Bridging the Waste Lane: Hart Crane and T. S. Eliot

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed by me and is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in this thesis. All references and verbatim extracts have been quoted, and all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged.

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Abstract

Hart Crane defined his poem, *The Bridge*, as a 'positive' response to the 'pessimism' of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The contrastive relationship between the poems has long been acknowledged by critics. Langdon Hammer argues, for instance, that Crane's 'modernism' refutes the representation of early twentieth-century society as 'in decline or decay' by showing it to be 'in the process of ascent or becoming' instead. However, a comparative study of *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land* remains to be written. My thesis makes a contribution by supplying that study. Chiefly from Crane's point of view as Eliot's answerer, I examine the stylistic and thematic interface of these interwar magna opera, describing how *The Bridge* affirms experiences of ecstasy and beauty with respect to what Crane termed *The Waste Land*'s 'damned deadness'.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preamble

This thesis draws on creative and scholarly investigation to develop an understanding of the relationship between optimism and pessimism in my own work and two famous Anglo-American poems from the early twentieth century, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (1930). In the creative component (which can be found as an appendix to this document), I explore optimism and pessimism via an adaptation of the *Aeneid* (29-19 BCE) in the form of a fragmentary epic which mixes Greco-Roman legend with autobiographical elements. Titled *Aeneas*, the project is organized like Virgil's poem, comprising twelve 'Books', each of which is split into five sections. *Aeneas* also has two vocal channels: the first consists of the voices of characters such as Aeneas, Dido, Turnus, Virgil, Vulcan and so on (only twice do I deviate from this convention by writing *about* Aeneas in Books 4 and 6). Singly indented, the second channel is for poems which relate thematically to the section in which they are included, though these do not come from the mouths of Virgilian figures.

I have written my poetry purposefully under the influence, as it were, of Crane's optimistic poetics. Crane privately compared *The Bridge* to the *Aeneid* on more than one occasion, and the connection has been analysed by critics before.[1] While I do not probe this nexus critically, it forms one of the background links between my creative aspirations and those of Crane's with respect to his 'very long poem'.[2] In the foreground, some of the ideas which I identify as making up the core of Crane's optimism are investigated in prose and tried out in the practical component. My poem, like *The Bridge,* tries to represent a view that faith in the universe as good is not misplaced. The focus of my research is to advance knowledge about poetic practice which is optimistic, tending toward belief in best case scenarios. My hope is that this study will lead to new knowledge in both the academic field of Anglo-American modernism, while also having operational significance for poetry.

[1] See, for example, R. W. B. Lewis' *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967); or, for a more recent take, William Logan's article, 'On Reviewing Hart Crane' in which he claims the poem Crane 'wanted to write was the Aeneid' before pronouncing that '[s]ome ambitions are disastrous' (*Poetry* 193, no. 1 (October 2008): 58).
[2] Hart Crane, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 491-492. Hereafter abbreviated to *CPSL* and incorporated into the main body of the text.

I owe a great debt to the assiduous efforts of a dozen or so critics who have looked at the Crane-Eliot relationship in the last three decades. Langdon Hammer's eloquent 1993 book on the divergent modernisms of Crane and Eliot-allied Allen Tate is a cornerstone.[3] In the realm of queer theory, Christopher Nealon and Michael Snediker have both made arguments about Crane substantiated by close-reading comparisons of his work with excerpts from Eliot's early corpus.[4] More recently, Niall Munro's 2015 *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic* addresses various manifestations of Crane's 'mysticism', which, according to Munro, empowered Crane 'to go beyond' Eliot.[5] Brain Reed has also discussed some differences between the dictional styles and perspectives in *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*, arguing that when Eliot adopts a point of view which is 'privileged' (transcending historical rough and tumble), his aim is to show up the 'futility and fatuousness of human endeavor'. When Crane adopts an analogous point of view in *The Bridge*, his intention is to 'escape[] history altogether'.[6]

However, there are few sustained, comparative examinations of *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*. To my knowledge, the only examples are two chapters—Harvey Gross's mid-1960s prosodic analysis of the poems and David Bromwich's 'T. S. Eliot and Hart Crane', published in *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (2001)—and two articles by Donald Pease and Susan Schultz, both written some time ago in the 1980s.[7] Despite Crane-orientated scholars treating the Crane-Eliot nexus as important, notorious, teeming with implications, no monograph exists which takes as its focus the relationship between the interwar *magna opera* of Crane and Eliot. I intend this thesis to be the basis for such a monograph. Using Cranean language, one of the general questions I ask is: How does *The Bridge* affirm experiences of 'ecstasy and beauty' in response to *The Waste Land*'s 'damned deadness'?[8] The originality of my research will result less from finding new things to say about *The Bridge* or *The Waste*

[3] Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane & Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[4] See Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall London* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Michael Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
[5] Niall Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 136.
[6] Brain Reed, *Hart Crane: After His Lights* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2006), 161.
[7] See Donald Pease, 'Blake, Crane, Whitman, and Modernism: A Poetics of Pure Possibility', *PMLA* 96, no. 1 (January 1981): 64-85; and Susan Schultz, 'The Success of Failure: Hart Crane's Revisions of Whitman and Eliot in "The Bridge"', *South Atlantic Review* 54, no. 1 (1989): 55-70.
[8] These phrases will be investigated later in the introduction. They come from Crane's letters written about *The Waste Land* immediately after its publication in the United States (*CPSL*, 310; 298).

Land, and more from the conclusions I draw based on back-and-forth readings of the two texts. In rubbing these monumental long poems together, and in rubbing certain well-known theories of their creators together, I hope sparks not seen before will fly.

Crane's optimism

'What do you think of Eliot's *The Wastelands*?', 23-year-old Crane asked friend and literary critic, Gorham Munson, weeks after Eliot's long poem appeared in the United States. Crane was living with his mother at the time in Ohio, not far from his birthplace where he is remembered today by a small cenotaph bearing the inscription, 'LOST AT SEA'. In the letter, Crane goes on to give his own take on Eliot's poem: 'I was rather disappointed. It was good, of course, but so damned dead. Neither does it, in my opinion, add anything important to Eliot's achievement' (*CPSL*, 298).[9] Based on the letters that have come down to us, this judgement—that Eliot used his virtuosity to create deadness—did not change much over the course of Crane's life. The habitual position the younger poet adopted could be summarized as follows: Eliot realized a consummate despair in the early 1920s and Crane wished to repurpose the power of that consummate despair so as to prove it is always viable to realise joy and see the world as beautiful.[10]

In my introduction, I will flesh out a definition of Crane's optimism contra Eliot. Though Crane does not, in any of his letters written in the wake of *The Waste Land* that I know of, describe his poetic intentions as 'optimistic' with respect to Eliot's 'pessimism'—preferring the word 'positive' perhaps to avoid the oversimplification of a named optimism-pessimism binary—the viewpoint is nonetheless strongly implied.[11] Furthermore, by calling Crane an

[9] In his correspondence, from the end of World War I until his death by suicide in April 1932, Crane mentions Eliot approximately forty times, mostly in private letters to friends and acquaintances; once in a public rejoinder to Harriet Monroe published in the October 1926 issue of *Poetry* magazine. Of these mentions, roughly one third are neutral and cursory. The largest grouping is negative, ranging from comments which coolly create space between the poets to snappish denunciations. Something like a fourth are favourable, though tellingly most of Crane's friendly remarks pre-date *The Waste Land*. My figures are based on Crane's letters available in *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, enlighteningly edited by Hammer. To enlarge my scope, I could consult archives of Crane's papers at Yale University, Columbia University and Kent State University as part of post-doctoral research.

[10] Crane's stance, however, appears to escape neat classification under Bloom's 'revisionary' rubrics in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). The reason is because Crane's intentions regarding Eliot seem to involve *both* a corrective 'clinamen' or swerving—Eliot's 'achievements' will serve as Crane's starting point—*and* the desire to antithetically complete, a strategy labelled 'tessera' by Bloom (*The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14).

[11] Crane famously wrote in a letter dated 19 January 1923, that one of his pre-*The Bridge* poems had been 'designed to erect an almost antithetical spiritual attitude to the pessimism of *The Waste Land*'. The attitude is

optimist, I am following in the footsteps of Snediker who has written persuasively about Crane's work as 'a recuperation of optimism'.[12] Yet Snediker is at pains to distinguish Crane's outlook from the optimism Leibniz promulgated in *Theodicy* (1710), which might be summarised as follows: Our world is the best of all possible worlds because God exists, is perfect, and therefore only brings into being what is optimal.[13] Snediker dubs this brand of optimism 'chronic' and 'imperialising' as it 'converts all crises (past, present, future) into manifestations of the good'.[14] On the other hand, there is 'queer optimism', which Snediker finds in Crane's poetry, and which is 'non-Leibnizian in its resistance to faith at the expense of thinking'.[15] Taking a different position, I hope to demonstrate *The Bridge's* hopefulness is much closer to Leibniz than Snediker allows.

In her 1989 article, 'The Success of Failure: Hart Crane's Revisions of Whitman and Eliot in "The Bridge"', Schultz holds that Crane reaffirms Whitman's upbeat 'vision' of America by 'testing' it against both 'contemporary reality' and Eliot's 'depressing gravity'.[16] Though the article looks at Crane's portrayals of 'Walt' in *The Bridge*, and proves the importance of the connection between the poets, Schultz does not define the Whitman-derived optimism she claims Crane promoted. To elucidate matters more, we might turn to Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871). Crane lauded this text more than once while composing *The Bridge*.[17] In 1926, he wrote to Yvor Winters:

> The "new Metaphysics" that Whitman proclaimed in *Democratic Vistas* is evident here and there in America today. I feel it in your work and think I can sense it in some of my own work. (Probably Whitman wouldn't recognize it in either of us, but no matter.) That *sine qua non* evidently has to be fought for and defended. I'm doing my best about it here and now, fighting off miasmas, bugs, hay fever, bats and tropical sqeks and birds—toward *The Bridge* a very long poem for these days, extending from Columbus to Brooklyn Bridge and Atlantis. It is three-fourths done, and I may have to

'based on personal experience (whether my poems prove it or not) that ecstasy and beauty are as possible to the active imagination now as ever. (What did Blake have from "the outside" to excite him?)'. The parenthetical question implies Crane was determined, at this point in his career, not to view historical circumstances—'the outside'—as a barrier to happiness. His poetry aimed 'at a synthetic statement of this fact' (*CPSL*, 310).

[12] Snediker, *Queer Optimism*, 48.

[13] For a thorough exposition of Leibniz's optimism see Lloyd Strickland's very readable *Leibniz Reinterpreted* (London: Continuum, 2006).

[14] Snediker, *Queer Optimism*, 27.

[15] Ibid, 29.

[16] Schultz, 'The Success of Failure', 67.

[17] For example, in July 1930, Crane wrote to his long-time friend and supporter, Allen Tate, defending Whitman's 'positive universal tendencies'. Crane also accused Tate of having never read *Democratic Vistas* properly, which 'sharply decried the materialism, industrialism, etc. of which you [Tate] name him the guilty and hysterical spokesman' (*CPSL*, 647).

> flee the torments (now settled in my nerves) to New Orleans soon to finish it. It will be a book by itself. And in it I shall incidentally try to answer all my friends who have for three years, now, sat down and complacently joined the monotonous choruses of *The Waste Land*. (*CPSL*, 491-492)

In fewer words then, Crane intended to foster Whitman's 'new Metaphysics' by writing *The Bridge*, while providing an energetic response to *The Waste Land*. He wanted to remain on his feet—fighting and defending certain ideas articulated by his nineteenth-century forebear, ideas without which America would cease to be what it essentially is—rather than smugly join the unchanging, dreary voices of Eliot's poem on the ground, so to speak.

In the first edition of *Democratic Vistas*, 'new Metaphysics' does not appear, only 'New World metaphysics'.[18] In the 1881 edition, however, Whitman inserted a parenthesis at the beginning of the paragraph prior to the one in which 'New World metaphysics' is mentioned: 'the reader of my speculations will miss their principle stress unless he allows for the point that a new Literature, perhaps a *new Metaphysics*, certainly a new Poetry, are to be, in my opinion, the only sure and worthy supports and expressions of the American Democracy [my italics]'.

Based on the argument which immediately follows the parenthesis, we might say that Whitman's 'new Metaphysics' is made up of roughly three beliefs. The first is that one's perspective must be expansive, aiming at totality. What does this mean for poetry? Whitman contrasts his vision for 'the prophetic literature of These States' with a perspective apparently Old World, in this case specifically concerning the depiction of 'Nature': 'I do not mean the smooth walks, trimm'd hedges, poseys and nightingales of the English poets, but the whole Orb, with its geological history, the Kosmos, carrying fire and snow, that rolls through the illimitable areas […]'.[19] Nothing, that is, should fall outside the scope of the poet's gaze.

The second belief involves the construal of the material world as leading to humanity's 'destination beyond the ostensible, the mortal' in the spiritual world. Additionally, Whitman claims 'Idealism' might be the best 'course of inquiry' for 'our New World metaphysics'.

[18] Because of the irregularity of capitalisation in *Democratic Vistas*, I will use 'New Metaphysics' hereafter when referring to both 'new Metaphysics' and 'New World metaphysics' since Whitman's text gives little indication these terms are distinct.
[19] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas: The Original Edition in Facsimile*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2010), 64.

Again, the notion is brought to bear on literature: Poets/writers would do well to bring the 'elevating and etherealizing ideas of the Unknown and of Unreality […] forward with authority' and 'confront the growing excess and arrogance of Realism'. The idealistic approach even has the power, Whitman suggests, to dissolve the physical world. Adopt a spiritual point of view, and as 'palpable' as the parade of merely physical things may seem, it will evaporate—'fall apart and vanish'.[20] Whitman's understanding of idealism was likely influenced by Hegel and other German idealists such as Kant, Fichte and Schelling.[21] Around the time of the composition of *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman wrote notes for a series of (never delivered) lectures on these philosophers. In Whitman's view, 'Idealism underlies' Hegelianism, and Hegel's 'doctrine' could be summed up as 'that which considers the whole concrete show of things, the world, man himself, either individually or aggregated in History, as resting on a spiritual, invisible basis, continually shifting, yet the real substance, and the only immutable one'.[22] This is mainstream idealism: the understanding that something abstract or mental (for example, the mind) is ground of all.

