, it is the internal “surveys” of conscience that cause Crane’s economy (whereby desire is transformed into poetry through the material practice of sex) to “fail.” Crane’s bourgeois role in this economy of poetic production is suggested by his self-admonition “You’re prevalent,—prevail!”, the proprietorial “all me under sail” and “my boys.” Despite these assertions of hegemony over the “friends” who, in the economic context, constitute a workforce to whom he offers wages in the form of “food [...] and souse” in return for sexual labor, he sees his enterprise collapse: “My friends, I never thought we’d fail.” From the opposing ideological viewpoint of material production, i.e. industry, internalized as conscience, his sexual practice is judged “dirty” rather than “clean” and egoistically taking his “[...]cock’s pride” now seems to constitute “use,” an exploitative relation.

The array of ethically weighted figures of subjectivity,—the “denizen,” (“pil[...](grim,” “gangster,” “scholar[.]”) and animals such as the “stingaree,” “peacock” and satyr (“cloven Hoof”)—mark out and contest positions in the field of ethicality and its beyond, the non-ethical animal world. The ethical figures of pilgrim and scholar are countered by the unethical “denizen” who exploits the freedoms accorded him, and the “gangster,” responsible for the sexual “break[-]in.” It is the scholar, perhaps, as the subjectivity closest to the cultured subject authoring the poem, who is privileged among them, but his admission into the text of an irruptive demotic (“no more,” “Youse”), figures his conscious recognition of the gangster’s urge for experience and power, without which he himself would not “speak” or “write” the text itself. The gangster brags of a macho trinity of insemination, guns and meat,—“What milk/ We’ve put in blasted pigs! I says”—but as erotic protagonist dispels the mundane blight of “cancers, jealousy, tenements or giblets,” enabling an insight, unconstrained by narrow ideological thinking, into a real condition of existence, mortality: “Death, my boys./ Nor blinkers either—.” The penultimate line, “Grabbed right out of my mouth that final chew—” recognizes that the gangster has nothing left to brag about, or that the animalistic sexual predator has been dispossessed of his prey, and suggests that this is the “right,” or ethical, state of affairs, “right there on Euclid Avenue.” By virtue of the same figure of oral voiding, the scholar has given up his speech and the pilgrim his Eucharist, a cessation of their ethical action, while the foregrounding of “right” (34, 35) presents ethics as both subjective, an assertion situated in “my mouth,” and objective, a set of values situated in cultural space, “on Euclid Avenue.” A conflict between a private and public ethic has been

articulated, though not resolved, but the way is now open toward a synthetic or transcendental movement beyond the perspective from the Avenue.

*

In “Euclid Avenue” the authoring subject generates subjectivities with prolific invention, but any reading of the poem which ignores the real Euclid Avenue will miss the subject’s most ambitious—even aggrandizing—stratagem: the configuration of the desiring self with Cleveland’s famous, sprawling landmark, described by Jan Cigliano in *Euclid Avenue: Showplace of America 1850-1910*, as “the megastructure of the city’s urban landscape.”¹³

In the last decades of the nineteenth century Euclid Avenue enjoyed national renown as one of the most magnificent examples of the American grand avenue, the rival of Fifth Avenue in New York, and the equal of any great avenue in Europe. Extending some five miles from the central Public Square to University Circle, a long section of the Avenue was lined with a series of mansions built and occupied by “a kind of linear roll call ... of Cleveland’s business and cultural leaders.”¹⁴ Photographs and postcard images from the era show this section, popularly known as “Millionaire’s Row,” to have been a sweeping landscape of imposing residences, spacious lawns and tall American elms. Although, in 1923, it was thirty years since the Avenue had been described in Baedeker’s as “one of the most beautiful residence streets in America,” and the inexorable process whereby “streetcar and commerce eroded the soul of the grand avenue” was already well advanced, the “tree-shaded panorama between Twenty-first and Fifty-fifth Street remained largely intact.”¹⁵ Crane would have known this landscape well. From 1908 to 1923 he lived at 1709 East 115th Street half a mile from University Circle and only two hundred yards from Euclid Avenue itself, and must have passed along it hundreds of times on trips to and from the city center. As a main artery into Cleveland the Avenue was the target not only of transit companies but developers, and of the 260 private residences that “lined the linear landscape between Ninth and Ninetieth streets in 1896, by 1921 only 130 were left standing.”¹⁶ Having seen it for the first time in its late prime, Crane would have witnessed a cycle of demolition and new building changing the face of the Avenue, and in 1921 when he lived for three months at the Del Prado apartment building at Euclid and 40th Street, was well placed to observe the side-effects of such change. Temporarily a “denizen” of Millionaire’s Row, Crane was installed at one of the flashpoints of old and new: “Sylvester Everett’s magnificent property was impeded, in his mind, when in 1910 the Del Prado apartment hotel went up on the lot just east of his mansion. Everett was so enraged he built a high, spiteful fence to mitigate the overbearing intrusion.”¹⁷

Euclid Avenue’s history—in particular its architectural rise and fall and function as a transportation route—provides the key to some of “Euclid Avenue’s” most “impenetrable” tropes, Crane seeing in the Avenue’s grandeur a figure for his own ebullience but in its decline an opportunity to reflect on destructive aspects of culture and his own nature. In the architectural context “nations romanized” alludes to the Romanesque style of building which in the 1880’s “defined the architectural design theme of this grand avenue”¹⁸ and functioned as “an architectural equivalent for the ambitions and achievements of Cleveland’s most prominent industrialists and financiers of the period.”¹⁹ However, as Cigliano remarks, “if the Romanesque spirit portrayed the Avenue in its finest hour, the imperial classicism of the following decade would come to symbolize the neighbourhood’s peak of elegance and the beginning of its decline. [...] Italian palazzos, French chateaux [sic] and Grecian mansions replaced Romanesque palaces as the new cultural monuments.”²⁰ A draft of the poem’s first stanza plays on this history:

And so—to be the denizen, appropriate
Or thin, as nations Romanless may show
Diverse but dwindlings slow.²¹

Crane, reading Euclid Avenue as a paradigm for the “nation,” regrets that it is “Romanless,” bereft of the ambitious, enterprising men who built it, and that the Avenue’s singular purposeful style has been replaced by a disparate architecture signifying a diminution of substance and strength, a “slow ... dwindling.” He retails this architectural narrative to lend historical support to his sexually self-assertive position, insinuating the phallic theme by “denizen” (whose first five characters read “penis” if the “d” is inverted and the “z” is mirrored). The performative fate of the denizen, either “appropriate” or “thin,” erect or detumescent, is identified on the one hand with the potency of Euclid Avenue’s Romanesque period and on the other with its subsequent decline. “Plutarch’s perch” is another figure by which Crane contrives to implicate the Avenue’s residences and his erotic theme. If (following the morphological relation of “patriarch” to “patriarchy,” for example) “Plutarch” is read as “a member of the plutarchy,” a plutocrat, then it stands for the wealthy residents of the Avenue, a social class whose qualification for membership was “affluence, rather than aristocratic origins.”²² “Plutarch’s perch” read as “rich person’s roost” thus refers in roundabout way to Millionaire’s Row, but also, by an even more convoluted route via the Greek historian Plutarch, to the early phallic cult of Osiris. In the *Moralia* Plutarch describes how Osiris is dismembered and the pieces thrown into the Nile, where the genitals are eaten by the “oxyrynchus,”²³ the river-pike. Since the pike and the perch are both teleosts, and as such equivalent, “Plutarch’s perch” = “Plutarch’s pike” = “that which consumes genitals.” The phrase “(grim)aces Plutarch’s perch” is thus a recondite figure for oral sex, which links with the orality of “eucharist” and “grabbed right outa my mouth.”

Euclid Avenue was both a residential address and an arterial route into Cleveland, and in the history of mass transportation on the Avenue Crane finds a complex historical figure for the ethical dilemma suggested by the opposition between the subjectivities of “pilgrim” and “gangster.” As the pilgrim the subject intends worshipful progress through Millionaire’s Row, but is then framed as a gangster who irreverently “breaks” down the “door.” This challenge to identity echoes the class-based experience, satirized by Artemus Ward in 1860, of

the hoy-poloy visitor to the street, [who] by wiping his feet on the mat at the lower end of the thoroughfare and showing a certificate of good moral character, will be permitted to traverse the sacred precincts free of charge[.]²⁴

In 1860 the collective attitude of Avenue residents suggested rather than imposed an etiquette of admission to their “sacred precinct” and was merely a matter for humorous satire, but with the advent of mechanized transportation only a few years later, the actual *mode* by which the Avenue was traversed would become the subject of real contention and division between Clevelanders. The introduction of the electric streetcar line to Euclid Avenue in the mid-1860s saw the beginning of a long-running controversy that brought differing interests into conflict. The public required quick and convenient access to the city but from the residents’ point of view the “romance” of the Avenue was threatened by “progress on the city’s chief transportation artery.”²⁵ The streetcar lines quickly “grew more popular and more crowded and expanded further east along Euclid,” until “in response to Avenue residents’ protests, city council routed the tracks along Prospect between Twenty-first and Fortieth streets to bypass the most fashionable stretch of Euclid Avenue.”²⁶ For a few years the plutocratic elite exerted sufficient influence to preserve a stretch of Avenue for the “Hoof”—horse-

drawn and equestrian traffic—but eventually commercial interests would prevail. In 1884 the electric line was installed as far as Fifty-fifth Street and within another five years the entire Prospect line had been rerouted to Euclid. In 1896 “Avenue residents petitioned the city ... to designate Euclid Avenue a boulevard”²⁷ as part of a park-and-boulevard plan “intent on preserving the historic distinction of the grand avenue,”²⁸ but although the plan was adopted and a park commission set up, in 1900 the city council rescinded the commission’s control of the Avenue, effecting a “repeal of the scheme.”²⁹

As “rail,” “boulevard” and “repeals” indicate, Crane refers to the struggle for authority over Euclid Avenue transit rights in “Euclid Avenue,” using the two competing modes of transport as coding for acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices. The poet’s private conflict between his urge for egoistic gratification and the ethical promptings of conscience is configured with the public conflict between commercial activity and the aesthetic wish to preserve the Avenue’s romantic beauty. The public conflict involves three groups: the general body of citizens who require access to the Avenue for transit purposes, the streetcar companies who aim to supply that demand, and the Avenue’s residential elite. The first two groups, representing the forces of demand (desire) and supply (satisfaction), comprise an economy whose function impinges on the residential group. As the dominant partner satisfying himself at the expense of the other’s beauty, Crane sees himself reflected in this rapacious economy despoiling Euclid Avenue, but when he questions his practice the vital imaginative identification (constituting the poetic truth of the poem) of inner and outer reality, subject and object, citizen and city (and by extension, nation), is broken because Euclid Avenue’s transit economy continues to function regardless of aesthetic considerations and objections. The invocation of Euclid Avenue is a bold and ingenious attempt by Crane to engage himself with American history but his dual identification with both the new transit economy and the beauty of the *ancien regime* which it is threatening is a conflict which the poem does not resolve.

