

Representation of Modernist Experimentation in Hart Crane's Select Poems

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Abstract

This study examines the role of figurative language as a poetic prototype in the select poems of Hart Crane, with particular focus on White Buildings. It argues that Crane's use of metaphor, symbolism, and imagistic compression functions not merely as ornamentation but as a central mode of meaning-making that articulates his transcendental vision. Through close textual analysis, the paper traces Crane's poetic development from impressionism to a distinctive symbolic idiom that integrates Elizabethan conceits, modernist experimentation, and Romantic idealism. Poems such as “At Melville's Tomb,” “Voyages,” and “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” reveal how figurative language enables Crane to reconcile personal experience with universal themes of time, love, memory, and artistic creation. The study situates Crane within the modernist tradition while highlighting his unique contribution to American poetry through a figurative strategy that seeks harmony and order amid cultural and spiritual fragmentation.

Keywords: Figurative Language, Hart Crane, Modernist Poetry, Symbolism, White Buildings.

As a well-known poet, Hart Crane keeps trying to find the right shape and to crystallise his imaginative idea. The majority of White Buildings consists of his poetry, especially from his second phase. These poems, like those of the first phase, focus on “personal and large-scale spiritual processes and possibilities.” In addition, they symbolise Crane's search for harmony and order in a chaotic world. According to Waldo Frank the first lines of White Buildings sum up Crane's mind during the period under discussion, “As silent as a mirror is believed Realities plunge in silence by...” These lines are, according to Waldo Frank, “a superb expression of chaos, and of the poet's need to integrate this chaos within the active mirror of self. Crane searches for the vision and love in his broken world in poem after poetry. He does this in an attempt to mend the rifts that formerly existed between his divided self and the divided world. Emerson tried to accomplish the same thing in the century before. The fact that the poems in White Buildings were composed in the shadow of The Bridge is their second significant feature. As a result, they foreshadow the epic's themes and approaches.

In terms of style, the second stage carries on Crane's exploration of Elizabethan and contemporary poetic norms. In terms of style, White Buildings' poetry are best analysed in three sections, according to Samuel Hazo. Poems that exhibit a significant Imagist influence

are covered in the first level. The third stage is characterised by a full fusion of the three impulses under the guise of an idiom that is indisputably Crane's own. The well-known Grandmother I poems of this stage are accompanied with contemporary imagery and symbolist gestures of Laforgue, Mallarme, and Rim Baud. The most distinctive quality of this idiom is that it emerges from within and comes to possess a life of its own. To quote R.P. Blackmur,

Crane habitually re-created his words from within, developing meaning to the point of idiom; and that habit is the constant and indubitable sign of talent. The meanings themselves are the idioms and have a turist and life of their own. It ourselves meditating on and idioms-it is only by emulation is only using by these that we can master them and accede to t heir life.

The poem of this stage, include such masterpieces as Praise for an Urn, At Melville's Tomb, Chaplinesque, Repose of Rivers, Passage, Paraphrase, Possessions, Recitative, The Wine Menagerie, For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen and Voyages. This chapter will unfold Crane's poetic voyage from poem to poem to achieve his transcendental vision and language.

Legend unlocks White Buildings. But this poetry is not the same as the Legend that was covered in the previous chapter. Lewis claims that whilst Legend "was not written until the autumn of 1925," Legend was penned in 1919. Because it "is not only a poem of affirmation but a synthesis of some of Crane's beliefs and poetic imperatives," the poem is significant in both form and content. The poem's theme blends Whitman's optimism, Blake's moral vision, and Plato's shadowy world of the "is!" the cave. Plato's vision up in the "mirror" symbol. Blake's moral is • a parent i n Crane's reaction against the bleak piety of Protestantism, which reduced all sexual activity to the sin of lust. Articulating life, the complex relation between the sexual and artistic life_, Crane explores the creative value of love. The real obstacle to creativity is not sex or lust, but "the mildness of despair." The poem also evokes Whitmanian words such as "Souvenir" and "eidolon" to prove Crane's special affinity with his American predecessor, "Twice and Twice (Again the smoking souvenir, Bleeding eidolon!) and yet again. Until the bright logic is won Unhampering as a mirror Is believed."