In due course everything in our divinely-steered 'Kosmos' will turn out well—summarises Whitman's third belief. In a lengthy footnote attached to the first edition paragraph about his New Metaphysics, Whitman asserts more generally that the 'altitude' of poetry is 'the consciousness of mystery, the recognition of the future, of the unknown, of Deity, over and under all, and of the divine purpose'.[23] He follows this sentence with the declaration that 'little or nothing can be absolutely known' except 'one permanency', which is 'that Time and Space, in the will of God, furnish successive chains, completions of material births and beginnings, solve all discrepancies, fears and doubts, and eventually fulfill happiness'.[24] Little or nothing can be known except that God knows best—might be another way of putting it. Since metaphysics, according to Whitman, has always involved the contemplation of the unknown, the existence of nonexistence of God and so on, what is *new* about his stance is the

[20] Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 65-66.
[21] See Robert P. Falk, 'Walt Whitman and German Thought', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40, no. 3 (July 1941): 315-330 and Cody Marrs, 'Whitman's Latencies: Hegel and the Politics of Time in Leaves of Grass', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 47-72.

[22] Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts: Volume VI: Notes and Indexes*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 2016; 2010.
[23] In this footnote, Whitman also mentions 'Leibnizt [sic]' as an example of someone who has made an 'invaluable contribution' to metaphysical-religious literature and poetry, which celebrates 'the central Divine Idea of All' (*Democratic Vistas*, 65).
[24] Ibid, 65.

determination to include everything; his encompassing—or, to use a political term, democratic—attitude. We might also label this monism, which roughly means, in the context of optimism: not one thing will miss out on joy.

As I hope to show, Crane's poetry is based on these beliefs, giving rise to a monistic, idealistic and theistic optimism.[25] For Crane, Eliot's *The Waste Land* likely represented Whitman turned on his head. Through the younger poet's eyes, *The Waste Land* was discriminating rather than inclusive (Eliot's poem does not advance the notion of monism, especially not upbeat monism), did not portray the immaterial as ultimate (eschewing an idealistic worldview), and broadcast doubt about the integrity of the 'Kosmos' (Eliot's text declines to communicate an overtly hopeful theism).

Around the same time Crane penned his letter to Winters, Eliot wrote a review of Emory Holloway's *Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative*, which was published in December 1926. In the review, Eliot argues Whitman's poetry is like Tennyson's to the extent that both poets possessed the 'faculty ... of transmuting the real into the ideal'.[26] Eliot ascribes this capability to a fundamental 'satisfaction' with one's historical context: 'essentially he [Whitman] was satisfied—too satisfied—with things as they are'. Such a 'satisfaction' is then 'made', in both Whitman and Tennyson's poetry, 'almost magnificent':

> Whitman succeeds in making America as it was, just as Tennyson made England as it was, into something grand and significant. You cannot quite say that either was deceived, and you cannot at all say that either was insincere, or the victim of popular cant. They had the faculty—Whitman perhaps more prodigiously—of transmuting the real into the ideal. Whitman had the ordinary desires of the flesh; for him there was no chasm between the real and the ideal, such as opened before the horrified eyes of Baudelaire. But this, and the "frankness" about sex for which he is either extolled or mildly reproved, did not spring from any particular honesty or clearness of vision: it sprang from what may be called either "idealization" or a faculty for make-believe, according as we are disposed.

[25] Since I can find little evidence Crane cared about distinctions between monistic outlooks, or brands of idealism or theism, I am using these terms broadly and sticking to their non-specialist, mainstream dictionary definitions. Monism usually means any theory that assumes a single ultimate principle, being, force, etc., rather than more than one. Idealism's common definition is: any of various views according to which reality is ultimately in some sense mental or, more generally, any view opposed to some form of realism or materialism (I delve more into idealism later in the introduction when discussing Whitman's understanding of the term). Finally, theism is often understood as a belief in a deity or deities.

[26] Eliot, 'Whitman and Tennyson', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, vol. 2, The Perfect Critic: 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014): 877.

Eliot's take is bluntly dualistic: there is a real which might not be all that grand and significant, and then there is an ideal unaligned with facts on the ground.[27] The possibility that what is real could be 'grand and significant', despite appearances to the contrary, is not entertained. However, it seems the problem with Whitman's poetry is not so much that it presents an 'ideal' vision—Baudelaire's poetry does this. The problem with Whitman's poetry is that it cavalierly elides the 'chasm' between real and ideal, presenting a *wholly* ideal vision.[28] It would seem what Eliot chiefly objected to about Whitman was his monism, his satisfied seeing of everything as ideal. Winters (the same recipient of Crane's letter I quoted from above) made a somewhat similar argument in a savage 1930 review of *The Bridge* published in *Poetry* magazine. Crane's epic fails because it attempted to tout Whitman's 'enthusiastic acceptance of everything at hand'. Lack of hierarchy leads to lack of distinction and meaning, however, because 'if nothing is bad it follows equally that nothing is good'.[29] Thus, Winters concluded *The Bridge* is necessarily full of 'vague thunder' and substance-less 'shouting'.[30]

On one side of the fence, therefore, we have Eliot and Winters (and, I would add our contemporary, Snediker), who do not look favourably on the embrace of 'everything at hand' because it is good—to modify the Winters's summary slightly. On the other side, stands Crane with his grasp of Whitman's New (World) Metaphysics, enacted in *The Bridge* via descriptions of life's basic perfection.

Conclusion

This thesis draws from stylistics when it comes to close-reading analyses of certain techniques and themes in *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*. I am interested in noticing how the mind is triggered by literary effects such as magniloquent diction, catachrestic metaphor,

[27] I do not think 'ideal' has any philosophical connotations in this review, likely meaning simply what is better than what is real.
[28] For an examination of Whitman's optimistic model of American liberalism and Eliot's reaction to it, see William Q. Malcuit, 'The Poetics of Political Failure: Eliot's Antiliberalism in an American Context', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 62, no. 1 (March 2016): 75-95.
[29] Yvor Winters, "The Progress of Hart Crane," *Poetry* 36, no. 1 (June 1930): 157-162.
[30] Though Crane responded to Winters' review in a long, fervent letter, he did not rebut any points to do with Whitman's brand of monistic optimism. Regarding his American forbear, Crane merely wrote: 'My acknowledgement of Whitman as in influence and living force: "Not greatest, thou,—not first, nor last,—but near", as I qualify it,—apparently this discoloured the entire poem in your estimation' (*CPSL*, 643).

allegory and so on. Sometimes, I have used technical terms derived from the field of cognitive stylistics, at other times I tried to describe my reactions more intuitively.[31] In the main, however, I rely on terms used by Crane and Eliot in their prose, attempting to track and explicate their sometimes divergent, sometimes complimentary, notions about poetry. In Crane's case, I draw heavily from his letters, which are usually dense with ideas. In Eliot's case, I range through the collected prose. Apart from a few exceptions, I have tried to keep the focus on Eliot's poetics during the decade following the First World War. Since Crane's *The Bridge* primarily responds to Eliot's work before the latter's conversion to Anglicanism in the summer of 1927, I seldom pursue Eliot's thinking beyond that point. Similarly, in terms of Crane's output, I have mostly stuck to the period in which *The Waste Land* and *The Bridge* were gestated, composed and published: approximately 1920 to 1930.[32]

My thesis is comparative: I move back and forth between the texts of Crane and Eliot, though overall, I attempt to reanimate Crane's worldview. The responsive orientation of Crane toward Eliot, and his commitment to optimism, is my starting point. However, it is not my intention to mount a defense of Crane or to pronounce him, on any front, as right and Eliot wrong. At times I delve quite deeply into Eliot's thinking on poetry when I feel it will further an understanding of the differences and/or similarities between the poets. On these occasions, I look at Crane's poetry and poetics through Eliot's eyes. Some of the differences between the writers are profound and point toward matters with almost universal application, such as which diction is best for tackling apparent novelty. Yet, I have also discovered during the course of my research that the interwar poems of Crane and Eliot accord on some vital issues. The material world is *not* portrayed as omegan—as the last word—in either *The Waste Land* or *The Bridge*. Moreover, both texts represent (with Eliot, only potentially) saving supernatural powers at their climaxes.

The critic Jeffrey Walker, in *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olsen* (1989), maintains Crane's positivity is primarily concerned with the demonstration of a 'divine … purpose' which shall redeem 'a mechanized modernity'. For

[31] As an example of the first approach, I use the idea of deixis in the fourth chapter. My understanding of this term comes from Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020).
[32] See T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, vol.1, Collected & Uncollected Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), for the compositional history of *The Waste Land* suggesting the poem was written sometime between November 1919 and February 1921 (547-548).

Walker, however, this sanguineness rests solely and fatally on 'declaration[s] of faith' and appeals to Whitman's authority. Crane's argument, therefore,

> reveals itself as indefensible. It develops no evidence that gives his modernist reader reason to believe that Crane's (and Whitman's) faith in a providential and evolutionary progress toward apocalyptic love is justified. Nor is there evidence that those who believe in that progress are engaged in anything but wishful or deluded thinking.[33]

One of the purposes of my thesis is to surface this apparently missing 'evidence', showing that Crane's optimistic argument is defensible for a sympathetic reader. The proof I have identified falls into three categories, each of which is allotted a chapter and related to *The Waste Land* as well as certain apposite ideas of Eliot's.

In the second chapter, I hold Crane's dictional style in *The Bridge* is what Eliot condemned, with reference to Milton's poetry and James Joyce's later prose, as 'magniloquent'. While Eliot argued, in his prose during the 1920s, 30s and 40s, that accurately portraying the twentieth century requires a language similar to contemporary speech, Crane flouted this tenet. Crane's *The Bridge* is therefore a text which manages to do what Eliot thought not only impracticable, but impossible: represent the modern world resplendently. My aim here is to spotlight how the poets differ dictionally. Moreover, this chapter can be read as substantiating my claim that Crane's optimism is monistic in the sense that his application of magniloquence to conspicuously new, unsightly and ostensibly senseless objects and situations (suicide, coal-fired power stations, and so on) suggests nothing is beyond beauty's sweep.

In my third chapter, I move to another element of Crane's optimism which I think gives the reader 'reason to believe' in providence, and that is his idealism. I compare the portrayal of Brooklyn Bridge in Crane's 'proem' with Eliot's portrayal of London Bridge in 'The Burial of the Dead'. *The Bridge*'s introduction, I claim, is idealistic to the extent that it exhibits many moments where the physical world is depicted as unfeasible due to catachrestic figuration. These moments compel the reader to seek meaning in mostly abstract ideas which generally relate to the ruling abstraction of the text: God. Eliot also undermines the integrity of the physical, though by means of allusion to allegory. What's more, the immaterial realm

[33] Jeffrey Walker, *Bardic Ethos and The American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olsen* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 134; 136-137.

revealed in the London Bridge passage—part of Dante's hell—is dramatically negative. My conclusion is therefore that both poets represent the material world as a bridge—as a *way* to the trans-material. Crane's leads up, Eliot's down.

Finally, the fourth chapter takes a look at the theistic face of Crane's optimism. I compare the endings of *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*, arguing that what is portrayed in both cases is contact between human speakers—sometimes sole, sometimes part of a group—and supernatural entities. In both cases, almost everything unconnected to the divine is represented as deeply unpleasant. At the close of Crane's text, the supernatural takes the form of a matchless, morphing bridge; at the end of Eliot's poem, speaking thunder. However, there is a key dissimilarity. Whereas *The Bridge* details the rewarding results of a relation with the transfinite, including the representation of the world by the light of eternity, *The Waste Land* leaves the reader wondering if the pains presented in 'What the Thunder said' have been, or ever could be, relieved by *shantih*.

Chapter 2: 'Exploiting magnificence'

In this chapter I will examine one tactic of Crane's optimistic stance: high-flown diction. I will do so by first contrasting this tactic with Eliot's own thinking on the subject of 'magniloquence', and Eliot's practice in the 1920s. Then I shall move on to analyse sections of *The Waste Land* and *The Bridge*, it being my intention to show that what distinguishes these texts dictionally is the following: *The Bridge* exhibits an uninhibited magniloquence related to modernity—or what Crane sometimes called 'the Machine Age'—whereas *The Waste Land* exhibits only a limited magniloquence usually related to not obviously modern situations (*CPSL*, 171). Though critical conversations have touched on how Crane and Eliot differ formally, the topic of the poets' diction has yet to garner close-reading comparative analysis.[34] In attending to Crane's use of magniloquent language as a way of exalting his present, this chapter contributes a perspective on how optimistic poetry of the early twentieth century brandished lexis in the face of bleaker outlooks. I also want to make the case that Crane's application of magniloquence to new, unsightly and potentially meaningless situations is a function of his optimism's monism; his denial of dualism (only *some* things are worthy of beautiful representation) and commitment to oneness (*everything* can be conceived of as beautiful).

Mark Ford, writing in the *New York Review of Books* some years ago, dubbed Crane's 'poetic idiom' 'contorted'.[35] The feeling that there is something abnormal or disproportionate about the language of Crane's oeuvre is common. Walker's criticism is characteristic: Cranean diction frequently becomes 'so hyperbolic that the words interfere with one another', causing the meaning to 'disappear'.[36] As an example of such tenor-erasing hyperbole, Walker seizes on a description of a fighter jet from 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen': 'corymbulous formations of mechanics'. Certainly, these four words do not elicit a straightforward image because of the difficulty of visualising a mechanical flower cluster in flight (a corymb is a raceme in which the lower flower-stalks are proportionally longer so that the flowers form a slightly convex head). In Walker's view, the line shows that Crane often attempts to endow

[34] See, for example, Gross's comparison of metre in Crane and Eliot's poetry in *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry: A Study of Prosody from Thomas Hardy to Robert Lowell* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964).
[35] Mark Ford, *This Dialogue of One: Essays on Poets from John Donne to Joan Murray* (London: Eyewear, 2015), 156.
[36] Walker, *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem*, 149.