“Euclid Avenue” critiques the culture whose economy is destroying the Avenue but is also a self-critical work which recognizes that personal vision and practice do not yet coincide. Arguably, however, writing “Euclid Avenue” helped Crane’s highest aim—to reveal in poetry a quintessentially American object symbolic of the successful ethical synthesis of desire and aesthetics that he hoped for in his own person—to become a realizable possibility. Within weeks of finishing it he had announced plans to write *The Bridge*, another poem which on an even grander scale again identifies personal experience and national history. A number of factors combined to precipitate Crane’s low-key but nonetheless momentous announcement of his major poem: the challenging effect of reading Eliot’s *The Waste Land* which he declared “so damned dead”;³⁰ his reading in proof of Gorham Munson’s study of Waldo Frank; the completion of his own poem “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” and its positive reception by Munson and Frank; the lengthening poetic gestation of the Bridge symbol which he had employed two years previously in “The Bridge of Estador”; and his initiation of a correspondence with Frank, whose writings were probably the seminal influence on the Bridge symbol. But another important factor was Crane’s realization of how he might assimilate a real bridge—and so the world of engineering and the machine—to his personal romantic vision. Having already assimilated the physical and historical features of Euclid Avenue to an erotic narrative, he could apply the same technique to the real bridges that he would use as the models for the symbolic Bridge.

A brief study of the period to which “Euclid Avenue” has been dated, “c. January - February 1923,”³¹ will suggest a likely composition date of between December 12 and Christmas 1922, a chronological position where it could have been a developmental step toward *The Bridge*. “Euclid Avenue” is very probably the un-named “enclosed poem” to which Crane refers in a letter to Frank of February 27,³² suggesting it was written in “ecstasy” but admitting it was “far from second-reader

penetration” and that “so far [he hadn’t] had the grace to change [it].”³³ However, it is actually in December 1922, rather than January or February, that events conspired to produce such an uncompromising piece of work. On December 4, replying to a friend’s letter which complained of “boredom,” Crane described his own, corresponding predicament:

Nothing happens here, either. I am grateful only for wine. I have neither women or song. Cleveland street car rides twice a day take out all hope of these latter elements.³⁴

Crane was bored too, but his despondent mood would soon be transformed. On December 10 he told Wilbur Underwood that he was “rebellious” against his mother’s refusal to allow wine in the house and had temporarily moved out and taken a hotel room in protest.³⁵ He had, he complained to Gorham Munson two days later, virtually given up hope of “doing any satisfactory writing” while living at home.³⁶ But there were also positive influences at work. On November 30 he had written to Frank for the first time, praising his short story “Hope,”³⁷ a tale of interracial love set in a metropolis resembling New York, for its “beautiful manipulation of symbolism.”³⁸ One symbol in particular Crane may have noticed is the “Elevated Road” under which “Hope’s” protagonist pauses shortly before meeting the black woman with whom he would later make love in a drab hotel room. Stimulated by Frank’s “daring” treatment of a taboo subject, and further inspired on December 10 by seeing Isadora Duncan dance and hearing her praise Walt Whitman, Crane was suddenly in a “great ferment,”³⁹ ready to challenge bourgeois restraints whether imposed by family or the routine of daily work. In mid-December, then, the conditions were right for the composition of a rebellious, “graceless” poem that strove to shatter the joyless routine symbolised by “street car rides”—almost certainly on Euclid Avenue—with a narrative of redemptive physical love, and it was probably at this moment that Crane (who may even have been lodging at one of the Euclid Avenue hotels he had used before) composed “Euclid Avenue.”

*

As indicated at the outset, “Euclid Avenue” is not an isolated example of a road figure in Crane’s work. Just as the Bridge is a symbol which Crane employs in other poems besides *The Bridge*, the road figure appears in several poems apart from “Euclid Avenue,” including *The Bridge* itself. In fact, the road constitutes a symbol in its own right,—the Road—being the counterpart of the Bridge to which it is consistently linked (with the exception of “Recitative,”⁴⁰ wherever a bridge proper is found in Crane’s poetry—“The Bridge of Estador,” “Faustus and Helen,” *The Bridge*—a road is found also). A subordinate, less privileged figure than the transcendental Bridge, the worldly Road contextualizes and complements it by virtue of the fact that road and bridge are similar cases: a road is bridge-like in that it connects two points, and a bridge is road-like in that it is a path along which to travel. Thus there is a parallel relationship in which road and bridge entail each other, but also a linear or narrative relationship of continuity and development: the road precedes the bridge, and is the lowly, earthbound starting point for the journey to it. Leaving the surface of the earth, a bridge can indeed be viewed as an “elevated road,” a place of exaltation—and risk. Crane’s Road is an essential prerequisite for his Bridge, or, as he put it more or less explicitly in what were probably the first lines he wrote for *The Bridge*, “first it was the road”:

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's pelt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate
For first it was the road, the road only
We heeded in joint piracy and pushed.⁴¹

In this scheme—Road first, Bridge second (or last)—the Bridge of vision is only reached after a journey through experience. Initially, Crane conceived the extent of “the road” as coast to coast, the breadth of America East-West, but his realization that he was writing a “mystical synthesis” or “Myth” of America that involved “history and fact, location” led him to continually expand the conception of the poem, working backward in time and space to find the sources of culture. By the time he had finished the poem the Road—now a realm of historical and geographical travel—had extended in space and time to include the Atlantic Ocean as crossed by Columbus, the continent of North America as traversed North-South by the Mississippi-Missouri, a native American trail, a pioneer trail, a railroad, a highway, a subway,—successively interwoven strands of American history itself. The poet's achieved consciousness of these trajectories brings him to the moment of vision on the Bridge, at which point their accumulated potential is finally released. Crane understood that the greater the history, the intenser the vision, with the result that most of *The Bridge* is Road.

The Road first appears—as an already well-developed foundational symbol—in “Porphyro in Akron” which Crane started writing not long after he read Frank's *Our America*, the book which was probably the seminal influence on the Bridge symbol. It is, perhaps, not too much to suppose that Crane, pondering a visionary Bridge and how to write about it, decided that if a real bridge presupposes a road so might a visionary one, and that elaborating a pre-visionary Road would allow to unfold the quest suggested by Frank: “the Bridge which all artists seek.” If one decides in all seriousness to conduct such a quest and has one's goal, the Bridge, and one's path, the Road, what is then required actually to take the first step is to decide where one is, and just as importantly *who* one is. In “Porphyro in Akron,” Crane does exactly that, identifying himself with the lover in Keats's “The Eve of St Agnes” who would view and steal away with beauty, but problematically locating himself in an industrial milieu, the rubber-manufacturing town of Akron some 20 miles south of Cleveland where he worked for his father in late 1919. The opening image of movement along a main thoroughfare in Akron—“a shift of rubber workers presses down South Main”—fixes the departure point of the quest at the gates of Industry but a further Road motif, “dust of a road,” figures a moribund literary tradition in need of revitalization and suggests the path Crane himself intends to follow.⁴² The Road seen in isolation is a place of material struggle and opportunity but in the context of the Bridge of spiritual progress or regress, of human action bearing a greater or lesser ethical value: the industrial workers who mechanically “press” forward have no aspiration other than economic survival and so on an aesthetic scale of values are moving “down.” Porphyro the beauty-seeker does not join them, instead playing quoits musingly in the dusty road but despite his challenging surroundings is sufficiently optimistic by the end of the poem to “look up.” Crane's next poem, “The Bridge of Estador,” which he began while still working on “Porphyro in Akron,” continues this aspirational upward movement, its first line combining the ideas of forward motion and elevation: “walk high on the Bridge of Estador.” The transition from “presses down” to “walk high” confirms the definitive upward direction of the Road to the Bridge, upwardness signifying the ethical component which is absent in the horizontal movement of the Road through the world. The later poem hints at the Road of the earlier poem and appears to be based on the same overall conception of quest. The Road by which the Bridge of Estador is gained is implicit as the route from the “arches” of the Bridge to the “corners of the sky,”—the cardinal points of distribution, “North-bound, and East and West” noted in the earlier poem by

Porphyro, who himself can be viewed as the predecessor of the “Beauty’s fool” who walks, wonders and reaches for the stars on the Bridge of Estador.