The poem contains echoes from other poems, reproducing the tender tone of My Grandmother's Love II Letters," the spirit of Faustus and Helen," the mirror symbol of "Recitative," and the allusions to smoking, burning, bleeding etc. of "Possessions." In technique, it follows impressionism. It uses the _multiple images arranged in a thematic progression. Besides imagery, "Legend," as R. W. B. Lewis points out, "exploits the logic of metaphor to suggest the achievement of it, 119 We can see the burning and bleeding in the poem become the very sources of harmony, "Then , drop by caustic drop, a perfect cry Shall string some constant harmony, Relentless caper for all those who step The legend of their youth into the noon."

In "Sunday Morning Apples" symbolism comes to the fore in a decisive manner. The poem, which Crane wrote "out of sheer joy" after visiting the country studio of his painter friend William Sommer to whom, the poem was dedicated. Apart from Sommer, the poem also received is inspiration from P. D. Ouspensky. According to Brom Webber, it is likely that Crane received "the initial impetus" for the third stanza of the poem from Ouspensky's observation "that positivism is limited to an understanding of matter, and cannot penetrate into the mysteries of consciousness, space, death and life. Ouspensky's reference to dog's inability to understand the principle of recurrence finds expression in the poem:

*A boy runs with a dog before the sun, straddling
Spontaneities that form their independent orbits,
Their own perennials of light
In the valley where you live.*

The poem is a tribute not only to Sommer and Ouspensky but also to the trans figurative character of all art." The apples in the poem are art objects. The artist with the help of his art transfigures the reality of apples. He continues this act of transformation till he seizes the inner reality of the apples:

*I have seen the apples there that toss you secrets,
 Beloved apples of seasonable madness
 That feed your inquiries with aerial wine.
 Put them again beside a pitcher with a knife,
 And poise them full and ready for explosion
 The apples,
 Bill, the apples.*

In the second phase Crane's eclectic genius fuses his imagism and symbolism with Elizabethan conceits. The most representative poems of this phase are "Black Tambourine" and "Stark career, Major." "Black Tambourine," a landmark in Crane's is "most overtly socially minded" of his lyrics. 25 It is a poem about the American Negro in the modern world. Although the poem is inspired by Anderson, it, in fact, embodies Crane's own "experience of actual life and his experience of poetry, both the reading and the writing of it, 1126 Naturally 'Black Tambourine' is not only the poem of the Blackman's mid-kingdom but also of the American poet and the destiny of ail poets.

*The interest of a black man in a cellar
 Mark tardy judgement on the world's closed door.
 Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,
 And a roach spans a crevice in the floor.
 Esop, driven to pondering, found
 Heaven with the toise and the hare;
 For brush and sow ear top his grave
 And mingling incantations on the air.
 The black man, forlorn in the cellar,
 Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies,
 Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,
 And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.*

Crane establishes the connection between the negro and the poet via the technique of indirection learned through Eliot and Whitman. This technique was also used by Emerson. He quietly juxtaposes the black man to the archetypal poet and fabulist Aesop. The blackman's cellar is conjoined with the poet's grave. From the verbal point of view, the poem displays Crane's use of the "compressed line" especially in "Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door." The poem as a whole heralds Crane's arrival at a resolute diction with right words forming themselves into the proper pattern at the proper moment. 'It is marked by "flexibility of diction and image, the functional reversals and substitutions within the traditionally regular verses of the poem, and the abrupt shifts of focus from stanza to stanza without transitional aids. 1128 Now he goes beyond impressionism. However, Crane's achievement of a resolute diction does not mean that Crane has freed himself from the influences of other poets. He still mimics them. In this poem itself he employs a semi Marlovian rhetoric to a modern subject.