'real-world object[s]' with meanings which would not otherwise emerge from those objects. The falsification of reality, through diction, is unsuccessful because the reader is easily able to perceive the mismatch between Crane's exuberant wording and the things to which he is referring. Reed has also flagged the clash between Crane's 'faux-Elizabethan texture' and the stuff of the 'twentieth century'.[37] The clash does not pose a problem for Reed though, as the 'mannerist style' of Crane's poetry creates its own special kind of content; a content which, while defying paraphrase, is roughly to do with the qualities that the language embodies, such as 'beauty, ecstasy, rhyme and rhythm'. Yes, the poet's 'rhetorical flourishes impede a reader's ability to envision what he describes', but this ultimately helps Crane to achieve his 'mystical ends'.[38]

Crane objected, however, to descriptions of his poetry as deliberate obfuscation. He complained to Winters in May 1927:

> It happens that the first poem I ever wrote was too dense to be understood, and I now find that I can trust most critics to tell me that all my subsequent efforts have been equally futile. Having heard that one writes in a metaphysical vein the usual critic will immediately close his eyes or stare with utter complacency at the page—assuming that black is black no more and that the poet means anything but what he says. It's as plain as day that I'm talking about war and aeroplanes in the passage from "F & H" (corymbulous formations of mechanics, etc) quoted by Wilson in the *New Republic*, yet by isolating these lines from the context and combining them suddenly with lines from a totally different poem he has the chance (and uses it) to make me sound like a perfect ninny. (*CPSL*, 545)

The flying flower cluster was a controversy from the start. What had Edmund Wilson written? That Crane's poetry, in essence, presented the reader with a 'great style' pasted over nothingness; there did not seem to be, 'as far as one can see, any subject at all'.[39] What is noteworthy about Crane's self-defence is that he claims his poetry refers to real-world objects of the 1920s—for example, 'Fokker planes'. Later in his letter, Crane argues the poet should aim at a 'sharpening of reality' (*CPSL*, 546). This, in my view, is a crucial declaration. In fact, Crane stated in multiple letters written over his lifetime that he had semantic matter which he wished to get cleanly across to the reader. 'I have always been working hard for a more perfect lucidity', he proclaimed midway through his career to Tate, 'and it never pleases me to be taken as wilfully obscure or esoteric' (*CPSL*, 376).

[37] Reed, *Hart Crane*, 24.
[38] Ibid, 79; 73.
[39] Edmund Wilson, 'The Muses Out of Work', in *The Shores of Light* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1952), 200.

How, though, could Crane have intended to sharpen reality, how could he have claimed to want 'lucidity', when most critics have experienced his poetry as more opaque than transparent, and untethered from what many of us would recognise as the ordinary or everyday world?[40] I believe the problem can be solved if we pick through Eliot's thoughts on a particular species of diction, which the older poet termed 'magniloquence'.

Eliot and the quality of magniloquence

Magniloquence is a kind of diction which Eliot detected in the poetry of Milton, as well as in the later prose of Joyce.[41] In an article on Marvell, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1921, Eliot defined magniloquence as 'the deliberate exploitation of the possibilities of magnificence in language'. This type of diction 'Milton used and abused'.[42] Eliot distinguished the 'quality' of magniloquence from wit, which comprehends a 'slight lyric grace' anchored by a 'tough reasonableness', stating that the English language bifurcated into these diverging qualities after Shakespeare (*SP*, 162). Eliot did not elaborate on the traits of the magniloquent 'quality' in his *TLS* piece, but did so later in two essays on Milton (hereafter referred to as 'Milton I' and 'Milton II'), published in 1936 and 1947 respectively. In the first of these essays, Eliot picked up his argument again, repeating that 'the living English which was Shakespeare's became split up into two components one of which was exploited by Milton and the other by Dryden'. Dryden's component—wit—was healthier because it preserved the tradition of 'conversational language in poetry', whereas Milton's magniloquence soared free from any taint of chitchat. Milton wielded magniloquence in such a way that his poetry became a rarefied domain of musical feats, especially evident in *Paradise Lost* (*SP*, 262).

[40] Over the past decade or so, the ordinary and the everyday have been probed by critics such as Thomas Davis, Liesl Olson and Rita Felski. The ordinary is marked by nonimportance, the everyday by unheroic routine, repetition, convention and its stubborn resistance to being transformed into anything incredible or transcendent. See Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Felski, 'Everyday Aesthetics', *the minnesota review* 2009, no. 71-72 (Spring 2009): 171-179.

[41] Eliot also called the dictional style of Milton's poetry 'rhetorical', but he never succinctly defines the term. I have therefore found it more helpful to use 'magniloquence'.

[42] Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 162. Hereafter abbreviated to *SP* and incorporated into the main body of the text.

We would be wrong, however, to imagine that magniloquence simply means Miltonic diction. It is a dictional *style*, according to Eliot, which can be found in the seventeenth century, but also in the twentieth.[43] Eliot, in his first essay, therefore, compares Milton's diction with Joyce's in the latter's *Work in Progress*, albeit tentatively. Milton and Joyce downgrade the visual in favour of the auditory. These two writers are not masters of 'the visible world', but 'draw rather on the resources of phantasmagoria' (*SP*, 262). In 'Milton II', the comparison is less hesitant. Both *Paradise Lost* and *Finnegans Wake* (*Work in Progress*' final version), make a peculiar demand on the reader. The demand is that we sacrifice easy seeing and understanding for hearing, indistinctness and perplexity (the last hopefully temporary rather than terminal).

Eliot's writings on magniloquence suggest he saw it as bordering on immoderation, especially when broken off from other dictional qualities. His tone, when dealing with magniloquent diction, is disapproving on the whole. Responding directly to Eliot, F. R. Leavis, in *Revaluation: Tradition & Development in English Poetry* (1936), describes 'magniloquence' as a 'damaging' denomination, because 'to say that Milton's verse is magniloquent is to say that it is not doing as much as its impressive pomp and volume seem to be asserting'.[44] Leavis' observation recalls Wilson's summary of Crane's style: greatness which exists to hide a deficiency.

It is possible to break Eliot's critique into two related charges. First, magniloquence is too detached from everyday reality, externally out-of-joint. Second, magniloquence creates internal out-of-jointness. More often than not, the magniloquent text is a discontinuous text; its linguistic surface does not usher the reader to the poetry's subject matter very well—very swiftly or smoothly. In Eliot's own words, the style is disadvantageous because

> a dislocation takes place, through the hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully understood. (*SP*, 263)

[43] Building on one of Remy de Gourmont's pronouncements, Eliot defined 'style' in the early 1920s as that which preserves literature. This is followed by the statement that Milton's style, 'far from "preserving" the content, appears to survive and to seduce quite apart from the content' ('Prose and Verse', in *The Perfect Critic*, 327).

[44] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition & Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936): 46-47.

Magniloquence is contrasted with the styles of Shakespeare and Dante where 'there is no interruption between the surface that these poets present to you and the core' (*SP*, 263). It would seem that with non-magniloquent diction, or with tempered magniloquent diction, the reader is able to penetrate through a relatively transparent language to where the 'inner meaning' is located. Full-blown magniloquence, on the other hand, creates a poem with divisions or impediments. 'Hypertrophy of the auditory imagination' means that how the work sounds has swollen to a dangerous degree.[45] It is hard to get to what lies behind the swelling.

Additionally, because the aural virtuosity of magniloquence prevents us from clearly seeing what the poem is about, the reader is often led to general conceptions rather than particulars (*SP*, 270). In 'Milton I', Eliot notes that Milton's diction shuns specificity, enabling Milton to deal not with 'types', but 'prototypes' (*SP*, 269). The point is fleshed out in 'Milton II':

> The limitation of visual power, like Milton's limited interest in human beings, turns out to be not merely a negligible defect, but a positive virtue, when we visit Adam and Eve in Eden. Just as a higher degree of characterisation of Adam and Eve would have been unsuitable, so a more vivid picture of the earthly Paradise would have been less paradisiacal. For a greater definiteness, a more detailed account of flora and fauna, could only have assimilated Eden to the landscapes of earth with which we are familiar [...] (*SP*, 270)

What the reader receives from Milton's magniloquent descriptions is an 'impression of light' which has 'a supernatural glory unexperienced by men of normal vision'. Yet, only a couple of sentences after this observation, Eliot concludes: '[t]he emphasis is on the sound, not the vision, upon the word, not the idea' (*SP*, 270). One could quibble with Eliot here and argue that Milton's poetry, using Eliot's own example above, surely emphasises the *idea* of Eden, and that Milton's sonic acrobatics are calculated to serve that idea. In other words, Milton's sound is actually all about ideas, though they are of a certain kind—unearthly ones—and depend on a lack of definiteness for their comprehension. Accepting the fundamentals of Eliot's view, though, we might sum up like this: magniloquence does not merely present the reader with magnificent language—'the witchery of music' as Maud Ellmann phrased it.[46]

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[45] Marjorie Perloff has recently used Eliot's idea of the 'auditory imagination' to argue he was much more interested in 'sonic and visual density' than previously assumed, jauntily calling him 'a precursor of Concrete Poetry' ('Eliot's Auditory Imagination: A Rehearsal for Concrete Poetry', *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 38, no. 3 (2019): 84).

[46] Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 43.

The style guides the mind to generalities beyond any 'particular place' or 'particular time' (Eliot's phrases) by the route of discontinuity. The content of a magniloquent text comes across as 'occult'—recherché and magical scenes float at an apparent distance from the words on the page. Abuse magniloquence and you split the world into reverberating language and dream.

Magniloquence meets modernity

There is evidence Crane thought of himself as linked to Milton in terms of diction. We find Crane's only mature mention of the English Civil War poet in a letter to William Slater Brown, which enthusiastically praises a recent article by Tate on Milton, published in *The New Republic* in 1931. Crane calls the article, in fact, 'one of the best things in modern criticism' (*CPSL*, 698). In the piece, Tate urges his readers to pay more attention to Milton's poetry: 'it is high time that the modern poets who feel strongly about seventeenth-century influences, came to a better view of Milton's significance for style'. The future U.S. Poet Laureate then goes on to argue that Milton's verse 'bewilder[s]' a twentieth century audience because of its 'immensely remote' and mythically-coherent worldview, uncontaminated by 'our modern disease—miscellaneous sensation'. Finally, Milton's 'abstract orotundity' is positioned by Tate in opposition to John Donne. Intriguingly, Tate then adds that 'the school of T. S. Eliot is the modern school of Donne'.[47] It is likely the article appealed strongly to Crane because he agreed with its thrust, which was that some characteristics of Milton's style were not inapplicable to the twentieth century. Moreover, it is likely Crane agreed that such a style might perhaps be able to effect something different from what 'the school of T. S. Eliot' was capable of achieving. Indeed, almost ten years prior to Tate's article, in a letter from 1922, Crane used a snippet from Milton's *Paradise Lost* when clarifying how his poetry would move beyond *The Waste Land*: 'In his own realm Eliot presents us with an absolute *impasse*, yet oddly enough, he can be utilised to lead us to, intelligently point to, other positions and "pastures new."' (*CPSL*, 279). Handled in a certain way, intractably unhappy Eliot reveals a path to Milton's hopeful verdure.

Nevertheless, interwar Eliot thought magniloquence could *not* be used successfully by any poet seeking to really grapple with (Western) modernity. In 'Milton II' he discusses his own

[47] Allen Tate, 'A Note on Milton', *New Republic* 68 (October 1931): 266-268.

position as a practitioner of poetry in the 1920s. At such a time, his central detraction regarding Milton's magniloquent diction was that it lacked any 'relation to contemporary speech' (*SE*, 272). An escape from magniloquence had been accomplished by Wordsworth, but at the beginning of the twentieth century, another breakaway movement was needed. The problem for modern poets was that Milton's verse represented

> poetry at the extreme limit from prose; and it was one of our tenets that verse should have the virtues of prose, that diction should become assimilated to cultivated contemporary speech, before aspiring to the elevation of poetry. Another tenet was that the subject-matter and the imagery of poetry should be extended to topics and objects related to the life of a modern man or woman; that we were to seek the non-poetic, to seek even material refractory to transmutation into poetry, and words and phrases which had not been used in poetry before. And the study of Milton could be of no help here: it was only a hindrance. (*SE*, 272)

The first tenet is relatively self-explanatory: Poetry should adapt to the real language of 1920s people and thus in this respect Milton's poetry is a nonstarter. The second tenet is harder to fathom. Earlier in the essay, Eliot notes that *Paradise Lost* represents demons which personify certain sins, the garden of Eden, and the origins of humanity. Eliot acknowledges the text is often magnificent and meaningful because made orderly by a particular theological viewpoint. Considering the context of the above passage, then, I think it is safe to read 'non-poetic' as everything which one would *not* expect to find in Milton's *Paradise Lost*—for example, the unprepossessing or bland, as opposed to the grand, and the meaningless as opposed to a universe structured by the 'laws of God'. So, apart from its lack of colloquial vocabulary and coinages, why did Eliot assume that Miltonic magniloquence could only be an obstacle for the interwar poet determined to convert their context into (free) verse? Because the style was simply *too* elevated to elevate the following: new things ('topics and objects related to the life of a modern man or woman'), *prima facie* meaningless things ('the non-poetic'), and ugly things that resist Pegasean take-off beyond 'contemporary speech' ('material refractory to transmutation into poetry').[48]

As we shall see, these three categories overlap a great deal in the poetry of Eliot and Crane—for instance, subject matter that is starkly modern is usually portrayed as not terribly

[48] My conjecture is that the ugliness of Eliot's 'refractory' material is nondramatic, opposed to the kind we find in Milton's poetry. Ugliness in *Paradise Lost* is dramatic, awesome even, showing up, for example, as the characters Sin and Death.

beautiful, and that lack of beauty frequently has a lot to do with the risk of meaninglessness.[49] To buttress this interpretation, we might glance at an earlier essay, 'Prose and Verse' (1921), in which Eliot intimates that Miltonic diction could not alchemise the twentieth century because of its aloofness; it is a 'language dissociated from things, assuming an independent existence'.[50] Eliot wanted modern poetry to change 'lead into gold, ordinary language into poetry'. Yet his 'gold' was not the gold of magniloquence, but the precious metal of the '*classic* style', which, as he phrased it in 'Milton I', depends on 'the elevation of a *common* style, by the final touch of genius, to greatness'.[51]

Crane, in 'General Aims and Theories'—an essay he wrote for Eugene O'Neill in 1925 to help the playwright with his proposed introduction to *White Buildings* (1926)—takes a different stance from Eliot.[52] 'I put no particular value on the simple objective of "modernity"', he begins, as 'the temporal location of an artist's creation is of very secondary importance' (*CPSL*, 161). It is worthwhile capturing one's historical moment. However, in Crane's opinion, that is best done by examining modernity's impact upon the perdurable human spirit. Because the focus is not so much on what is new out there, but how that newness affects us, it can be conveyed in any idiom. '[T]o fool one's self', Crane declaims,

> that definitions are being reached by merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time is merely to paint a photograph. I think that what is interesting and significant will emerge only under the conditions of our submission to, and examination and assimilation of the organic effects on us of these and other fundamental factors of our experience. It can certainly not be an organic expression otherwise. And the expression of such values may often be as well accomplished with the vocabulary and blank verse of the Elizabethans as with the calligraphic tricks and slang used so brilliantly at times by an impressionist like Cummings. (*CPSL*, 162)

[49] Charles Taylor has argued there are three, key 'malaises' of our secular and immanence-committed modernity, two of which roughly correspond with the elements 1920s Eliot wanted poetry to capture: 'the sense of the fragility of meaning' and the 'utter flatness, emptiness of the ordinary' (*A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 309).
[50] Eliot, 'Prose and Verse', in *The Perfect Critic*, 327.
[51] Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 154.
[52] In Eugene O'Neill's unpublished text, we find: 'This poetry is ambitious. It is poetry that is wholly contemporary in the grand style'. See Marc Simon, 'Eugene O'Neill's Introduction to Hart Crane's "White Buildings": Why he "would have done it in a minute but..."', *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 41-57.