“Porphyro in Akron” and “The Bridge of Estador” are complementary works—in effect, a suite and finale—which considered together anticipate the symbolic ethical structure of *The Bridge*, establishing the main symbols of Bridge and Road together with the figure of the Artist, the lover of Beauty who follows the Road to the Bridge. The system underlying this grouping will become a recurrent organizing principle of Crane’s work. “Chaplinesque,” written a few months later, focusses on the Artist, the imaginative individual who spurns the “fury of the street” for a bond of the “heart” and instead of indulging in vulgar “gaiety and quest” conducts his own search for a “grail” of Beauty glimpsed in “lonely alleys.” Road, Artist and quest are clearly present, while (in terms of the system) the redemptive moonlit “ash can” glimpsed in the alley stands in for the Bridge. Before the point when it became more or less inevitable that the system would be fully elaborated in its own dedicated poem—the moment of the announcement of *The Bridge*—Crane again rehearsed the systemic relation of the symbols in “Faustus and Helen.” The Road is a significant background feature of the poem, the obliquely suggested context (“curbs” and “asphalt”) of what Crane called the “street car device” in Part I, and the directly stated setting of the cryptic Bridge figure in Part III: “Capped arbiter of beauty in this street.” The street car, being the vehicle which takes the poet, via the detour of Part II, to the Bridge, actually functions analogously to the Bridge itself. The street car is in the city but not quite of it, serving, not as a stationary visionary platform as does the Bridge, but as a moving observation capsule from which its passenger’s vision may pass from “quotidian details to the universal consideration of beauty.”⁴³

The movement from Road to Bridge implies progress: from quotidian detail to universal beauty, from delusion to vision, from industry to art—and on the scale of values suggested by the symbols themselves and the texts of “Porphyro in Akron” and “The Bridge of Estador,” from low to high. In the arena of desire which was becoming an urgent motive in Crane’s life and work in the period 1920-23, the movement is from low desire to high desire, from lust to love. Correspondingly, the Road and Bridge symbol texts (with the exception of “Chaplinesque”) introduce a deliberate and deliberately cryptic sexualization of the text, but as they develop in frankness of content show an increasing concern with ethics. The ethical framework is suggested in two letters of 1920 in which, writing about his love life, Crane distinguishes “the brief and limited sensual thing alone” from “something infinitely more thrilling and inclusive”⁴⁴ and records his regret that following the demise of an affair he had “seen love go down through lust to indifference.”⁴⁵ The ethical project of *The Bridge* is to reverse the latter movement by going upwards through lust to love. This movement toward an ethicalized desire will be seen in the transition between “Euclid Avenue” and “Lines Sent to Alfred Stieglitz,” closely related texts written within months of each other, but before and after Crane’s crucial decision to write *The Bridge* itself.

The Road and Bridge symbol texts progressively thematize desire and identify it with imagination to the point where visionary ecstasy is virtually indistinguishable from sexual ecstasy. Porphyro’s concluding declaration in “Porphyro in Akron” that “poetry’s a bedroom occupation” is a clear, if anodyne, hint that eroticism is on the poet’s agenda, but more covertly—and allowing Crane to derive some degree of sexual release through his text—the industrial workers are sketched as ciphers of a “stubborn” phallic drive: “rubber” is slang for condom, “presses down” suggests penetration and “South Main” (applied to the topography of the human body) has genital or anal connotations. In “The Bridge of Estador” a similar strategy is applied less covertly, the slang meanings of “gash” and “jerk” bringing an erotic charge to the description of a minor industrial injury:

Yet a gash with sunlight jerking through
A mesh of belts down into it, ...

In the context of the erotic fantasy Crane makes of the incident, the “mesh of belts” is a fetishistic figure to correspond with “Euclid Avenue’s” “jockstraps” and “Lines Sent to Alfred Stieglitz’s” “ribbon-wound ... Great Bridge.” In Part I of “Faustus and Helen,” Faustus, recommencing the quest initiated by Porphyro, is again on a Road, travelling in the streetcar towards “white cities,” but his contemplation of Helen conjures unambiguously stated erogenous pleasures (probably because it involved no actual sexual fantasy): “when ecstasies thread the limbs and belly ... bluet in your breasts.” In part III Faustus is nearing the “bridges of the city” but he is still in the “street” with the “imaginative span” of the Bridge above him rather than under his feet. Giving a modernist twist to the classic trope of love as war, the object of desire is the phallic “religious gunman” who in the guise of a World War I airman “sh[akes] down vertical/ Repeated play of fire.” Faustus survives and sublimates the downward energy of violent, destructive lust to “delve upward” towards the “height” of imagination, the as yet unattained Bridge. Bringing the preliminary sexualization of the Road-Bridge system to completion the Bridge symbol itself is sexualized by the phrase “the climax of the bridge”⁴⁶ (in a letter describing *The Bridge* to Munson), an apparently innocuous metaphor which accurately foreshadows the project of the next few months. Crane went on to enthuse that from “the field of possibilities which literally glitters all around” he would “pick out significant details and digest them into something emotional,”⁴⁷ but in the coming drafts of *The Bridge* he would not only emotionalize the Bridge, but sexualize it.

The Bridge symbol acquires a full complement of sexual affect in the two slightly variant drafts of the final section of *The Bridge* which Crane sent to Alfred Stieglitz and Charlotte Rychtarik on July 4 and July 21 of 1923.⁴⁸ In these drafts, written in “the most tremendous emotional exaltations”⁴⁹ he had yet known, he describes at once his most deeply desired and highly valued personal experience, and a cultural-historical equivalent of that experience. Developing “Euclid Avenue’s” technique of identifying body and city, Crane configures a private erotic narrative and a narrative situated in public civic space but this time using the image of a bridge as the controlling point of contact. As Langdon Hammer notes of “Lines Sent to Alfred Stieglitz,” “the bridge [is] a figure ... for the sexual union of two male bodies,”⁵⁰ but the “Great Bridge” is not only a bridge formed by two bodies, but the male organ that effects that connection, “upborne/ through the bright drench and fabric of our veins.” This intense focus on sexual action and anatomy is accompanied by the sanctioning assertion of its ethicality. As a Bridge, the sexual organ is the “whitest [of] instruments” writes Crane, who thereby figuratively asserts of his desire, as he literally did of the desire treated in Frank’s short story “Hope,” that “nothing could be cleaner.”⁵¹ The desire now envisioned aims beyond “the brief and limited sensual thing,” the “dirty peacock’s pride” acknowledged in “Euclid Avenue,” toward the “infinitely more thrilling and inclusive” love that, as the drafts put it, “fills us and renews us as a sun.” The attainment of the Bridge thus represents an ethical advance beyond the egoism of the traveller on “Euclid Avenue’s” Road, although *The Bridge*, as a poem, includes the Road of worldly desire which men travel together. The relation between travellers on the Road of *The Bridge* is no longer power-based or hegemonistic—as is the relationship between captain and crew (“all me under sail”) in “Euclid Avenue,”—but a “joint piracy” in which power is shared, and leads to a Bridge forging a connection between peers, “from equal out to equal,” instead of from a “prevalent” to a passive partner. Desire is still necessarily passionate, even violent, toward its object and “strike[s]/ Its breast precipitate” as in “Euclid Avenue” it “strike[s]/ [...] through broken ribs” but this physicality is now directed toward “mutual assumption.” And just as desire in “Euclid Avenue” is destructive not only of

bodies (“broken ribs”) but of buildings (“broken door”), by contrast the creative, constructive union of *The Bridge* “lifts a porch,” a sheltering structure which like the Bridge itself commemorates ethicalized desire in a vertical figure rising above the horizontal figure of the Road.

In Crane’s earliest Bridge symbol writings, then, and in *The Bridge* itself, the transcendent Bridge exists in the worldly context of the Road. In the final text of *The Bridge* the Road opens out far beyond the confines of “macadam,” and, as the figure for history itself (personal and national), is a fundamental figural and conceptual dimension of the poem. The leaping macadam highway of the “first verse” draft is retained as the opening to “Van Winkle,” but the Road as road is featured again in the final section of “Cape Hatteras,” Crane’s “rhapsodic address” to Whitman, which, referring to “Song of the Open Road,” celebrates the “Open Road” as the essential Whitmanian legacy, the place of brotherly intercourse whereby tradition is passed on and extended. The draft line “for first it was the road” does not appear in *The Bridge*’s final text but its function of indicating that experience is the necessary prelude to vision is rendered by the epigraph from Job: “From going to and fro in the earth/ and from walking up and down in it.” In life, the poet who was the protagonist of *The Bridge*’s quest for transcendental experience himself went to and fro in the earth, and although his “room in Cleveland” was where he “first thought about ... *The Bridge*,”⁵² by the time he came to write most of the poem New York had replaced Cleveland as the epicenter of his movements and the dominant influence on his writing. Whether intentionally or not, the road Crane chose as emblematic of New York, Broadway, named in “Van Winkle”⁵³ and indirectly referenced in “The Tunnel,”—“up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights”⁵⁴—echoes with another great thoroughfare connecting a Square and Circle. For years earlier the city of Cleveland, the gestative context of *The Bridge*, gave Crane a template for the Road as locus of desire, history and mythic passage, in the form of Euclid Avenue.

¹ See Brom Weber, *Hart Crane: A Biographical and Critical Study* (The Bodley Press, 1948), p. 117.

² Hart Crane, *Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, ed. Marc Simon (Liveright, 1986), pp. 177-8.

³ R. W. Butterfield, *The Broken Arc: A Study of Hart Crane* (Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 71.