"Stark Tambourine." Major" is Thematically not its as important as "Black importance lies in its tantalizingly ambiguous title. Although in a letter to Munson Crane described the title as "the right thing"- he could not justify its meanings. Crane, as Blackmur thought, shows a propensity to create his words from within. "Stark. Major" is one of the best examples of this propensity. But even a prolonged meditation and accession to their life, on the guide lines suggested by Blackmur, will hardly enable us to arrive at any meaning at all. However, the poem itself is free from ambiguity. The protagonist of the poem is a lover, who visualizes the death of the lover, although figuratively, after the child-birth, Brom Weber suggests that "the birth of a child (like the birth of day) inevitably separates the two lovers. 1129 Expressing the agony of "the time of sundering," the poet concludes:

*Walk now, and note the lover's death.
Henceforth her memory is more
Than yours, in cries, in ecstasies
You cannot ever reach to share.*

Brom Weber finds this psycho-analytical poem technically “adequate” but emotionally a failure. Few images, except for “broken. eyes” and “mound of undelivered life, “approach a direct expression of feeling; the obliquity of negates what effect these few have.”

But it isn't until the third stage of Crane's creative development that his lyrical talent fully blossoms. He finds a unique voice that surpasses that of his forebears in his transcendental vision. A Crane's style and form are currently created by fusing the rhetoric of Marlowe, the symbolic metaphors of Verlaine or Laforgue, the blank verse and the conceits of the great Elizabethans, etc. In addition, his vision takes on a distinct form. “Praise for an Urn,” which is dedicated to a Norwegian lithographer that Crane met through William Sommer while he was living in Cleveland in the early 1920s, marks the beginning of this era. December 1921 saw Nelson's death. This elegy was composed by Crane in the spring of 1922.

The poem's two main themes are the inviolability of some human relationships and the predicament of artists in American culture. Regarding human relations, Crane believes that some relationships are unbreakable in spite of all unfavourable conditions. In this sense, the poem according to R. W. B. Lewis. The talented poet-painter, Des Les, or Crane, was one of the numerous artists who were outraged by the folly of American society. In Nelson, Crane recognised a reflection of his own artistic state. With Crane, that was standard procedure.

Despite being an elegy in the traditional sense, “Praise for an Urn” has a lot of unique elements. Crane claims that the poem exhibits developing phrasing abilities as well as a consistent, suitably undramatic cadence that is never boring. Undertones:

*'It was a kind and northern face
That mingled in such exile guise
The everlasting eyes of Pierrot
And, of Gargantua, the laughter.*

*His thoughts, delivered to me
From the white coverlet and pillow,
I see now, were inheritances
And such assessments of the soul*

From the technical point of view, the poem makes a significant of contrasts. For example there is the contrast of I Pierrot and Gargantua, the two archetypal figures of contrasting nature. Brom Weber is critical of such images as “delicate riders ---- slant moon on the slanting hill and the Pierrot Gargantua” unity, for they lessen the emotional impact of the poem. However, he acknowledges the brilliant conclusion of the poem:

*Scatter• these well-meant idioms
Into the smoky spring that fills
The suburbs, where they will be lost.
They are no trophies of the sun.*

Another elegy is At Melville's Tomb. It is excellent in both form and content. Since the poem is the pinnacle of Crane's “condensed metaphorical hobbit,” it is essential to his visionary consciousness. Additionally, it represents the extent of Crane's imaginative vision during his lyric phase, particularly in the third stanza. The technical details of the poem and Crane's justification for his theory of metaphor, as stated to Harriet Monroe, do not need to be discussed here. In

our third chapter, we have already discussed the technological component in some detail. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, for its sea imagery, intriguing prosody, metrical changes, and the deft use of alliterative and tonal effects to encapsulate the poem's content. Melville's contribution to Crane's imaginative explorations of historical America and to the development of his final vision of the loving transformation of the real world is our primary area of focus.