In this passage, Crane is arguing for something Eliot did not countenance: that a high-flown diction, including 'the vocabulary and blank verse of the Elizabethans', could be used non-ironically and consistently to create poetry which tells of the 'surface phenomena of our time'. Granted, Elizabethan vocabulary does not necessarily mean the exploitation of linguistic magnificence. Yet this passage shows Crane thought the poet of the early twentieth century needn't avoid certain dictions when tackling their own 'temporal location'. '[S]kyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles'—these are new, and could also be classed as Eliot's 'non-poetic' material, 'even refractory to transmutation into poetry'.

Crane did not, in any of his prose I have come across, explain why he frequently chose florid and flagrantly archaic language to express the effects of 'the Machine Age'. At the end of 'General Aims and Theories', however, he suggests the reason might have had something to do with disjunction. The last paragraph begins:

> New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation. And while I feel that my work includes a more consistent extension of traditional literary elements than many contemporary poets are capable of appraising, I realise that I am utilising the gifts of the past as instruments principally; and that the voice of the present, if it is to be known, must be caught at the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions sometimes shocking to the scholar and historians of logic. (*CPSL*, 164)

Here Crane defends his use of 'the gifts of the past' as 'instruments' to capture his contemporary moment's 'voice'. Why apply 'traditional literary elements' to 'new conditions'? The answer comes into view if we conjecture that Crane intended his diction to strike the reader as being at variance with such 'new conditions', no matter how 'shocking' that variance.

After moving through some of Eliot and Crane's thinking on diction, we are now in a position to clarify the latter's standpoint: The poetry of Crane is, on the face of it, magniloquent in the ways Eliot thought both Milton's and Joyce's works were. Crane's 'idioms and circumlocutions' exploit the magnificent possibilities of language, at times to an almost cartoonish degree. His diction is also both dislocated from ordinary reality (being, on the whole, remote from speech) and internally dislocated—form and subject matter are not bonded to the extent that the former becomes mostly see-through and the latter accepted as a stable given. For the reader, it can be hard going and time-consuming traveling between these components (form and matter). Moreover, Crane's poetry often seems to delight in the

apparent contrariety between a magniloquent diction and everything that kind of diction was *not* expected to express in the 1920s: industrial machinery, new urban environments, subway rides, and so on.

Magniloquence in *The Waste Land*

For Ben Hutchinson, Eliot's 'style' in *The Waste Land* is an 'impure' one as it involves assorted types of diction.[53] *The Waste Land* contains moments of magniloquence, yet, in almost every case, these moments are either unavailable to the present (anachronistically haunting like the 'aethereal rumours' which 'Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus' in the penultimate stanza of 'What the Thunder said'), fleeting (like the 'inexplicable splendour' of Wren's St. Magnus-the-Martyr church in 'The Fire Sermon') or lacking sincerity (see below).

The most obvious example of magniloquence in *The Waste Land* can be found in the opening one hundred lines or so of 'A Game of Chess'. Immediately the reader is made aware, by the adaptation of 'The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne', from Act II of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, that we are in the realm of the non-new. The first two sentences are serpentine and very aurally pleasing:

> The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Glowed on the marble, where the glass
> Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
> From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
> (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
> Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
> Reflecting light upon the table as
> The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
> From satin cases poured in rich profusion.
> In vials of ivory and coloured glass
> Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
> Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
> And drowned the sense in odours [...] [77-89][54]

[53] Ben Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 186; 196.
[54] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of *The Waste Land* and its paratexts are from this edition and line numbers keyed to Ricks's and McCue's.

As has been noticed before, these lines are supposed to depict a woman at her toilette, except the human being is almost entirely eclipsed by cosmetics, art and pieces of furniture.[55] She is more concept than fleshy person. The gaze moves from representation to representation: we are shown 'standards wrought with fruited vines', a 'golden Cupidon'. And then, later, a 'carvéd dolphin' before a painting (or tapestry?) of Philomel's metamorphosis into a nightingale concludes the drawn-out ekphrastic swoon. Revealingly, Eliot uses 'Sylvan scene' to describe the depiction of Philomel's 'change', a phrase taken from *Paradise Lost.* The section, found at the beginning of Book IV, involves Satan surveying that landscape from which he has been exiled. The fallen angel gazes at Paradise, which 'crowns' Eden, but which is also surrounded by a wilderness that 'denies' any 'Access'. The wilderness is composed of 'Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm, / A sylvan scene'; it is all impressive but also vertiginously 'Insuperable' (ll. 135-140).[56] Though the passage begins with an adaptation of a piece of Shakespearean description and references a mythological tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* I think it is the Milton citation which is key to understanding what Eliot is trying to do here.

One reason the language is more magniloquent and connected to Milton, than it is Shakespearean, is because of its infirmity. Hugh Kenner noted this when he wrote that the passage begins as confidently 'Miltonic' but then betrays a 'lack of nerve', the first sentence dissipating 'itself among glowing and smouldering sensations'.[57] A consequence is that we feel there is nothing to which the 'brocaded' language is really pointing.[58] Surface and subject are both presented as archival. The recollection of Cleopatra by Enobarbus in Shakespeare's play is in response to a question and very much about a particular character we have already witnessed in all her frisky forthrightness. Eliot is not attempting to mimic the style of *Anthony and Cleopatra* in the portrayal of a seductive queen. What we witness, rather, is a pastiche of the kind of diction Eliot found unworkable for the twentieth century—that overexploited and hermetic magnificence on display in *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, there is a connection between the viewer in Eliot's stanza and Satan in Milton's epic. The latter is condemned to be a mere observer of Paradise, which is an arena inaccessible to him

[55] Or, as John McCombe puts it, 'the reader of *The Waste Land* is unable to see Belladonna for all of the finery that surrounds her'. 'Cleopatra and Her Problems: T.S. Eliot and the Fetishization of Shakespeare's Queen of the Nile', *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008), 31.
[56] John Milton, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 424.
[57] Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London: Methuen & Co, 1959), 132.
[58] See Robert L. Schwarz, *Broken Images: A Study of* The Waste Land (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988).

forevermore. The viewer in *The Waste Land* is comparably condemned to be a mere observer of renditions of paradisiacal 'scene[s]'—and not only this, but an observer whose observational medium is also inaccessible in the sense that it cannot be fully alive for Eliot's present (minus a smirk or sigh).

If we stick with Eliot's view, because the Cleopatra stanza is Miltonic-magniloquent, it must also be reality-avoidant. Certainly, the passage does not feel up-to-date, does not feel *l'entre-deux-guerres*. It is only after the hackneyed splendour of the boudoir episode that obviously modern 'material' enters *The Waste Land* for the first time (there are no plainly twentieth century objects in 'The Burial of the Dead'). The section's magniloquence cannot continue into Eliot's present however; it terminates in 'dirty ears'. The dirtiness implies the ears are blocked to the luxuriant diction of the past. What comes after? A perfunctory modern schedule is delivered with perfunctory panache. In answer to the frantic question, 'What shall we ever do?', we get, therefore, 'The hot water at ten. / And if it rains, a closed car at four'. 'Real' modern men and women speak in 'real' and therefore starkly non-magniloquent tones. 'A Game of Chess' ends with the boisterous, flat-footed chatter of lower-class pub-goers.[59] The section is like a time-machine, shunting the reader from the pre-modern to the current, bawled 'TIME'.[60] And so the diction lurches from one pole to the other, from magniloquence—though tainted with obsolescence—to vulgate. The lurching demonstrates Eliot's tendency to shackle form to content; when the latter is high and/or pre-modern (like a Wren church), the form is high and/or pre-modern ('Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold'), when low and/or modern (like post-WWI, working-class women tersely gossiping about unfortunate sexual goings-on), the form is low and/or modern ('I said—/ I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself, / HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME').

[59] Readers have long taken for granted, as David Chinitz writes, 'that *The Waste Land* proposed simply to discredit the barren present by comparison with the fertile past ... of Shakespearean high culture'. *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 47.

[60] Some of Eliot's later comments might seem to contradict this interpretation. For example, the poet wrote to Paul Elmer More in 1934: 'I was not aware, and am not aware not, of having drawn a contrast between a contemporary world of slums, hysterics and riverside promiscuity etc. with any visibly more romantically lovely earlier world. I mean there is no nostalgia for the trappings of the past ...' (quoted in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot, vol. 2, Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks and J. McCue (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 577). Trying to square this with most readers' impressions, we could say that Eliot does not dispute having drawn a contrast *per se*, but a contrast which roundly condemns the present in favour of the past. Certainly, using a sort of enervated, echoic magniloquence to portray the bygone does not recommend we go back. In fact, it hints that perhaps we are deluding ourselves when we pine for an idyllic vanished world, or 'withered stumps of time'.

If we turn to Crane's 1920s epic, we find that magnificent language is used in a contrasting way. Crane, that is, frequently and boldly applies magniloquence to the brand new, the unprepossessing and the automatistic.[61]

Magniloquence in *The Bridge*

Let's look at some exemplary moments in *The Bridge* where magniloquence meets those modern materials resistant to poetic elevation which Eliot claimed he sought in the 1920s. *The Bridge* begins with a soaring, iambic proem, 'To Brooklyn Bridge'. A seagull is surveyed as it flies, 'shedding white rings of tumult' before forsaking our vision, 'As apparitional as sails that cross / Some page of figures to be filed away'. The splendour of the bird, symbolising 'Liberty', is portrayed here in the second quatrain as invading an office space that has a desultory and goodbye atmosphere (the vagueness of 'some page of figures' implies unimportant content; filing away conjures white sheets sliding into darkness). Yet Crane's diction does not significantly alter, does not become desultory or downcast to suit the shift of subject. His magnificence continues, which means the reader is likely to become aware of some incongruity between presentation and what is being presented.

Stanzas five and six, the heart of the text, depict a suicide, New York City's financial district and the working Port of New York and New Jersey:

> Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
> A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
> Tilting momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
> A jest falls from the speechless caravan.
>
> Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
> A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
> All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn ...
> Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still. [1.17-24][62]

[61] Sex had been reduced to a 'cheery automatism' by modern society, so Eliot declared in his 'Introduction' to Baudelaire's *The Intimate Journals of Charles Baudelaire*, originally published in 1930 ('Baudelaire', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, vol. 4, English Lion, 1930–1933*, ed. Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 162).

[62] Crane, *The Bridge*, in *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge': An Annotated Edition*, ed. Lawrence Kramer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of *The Bridge* and its paratexts are from this edition and line numbers keyed to Kramer's.

The ‘bedlamite’ kills himself by jumping from Brooklyn Bridge, described as ‘silver-paced’ in the preceding stanza. The character is a mentally deranged archetype (he does not have a specific origin but could emerge from any cramped place) and becomes a ‘jest’ as he falls to his death. His plight is not detailed, nor does the text try to make much sense of it. The moment is threatened with meaninglessness due to ‘the speechless caravan’ of unstinting traffic across Brooklyn Bridge. No one has time to stop, care, communicate. Again, however, Crane’s style does not drop with the bedlamite’s drop, as it did not change in the second stanza when the speaker’s focus moved from ‘Liberty’ to office work. As we have seen, this is not the case with ‘A Game of Chess’. In Eliot’s text, despondency and mental disarray in a modern context are presented using a drab and halting style after the auditory virtuosity of the section’s opening lines.

Crane’s sixth stanza deals with a part of the city which is under construction and through which daylight ‘leaks’. The key word in this stanza is ‘acetylene’, R. P. Blackmur has argued, because it carries associations which enable the reader to imagine, at the same time, ‘an intolerable quality of light and a torch for cutting metal’ (acetylene is used as fuel gas in welding).[63] ‘[R]ip-tooth’ emphasises the cutting process. Here Crane could also be referring to a ‘Rip Saw’, which is relatively coarse and has its teeth angled backwards. Overall, then, ‘noon’ is depicted as advancing, in an un-picturesque manner, from an exposed metal beam. The advance saws coarsely at Wall Street using the kind of eye-paining, cold light one sees coming out of the end of a welding-torch. Two worlds, therefore, confront us: One is formally luxurious, the other is raw, perplexing and unsightly, comprised of cursory death, traffic, a colourless pungent-smelling hydrocarbon gas and shipping cranes.

William Carlos Williams denied that he could discern much of this second world. The New Jerseyan thought Crane’s ‘superb’ musicality cost him particulars, especially grim particulars:

> Crane didn’t write as low as he knew, or should have known, his life to be. Instead he continually reached “up,” out of what he knew, to that which he didn’t know. He was

[63] R. P. Blackmur, ‘New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text of Hart Crane’, in *Hart Crane: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 28.

> fascinated by a long, billowy music which deceived him very often. He grew vague instead of setting himself to describe in detail—Achilles' greave and shield.[64]

The criticism sees these three aspects as making up a nexus in Crane's work: 1) reaching heavenward, 2) 'billowy music' and, 3) a lack of extended descriptions of discrete objects (e.g. 'Achilles' greave and shield'). The connection between the first two characteristics could be explained, perhaps a little crudely, like this: The poet who wants to explore realms beyond what they already think they know, will probably opt for a 'music' which seems to incarnate limit-defying, gravity-defying freedom. Indeed, 'billowy' is usually used to describe a large undulating mass of something, typically cloud, smoke or steam. Williams' adjective construes Crane's language as spacious, floaty, sky-loving. Moreover, the passage as a whole implies there exists a non-billowy style for poetry. The non-billowy style, I think it is fair to infer, would keep the reader's attention tied to the ground, showing, for example, that so much depends on one, red wheel barrow glazed with rain water, rather than on a cluster of quintessences.