⁴ Aside from its difficulty, another reason for the lack of critical attention given to this poem may be that by the time it gained admission to the corpus proper in 1986 by being included in the *The Poems of Hart Crane* edited by Marc Simon (having not been included by Brom Weber in his 1968 edition of *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*), Euclid Avenue had effectively ceased to exist as the entity which gave its name to the poem and it would be another five years before the appearance of Jan Cigliano's definitive study, *Euclid Avenue: Showplace of America 1860-1910*, would provide easy reference to the history of the magnificent avenue.

⁵ Crane, *Poems*, p. 150-2.

⁶ Crane, *Poems*, p. 174-5.

⁷ Crane, *Poems*, p. 26-32.

⁸ Crane, *Poems*, p. 43-4.

⁹ Thomas E. Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 143.

¹⁰ Yingling, p. 106.

¹¹ Robert Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition*, quoted in Yingling, p. 108.

¹² T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 15.

¹³ Jan Cigliano, *Euclid Avenue: Showplace of America 1850-1910* (Kent State University Press, 1991), p. 306.

¹⁴ Cigliano, p. 2.

-
- ¹⁵ Cigliano, p. 335.
- ¹⁶ Cigliano, p. 309.
- ¹⁷ Cigliano, p. 334.
- ¹⁸ Cigliano, p. 183.
- ¹⁹ *The Encyclopaedia of Cleveland History*, ed. David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 380.
- ²⁰ Cigliano, p. 185.
- ²¹ Hart Crane, D29, Kenneth Lohf, *The Literary Manuscripts of Hart Crane* (Ohio State University Press, 1967), unpublished transcript by Marc Simon.
- ²² Cigliano, p. 229.
- ²³ See *Plutarch's Morals: Theosophical Essays* (George Bell & Sons, 1908), p. 15.
- ²⁴ Cigliano, p. 229
- ²⁵ Cigliano, p. 32
- ²⁶ Cigliano, p. 33.
- ²⁷ Cigliano, p. 312.
- ²⁸ Cigliano, p. 313.
- ²⁹ Cigliano, p. 314.
- ³⁰ Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 108.
- ³¹ Crane, *Poems*, p. 250.
- ³² This thesis is supported by the existence of a typescript of "Euclid Avenue" in the Waldo Frank Collection. The poem in question is clearly one Frank had not seen before, so any version of "Faustus and Helen Part III" or "Stark Major" is ruled out, while the humorously scatological "America's Plutonic Ecstasies" is probably not a piece that Crane would have offered for the "major criticism" (Crane, *Letters*, 135) of Frank at this stage in their friendship. The four-line "first verse" and "last lines" drafts of *The Bridge*, and "Belle Isle," all of which Crane might have thought would be of interest to Frank, do not present a significant challenge to "second-reader penetration."
- ³³ Crane, *Letters*, p. 135-6.
- ³⁴ Crane, *Letters*, p. 111.
- ³⁵ Crane, *Letters*, p. 112.
- ³⁶ Crane, *Letters*, p. 115.
- ³⁷ Waldo Frank, "Hope," *Secession* 3.
- ³⁸ Crane, *Letters*, p. 111.
- ³⁹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 115.
- ⁴⁰ Crane, *Poems*, p. 25.
- ⁴¹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 129.
- ⁴² See " 'Porphyro in Akron': the beginning of the Road."
- ⁴³ Crane, *Letters*, p. 126.
- ⁴⁴ Crane, *Letters*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁵ Crane, *Letters*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁶ Crane, *Letters*, p. 131.
- ⁴⁷ Crane, *Letters*, p. 132.
- ⁴⁸ See Crane, *Letters*, pp. 154-7, 157-60, and Weber, pp. 426-8, 428-9. The dates of the two letters, Independence Day and Crane's birthday, are unlikely to have been purely coincidental, and may have been chosen by Crane to confer a certain ceremoniality on the sending of the drafts. Crane was conscious of entering a new phase of his writing career, and the sharing of the texts inaugurate his birth and independence as a poet come of age.
- ⁴⁹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 159.
- ⁵⁰ Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton, 1993), p. 191.

⁵¹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 111.

⁵² Crane, *Letters*, p. 157.

⁵³ Crane, *Poems*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Crane, *Poems*, p. 97.

“The Bridge of Estador” and the Cleveland Bridges

Hart Crane’s long poem *The Bridge* explicitly invokes the Brooklyn Bridge but, considering that the poem was almost seven years in the making, it is notable that nowhere in his writings is there any explicit reference to other real bridges, from which it might appear that he was never inspired by, or even interested in, bridges other than his “beloved”¹ muse in New York.² The spectacle of Brooklyn Bridge in its Lower Manhattan setting famously claimed Crane’s imagination in the period 1923-1929 when he was engaged in writing *The Bridge*, but during the immediately preceding years, 1920-1922, which he spent in Cleveland, Crane was confronted with another impressive cityscape which also had a strongly formative effect on his work. In this period he not only discovered his major symbol of the Bridge, but actively and imaginatively engaged with the fabric of the city in which he had lived since he was a boy. The early drafts of *The Bridge*, and other, earlier, poems, read with reference to Cleveland’s civic and industrial architecture, show that years before writing the dedicatory proem “To Brooklyn Bridge” in 1926, Crane was “in vision bound”³ to Cleveland’s bridges, which served as unnamed models of his symbolic Bridge. First and foremost of these was the Detroit-Superior High Level Bridge,⁴ but Crane also referred to the Superior Viaduct, no longer extant, and the first generation of the movable bridges for which the city is famous. The Cleveland bridges are not only an important founding context of *The Bridge*, but a link with the earlier works which have long suggested to Crane’s critics that the origin of the Bridge symbol predates his announcement of *The Bridge* itself.

Crane first used the Cleveland bridges and their surroundings as a basis for imagery in “The Bridge of Estador,”⁵ a poem written in 1920-21 whose precursive relation to *The Bridge* is briefly noted in two important studies of the poet. R.W.B. Lewis cites the poem as the “first vague use of the major symbol of *The Bridge*”⁶ and Sherman Paul finds that the opening lines “summon us to the bridge, which as an explicit image now enters Crane’s work.”⁷ Neither critic makes a textual link between the poems, but comparison of “The Bridge of Estador” with one of Crane’s earliest drafts for *The Bridge* will show them to be cognate texts sharing not only the eponymous bridge figure, but their visionary impulse and repertoire of imagery. Moreover, Crane dated the conception of *The Bridge* close to the date of composition of “The Bridge of Estador,” which can be posited as the first textual evidence of the “Idea.” Describing his progress on *The Bridge* to Yvor Winters in early 1927, and referring to the inspirational “impetus” he experienced while in Cuba in July-August 1926 when he suddenly wrote the greater part of that poem, Crane remarked “I carried the embryonic Idea of the poem about with me for *six years* before I ever wrote a line. Then there was a sudden impetus ... ”⁸ (italics added). The earliest recorded references to a “new poem” called *The Bridge* are made in letters to Gorham Munson and Allen Tate, both of February 6, 1923.⁹ If this is taken as the approximate date of origin of the poem in terms of composition, the letter to Winters dates the conceptual origin some three years earlier. Crane actually did a considerable amount of writing on the “Ave Maria” and “Atlantis” sections of *The Bridge* before the summer of 1926, but if, following the letter, July 1926 is taken as the date of first composition, a six-year gestation of an “embryonic Idea” would have commenced in July 1920 which is four months before Crane started to write “The Bridge of Estador.” It would seem then, that although *The Bridge* was indeed a “new poem,” it was also the second distinct work to develop from a single concept—and that the seven-year history of *The Bridge* is subsumed by the even longer ten-year history of the Bridge symbol.

Crane himself saw *The Bridge* as having continuity with his earlier work, telling Munson that the poem “carries on further the tendencies manifest in ‘F and H,’ “ referring to “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” a poem he had been working on since 1922. But “the last lines”¹⁰ of *The Bridge*, a thirteen-line stanza he sent to Wilbur Underwood in mid-February 1923, can also be read as a triumphal revision of “The Bridge of Estador”:

And midway on that structure I would stand
One moment, not as diver, but with arms
That open to project a disk’s resilience
Winding the sun and planets in its face.
Water should not stem that disk, nor weigh
What holds its speed in vantage of all things
That tarnish, creep, or wane; and in like laughter,
Mobile, yet posited beyond even that time
The Pyramids shall falter, slough into sand,—
And smooth and fierce above the claim of wings,
And figured in that radiant field that rings
The Universe:—I’d have us hold one consonance
Kinetic to its poised and deathless dance.¹¹

(*Hart Crane Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library,
Columbia University. Quoted with permission.*)

Crane had anticipated that *The Bridge* “will be extremely difficult to accomplish ... so much time will be wasted in thinking about it,”¹² but was able to write this well-finished stanza with little delay because, far from being a completely new departure, it revisits the visionary scene of the earlier poem and builds on its plan. Yet although the two texts are similar in content they differ significantly in attitude, the new stanza confidently projecting as actuality, or near-actuality (“I would”), “The Bridge of Estador’s” sense of a more remote visionary possibility. No longer mocking himself as “Beauty’s fool,” the speaker has been transformed by a “smooth and fierce” self-belief which re-energizes the imagery with which he previously hazarded his quest for beauty. In their essentials, though, the constitution of the scene, and the physical relationship of speaker and scene, are unchanged: the “structure” above “water” on which he “stand[s]” is a new version of the Bridge, first called “Estador,” which overlooked “lake” and “tides,” and again he faces the “sun and planets,” as in the earlier poem he saw “sun,” “moon,” and “stars.” He repeats the same ritual of extending his arms towards the heavens, but instead of vainly grasping at the stars and gazing at evanescent “Gods” (“you have never/ Seen them again”), or consoling himself with the hope of “far consummations,” he now unhesitatingly “project[s]” an encompassing vision from his own “face,” a “disk” whose circularity suggests the completeness and completion of his vision. The speaker who was “twisted” by “things irreconcilable,” has discovered a new “resilience” and dismisses the dual threat to life and vision posed by water. Denying that he is a “diver” whose body might fall victim to the treacherous tides which earlier threatened a “wreck of dreams,” he now claims a “speed” such that water cannot impede or “weigh” him down. But water can also endanger vision itself by overwhelming the organs of sight, the eyes. In this context “water” signifies tears, the efflux of suffering which can “stem” or block the channels of vision and so reduce the power of the poet. “The Bridge of Estador” also drew on the expressive faculties of the human face, to figure diverging destinies of sadness and joy: “the

everlasting eyes of Pierrot,/ Or, of Gargantua, the laughter.” The draft reconfigures this dichotomy and suggests a creative reconciliation of the two emotions in which ascendant “laughter” expresses and sustains visionary “vantage.”