The poem was written following Crane's visionary experience in the dentist's chair in January or February of 1922, which makes it Whitmanian as well. Whitman experienced the same thing one morning in the early 1850s. The *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855, quickly resulted from this experience. Crane's letter to Munson in June of that year, or 1922, attests to the fact that he wrote "Faustus and Helen" following that incident.

"Did I tell you of that thrilling experience this last winter in the dentist's chair when under the influence of aether and amnesia my mind spiralled to a kind of seventh heaven of consciousness and egoistic dance among the seven spheres and something like an objective voice kept saying to me 'You have the higher consciousness - you have the higher consciousness. This is something very few have. This is what is called genius? A happiness, ecstatic such as I have known only twice in 'inspirations' came over me. I felt the two worlds. And at once. As the bore went into my tooth, I was able to follow its every revolution as detached as a spectator at a funeral. eternity. I tell O Gorham, I have known moments in you this as one who is a brother Today, I have made good start on the first part of Faustus and Helen.

In addition to releasing Crane from the oppression of the real world, the mystic experience also released his style from the artistic servitude of Laforgue and T.S. Eliot. He later changed his loyalty to William Blake, who gave him poetry and a visionary imagination that simultaneously observed and penetrated the immediate and visible world. Crane used metaphorical means to move the protagonist from this mundane world to a world of unadulterated beauty. Crane identified four phases in the process of moving from the real to the ideal in a letter to Munson: "Meditation," "Evocation," "Love," and "Beauty".⁶⁴ The eclectic character of the poem is evident from the epigraph of the poem as well. The epigraph is taken from a passage of dialogue in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. It includes a fusion of Hebraism and Hellenism, the two most fundamental cultural forces of Western civilization.

"For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen, is a poem in three parts-composed separately, before and finding submitted its present for form publication in White Buildings. Part I of the poem begins with a description of human mind reduced to the average in the dimensional world. However the poet by replacing the image of "smuty wings" by "sparrow wings" suggests that mind, if it return to itself, is capable of moving to the higher worlds. The poet finds himself "lost yet poised in traffic. He sees the eye of Helen in a girl seated in a street car. Now he is lost in the thought of Helen. Part I ends with the poet's promise of loyalty to beauty. In the second and central part of the poem, the protagonist confronts the spirit of Helen in the form a penthouse night club of a metropolitan hotel in an atmosphere of the Dionysian revelry. The poet describes the scene in jazz rhythms. As the poet sought the spirit of beauty (Helen) to save him from the "staked portions of the day" in part I, and from "metallic paradises in Part II, in Part III, he wants that the spirit of beauty should save him from devastation wrought by World War I; which for Crane was the modern counterpart of the battle of Troy; Speaking as "everyman" haunted by the presence of death_, the poet seeks the regenerative catharsis of beauty even in the midst of the destructive fur y of the War. In the end Crane the poet (Faustus) triumphs over death and time through beauty and, knowledge, the way suggested by the epigraph prefixed to the poem. Naturally the poet suggests that the true lover of Helen cannot be defeated :

*Laugh out the meager penance of their days
 Who dare not share with us the breath released,
 The substance drilled and spent beyond repair
 For Golden, or the shadow of gold hair.*

Faustus is able to overcome time, battle, and other challenges after being redeemed by Helen. The poem's lesson is that beauty has the power to rejuvenate people and enable them to rise above the "dimensional" reality. As a result, Crane makes the customary argument for a union between Helen (beauty or the ideal beauty) and Faustus (the poetic and imaginative man as well as the common man). Man would only be able to protect himself from the perils of the human condition, to which he is doomed, through such a marriage.