The link between the second and third characteristics recalls Eliot's take on Miltonic magniloquence: there is a type of lexical splendour which gets in the way of the reader's ability to imagine a world with high levels of definition. Unsurprisingly, Williams advised that modern poets should give the style of Milton a wide berth. In fact, he reacted vociferously to Eliot's more tempered treatment of Milton's verse in 1947 responding, in February of 1948, that the seventeenth century poet's bad features (which Williams's article suggests are more or less the same as the features Eliot had censured earlier in his career) were 'contagious'. Nothing less than strict repudiation would do. 'We cannot write as Milton wrote and have it be what is called for in our day. We CANNOT', he bellowed.[65]

The accusation of vagueness is more or less valid if it is taken to mean a preference for dreamy paradigms or exemplars. It is true that Crane's proem we have been looking at rarely gets into descriptive situations where specifics engross awareness for long. In 'To Brooklyn Bridge', there are details—for example, 'shrill shirt ballooning'—but they are described glancingly. For the most part, the emphasis is on big, symptomatic facets of a new world: the 'subway scuttle' standing for contemporary transport and its oppressiveness; the bedlamite

[64] William Carlos Williams, 'Hart crane [1899-1932]', in *Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 34.
[65] Williams, 'With Forced Fingers Rude', *Four Pages*, no. 2 (February 1948): 3.

standing for a type of peripheralised and anonymous suffering perhaps uniquely modern; ‘Wall’ standing for the preserve of finance. However, ‘vague’ does not really fit lines like, ‘from girder into street noon leaks / A rip-tooth of the sky’s acetylene’. Here there is focus and precision, it is just that these qualities are not chiefly concerned with sparking a solid-seeming scene in the reader’s head. And since the scenes in our heads are never solid, one could argue that it is quite accurate to write in a way which accents such insubstantiality, i.e. in a way which obliges the imagination to acknowledge that what it pictures is not real.

The statement that Crane did not write as low as he knew his life to be—that he was beguiling himself and his readers with a dictional style eliding the difficulties of life—is also a questionable assessment. It is hard to think of a topic much ‘low[er]’ than lonely suicide. Once again it would seem that Williams, like Eliot, thought magniloquence incompatible with depicting the adverse and rough-hewn facts of modern existence.

In the fourth section of *The Bridge*, titled ‘Cape Hatteras’, the text focuses on a ‘gigantic power house’. As usual, the reader is met with an imposing word-surface, behind which we are able to dimly make out a coal-fired power station. The subject matter ticks all three of Eliot’s boxes that make up his second tenet in ‘Milton II’ we discussed earlier: It is new, ambiguous, and it is not an object most people would label magnificent.

> The nasal whine of power whips a new universe ...
> Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky,
> Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house
> Stars prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs,
> New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
> Of dynamos, where hearing’s leash is strummed ...
> Power’s script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
> Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.
> Towards what? The forked crash of split thunder parts
> Our hearing momentwise; but fast in whirling armatures,
> As bright as frogs’ eyes, giggling in the girth
> Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined
> In cold precision, bunched in mutual glee
> The bearings glint,—O murmurless and shined
> In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy! [4.58-73]

So here we really have it: magniloquence tackling a ‘new universe’ which takes material form as heavy industry. Leo Marx’s ‘machine in the garden’ has expanded to become a

machine in the cosmos, harnessing the 'jelly of the stars'.[66] There are almost no residual traces of any sort of 'pastoral ideal', which even Eliot's domestic meditation in 'A Game of Chess' touches upon. Instead, technological progress is presented awesomely as a site of nativity. All is being altered, born again. The 'evening sky' is hunted (spoored) by the power station's smoke and the proverb-emanating stars (which hang *under* the powerhouse's 'looming stacks') have been sharpened by ammonia, an extremely hazardous compound often used to neutralise the gases produced by the burning of fossil fuels, particularly coal.

The hinge of Crane's passage is a short question: 'Towards what?' This query refers to the capturing of power (which is 'wound, bobbin-bound, refined' as well as 'stropped' and 'spurred') in the three preceding lines, and might mean the following: For what purpose are we generating such a mammoth amount of (electrical) power, and where will it lead us? The question is not answered. Nor did Crane think it needed answering. He explained, in a letter written in early 1927, that the 'materials' of his period contained 'enough direction—enough dynamism in themselves—to eradicate the question or the primal importance of the question––as to just *where* they are taking us' (*CPSL,* 526). Energy, vitality, is sufficient to draw forth paean. The uncertainty, however, shows Crane's subject matter is not straightforwardly meaningful in itself, despite its consistently magnificent presentation. In fact, much of what is being portrayed is rather bewildering. Following 'Towards what?', we have hearing upset by mechanical 'thunder': 'The forked crash of split thunder parts / Our hearing momentwise'. And the 'bearings' which conclude the stanza are described in a way which is quite inundating. First, they are 'bright as frogs' eyes, giggling'. Second, they 'glint', flashing out their 'mutual glee'. But this is not enough. The bearings are, thirdly, 'murmurless and shined / In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy'. It is as if the excessive lustre is meant not so much to be visualised as to 'blind' our minds, perhaps with the intention of inducing the 'up' at which Williams scoffed. Certainly, moving by way of overwhelm—from exact knowns to less exact unknowns—fits the rudimentary Kantian definition of the sublime. The passage does a certain amount of 'violence to our imagination', forcing us to 'abandon sensibility'—clear-cut mental images of industrial machinery—in favour of awareness which soaringly 'surpass[es] every measure of the sense'.[67] What is probably most important about the

[66] See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
[67] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129; 134.

passage, though, is that it shows dazzling bliss can be recorded inside a potentially alien-looking and frightening (because new and dubious), loud, furious, oily, power station. One extrapolation: if sublimity can be enjoyed *there*, it can be enjoyed anywhere.

Magniloquence does retreat at points in *The Bridge*. This happens, for instance, in 'The Tunnel', which includes much workaday, contemporary speech floating about 'Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads'. Yet, even in Crane's Hadean section, language aspiring to magnificence keeps intruding, and re-establishes supremacy at the journey's conclusion. For instance, after observations of newspapers as they 'wing, revolve and wing', and a 'washerwoman' with 'bandaged hair', the speaker turns to address a 'Daemon' figure. Various actions of this figure are enumerated before the deity is described as being able 'To spoon us out more liquid than the dim / Locution of the eldest star'. One of the high points of 'The Tunnel', these two lines catapult the reader from subway train to stellar utterance. They give, like Milton's verse according to Eliot, interlinked 'impressions'—of infinity, the soul free from the body (we are liquified), and speaking starlight.

Dissonance

While Eliot was defining 'contemporary history' as an 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy' in his famous 1923 article on Joyce's *Ulysses*, Crane was rendering that panorama magniloquently (*SP*, 177). As I hope to have shown, the younger writer's efforts did not yield congruent poetry. Far from it. Eschewing a smooth alchemical process, whereby ordinary leaden life is transformed gracefully—or *classically*, as Eliot would have had it—into golden poetry, *The Bridge* offers us dislocation which exercises focus. We have to continually jump, for example, between industrial bearings pictured in the mind's eye as hard, detailed objects, and their magniloquent expression as 'murmurless and shined / In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!'. One obvious consequence is that we are encouraged to dwell on the relationship between form and content longer than we would if we could swiftly and easily see 'to the core' of the poetry (Eliot). The mandatory back-and-forth movement is what makes Crane's poetry difficult, sometimes in a 'pleasure-crushing' way, to use a great phrase of Leonard Diepeveen's.[68]

[68] Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 152.

Furthermore, we might say that *The Bridge* manifests Adorno's idea of 'dissonance' which the philosopher, writing in the 1950s and 60s, proposed as 'the seal of everything modern'.[69] The dissonance arises because Crane's text appears dictionally autonomous, but at the same time depicts 1920s New York City without excising its misery (again, one of the clearest examples is the stately depiction of a maddened person leaping to their death as *The Bridge* opens). Adorno did not appear to investigate the possibility that twentieth-century art could remain true to what he saw as a brutal and disenchanted 'empirical reality', while also offering consolation.[70] For him, twentieth-century artworks can only really intimate utopia by repudiating positivity, at least in its mainstream guise:

> The caustic discordant moment, dynamically honed, is differentiated [...] from the affirmative and becomes alluring; and this allure, scarcely less than revulsion for the imbecility of positive thinking draws modern art into a no-man's-land that is the plenipotentiary of a liveable world.[71]

From Crane's perspective, though, there is no need to damn 'positive thinking' in order to force the reader to imagine a 'liveable world'. The poet's choice of diction enables him, at times, to portray an ostensibly unliveable world on the level of subject matter as well as its opposite on the level of lexis.

But, finally, what about Crane's claim that he wished to 'sharpen[] reality' with a lucid poetry? The only way I can make sense of this statement is to assume the poet thought reality roughly what he depicted it to be: dissonant, split unevenly between dominating language and that which lies beyond language. We could say that *The Bridge* sharpens the fact that most of existence is determined by our reverberating words.[72] The rest is truly phantasmagoric and can be interpreted as magnificent or not. Of course, *The Bridge* beckons us to choose the magnificence option. I do not think Crane's diction is about re-sacralising modernity, and it definitely does not present the reader with paradise. What wins out in the poem is the ecstasy

[69] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 7; 18.
[70] Adorno says that modern art receives society's ugliness through formal dissonance while *refusing* to console by harmonising that ugliness with beauty, which was the goal of many pre-modern (European) artworks (Ibid, 64).
[71] Ibid, 54.
[72] This is very different from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers who were, Hutchinson argues, preoccupied with words and excited about the possibilities of art as non-representational and '*only* style'. Crane's magniloquence was *not*, in my opinion, about foregrounding form to purify the language of his tribe, or so that we may ponder the workings of poetry. It was an attempt to represent what he felt was real (*Modernism and Style*, 6).

of someone electing to comprehend everything—including people killing themselves, gigantic, noisy and polluting technological innovations, Wall Street—as fit for kingly formulation and therefore ultimately positive. Crane's poetry is rather like a spell which, returning to Adorno, 'cancel[s] the spell that this world casts by the overwhelming force of its appearance'.[73] The sorcery of magniloquence is upfront about itself however, whereas the latter's—the world's—depends on pretending it does not exist until tricked into visibility by art.

[73] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 80.

Chapter 3: The Dematerialisations of Crane and Eliot

In the previous chapter I looked at the ways Crane makes the world he portrays magnificent via diction. Now I want to look at the ways he dematerialises things in his poetry via figuration, bringing the idealism of his optimism to the fore. Niall Munro made the astute observation a few years ago that by 1922, 'when he read *The Waste Land*, Crane was prepared to use a strategy that emphasized the immaterial world over the material to respond to and challenge Eliot's work'.[74] In my view, this emphasising involves the creation of impossible physical objects and situations and might be read as another side of Cranean sublimity. Overpowering or excessive magnificence goes hand in hand with Crane's tropological scrambling of the physical. That is, both tactics do 'violence to the imagination'––again, using Kant's definition—the kind of imagination, at least, which is determined to hold on to a conception of a hard-and-fast material world.[75]

When it comes to the difference between abstract (or immaterial, or metaphysical) and concrete (or material, or physical), I have decided, as in the preceding chapter, to follow Eliot's terminological lead (I will also do this when discussing 'allusion' and 'allegory' later). In 'The Perfect Critic', which was collected in *The Sacred Wood*—a book Crane read and praised—Eliot claims a word may be 'abstract' in the following ways: It may have 'a meaning which cannot be grasped by appeal to any of the senses' and/or 'its apprehension may require a deliberate suppression of analogies of visual or muscular experience, which is none the less an effort of the imagination'.[76] It is probable these criteria overlap.[77] The point is that in order to understand properly abstract terms, the mind must try to dispose of the sensory, and must also not (be able to) form a clear-cut picture or refer to anything tangible. The achievement of this kind of thing-less thought is of course debatable.[78] Though Eliot does not define 'concrete' words, we may deduce from the essay that they would encourage

[74] Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic*, 136.
[75] Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 129.
[76] Crane wrote in a letter: 'Certain Elizabethans and Laforgue have played a tremendous part in Eliot's work, as you can catch hints of his great study of these writers in his "Sacred Grove" [sic]' (*CPSL*, 257).
[77] Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', in *The Perfect Critic*, 266.
[78] Don Paterson, in a passage on the differences between abstract and concrete, comes to this conclusion: 'No distinctions can be clearly drawn'. This is because concrete terms enclose concepts. At the same time, 'it is difficult to say that an abstract term is *ever* used in a way that seems entirely free of the shadow of its real-world exemplum, something kept 'in the back of the mind' as a kind of experiential guarantor of the term's potential hypostatization' (*The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 192).

comprehension by means of the senses, as well as the conjuring of exemplifying or analogous visual or muscular experiences.

To scrutinise how Crane and Eliot handle the material-immaterial binary, I will compare famous passages from each text portraying bridges: Crane's Brooklyn Bridge in his proem, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', and Eliot's London Bridge in the first section of *The Waste Land*, 'The Burial of the Dead'. Each, I will show, presents the material as a *bridge* to the immaterial. It is probably more than a coincidence that this concept tallies with the subject matter.

In the months after *The Waste Land* was published, Crane described Eliot's pessimism as a killing off—or at least a secreting away—of optimism: 'Certainly [Eliot] has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and direfully as it can ever be done' (*CPSL*, 308). Suitably, this metaphor involves an abstract quality being interred by something stubbornly material, often symbolic of the destruction of every material thing: dirt. Extending the figure, we might say that Crane reversed Eliot's course in *The Waste Land* by unearthing positive abstractions and establishing their ascendency. However, it would be absurd to say that Eliot's poetry does not engage with immaterials. Lyndall Gordon has even argued that *The Waste Land* presents Eliot's 'case against the material world with authority', though 'his evidence for an alternative is flimsy'.[79] This observation is important, I think, as it captures both the main similarity as well as difference between Eliot and Crane with respect to materiality/immateriality. The main similarity is that both writers represent material reality as not the only one. Yet, with Eliot, the abstract is used to criticize the physical. With Crane, however, 1920s New York City is depicted as a way to abstractions which are, for the most part, positive. The poets' dematerialising techniques are also dramatically unalike, as we shall see.