The parallelism between “The Bridge of Estador” and “And midway on that structure” strengthens the thesis that in February 1923 Crane does not have an idea for a completely new work, but rather, to pursue the metaphor in his phrase “embryonic Idea,” experiences the *birth* of the Bridge symbol,—its emergence into his consciousness as a principle capable of supporting its own poetic form or body.¹³ “The Bridge of Estador” was evidence of the earlier *conception* but at this stage the symbol is not yet viable in the sense of being capable of survival in serious culture, the form (signifier) lacks mature, realistic content (signified) and is invested with fantasy: “Estador.”¹⁴ When Crane wrote, in “The Bridge of Estador,” “I do not know what you’ll see,” he was admitting this visionary immaturity and it was only when he had begun to perceive, even in “the least outline,”¹⁵ the proper content of the Bridge symbol, that the project gained substance and direction. Symbols, though transcendent in aim, “need not necessarily [mediate] a supernatural reality, the subject of theology, the sphere of divinity. The transcendent realm may be the spirit of a nation, a tradition, a cultural legacy, an ethical or political ideal.”¹⁶ Although, with the exception perhaps of the political, the Bridge symbol would ultimately make connections with all these realms, Crane’s earliest characterization of *The Bridge* was as “a mystical synthesis of ‘America’ ” whose materials would be drawn from “history and fact, location.”¹⁷ *The Bridge* comes into being as the Bridge form acquires transcendent spirit-of-a-nation content: fantastic “Estador” is displaced by real “America.”

“The Bridge of Estador”—despite its fanciful name, and though not attempting anything so ambitious as a “synthesis of America”—was also grounded in the “history and fact” of a particular American “location.” Crane was living in Cleveland when he wrote the poem and as John Unterecker observed, “put so much local scenery into ‘The Bridge of Estador’ that a realistic reading almost forces itself on one.”¹⁸

Walk high on the bridge of Estador,
No one has ever walked there before.
There is a lake, perhaps, with the sun
Lapped under it,—or the dun
Bellies and estuaries of warehouses,
Tied bundle-wise with cords of smoke.¹⁹

Reading the first stanza for real local scenery, the “lake” evidently suggests Lake Erie, and the “estuaries of warehouses” the harbour and industrial district, known as “the Flats,” where the Cuyahoga River, passing the city’s Warehouse District, approaches the lake in a series of ox-bow bends. The image of “warehouses,/ Tied bundle-wise with cords of smoke” is clearly recognizable in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century illustrations which show smoke from the Flats’ industrial chimneys being blown into near-horizontal streamers by the wind off the lake.²⁰ With the Flats identified as the model for the setting of the poem, it would seem likely that one of the area’s many bridges was the model for the “high” visionary bridge, the Bridge of Estador itself, in the way that the Brooklyn Bridge later served as visionary motif for the symbolic Bridge in *The Bridge*. Highest of all, and prime contender, would have been the recently built Detroit-Superior Bridge, which in 1920 dominated the Flats by virtue of its scale—3,000 feet in length, and imposing design—twelve massive concrete arches linked by a 600-foot steel arch. Clearly a structure of historic and economic significance for the city, it had a claim to national and even global renown. *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, published to

commemorate the bridge's completion in 1918, described it as "one of the finest specimens of engineering art to be found anywhere in America" and "the largest double deck reinforced concrete bridge in the world."²¹ Superlatives aside, its height and concomitant vantage suggest it as the bridge most likely to have modelled the Bridge of Estador: a hundred feet above river level, the roadway and sidewalks gave views on both sides over the Flats, and to the north, Lake Erie.

Situated in central Cleveland only half a mile from Public Square (and the same distance from 208 St. Clair Avenue, the site of the factory where Crane worked during 1920), the new bridge was an easily accessible, world-class addition to the city's infrastructure and at some point in 1920, Crane surely did "walk high" over its "arches," subsequently making it the platform for "an impromptu, aesthetic tirade," as he sub-titled his first Bridge symbol poem. This "tirade," which challenges a traditional aesthetic by asking "how can you tell where beauty's to be found?", is actually a fairly gentle affair, only taking on a note of vehemence in the final stanza in which Crane, realising the aesthetic experience offered by a walk on the Detroit-Superior Bridge is not universally appreciated, scornfully rejects the public perception and use of the bridge:

And you others---follow your arches
To what corners of the sky they pull you to,---
The everlasting eyes of Pierrot,
Or, of Gargantua, the laughter.

The "others," his fellow-citizens, ignore the Detroit-Superior Bridge as an example of engineered "art," using it only as an economically expedient route to some point beyond itself, whereas for Crane the bridge itself is a destination, a visionary platform that attracts him to its central point, "midway," as the later draft puts it. For the young poet, destinations beyond the bridge are "corners," spiritual dead-ends because they are fragmentary, they do not join sadness ("Pierrot") and joy ("Gargantua") into the whole consciousness which is attained midway, high on the bridge of vision.

Crane's visionary walkway was constructed during a foundational phase in the formation of modern-day Cleveland. Though not formally part of the scheme, the Detroit-Superior Bridge was built during the era of the city's Group Plan, 1903-1930, which directed the siting, design and construction of seven important public buildings in the city center.²² The opening paragraph of *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County* provides a vigorous example of the contemporary civic rhetoric:

Linking the east and west sides of Cleveland with a broad ribbon of concrete and steel, the new Detroit-Superior high level viaduct ... stands as a splendid monument to the enterprise and aggressive action of the citizens of Cuyahoga County²³

On a loftier note, the frieze of the Cleveland Public Auditorium, one of the landmark buildings of the Group Plan, bears an inscription attesting to the power of the built structure to represent the ideals of the citizens who constructed it:

A MONUMENT CONCEIVED AS A TRIBUTE TO THE IDEALS OF CLEVELAND ·
BUILDED BY HER CITIZENS AND DEDICATED TO SOCIAL PROGRESS INDUSTRIAL
ACHIEVEMENT AND CIVIC INTEREST

At the time of writing "The Bridge of Estador," Crane's antagonism towards industry left him isolated as citizen (and unrealized as poet), but his statement of intent for *The Bridge*, embracing the

previously rejected “you others” as “ ‘our people’ ”, echoes the energetic, public-spirited idealism of Cleveland’s civic discourse, in particular the Public Auditorium inscription (which he could have read when he attended a performance there by Isadora Duncan in December 1922²⁴):

Very roughly, it concerns a mystical synthesis of “America.” [...] The initial impulses of “our people” will have to be gathered up toward the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is included also our scientific hopes and achievements of the future.²⁵

In a decisive movement beyond his earlier position, Crane endorses his city’s praise of “enterprise” and “industrial achievement”—and then ambitiously extrapolates it to the national level. Instead of dreaming in isolation as he did on the Bridge of Estador, he now intends to raise the American consciousness by writing a work which mirrors in poetry what is achieved in the realm of engineering by the pre-eminent bridge of his city, the Detroit-Superior Bridge: a triumphal consummation of a local bridge-building tradition, which by extension stands as a symbolic consummation of American history.

As the primary source of information about the Detroit-Superior Bridge (and the history of Cleveland’s bridges), *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County* would have been of considerable interest to a poet who had written a poem based on an experience on that bridge. A copy was acquired by the Cleveland Public Library in 1919, and given his appetite for literary and historical research, Crane very probably found and studied the book which shows signs of having influenced the early drafts of *The Bridge*. The phrases “great bridge”²⁶ and “broad ribbon of concrete and steel” are echoed in the third stanza of “Lines Sent to Alfred Stieglitz, July 4, 1923”:

To be, Great Bridge, in vision bound of thee,
So widely straight and turning, ribbon-wound,²⁷

Certain passages in the book suggest a version of industry that would have been amenable to a poet of romantic sensibility striving to assimilate the world of the machine. The description of the bridge as “engineering art,” and the statement “nowhere in America does there exist at the present day any bridge or viaduct that can rival, in artistic design, usefulness and permanency of construction, this massive span,”²⁸ uphold aesthetic virtues as the equal of utilitarian, economic values, while an almost Whitmanian brother-bond is projected in the chapter listing the companies and contractors involved in the building of the bridge: “Many men joined hands in the work of planning and completing the new Detroit-Superior high level bridge.”²⁹ Paradoxically, a strictly technical passage may have lent an erotic dimension to the “rich suggestions ... on the treatment of mechanical manifestations” which Crane found so valuable in Munson’s study of Waldo Frank.³⁰ Munson had cited Dada as a contemporary movement which sought to “relate man positively and spiritually to Machinery as well as to nature” but noted that “up to now, it has refused to channel emotional profundities, to take up love and *desire* and religion into its form” (italics added).³¹ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*’s account of the construction of the bridge’s steel arch provides a ready-made example of how, at the level of language, “mechanical manifestations” might not be inimical to a poetics concerned with fusing a discourse of desire and the body with the discourse of cultural progress and redemption:

the massive arch was erected from each river pier as a cantilever anchored through back stays to the main concrete piers. The erection of each arm was started from ninety foot steel towers

erected just back of the abutment piers, the traveler and its two stiff-legged derricks being sustained by these towers.³²

But most resonantly, perhaps, the book concludes by illustrating the impact of individual vision on communal history. The final chapter, “An Early Clevelander’s Vision which Came True — A Project,” describes how in 1835 Oliver Baldwin, a journalist on *The Cleveland Daily Advertiser*, wrote an editorial envisioning the construction of a “grand and stupendous bridge from the top of the hill in Cleveland to the top of the hill in Ohio City.”³³ According to the editorial, “immortal honour” would be conferred on whoever would build such a bridge. In his own time Baldwin was dismissed as a dreamer, but for the later generation of bridge builders who wrote *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, his lone assertion “it can, must and will be done” had acquired the aspect of prophecy.

