

ENGL 310 Modern Poetry

March 9, 2007

Discussion Section: Hart Crane

Hart Crane's *The Bridge*

Hart Crane, Letter to Yvor Winters, November 15, 1926:

I must thank you for the most intimate sort of critical sympathy—not only with my work, but my aims—that I've about ever been given. I am convinced now that telepathy is constantly at work, for have, confess it now, been so impressed by certain kinship in certain stray poems have seen of yours at wide intervals—that have thought at times, when pausing over certain lines of my own,—“well, Winters, think, would like this line”. But one scarcely dares expect (any more) such explicitness as yours in locating and justifying that code of reference, that metaphysical common denominator upon which our composite values seem to rest. We may differ in many a detail, but I'm amazed at our essential sympathy.

Perhaps any modern equivalent of the old epic form should be called by some other name, for certainly, as see it, the old definition cannot cover the kind of poem am trying to write except on certain fundamental points. At least both are concerned with material which can be called mythical.

There are certainly basically mythical factors in our Western world which literally cry for embodiment. Oddly, as see it, they cannot be presented completely (any one of them) in isolated order, but in order to appear in their true, luminous reality must be presented in chronological and organic order, out of which you get kind of bridge, the quest of which bridge is—nothing less ambitious than the annihilation of time and space, the prime myth of the modern world.

One can go only so far with logic, then willfully dream and play—and pray for the fusion.— *When* one's work suddenly stands up, separate and moving of itself with its own sudden life, as it must; quite separate from one's own personality.¹

Yvor Winters, "The Progress of Hart Crane" (on *The Bridge*):

The flaws in Mr. Crane's genius are, believe, so great as to partake, if they persist, almost of the nature of public catastrophe.²

¹ *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 495–497.

² Quoted in Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton

Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate* (on "Letter to Harriet Monroe"):

Crane imagines the act of reading modern poem—when it is successful, when the reader and poet really "spark" (slang word Crane used)—as tryst. Reading is like cruising; it calls for shared recognitions; it communicates pleasure and pain. Even the arbitrariness of the union between modern poet and reader, the necessary impersonality of their bond, becomes the ground of profoundly personal relation, communication that exceeds the demands and conventions of civil reference.³

U.P., 1993), 175.

³ Hammer, 160.