Crane's Impossible Brooklyn Bridge

In 'General Aims and Theories', we find Crane describing the discovery of 'certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities' as the point of his poetry. Later in the essay, though, he warns that these quantities cannot be 'reached by merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio

[79] Lyndall Gordon, 'The Waste Land Manuscript', *American Literature* 45, no. 4 (January 1974): 564.

antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time' (*CPSL*, 161-162). Instead, the poet needs to go beyond outward appearances, using 'our "real" world somewhat as a spring-board'—where 'real', in this context, likely denotes the physical.[80] Crane contrasts his '*modus-operandi*' with the literary movement exemplified by Cummings' work (as we saw in the second chapter). 'The impressionist', Crane writes

> is interesting as far as he goes—but his goal has been reached when he has succeeded in projecting certain selected factual details into his reader's consciousness. He is really not interested in the *causes* (metaphysical) or his materials, their emotional derivations or their utmost spiritual consequences. A kind of retinal registration is enough, along with a certain psychological stimulation. (*CPSL*, 162)

That is, the impressionist aims to describe features of facts which can be detected by physical sight. This leaves the metaphysical causes of things, as well as their consequences, out of the picture.[81] It also requires the reader to do a lot of piecing together: 'If the effect [of the impressionist's text] has been harmonious or even stimulating, he can stop there, relinquishing entirely to his audience the problematic synthesis of the details into terms of their own personal consciousness' (*CPSL*, 163). The sentence echoes Cummings' statement in 'The New Art', presented before the 1915 graduating class at Harvard, that in 'Impressionism', the 'significant characteristics of the subject are caught and rendered; detail is left more or less to the [reader's] imagination'.[82] It is also possible Crane had in mind some of Ford Maddox Ford's theories about literary impressionism, most of which were based on the belief that the reader can achieve a sense of reality if the writer frankly conveys how the world is absorbed by their—the writer's—selective, discrete and distorting 'ego'.

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[80] Another statement in 'General Aims and Theories' buttresses my reading, though it metaphorically clashes somewhat with the 'spring-board' analogy. Crane wrote that he also wanted his poetry to spark a certain 'state of consciousness' in the reader which would allow the discovery 'under new forms' of 'certain spiritual illuminations'. Such 'new forms' included 'street car[s]' and episodes like 'the recent World War' (*CPSL*, 163).

[81] For more context, Crane was a Christian Scientist from the age of nine, when his mother converted to the religion, until his early 20s. In retrospect Tate wrote that Crane, 'came to New York at seventeen equipped with an hysterical and disorderly family, almost no formal education, and the cultural inheritance of a middle-western small town; his religious training had been in Christian Science' ('Crane: The Poet as Hero', in *Essays of Four Decades* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999), 324). If we take a look at the sect's central text, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875), we find Mary Baker Eddy propounding that 'Spirit is good and real, and matter is Spirit's opposite'. Though matter is evil, it is also crucially unreal. 'Divine Science' is Eddy's solution to this error of misperception—a method which rises 'above physical theories' and 'resolves *things* into *thoughts*' (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Writings of MaryBakerEddy, 2000), viii; 71; 123). Such ultra-idealism is likely to have influenced Crane's approach to the physical world. Indeed, some of Crane's pronouncements in 'General Aims and Theories'—about going beyond 'surface phenomena' and finding metaphysical 'causes'—sound definitely Eddian.

[82] E. E. Cummings, *A Miscellany Revised*, ed. George J. Firmage (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), 5-11.

Impressionism exists, Ford wrote in 1913, to render 'those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass—through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you'.[83] The glass is one's idiosyncratic perception. Crane's contention is that this approach does not question the bodiless reasons behind impressions, irrespective of whether they are perceived as beyond the mind's pane or as reflections. Essentially, the ellipses-loving impressionist does not often join the dots between material facts and also does not often delve into the metaphysical nature—perhaps substructure or superstructure—of such facts.

Let's turn once again to Crane's proem. When Brooklyn Bridge first appears, it is described in such a way that it barely registers from a physical point of view: 'And Thee, across the harbour, silver-paced / As though the sun took step of thee, yet left / Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—'. '[S]ilver-paced' is explained by the following two lines: The sun gives the bridge its silvery colour and paciness after coming in contact with the materials of Brooklyn Bridge—steel, limestone, grantie and Rosendale cement—gifting it a fraction of its own eternal ('ever unspent') dynamism. The bridge also has its own 'stride', though it is unclear if this stride has been bestowed, activated or simply accentuated by the sunlight. Brooklyn Bridge as a shining, striding receiver of everlasting solar power is not, of course, an entirely abstract image or idea, though it is nearly impossible to sensuously grasp.

The second major metaphorical take on the bridge comes in stanza six: 'Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still'. After that, we have the final five stanzas of the text, which are packed with figures:

> And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
> Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
> Of anonymity time cannot raise:
> Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.
>
> O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

[83] Ford Maddox Ford, *The Critical Writings of Ford Maddox Ford,* ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1964), 41-42.

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God. [1.25-44]

Paul Giles has aptly compared Crane's Brooklyn Bridge to 'one of those trick-mirrors which give a different reflection according to the angle they are seen from'.[84] In the proem, the structure is described in roughly eight ways (we have already taken apart and examined the first):

1. As a stride or pace of sunlight's unspent motion. This is the substance of stanza four.
2. As a breathy thing. This concept is introduced in stanza six and can be linked with the concept of the bridge as utterance (see #4 below).
3. As a numinous award ('guerdon', which is as 'obscure' as 'heaven'), accolade, reprieve and pardon. This metaphor makes up the seventh quatrain and is, I believe, single, though described in four slightly different ways.
4. As an instrument/music/utterance which connects human and divine. This metaphor governs the eighth stanza and, as with the seventh, is also described symbiotically in varying ways.
5. The first compound metaphor of the ninth stanza is probably the most abstract of the metaphors relating to Brooklyn Bridge, and constitutes the apex of the object's immateriality: 'swift / Unfractioned idiom', also an 'immaculate sigh of stars'.
6. As condensed eternity. This is technically a description of traffic lights on Brooklyn Bridge rather than the bridge itself (stanza nine).

[84] Paul Giles, *Hart Crane: The Contexts of The Bridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 84.

7. As a human-like or deity-like figure with giant arms capable of lifting night (stanza nine).

8. As one of God's myths, sleepless and vaulting a huge geographical area (there were no prairies in 1920s Brooklyn). This figure concludes the proem (stanza eleven).

Before analysing these figures, I want to take a look at Crane's understanding of metaphor. When Crane wrote at length about the figure in his well-known letter to Harriet Monroe, he gave no indication he distinguished it from other tropic types or subtypes, such as metonymy. Moreover, 'symbol' is sometimes used instead of metaphor—though the latter and its cognates twice as frequently—implying Crane saw the two as interchangeable or at least their differences as irrelevant. Critics, such as Gregory Zeck, have done a wonderful job of explaining this letter, which Crane wrote in defence of his metaphors in 'At Melville's Tomb', submitted to *Poetry* in the summer of 1926.[85] Founder of the magazine, Monroe charged Crane with three, interrelated figurative crimes: 1) his metaphors were illogical or did not make sense; 2) his metaphors were mixed, disorderly and 'packed'; 3) his metaphors were 'difficult to visualise' (*CPSL*, 803). In her response to his response—Crane's letter ended up in the October issue of *Poetry* sandwiched between the editor's sceptical addresses––Monroe shifted her argument slightly. Instead of claiming Crane's figures did not make sense, she claimed they were too difficult—too dense and elliptical for their meanings to come across. 'I think that in your poem certain phrases', she wrote, 'telescope three or four images together by mental leaps (I fear my own metaphors are getting mixed!) which the poet, knowing his ground, can take safely, but which the most sympathetic reader cannot take unless the poet leads him by the hand'.[86]

What was the gist of Crane's rebuttal? Simply that, in order to get at 'nuances of feeling and observation', the poet has the 'authority' to enter the realm of so-called illogic, which is really 'another logic' expanding the field of consciousness by going beyond poetry's 'already evolved and exploited sequences of imagery'. The poet has the authority, therefore, to make 'mental leaps' even if that means the reader will have a hard time following suit. Yet, crucially, the writer must 'supply the necessary emotional connectives' for the illogical metaphor to work (*CPSL*, 166-167). Crane then justifies his figures by dissecting one of

[85] Gregory R. Zeck, 'The Logic of Metaphor: "At Melville's Tomb"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1975): 673-686.
[86] Harriet Monroe, 'A Discussion with Hart Crane', *Poetry* 29, no.1 (October 1926): 40.

Eliot's similes, excerpted from 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night': 'Every street *lamp* that I pass *beats* like a fatalistic drum [italics are Crane's]'.'There are plenty of people', he claims,

> who have never accumulated a sufficient series of reflections (and these of a rather special nature) to perceive the relation between a *drum* and a *street lamp—via* the *unmentioned* throbbing of the heart and nerves in a distraught man which *tacitly* creates the reason and "logic" of the Eliot metaphor. (*CPSL*, 167)

To understand what is going on in Eliot's line, we must have had the particular experience, text-absent, which the metaphor has been brought into existence to represent. 'It is of course understood', Crane wraps up his discussion, 'that a street-lamp simply can't beat with a sound like a drum; but it often happens that images, themselves totally dissociated, when joined in the circuit of a particular emotion located with specific relation to both of them, conduce to great vividness and accuracy of statement in defining that emotion' (*CPSL,* 168). We might condense this to: Only feelings can yoke 'totally dissociated' imagery together and make sense of their connection. Certainly, Eliot's line is not a simple case where one physical object is identified with another. At first this may seem to be so, with the 'fatalistic drum' as vehicle and lamp as tenor. What bonds the images is their beating, their 'throbbing'. But, as Crane argues, stopping here leaves the main point in the shadows, which is the emotional state of 'a distraught man'. Distress is therefore the proper tenor of the sentence, while the two physical objects are unified via simile—into beating lamplight—and in that unification become something of a symbol for upset. Moreover, the immaterial tenor provides the 'logic' for the seemingly illogical conjunction on the material plane and resolves most of the problems which Monroe highlighted: potential bizarreness, unruliness, too much density (impeded visualisation is not remedied, however, as the goal of the metaphor is not to sharpen what occurs in the sensuous domain, but in the abstract). To be sure, Crane's understanding of Eliot's line refers to something physical, the body—'throbbing of the heart and nerves'—yet these symptoms are caused by a mood; an immaterial mover of bodies, not a body itself.

For Zeck, Crane's Eliot-based argument is not entirely convincing as his own figures under discussion—such as, 'The calyx of death's bounty giving back / A Scattered chapter' from 'At Melville's Tomb'—are 'more involuted' than Eliot's.[87] While Eliot's simile/symbol is obviously connected to a scene, which is relatively deictically clear—that is, familiar and

[87] Zeck, 'The Logic of Metaphor', 677.

physical (walking on a windy night past lamps)—Crane's 'calyx' metaphor is less obviously connected to the physical situation of, as Crane explains in his letter, 'the vortex made by a sinking vessel'. Yet, degree of complexity needn't impinge on Crane's theory. Following the poet's line of reasoning, if one has had the experience of imagining or witnessing death being a strange kind of cornucopia, then one should be able to supply the 'necessary emotional correctives' and therefore logic-beyond-logic for 'The calyx of death's bounty giving back'. *Mutatis mutandis,* if one has had the unmentioned mood which backs 'To Brooklyn Bridge'––perhaps the experience of God's presence in the midst of urban hubbub—then one will recognise how the bridge's plethora of figurative facets are joined in a single, emotional 'circuit'. Again, Crane's theory suggests that to understand certain metaphors, you have to discover the reason, usually immaterial, for the metaphor's existence.

Crane's unorthodox figures have been much commented on. Crane's 'violations', according to John T. Irwin, question 'the status of objective reality as the sole criterion of value'.[88] In the late 1980s, Lee Edleman used 'catachresis or *abusio*' to describe Crane's tropology, arguing the poet's goal is to name 'the nameless through abusive figuration'.[89] In a similar vein, Bloom wrote that one of Crane's major techniques is 'the trope-undoing trope': 'Crane's rhetorical negativity is omnipresent: he abuses metaphor until it hardly can be called that'.[90] I want to build on these observations, using the term catachresis, which Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska has argued usually shows 'a strong clash or incongruity, conflict or discordance' between its constitutive elements.[91] Yet my argument is that the conflict or discordance lies solely in the realm of the physical. What we really encounter when we encounter 'illogic', brought about by one or many of Crane's figures, is material impossibility. Crucially, an impossible material object or situation does not preclude logic or coherence or comprehension in the realm of the abstract. This assessment, I think, fits with what Crane attempts to articulate in his letter to Monroe: 'another logic' beyond the 'ordinary logical relationship between word and word', and I would add, also between physical object and physical object (*CPSL*, 166).

[88] John T. Irwin, 'Naming Names: Hart Crane's 'Logic of Metaphor'', *Southern Review* 11, no. 2 (April 1975): 293; 297.
[89] Lee Edelman, *Transmemberment of Song: Hart Crane's Anatomies of Rhetoric and Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 197-198.
[90] Bloom, *The Daemon Knows*, 460.
[91] Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, 'Catachresis–A Metaphor or a Figure in Its Own Right?', *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor*, ed. Monica Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2011), 41.