Crane, having determined to build his own poetic bridge whose span was to constitute “a mystical synthesis of ‘America,’ ” was initially baffled by the “vague and nebulous”³⁴ subject he had glimpsed but sustained his creative momentum by focussing on his experience of Cleveland’s bridges. The experience of walking across the Detroit-Superior bridge, first gained in 1920 and apparently repeated in early 1923 with an sharpened awareness of its personal significance (judging by the formal, almost ceremonial gesture of “arms that open to project a disk’s resilience”) again stimulated his poetic production, providing the compositional starting point and materials for *The Bridge*.³⁵ But even before announcing the new poem in February, Crane’s interest in his city’s bridges was shaping the conclusion of a poem he had been working on for over a year. Part III of “Faustus and Helen,” on which he was working in early January, alludes to Cleveland and the movable bridges for which it has long been famous in engineering circles.³⁶ The lines “And in other ways than as the wind settles/ On the sixteen thrifty bridges of the city,”³⁷ can be linked to Cleveland by “wind”—like other Great Lake cities, Cleveland is a windy city, with a wind that often blows off the lake—and “sixteen thrifty bridges.” This might seem a high number even for a city the size of Cleveland, but maps show that in 1922 there were twenty-one bridges over the Cuyahoga in the metropolitan area (of which two were “fixed” and nineteen movable), and “sixteen,” rather than having some arcane numerological significance, was probably intended by Crane as a more-or-less accurate count.³⁸ By “thrifty,” in keeping with the evolution which, in *The Bridge*, sees him begin to perceive the material bridge not only as the vantage point for the viewing of beauty, but as an object of contemplation in its own right, he may have intended to distinguish between the low-level movable bridges, which mainly served the railroad lines and were of functional design, from the high-level Detroit-Superior Bridge which although of great economic importance, was also a classically beautiful object.

The Bridge symbolism³⁹ in “Faustus and Helen” Part III remains subordinate to the poem’s ruling motif and it is not until the first multi-stanza drafts of *The Bridge*, written in the spring and summer of 1923, that Crane develops and presents a “Great Bridge” in a dedicated setting. Many features of both the bridge and setting of these drafts can be referred to the Cleveland bridgescape, as it appeared in reality and as mediated by *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*.⁴⁰ “Waters bending” echoes the oxbow “bends” of the Cuyahoga River, “white escarpments” literally suggests the escarpments of the Cuyahoga Valley, and “tethered and welded as the hills of dawn” suggests the completed engineered linking (by the bridge) of the “the hills in Cleveland and Ohio City” originally projected by Baldwin. The concluding quatrain of the drafts’ first stanzas, envisioning the “rear[ing] alignment” of the Bridge’s “arches” and “arms” may have drawn inspiration both from *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*’s description of the steel arch’s construction and from one of the book’s most striking photographs, which shows the steel arch of the Detroit-Superior Bridge nearing completion, the two halves (“each arm”) almost joined and the final girders being positioned.⁴¹ The image of “that

sear arch-head,—/ Expansive center” (“expansive” playing on “span”) precisely fits the completed structure’s “most striking feature[,] the huge steel span in its center,”⁴² and almost beyond doubt links Crane’s text to the Detroit-Superior Bridge. The drafts also refer in some detail to the world of the movable bridges. Today river traffic is low in volume and the bridges are mainly inoperative, but in the 1920s the interaction of shipping and movable bridges on the navigable part of the Cuyahoga would have been a highly distinctive feature of commercial life in the city:

... as we hear

The looms, the wheels, the whistles in concord⁴³

These lines evoke the sound of the movable bridges’ machinery in operation blending with the call-and-response signalling system of whistles by which the shipping pilots and bridge operators communicated.⁴⁴ The operational movements of the main types of movable bridge,—the rolling lift, bascule, and swing bridges—are echoed in “lift” and “swinging,” while “signalling upright” suggests the near-vertical position taken up by the rolling lift and bascule bridges, and the signalling procedure that would accompany it. The “shuttles, silvery with speed,” extend the weaving metaphor suggested by “looms” but also suggest the streamlined shape of the river piers of the swing bridges.

Although the Detroit-Superior Bridge was the principal model for the “Great Bridge” of Crane’s imagination, another bridge in the Flats gave a powerful transhistorical dimension to this nascent symbolic Bridge. In the late nineteenth century the city had built its first viaduct bridge, the Superior Viaduct, across the river, and the fate of this relatively short-lived structure—opened in 1878 and demolished in 1922—allowed Crane to conceive of his own Bridge as an ideal form materially renewed or re-incarnated through history in a cyclical process of construction, destruction and new construction. As has been seen, Crane’s text refers to the Detroit-Superior Bridge, but the description of the Great Bridge as “widely straight and turning” acknowledges two distinctive features of its predecessor, the Superior Viaduct. The viaduct arches on the west bank of the river made a sharp thirty-degree turn to join the river-crossing section, while that section itself, a 332-foot movable steel drawspan, was designed to rotate through ninety degrees on a mid-river pier to allow tall ships to pass on either side. Viewed both with the drawspan in the closed position and in operation, as Crane must have seen it many times, the bridge would have appeared “widely straight and turning.” Both bridges led from Superior Avenue on the east bank of the Cuyahoga, their roadways diverging and crossing the river at points about two hundred yards apart. For a few years after the Detroit-Superior’s completion in 1918 they co-existed side by side but the new bridge’s ample river-clearance meant the slow and cumbersome movable section of the Superior Viaduct caused an unnecessary hindrance to shipping, and watched by a crowd, its river pier and central span were dynamited in 1922,⁴⁵ “crashes manifoldly” reflecting the dramatic moment of destruction. The topography is such that, the old bridge destroyed, “we,”—the spectators of the demolition—can literally “turn” on the spot to apprehend “with keenest transience” its successor, the Detroit-Superior Bridge, whose curved “arch-head” is the newly engineered embodiment of modernity and science: “purest moment and electron.”⁴⁶ The poet sees the Superior Viaduct’s demolition as an architectural demise which is followed by a resurrection: the “manifold” forms of the earlier bridge are “recreate and resonantly risen” in the “upborne ... dome” of the new Detroit-Superior Bridge.

The many and diverse correspondences between the Cleveland bridges and “The Bridge of Estador,” “Faustus and Helen” and “Lines Sent to Alfred Steiglitz” strongly suggest that the bridges modelled the symbolic Bridge as imagined in those texts. Even in the absence of any explicit reference by Crane to the bridges, this thesis must be accorded a high degree of probability since he was living

in Cleveland when these texts were written or begun, and such a modelling process would clearly foreshadow the inspirational use he later made of the Brooklyn Bridge and its environs. That bridge would become the acknowledged model for the Bridge in poems such as “To Brooklyn Bridge,” “Cutty Sark” and “Atlantis,” which raises the question as to when it became a positive factor in Crane’s writing, and also, how the dual influence can be reconciled. In fact Crane appears to have been thinking of Brooklyn Bridge as a model for the emerging Bridge symbol as early as 1923. In a letter of 1924 to Waldo Frank he linked the bridge with “Faustus and Helen,” explaining that “it was in the evening darkness of its shadow that I started the last part of that poem,” although at the time of its writing Crane was almost certainly working from his imaginative projections of the New York bridge rather than from “factual previsions,” or actual previous experience.⁴⁷ Several intertexts noted by Alan Trachtenberg in *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* indicate that Crane had researched Brooklyn Bridge by early 1923. A passage from a speech made at the opening of the bridge includes the phrases “Great Bridge” and “our people,” the first of which is used in the early drafts of *The Bridge*, and the second of which appears, in quotes, in Crane’s first description of *The Bridge* to Munson.⁴⁸ Trachtenberg also quotes a passage from Frank’s novel *The Unwelcome Man* which describes the protagonist being overwhelmed by a portentous vision of Brooklyn Bridge; “The bridge that reeled beyond him seemed an arbiter. ... It must know the city’s soul,”⁴⁹ and subsequently identifies the “capped arbiter” of “Faustus and Helen” Part III as Brooklyn Bridge.⁵⁰ With reference to the Bridge symbol proper, Trachtenberg quotes a passage from Frank’s *Our America*, which Crane read in December 1919,⁵¹ proposing the idea of “the Bridge which all artists seek.”⁵² To adapt the words of Robert L. Perry, then, “there is good reason to believe that Crane’s central symbol, the Bridge itself [and Brooklyn Bridge as a historical example of such], was suggested to him by certain passages in Frank’s [cultural studies and] novels.”⁵³ There is also reason to believe that having conceived an “embryonic Idea” which would be “fleshed” by a great real bridge—possibly the Brooklyn Bridge—but with only textual or pictorial access to that bridge in the East, Crane turned for inspirational physical experience to the bridges of his hometown.