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

"Voyages", Crane's final poem of the second phase, is, according to R.W.B. Lewis, "the only truly moving and beautiful poetry of male homo sexual love in English. The poem offers us an all-inclusive poetic vision of human life viewed under the aspect of eternity and illuminated by the language of poetry. It's intriguing that the poem was influenced by obscure figures rather than well-known ones, save from Melville. One of these was a handsome young man who was typically classified as a Northern European seafarer. Crane had a romantic relationship with this man. Samuel Greenberg was another. However, the impact of his homosexual relationships on the poem's concept and imagery is not the main topic of our conversation. Our goal is to examine the thematic and technical merits that contribute to these six accomplishments, which together include one-third of the most representative phase of Crane's poetry evolution. The main theme is musically presented in a well-thought-out manner in each of the six sections. In Horton's words, "Crane appears to have built up his poems in blocks of language which were cemented into coherent aesthetic form by the ductile stuff of complex associations, metaphors, sound, color and so forth."

The basic theme of "Voyages" grows from the concept of poet as Voyager. The sea upon which he voyages is the symbol of time, dissolution, flux, and nature." Structurally "Voyages I" is a 'poster designed to warn the reader of the treachery of the sea which symbolizes time. "Voyages II" deals with the terror, power and seeming mastery of the sea." "Voyages III" marks the fulfilment of the poet's desire. "Voyages IV" continues the theme of fulfilment. "Voyages V" embodies the interruption in the rapture of the fulfilment by the demands of time as symbolized by the moon. "Voyages VI" sums up the two dominant themes of the five preceding poems; time and dissolution, and the fulfilment through love.

The first poem in this sequence "introduced the conception of the Sea which Crane found in Melville," according to Robert Combs. It provides us with two very different ideas about the sea: the sea as the source of compelling beauty and the sea as the emblem of death, disaster, and destruction. Crane opens the poem by describing some lads (referred to as "Bright striped urchins") playing on a beach. The poet warns them against going too far. The sea is then referred to as a woman for the first time in the poem and the sequence after Crane quickly turns the urchins into ships that are warned to go. But according to the poet, the "sea" is likewise unkind to trespassers:

*-----but there is a line You must not cross nor even trust beyond it
 Spry cordage of your huddles to caresses Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast. The bottom of the sea is cruel.*

In "Voyages II" Crane crosses the line that he has warned the children and his "more childlike self" never to cross, Yvor Winters regarded this poem as "one of the most powerful and one of the

most nearly perfect poems of the past two hundred years. The notion of quest, which is also central to *The Bridge*, is revealed in this section. As a representation of time and change, the protagonist faces the sea. In addition, he views it as a challenge to the traveller. From a metaphysical perspective, eternity is also contrasted with the sea as a process of flux. But it continues to be personified as a woman. In “Voyages III,” the poet speaks to the beloved and admits that love and the sea of time are blood. In the same spirit that he admits his desire for love, he accepts the sea of time. He thinks that love will push him back against the waves of change and disintegration.

“Voyages IV” carries on the theme of love-based fulfilment. He likens love to a rainbow that can fill in the holes left by death. He ultimately acknowledges that in order for the beauty of love to be recognised, it must become and stay embodied. In “Voyages V,” Crane describes the moon’s symbolic representation of time’s demands. His attempt to make love and time work together is doomed to fail.

Two major themes are combined in *Voyages VI*: The first highlights death’s inevitable nature, while the second highlights life’s contradictory demands for fulfilment and love. The poem then turns into a meditation on the nature of creation, revealing its secret over time. The poem ends with a foretelling of future events:

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

In conclusion, *White Buildings*, which was released in 1926, is a collection of poems written over a number of years. It’s significant to note that Crane was also giving *The Bridge* a clear shape at this time. For this reason, he used the majority of *White Buildings*’ poems as homework for his epic. This claim, however, should not be interpreted as implying that *White Buildings*’ poetry has merely historical significance. Many of them are, in fact, outstanding works of art, such as “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” “Voyages,” “The Wine Menagerie,” “At Melville’s Tomb,” “Praise for an Urn,” and “Chaplinesque.” However, when viewed in light of *The Bridge*’s composition, their inherent value is further increased.

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