I want to write out the list of Crane's metaphors again, except this time ranking them from easiest to grasp materially to least easy, while keeping my original numbering. Unsurprisingly, the least easy are usually highly abstract—but not always. As we shall see, sometimes material impossibility lies in activity or placement. My notes on the degree and mode of impossibility are italicised. Two quick qualifications about the word 'impossibility' before processing. Nothing is completely materially incomprehensible. If a reader really wants to get sensuous with a figure, no matter how abstract it is, of course there is no stopping her. Moreover, as Paterson has pointed out, metaphor is fundamentally about sparking connections which often go beyond the possible: 'The metaphor has its frisson because it states a categorical impossibility, i.e. that something is that which it is clearly not'.[92] In other words, the impossibility is to be found in the comparison. How does Crane's metaphorical unfeasibility go beyond the one identified by Paterson? Because the former catachrestically scrambles the physical world so boldly and frequently that grasping *anything* material becomes extremely difficult, not just the identity of two or more entities. So, again, Brooklyn Bridge is figured in the following ways:

> 7. As a human-like or deity-like figure with giant arms capable of lifting night. This metaphor is easily materially constructed in the mind's eye. *The action, however, is impossible on a material plane* (stanza nine).
> 8. As one of God's myths, sleepless and vaulting a huge geographical area. This is probably, initially, the most material (compound) metaphor of those listed. Yet, the fact the bridge is described as something which can lend its symbolic 'curveship' to a concept of God destabilises the concreteness of the first part of the figure comprising rivers, seas and sods. *The impossibility here lies in the bridge's sleepnessness, great vaulting and descent to 'us'* (stanza eleven).
> 4. As an instrument/music/utterance which connects human and divine. This metaphor is both material and immaterial, beginning with two clear-cut physical objects: a harp and an altar. Later in the stanza the figure is elaborated in an abstract direction, however, *especially when we meet with the impossible-to-visualise 'Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge'* (stanza eight).

[92] Paterson, *The Poem*, 270.

2. As a breathy thing. This is on the borderline between material and immaterial. Breath cannot be visualised easily, though, *and cables breathing an ocean calm is an unfeasible activity* (stanza six).
3. As a numinous award ('guerdon', which is as 'obscure' as 'heaven'), accolade, reprieve or pardon. The figure is immaterial as the mind's eye cannot find much to look at when presented with adjectivally-unadorned nouns such as 'accolade' or 'pardon'. *The fact the first and governing metaphorical noun, 'guerdon', is compared to 'heaven' boosts the impossibility of visualisation* (stanza seven).
1. As a stride or pace of sunlight's unspent motion. Highly abstract and *nearly impossible to grasp materially* (stanza four).
5. The first compound metaphor of the ninth stanza is likely the most abstract of the metaphors relating to Brooklyn Bridge and could stand as the apex of the object's immateriality: 'swift / Unfractioned idiom' which is also an 'immaculate sigh of stars'. *Such imagery is impossible to picture physically* (stanza nine).
6. As condensed eternity. This is highly abstract and, again, *close to impossible to grasp physically* (stanza nine).

At a glance it becomes clear that at least six out of the eight metaphors collected here are very abstract, as well as mostly impossible to assemble as material entities in the mind's eye. Only #7 does not seriously buck material feasibility. #2, #4 and #8 are borderline cases which involve materially-stable objects/situations as well as elements of impossibility (in the cases of #2 and #8 that impossibility is to do with action). I will analyse in more depth the two most immaterial examples, #5 and #6, which make up the ninth stanza immediately below, returning later to the concluding borderline metaphor, #8.

> Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path—condense eternity:
> And we have seen night lifted in thine arms. [1.33-36]

This quatrain is like a hillock, with the base standing for literal description and the top standing for abstraction. The line invites us to ascend from delimited, concrete observation ('traffic lights') to a zenith composed of stars sighing. Crane then carries us back down again to the earthier image of an anthropomorphised Brooklyn Bridge lifting night in its arms. 'Traffic lights' can be sensualised. The purpose of the description, though, is not to draw the

focus to the lights but their skimming of the bridge, which is portrayed as beyond physical feasibility: It is rendered as a 'swift / Unfractioned idiom'. Then we have the 'idiom' described again or clarified—or some might say, obfuscated—by 'immaculate sigh of stars'. Stars can be visualised but the genitive (of-type) metaphor's focus is not so much on them, as it is on their one, immaculate exhalation. The reader remains aware (can opt to remain aware) that this is still Brooklyn Bridge being described, meaning what she is engaging with at this point is *hyperstasis*: a kind of metaphor where an abstract quality—'idiom', for example—stands for a concrete thing.[93] Traffic lights are represented by condensed eternity in the third line, after coming into contact with the idiomatic and star-sighing structure of the bridge. Thus, condensed eternity is also a *hyperstatic* metaphor, though Crane's figures generally cannot be easily isolated and tagged like this. The entire proem, for example, might be read as the opposite of *hyperstatic*—that is, *hypostatic*. Hypostasis is a species of figure where a concrete thing—the bridge of the title—stands for an abstract quality.

Let's take a closer look by examining, again, the final lines of the text: 'Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend / And of the curveship lend a myth to God'. The conclusion retroactively (unless it has already been intuited by the reader) converts the entire poem into a hypostatic metaphor or symbol. Yes, we can start out thinking the bridge is the text-present tenor and the descriptions figurative ways of conceiving it—e.g. Brooklyn Bridge is like an unbroken language. However, by the end it becomes clear—as Crane spells it out—that the concrete object in this case indicates a ruling abstraction: God. If the bridge is meant to mythologise God, then 'Unfractioned idiom', 'immaculate sigh of stars', and every other apparent metaphorical vehicle/source element should probably be read as facets of the divine. The text is thus *both* metaphorically hyperstatic and hypostatic, *as well as* symbolic—if symbol can be distinguished as a figure where the abstraction unquestionably rules, which Crane's ending suggests is the case.

We therefore might like to define the metaphorical concept governing the text as GOD IS A BRIDGE, where characteristics from the (source/vehicle) domain of the bridge are used to flesh out the abstraction that is divinity (target/tenor). However, as we have seen, many of the source constituents used to describe the bridge, and therefore God, are highly abstract. Regardless, showing how these domains blend makes up the bulk up the proem. Based on my

[93] Paterson, *The Poem*, 202.

list above, which I will now put back in sequential order, we can say that God is like Crane's Brooklyn Bridge because:

1. God is something always in motion, involving never-spent vitality and luminosity. This metaphor transfigures the bridge in a textbook (Gospel-based) way (stanza four).[94]
2. God calms oceans with breath (stanza six).
3. God, though obscure, gives rewards, accolades, reprieves and pardons (stanza seven).
4. God is something that encompasses human and divine; or, is the passion-powered connection between human and divine that music, sacramental ceremonies, fury, prayers and the crying of lovers create (stanza eight).
5. God is a swift, unbroken, astral exhalation/language (stanza nine).
6. God is a condensation of eternity (stanza nine).
7. God lifts night (stanza nine).
8. God is always awake, leaps great distances and stoops to make contact with 'us lowliest' (stanza eleven).

Most of these metaphors depend on the shared activities of the two domains.[95] Both bridge and God offer reprieve, for example. Some of the metaphors are more about the nature of source/vehicle and target/tenor: Both bridge and God are connective beings. Though there is validity to GOD IS A BRIDGE as the governing metaphorical idea, it is perhaps too restrictive. For example, 'lend' in the last line of the text might make us think of a temporary transfer which emphasises separation (between what is being lent and God) rather than metaphorical blending. It is also possible to isolate the final stanza from the rest of the proem, reading only the 'curveship' of the bridge as emblematic of God, whereas the preceding metaphors are meant to bring alive Brooklyn Bridge as the sole tenor. I do not read the poem

[94] Dorothy Lee, in her theological tract on the concept of transfiguration in the New Testament, has stressed the endurance, not annihilation, of materiality during the transfigurative process. When Jesus is transfigured in the Gospels, for example, his physical body 'becomes the icon of his celestiality' (Dorothy Lee, *Transfiguration* (London: Continuum, 2004), 133). This Christian notion has often been adopted by Crane critics when describing how the poet handles the physical. See, for instance, L. S. Dembo, *Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966). Yet, as the table above shows, the irradiation of a physical object with unearthly splendour is only one element contributing to the concept GOD IS A BRIDGE.

[95] Thus Paterson would call their metaphorical grounds 'aetemic' as the overlap between domains is to do with function (*The Poem*, 239).

in this way, though Crane's delay in naming God as the text's dominant animus or spirit certainly allows for it.

The list above hopefully shows that Crane's figures are not very illogical *on the level of the abstract*. So, to take #1 as an example, God as a stride or pace of sunlight's unspent motion is perhaps easier to grasp than—if we were determined to construe things only in material terms—Brooklyn Bridge as a stride or pace of sunlight's unspent motion. Moreover, most of the figures, comprehended via divinity as tenor, are congruent with one another. There is nothing illogical or mixed about God being both luminous and language-like. Because the deity-bridge's attributes do not have, to use one of Reuven Tsur's phrases, 'well-differentiated boundaries', conceptual coherence is available.[96] In fact, the key and encompassing picture on this more or less immaterial plane is a simple one and might be summed up as: God is good, bright and connecting. To risk repetition, however, though Crane's abstract notions accord quite well, the material components of the figures often clash and even mutually-destruct. Hammer's view is that Crane creates 'substitutive chain[s]' of metaphors.[97] That is, each new figure substitutes or erases the previous one. I would add that the erasure can work both ways. For instance, you cannot mix both harp and altar in the mind's eye without, in some sense, annihilating or at least radically changing the materiality of both. This leaves only their shared abstract tenor for comprehending, which is to do, I believe, with solemnity and communication. I would even go so far as to say that the instability of the material components of Crane's figures means the reader *must*, if they are to get any logic from the poem, draw conclusions from the abstract realm. The physical world cannot be mistaken for an end in itself. Using my own metaphor, what Crane's catachrestic-style tropes do is make the physical ground so unstable, you have to jump into the arms of angelic abstractions if you are to survive, semantically.

Eliot's Unreal London Bridge

Now let us compare what we have been discussing with Eliot's moment of dematerialisation in *The Waste Land*, beginning with the last stanza of 'The Burial of the Dead':

[96] Reuven Tsur, *On the Shore of Nothingness: Space, rhythm, and semantic structure in religious poetry and its mystic-secular counterpart* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 238.
[97] Hammer, *Hart Crane & Allen Tate*, 153.

Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine. [60-68]

With this passage, the patent physical world is described as not the most real thing by means of three elements, which I will list in ascending order of dematerialisation-power, or how effectively they dematerialise: 1) the introductory description of the city as 'unreal', 2) the allusive impact of Eliot's translation of 'Inferno III, 55-57': 'I had not thought death had undone so many', and finally, 3) the option of reading London Bridge and its traffic as allegorical, which arises because of 2), the allusion to Dante's gigantic allegory, the *Divine Comedy*.[98] These elements cause a temporary dematerialisation of interwar London. However, it is quite different from the kind of dematerialisation we have just been arguing takes place in Crane's proem. Eliot does not use catachrestic metaphors to irrevocably scramble the physical. The physical remains, yet it is robbed of its claim to supreme reality. In fact, the poem even hints that if materiality is taken as the supreme reality, it might become a kind of inferno. Or, to put it another way, if we think this is all there is—the physical here and now minus anything higher or beyond—we are doomed.

Before examining Eliot's dematerialising elements, I want to consider the idea, which has been around for decades now, that what we witness in this passage is superimposition. Robert Lehman is worth quoting: 'London remains London, though superimposed upon it is Dante's vision of Hell'.[99] If we go along with this reading, the line which triggers such superimposition is: 'I had not thought death had undone so many'. While Lehman thinks Dante's hell is superimposed upon London, Allyson Booth argues for the opposite: In the passage, she writes, 'commuters who cross London Bridge to their jobs in the city's financial district are *superimposed* onto two categories of people Dante installed at the periphery of

[98] In the 1990s William Sharpe wrote a brilliant book which treats the 'dematerialising effect' of Eliot's allusions. See *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot and Williams* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).
[99] Robert S. Lehman, *Impossible Modernism: T. S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 64.

hell: the morally neutral and virtuous heathen (born before Christ) [my italics]'.[100] Despite hinging on the same term, these two interpretations have quite different ramifications. Lehman's assumes that London's physical setup is not much undermined or unsteadied by Eliot's Dantean allusion. It is rather the solid receiver of an infernal 'vision'. Hell superimposed suggests hell is less real, more ephemeral, than London. However, if we agree with Booth's take, we find quite dramatic dematerialisation occurring. Twentieth-century London becomes subordinate to hell, the former a gauze through which the damned assert their reality. In this case, hell may be the more real realm. Superimposition as a term also implies the result of Eliot's allusion is two images made one, regardless of which one is overlaying the other. Is this really what takes place in the passage? I do not think so. Let's return to the three dematerialising tactics I mentioned earlier and walk through them, one by one.

The first tactic is to announce the unreality of London, demoting its material stature somewhat. Yet, the lines that follow, apart from the Dantean one, are mostly straightforwardly muscular, auditory and visual. Seemingly almost everything can be grasped by appeal to the senses. Nonetheless, 'Unreal city', because of its placement (heading the stanza, on its own) and synoptic breadth (we are taking about an entire metropolis here, not just one bridge or street) invites the reader to read everything which follows as unreal. Keeping our focus on the excerpt at hand, we might venture that 'Unreal' in this context probably implies that that which is commonly considered life—physical, palpable here and now, breathing people walking around a contemporary landscape—is really un-life or death, real life being elsewhere or suppressed. This point brings us to the next and linked dematerialisation move: the allusion to Dante's *Inferno*. Eliot's own definition of the technique, allusion, does not suggest superimposition but the creation of great space in addition to the non-allusive (by which I simply mean parts of the text which are not explicitly allusive). In 'A Note on Ezra Pound' (1918), Eliot calls Joyce a 'learned literary artist, [who, like Pound,] uses allusions suddenly and with great speed, part of the effect being the extent of the vista opened to the imagination by the very lightest touch'.[101] So, physically-feasible London Bridge and its traffic are dubbed unreal and then, in the fourth line, an infernal vista

[100] Allyson Booth, *Reading* The Waste Land *from the Bottom Up* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 59.
[101] Eliot, 'A Note on Ezra Pound', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, vol. 1, Apprentice Years, 1905–1918*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2014): 751.

is added to them, perhaps even encompassing or competing with them. Unreal London is no longer on its own but attached to a sweeping view of condemned dead.