A brief schematic history of the Bridge symbol as imagined as a real bridge, accounting for the influence of both the Cleveland bridges and the Brooklyn Bridge, can now be proposed. Crane conceived the symbol in late 1919 or 1920 after reading *Our America*,⁵⁴ and, struck by Frank’s notion of artists’ universal attraction to an ideal “Bridge,” tested the proposition by walking across Cleveland’s Detroit-Superior Bridge. That experience, suggesting an expansive, epic vision that as yet exceeded his powers to realise, produced only the enigmatic-prophetic “The Bridge of Estador,” but two years later in the final part of his first major poetic statement, “Faustus and Helen,” Crane reprised the Bridge symbol and felt he was ready to compose his own poetic version of “the Bridge which all artists seek.” As he contemplated his new work-to-be *The Bridge* in February 1923 Crane had in mind two sets of bridges: the Cleveland bridges, and the Brooklyn Bridge. At this point he had substantial and immediate experience of the former but not the latter, his knowledge of which was still essentially derived from textual and pictorial sources.⁵⁵ Thus, in the texts stemming from this period it is the intimately known Cleveland context—bridges and setting—which is most recognizable, while Brooklyn Bridge as a referent is mainly inferred intertextually. But although it would be another three years before Crane stated categorically that *The Bridge* “concludes at midnight—at the center of Brooklyn Bridge,”⁵⁶ the balance of derivative emphasis between the two contexts would begin to shift in favor of Brooklyn Bridge shortly after his move to New York in April 1923. Perhaps already regarding the famous Brooklyn Bridge as pre-eminent among American bridges, and himself lauding it as “the most superb piece of construction in the modern world”⁵⁷ a year later, within weeks of his arrival he had discovered that, like the Detroit-Superior Bridge, it could provide a platform for

visionary experience. Munson, with whom Crane stayed during his first two months in New York, remembered how one afternoon his friend's "eyes were popping" as he described "a walk he'd taken over Brooklyn Bridge. He kept ejaculating about the beauty of the bridge and how marvellous this walk had been and how he was going to do it again."⁵⁸ If this sounds like a second "impromptu, aesthetic" outburst following a walk across a bridge, Crane's eye-popping amazement also suggests that it was his first ecstatic experience on Brooklyn Bridge, though clearly he did not intend it to be his last. These walks would soon impact on the drafts he had been developing since the spring: "through blinding cables"⁵⁹ has the feel of an image derived from first-hand contact with the Brooklyn Bridge. But Crane's primary intention, of course (even after naming the Brooklyn Bridge in the text of *The Bridge*), was to create a symbolic Bridge, not to depict any real bridge or bridges, and although the New York bridge would subsequently become the pre-eminent historical model for the Bridge, he did not instantly relinquish the Cleveland bridges, as can be seen from the drafts of July 1923 which synthesize the symbolic Bridge from forms abstracted from both contexts. Although these drafts were finalized in New York, they represent the culmination of the gestative period 1920-1923 and the Cleveland context is still uppermost. The inversion of this relationship and the virtually complete superimposition of the New York context would not be confirmed in the poem's text until the composition of "To Brooklyn Bridge" in 1926. Around this time Brooklyn Bridge becomes recognizable in the imagery of the poem: a draft of "Atlantis" from the same year describes how the "new measures" of the Bridge "tressel [sic] the twin monoliths,"⁶⁰ the images of a trestle and monoliths being clearly drawn from the form of the New York bridge. Yet, despite Crane observing the following year that "'Atlantis' ... may rely too much on a familiarity with the unique architecture of Brooklyn Bridge"⁶¹ and eventually editing out most of the Cleveland imagery, traces of the "veering," "lifting," "swinging" bridge-forms persist in the finished text of the poem.

The early textual history of *The Bridge*, no longer apparent in the final text—like the submerged caissons and masonry beneath the superstructure of the Brooklyn Bridge,—reveals that the poem takes foundations in the engineering achievements of the city where Crane passed from boyhood to manhood. If, as R.W.B. Lewis wrote, Brooklyn Bridge represented for Crane "a kind of promise of possible eventual success for the poetic quest,"⁶² that was because it was material proof of achieved vision. It can also be suggested that for a significant period in the development of the Bridge symbol which is the ultimate aim of *The Bridge*, its hope of eventual success was upheld by the aesthetic, technical and cultural achievement of the Detroit-Superior Bridge, and other of the Cleveland bridges.

¹ Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 227.

² Crane's imagination may have been stirred by proposals for another American bridge—but one that would not be built until after his death. In 1921 Joseph Strauss presented initial plans to the city of San Francisco for a bridge across the Golden Gate strait. The following year a special district to administer the bridge was proposed and in January 1923 an "Association for Bridging the Gate" was formed. When Crane invoked the "Golden Gate" in his "first verse of *The Bridge*" draft of February 1923 (Crane, *Letters*, p. 129), he may have done so in the knowledge that there were plans afoot to build a spectacular bridge in California.

Another real bridge that Crane may allude to is the Bridge of Sighs in Venice, given high place in the Romantic canon by the fourth Canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand ...

George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Lord Byron: The Major Poems*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, (Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 148. The speaker of "To Brooklyn Bridge" follows the rise of the "seagull's wings" to see similarly enchanted "panoramic sleights,"—and an "immaculate sigh of stars" trace the path of the bridge. Hart Crane, *Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, ed. Marc Simon (Liveright, 1986), pp. 43-4. The bold attitude of "I think of cinemas ..." echoes Byron's heroic stance, as does an early draft of *The Bridge*: "And midway on that structure I would stand" (Crane, *Letters*, p. 134). It may also be intertextually significant that in the schematic division of city and country which is one of the oppositions that the symbolic Bridge, in the guise of Brooklyn Bridge, unites, the city (Manhattan) is the place of "each prison crypt of canyoned traffic," (Crane, *Poems*, p. 78) and the country (Pawling, New York) a decaying hotel, "old Mizzentop, palatial white hostelry" (Crane, *Poems*, p. 92).

³ Hart Crane, "Lines Sent To Alfred Stieglitz, July 4, 1923," in *Hart Crane: A Biographical and Critical Study*, ed. Brom Weber (The Bodley Head, 1948), p. 427.

⁴ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County* (Cleveland, 1918), p. 7. The authors also refer to the bridge as the "Detroit-Superior high level viaduct." In 1989 the bridge was renamed the Veterans' Memorial Bridge by the City of Cleveland. For convenience it will be referred to here as the Detroit-Superior Bridge.

⁵ Crane, *Poems*, pp. 174-175.

⁶ R.W.B. Lewis, *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* (Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 22-23.

⁷ Sherman Paul, *Hart's Bridge* (University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 53.

⁸ Crane, *Letters*, p. 327.

⁹ Crane, *Letters*, pp. 123, 124.

¹⁰ Crane, *Letters*, 134.

¹¹ Crane, *Letters*, 134. (Hart Crane Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Quoted with permission.)

¹² Crane, *Letters*, 123.

¹³ In the same metaphoric vein Crane wrote of "an abortion in art" (Crane, *Letters*, 15), of viewing a poem "in the red light of the womb" (88), of the "fleshing of a concept" (240), that a successful poem must "stand[...] up, separate and moving of itself with its own sudden life" (289) or "have its own legs" (329), and, anticipating a period of creativity in Mexico on a Guggenheim fellowship, that "I am too happy at change to a really (for me) creative locality to be anything but pregnant" (459).

¹⁴ The origin and meaning of the name "Estador" have been the subject of speculation (Weber, p. 103, Lewis, p. 22), but, whatever other connotations were intended, it roughly echoes "Detroit-Superior." "Estador" also more closely echoes "El Dorado," the legendary city to which Crane alludes in *The Bridge* (Crane, *Poems*, p. 66),—and the "element" to which the poem refers may be the gold suggested by "dor." In a lineage of imaginative geography Estador is preceded by the orientalized "Arabian" setting of an earlier poem, "The Moth That God Made Blind" (167-169), but the culmination of the fabulous geographies invented or invoked by Crane is Atlantis, the ideal world of legend which sinks below the waves.

¹⁵ Crane, *Letters*, p. 131.

¹⁶ Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (Routledge, 1999), p. 107.

¹⁷ Crane, *Letters*, p. 131.

¹⁸ John Unterecker, *Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1969), p. 191.

¹⁹ "The Bridge of Estador" ll. 1-6, from [COMPLETE POEMS OF HART CRANE](#) by Hart Crane, edited by Marc Simon. Copyright 1933, 1958, 1966 by Liveright Publishing Corporation. Copyright © 1986 by Marc Simon. Used by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation. (This selection may not be reproduced, stored

in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.)

²⁰ See *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, pp. 12-13, 17.

²¹ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 7.

²² See Holly M. Rarick, *Progressive Vision: The Planning of Downtown Cleveland 1903-1930* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1986). This period is fascinatingly synchronous with Crane's short life. It was in 1899, the year of his birth, that Cleveland's Chamber of Commerce officially adopted a resolution appointing a Grouping Plan Committee to study how Cleveland's public buildings might be laid out in the downtown area (Rarick, p. 14), and in 1903 that the Committee unveiled a plan for the construction and siting of seven municipal buildings including the City Hall (1916), the Public Auditorium (1922) and the Public Library (1925). These major additions to the city's fabric and status were the occasion of speeches, press reports and general comment which Crane cannot have failed to notice and absorb as he approached his majority. On June 7 1916, for example, the *Plain Dealer* reported the opening of the Cleveland Museum of Art in "ecstatic language." Carl Wittke, *The First Fifty Years: The Cleveland Museum of Art 1916-1966* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1966), p. 44.

²³ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 7.

²⁴ See William Ganson Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of A City* (World Publishing, 1950), p. 815 and Crane, *Letters*, p. 114-5.

²⁵ Crane, *Letters*, p. 131.

²⁶ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 9.

²⁷ Weber, p. 427. (Hart Crane Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Quoted with permission.)

²⁸ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 37.

³⁰ Crane, *Letters*, p. 132.

³¹ Gorham Munson, *Waldo Frank: A Study*, (Boni and Liveright, 1923), pp. 24-25.

³² *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, pp. 10-11.

³³ *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, pp. 38-40.

³⁴ Crane, *Letters*, p. 124.

³⁵ Thus, it is likely that Crane started writing the final section of *The Bridge* first for pragmatic rather than programmatic reasons: a "mystical synthesis of 'America'" involving "history and fact, location," would inevitably require considerable preliminary research, and so the finale on the Bridge of vision was probably the only part of the poem of which he had sufficient knowledge for immediate composition. Yet it seems that Crane actually *did* attempt to start writing *The Bridge* at the beginning, but was only able to complete a few lines before reaching an impasse. A week before sending "And midway on that structure" to Wilbur Underwood, he sent a four-line stanza, "the first verse of *The Bridge*," to Allen Tate (Crane, *Letters*, p. 129). The stanza projects a pan-American odyssey by road, "from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate," but Crane must have quickly realised that he didn't yet have the materials to make the journey straight through.

³⁶ For an account of Cleveland's movable bridges, see Sarah Ruth Watson and John R. Wolfs, *Bridges of Metropolitan Cleveland* (Cleveland, 1981) pp. 41-54; and Sarah Ruth Watson and John R. Wolfs, "Movable Bridges on the Cuyahoga," *The Gamut*, Spring/ Summer 1981.

³⁷ Crane, *Poems*, p. 31.

³⁸ *Plat Book of the City of Cleveland, Ohio and Suburbs*, (G. M. Hopkins Co. Civil Engineers, 1922).

³⁹ Alan Trachtenberg notes a pervasive Bridge symbolism, and references to Brooklyn Bridge, in "Faustus and Helen" Part III, observing that "in the poem the bridge is the 'Capped arbiter of beauty in this street,' 'the ominous lifted arm/ That lowers down the arc of Helen's brow.' Its 'curve' of 'memory' transcends 'all stubble streets,' " and that "the idea of a bridge is explicit in the closing image ['the height/ The imagination spans beyond despair']." Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol*, Phoenix Edition (University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 144, 145.

⁴⁰ The culmination of Crane's first phase of writing on *The Bridge* was reached in the summer of 1923, when he enclosed two variant drafts of the final section with letters of July 4 and July 21. For the following discussion, see "Lines Sent To Alfred Stieglitz, July 4, 1923," in Weber, pp. 426-8.

⁴¹ "Ends of Steel Arch to be Joined," *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 12.

⁴² *Bridges of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County*, p. 10.

⁴³ Weber, p. 427. (Hart Crane Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Quoted with permission.)

⁴⁴ Sarah Ruth Watson and John R. Wolfs, "Movable Bridges on the Cuyahoga," *The Gamut*, Spring/ Summer 1981.

⁴⁵ *The Encyclopædia of Cleveland History*, ed. David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 945.

⁴⁶ Historical record links the Superior Viaduct not only with transience but with a sense of the past. At the Viaduct's opening ceremonies the Hon. R. C. Parsons compared the new bridge to the most impressive achievements of antiquity: "Who and where are the men who erected the magnificent ruins on the banks of the Nile, whose colossal monuments of engineering skill and power lie scattered along its shores? Where are the men who built the aqueducts of Rome?...as it has been with other nations, so it is likely to be with us. The time may come when in some far-off century the orator or the poet of a yet unborn race will point to the remains of the splendid works of engineering skill scattered all over the American continent, and among them the Cleveland viaduct whose successful completion we this day commemorate, as marks of high civilization and intelligent skill of a simple remembered people..." (*Bridges of Metropolitan Cleveland*, p. 17). In the case of the Superior Viaduct, Parsons' prophesy was fulfilled prematurely, and by the time Crane came to write the early drafts of *The Bridge*, all that remained were the stone arches, "ruins on the banks"—of the Cuyahoga rather than the Nile. Crane's own vision is of a Bridge "posited beyond even that time/ The Pyramids shall falter, slough into sand.---"

⁴⁷ Crane, *Letters*, p. 187. In the same letter Crane told Frank "then we shall take a walk across the bridge to Brooklyn (as well as to Estador for all that!)" which suggests that the latter was familiar with "The Bridge of Estador." Crane may have shown the poem to Frank because he considered its vision relevant to *The Bridge*.

⁴⁸ *Opening Ceremonies of the New York and Brooklyn Bridge* (Brooklyn, 1883), quoted in Trachtenberg, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Waldo Frank, *The Unwelcome Man* (Little, Brown & Company, 1917), quoted in Trachtenberg, p. 141.

⁵⁰ Inasmuch as "capped arbiter" suggests a visual, or architectural, image, it can be referred to both the Detroit-Superior and Brooklyn Bridges: the domed arch of the former resembles a cap, while the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge are topped by capstones.

⁵¹ Crane, *Letters*, p. 28.

⁵² Waldo Frank, *Our America* (Boni and Liveright, 1919), quoted in Trachtenberg, p. 141.

⁵³ Robert L. Perry, *The Shared Vision of Waldo Frank and Hart Crane* (University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 67.

⁵⁴ Although *Our America* may be judged the seminal influence on the Bridge symbol, Crane's interest in the concept of an artistic or poetic Bridge could also have received impetus from other sources, including Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, which describes the poetry of Dante as "a bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and antient world." Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), p. 498. The power of the Bridge to transcend time is a theme evident in the earliest drafts of *The Bridge*, but it seems likely that Crane had read *A Defence of Poetry* even earlier. In the essay Shelley asserts poetry's ability to unite "irreconcilable things," a phrase which appears in inverted form in "The Bridge of Estador": "But some are twisted with the love/ Of things irreconcilable,—" (Shelley, p. 505). For other suggestions on the origin of the Bridge symbol, see Trachtenberg, p. 189, n. 6, and John T. Irwin, "Hart Crane's 'Logic of Metaphor,'" *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. David R. Clark (G. K. Hall and Company, 1982), p. 218.

⁵⁵ Crane lived in New York for a total period of approximately two years between 1916 and 1919, during which he could have viewed or visited its most famous bridge and in August 1919 sent a postcard of Brooklyn Bridge

to Gorham Munson noting his friend's "predilection for bridges." Hart Crane, *The Letters of Hart Crane 1916-1932*, ed. Brom Weber (Hermitage House, 1952), p. 22. However, in the history proposed here this period predates his literary sensitization to the Bridge symbol, and though he was certainly alive to the "beauty" of architecture such as "the new Cusack Bldg. on Fifth Ave. and Broadway" (Crane, *Letters*, p. 20), and New York's "entrancing vistas" (23), there is no evidence to suggest that if he did view or visit Brooklyn Bridge at this time, it made a particularly significant impression.

⁵⁶ Crane, *Letters*, p. 235.

⁵⁷ Crane, *Letters*, p. 190.

⁵⁸ John Unterecker Papers, quoted in Clive Fisher, *Hart Crane: A Life* (Yale University Press, 2002), p. 177.

⁵⁹ Weber, p. 429.

⁶⁰ Weber, p. 438.

⁶¹ Crane, *Letters*, pp. 333-334.

⁶² Lewis, p. 248.

Afterword

Born in small-town Ohio and raised in Cleveland, as a young man Crane gravitated to New York, the city in whose “sea of humanity” he once fancied he was searching for his “lost identity.”¹ In the “chill vastness”² of the brimming seaboard city he could lose, but perhaps also find, himself. New York was a destination holding the promise of self-discovery which Cleveland never could be.

Living, sometimes discontentedly, in Cleveland between 1920 and 1923 Crane played the two cities against each other, usually—though not always—to Cleveland’s disadvantage. If he found fault with Cleveland, he possessed sufficient critical acuity and integrity to see and admit the problem was general rather than particular: confiding to a friend that his present longeurs in the city made him “think of New York” with pleasurable anticipation, he conceded that “the main faults are not of our city, alone. They are of the age.”³

It was only after he moved to New York in the spring of 1923 that Crane was able to give, in some measure, his longtime hometown its due, acknowledging that his “room in Cleveland ... was the center and beginning of all that I am and ever will be.”⁴ Writing the first full drafts of *The Bridge* in his new room in Greenwich Village from where he could walk to the Brooklyn Bridge, and perhaps sensing he was on the way to creating the lasting work on which would rest any reputation he might ever claim as a poet, he was inclined to look back as well as forward. Exalted by his creative response to the most surpassing of New York’s “entrancing vistas,” he knew those heights would never have been reached without the marches which had come before, just as he had early realized a Bridge is unattainable without a preceding Road. Now he could see the positive role of Cleveland in relation to his great endeavor. The beginning in time, certainly, but also in space, the physical dimension so important to *The Bridge*. The room at 1709 East 115th Street—the “sanctum de la tour”⁵ as he called it—the womb at the center, but outside it the blood and bone of the city: Euclid Avenue, the Detroit-Superior Bridge, the Flats, and beyond them the lake, cornfields and rolling hills. Crane’s ambition had drawn him irresistibly to the grandeur and glamor of the national metropolis but as he achieved the first stage of his major work, finally within reach of the powers which had long eluded him, he accorded Cleveland, and Ohio, the full and immovable weight of origin.

¹ Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 9.

² Crane, *Letters*, p. 37.

³ Crane, *Letters*, p. 111.

⁴ Crane, *Letters*, p. 157.

⁵ John Unterecker, *Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1969), “The Cleveland house where Hart Crane grew up,” illustration following p. 48.