The picture gets even more complicated when we add allegory to the mix. Eliot does not simply allude to a piece of text describing in a materially-feasible way, let's say, London or Florence in the 1300s. He is, rather, alluding to an allegorical take on spiritual or moral consequences for human souls. Again, I want to bring in the poet's own perspective, which is that 'allegory means *clear visual images*. And clear visual images are given much more intensity by having a meaning—we do not need to know what that meaning is, but in our awareness of the image we must be aware that the meaning is there too' (*SP*, 209).[102] Now we might combine allusion's vista-creating effect with allegory's clarifying and intensifying effect, taking into consideration the opener of 'Unreal city'. What I think occurs in the passage is roughly this. The unreality of the London Bridge scene means it, the scene, cannot be materially supreme. The opener also primes the reader for an alternative, or maybe even superior, reality, which arrives as an optional vista of a moral order where some are damned in the afterlife. The vista does not trump early twentieth-century London, nor is it superimposed, nor is it superimposed onto. Instead, what the reader is invited to engage with is a spiritual world which vies with the physical setup. Additionally, due to the allegorical component, London Bridge and its environs become clear, in the sense of glasslike, images. The flowing crowd made more translucent means gradations of damnation—perhaps a huge swathe of Dante's *Inferno* or as much as the reader, given license to roam by allusion, wishes to imagine—can be perceived through it, through numerous physical bodies. And since 'Unreal city' begins the sentence which concludes with the Dantean observation, the latter retroactively lends extra meaning to the introductory phrase. London is unreal because it is being presented as an allegory, seen through.[103]

However, I believe the degree of impact of Eliot's dematerialising trinity—unreality, allusion and an allegorical vitrification—is limited. This is because the allegorical component is an

[102] Moreover, according to Eliot, the reason for allegory's rareness in early twentieth-century poetry was not due to its unworkability but to 'our' vision's comparative restriction (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), 99-100).
[103] The original transcript of *The Waste Land* shows this passage beginning with a line emphasising the speaker's gaze: 'Unreal City, I have sometimes seen and see' ('*The waste land*: a facsimile and transcript of the original drafts, including the annotations of Ezra Pound / T. S. Eliot; edited by Valerie', British Library, accessed Aug 13, 2020, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-t-s-eliots-the-waste-land-with-ezra-pounds-annotations.)

allusive one, that is, introduced by allusion, which somewhat weakens its impact. It would be different if Eliot had written his own line about damnation, boldly signalling at the outset the stanza's allegorical character, with something like: 'Underworld city'. There is another reason for the fact that dematerialisation is limited, and that is the lack of clear development of the alluded-to allegory. The reader, after the Dantean line, is not given any indication the next five are still within the realm of the allegorical and therefore contain clear visual images. Are the sighs coming from dead souls or have we switched back to a more naturalistic lens? Are Saint Mary Woolnoth's strokes also of the underworld; is that why one of them sounds dead? We cannot answer these questions with confidence. Thus, Eliot's allusion to allegory appears to make London clear or transparent for a moment but conspicuously fails, in this case, to 'subordinate[] the formal features of the text to preconceived intellectual structures and a didactic purpose'.[104]

Another way of putting it: The promise of allegory to deliver a material world clarified as so many images made meaningful by certain abstractions, is used fleetingly by Eliot as a condemnatory device.[105] In my previous chapter, I argued snatches of magniloquence in *The Waste Land* serve to emphasise that the species diction rarely finds purchase in the modern world. Here, in a similar way, it would seem Eliot's flare of allegorical elucidation signals that modern, physical London might be deader than the concept of dead people being judged. In other words, what is really real is not breathy people walking to work, but the fact they are either destined for, or already in, hell. We might call what Eliot does here 'dark transfiguration'. London Bridge—bit of a larger waste land—momentarily offers passage to a comprehensive moral and spiritual order bereft of luminosity. In other words, something beyond the physical world is depicted but it is not a celebratory divine something, rather the curse of divinity's dismissal. If we want to project a ruling abstraction onto Eliot's passage, it could be the opposite of God. This was Bloom's angle: 'Crane's bridge is to Atlantis', symbolising a quest disclosing perfect, immaterial ideas (Bloom called these ideas 'Platonic'), whereas Eliot's bridge plunges toward perdition.[106] However, both poets in the

[104] Deborah Madsen, *Allegory in America: From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 123.
[105] Building on certain theories of Walter Benjamin, Bainard Cowan has argued that allegory decrees the physical world not enough. In fact, earthiness can be a barrier to what is real unless apprehended allegorically: 'Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible: as a mode of expression it arises in [...] response to the human condition of being exiled from the truth' ('Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, no. 22 (Winter, 1981): 114).
[106] Bloom, *Anon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 264.

passages I have picked out practice dematerialisation. Both present the physical world as not the highest-ranking reality. Reading *The Bridge*'s proem, we *must* spring from materiality (if we'll recall, Crane declared he wanted to use the so-called 'real' world as a 'spring-board') into abstraction as the material world is depicted as too illogical for much meaning to be got from it. With Eliot, materiality is also unstable, prone to becoming an unearthly place of damnation without warning.

Chapter 4: Flaming Bridge, Speaking Thunder

In my final chapter, I examine the theistic face of Crane's optimism, focusing on the conclusions of *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*. At the end of each poem, the speakers—alongside, at times, the rest of shadowy humanity—interact with godlike entities. People are brought into relationship with supernatural or transfinite powers that offer succour.[107] If I were studying the Sistine Chapel, an artwork Crane used as an analogy for *The Bridge*'s structure, I would be zooming in on the space between Adam's index finger and his maker's (*CPSL*, 555).

I use numinous words such as 'supernatural', 'divine', 'otherworldly' and 'deific' interchangeably. This is because I want to reflect the non-doctrinal capaciousness and mystery that characterises portrayals of divinity in both *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*, as well as in discussions of the extra-human in the poets' prose. Neither *The Waste Land* nor *The Bridge* elevates a single spiritual term or cluster of terms. *The Waste Land* contains a number of mythological characters, such as Tiresias, and religious allusions to both Buddhist and Christian texts, though only one overtly deific name: 'Lord'. 'Lord' is repeated twice at the end of 'The Fire Sermon': 'O Lord Thou pluckets me out / O Lord Thou pluckest' ('From St. Augustine's *Confessions*', as the footnote has it). *The Bridge*, on the other hand, is awash with diverse divine indices such as, 'God', 'incognizable Word of Eden', 'Elohim', 'Deum', 'O Thou Hand of Fire', 'HOLYGHOST', 'gods', 'Daemon', 'Deity', 'Everpresence'—not to mention others which are less explicit, like 'Answerer of all'. In Eliot's and Crane's published prose during the 1920s (excluding Eliot's post-conversation writings), we get a similar picture. Both poets deploy a range of designations when describing the supernatural. For instance, Crane, in 'General Aims and Theories', uses the rather vague word 'spiritual' five times and in his 1926 letter to Monroe, discusses postulating 'a deity somehow'. Glancing at *The Perfect Critic: 1919-1926*, volume 2 of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, we find that Eliot, when discussing Christian matters, respectfully uses

[107] Both 'supernatural' and 'transfinite' were used by Eliot in his 'London Letter: August, 1922', composed two months before *The Waste Land* was published in England. He wrote: for the writer who analyses the 'soul of man' using a (scientific and secular) technique like psychoanalysis, 'there is no possibility of tapping the atmosphere of unknown terror and mystery in which our life is passed'. If you wish to tap such an atmosphere, you must 'proceed from psychotherapy even to the supernatural, or at least to that transfinite world with which Henry James was in such close intercourse' (in *The Perfect Critic*, 412).

Christian terminology.[108] However, 'divine' is probably the most common numinous word used during the period, which, like Crane's 'spiritual', is broad and not necessarily tied to a particular religion.[109]

It is nothing new to say that the denouements of *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land* involve encounters with deities. However, these encounters have yet to be comparatively analysed. My argument is that both Crane and Eliot, in the final sections of their epics—'The Tunnel' and 'Atlantis' in *The Bridge*, 'What the Thunder said' in *The Waste Land*—depict almost everything which is not connected to the supernatural as unsatisfactory, sometimes downright tormenting. Chiefly, human finitude is represented negatively and, in the texts, comprises two major problems: the problem of solipsism or being bound in one's mind, and the problem of mortality or being bound for extinction.[110] The remedy is not human love, though, irrespective of whether it takes the form of romance or community. Generally, Crane focuses on the unworkability of the former (romance) in 'The Tunnel', while Eliot focuses on the latter (community). The only possible salve, *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land* suggest, is divinity surpassing the monadic mortal thinker. In Crane's case, that divinity takes the shape of dazzling, multiform Brooklyn Bridge, and in Eliot's case, talking thunder.

'The Tunnel'

When 'The Tunnel' was in 'feverish embryo', Crane attacked Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' in a letter to Munson dated 5 March 1926. After discussing his progress with *The Bridge*, Crane asked,

> Is the last statement sentimentally made by Eliot,
>
> > "This is the way the world ends,
> > This is the way the world ends,—
> > Not with a bang but a whimper."

[108] A good example is Eliot's 1919 review of Yeats' *The Cutting of an Agate* ('A Foreign Mind', in *The Perfect Critic*, 72-76).

[109] Another example is 'Dante as a 'Spiritual Leader'', originally published in *The Atheneum* in 1920, in which Eliot wrote: 'But the true mystic is not satisfied merely by feeling, he must pretend at least that he *sees*, and the absorption into the divine is only the necessary, if paradoxical, limit of this contemplation' (in *The Perfect Critic*, 233).

[110] Finn Fordham has argued that conceptualisations of self in literature, including those which accent solipsism, may be influenced by the writing process itself. See *I Do I Undo I Redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves in Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

> is this acceptable or not as the poetic determinism of our age?! I, of course, can say no, to myself, and believe it. But in the face of such a stern conviction of death on the part of the only group of people whose verbal sophistication is likely to take an interest in a style such as mine—what can I expect? However, I know my way by now, regardless. I shall at least continue to grip with the problem without relaxing into the easy acceptance (in the name of "elegance, nostalgia, wit, splenetic splendor") of death which I see most of my friends doing. O the admired beauty of a casuistical mentality! It is finally content with twelve hours sleep a day and archeology. (*CPSL*, 435)

Apparently what bothered Crane about Eliot's poetry during this period was its certainty of annihilation—'stern conviction of death'—and posture of submissive fatalism on the road to annihilation. Yet, the passage is not simply about life versus death. Crane recoils here at the *conviction* of death, which we might interpret as meaning: the belief in death. If this is the case, then the question becomes: How does one disbelieve in death? One answer might be to assert immortality or eternity for the human, abolishing the concept of death as extinction of everything, as a way the world will whimperingly end (for the human).

Published in *The Criterion* in November 1927, 'The Tunnel' is the only poem of Crane's we know for sure Eliot read (and presumably liked). Fittingly, is it also the segment of *The Bridge* most often described as 'Eliotic' by critics.[111] My reading of 'The Tunnel'—much of which takes place underground, inside a subway train—is that it countenances what Crane saw as Eliot's acquiescence to death, or, a kind of finitude excluding possibilities of immortality and/or union with the divine. Therefore, I believe the bulk of 'the Tunnel' describes those who are dominated by (the conviction of) death. The section begins with an address to 'You':

> Performances, assortments, résumés—
> Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights
> Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
> Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces—
> Mysterious kitchens. … You shall search them all. [7.1-5]

[111] See, again, Schultz, 'The Success of Failure: Hart Crane's Revisions of Whitman and Eliot in "The Bridge"' and Helge Normann Nilsen, *Hart Crane's Divided Vision: An Analysis of The Bridge* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980).

The person addressed, though viewing a multitude of people ('congresses'), is detached and literally separated from others in the poem by an ellipsis. We 'shall search' but not very fruitfully the stanza intimates, as we have to deal with 'refractions'—broken and deflected scenes—from a position of isolation. A handful of lines later, the protagonist decides to take the most convenient route home via the city's subway system, which G. M. Hyde has called Brooklyn Bridge's 'dark antithesis' and Sunny Stalter its 'evil twin'.[112] Once underground, three difficulties menace 'you'/us: 1) being mentally stuck, 2) death and 3) failed human love. I will track appearances of 2) which often involve either 1) or 3), sometimes both.

It is in the seventh stanza that death is properly entertained for the first time. Between shreds of decontextualised, inconsequential small talk, the speaker reflects:

> Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.
> This answer lives like verdigris, like hair
> Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;
> And repetition freezes—"What
>
> "what do you want? […] [7.47-51]

Here 'Our tongues' are trying to renounce or let go of what has tired them, which might be sexual love. The preceding line runs, 'girls all shaping up—it used to be—"', implies erotic attraction in the past (this interpretation is strengthened by the stanza following the one above, which ends with a sexual innuendo: 'if / you don't like my gate why did you / swing on it, why *didja* / swing on it anyhow'). The 'answer' referred to in the second line is ambiguous apart from its location 'Beyond extinction'. Perhaps, '"What // "what do you want?', is being answered proleptically—i.e. 'I want what is beyond dying or 'surcease of bone''. If this is so, then it follows that the question *cannot* be met with a response (the want cannot be fulfilled) while extinction is accepted as cancelling afterlife possibilities. Which may explain the phrase, 'And repetition freezes'. '"What // "what do you want?' will keep being uttered until the thing wanted is fathomed 'Beyond' the mortal.

The next mention of death comes in stanza nine:

[112] G. M. Hyde, 'The Poetry of the City', in *Modernism: 1890-1930,* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and J. McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 347; Sunny Stalter, 'Subway Ride and Subway System in Hart Crane's "The Tunnel"', *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, No. 2 (Winter 2010), 70-91.

The phonograph of hades in the brain
Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love
A burnt match skating in a urinal. [7.59-61]

Here we have another moment of repetition and communicative paralysis. Phonographs go around and around, and these phonographs are infernal, cranial ones. Hades is connected with the failure of erotic encounters: Love flares brightly for a short time, goes out and is unceremoniously disposed of as, and with, excreta. The two metaphors Crane uses—of the phonographs (demonstrating the way the mind can work) and the burnt-match-skating (demonstrating the way love between people can turn out)—are mutually supportive as they share the action of rotation, moving in circles. A hellish mental music opens tunnels in strange reversal (or perhaps the tunnels are referring to the spiral grooves on phonograph records) that, the addition of the last clause suggests, lead to love's never-ending end.

Crane then, in the next stanza, zeroes in on a seriously injured or dying—perhaps already dead—person:

Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
In interborough fissures of the mind …? [7.68-72]

The horrifying image of a smoking/smouldering/puffing (almost) cadaver, which has perhaps been run over by a train (it is 'riven'), is located at the rear of the brain. The mention of 'back forks' and 'interborough fissures' after 'tunnels' rewinding themselves in the previous stanza suggests an uncanny symmetry between the physical subway system and how the mind is structured. The latter is portrayed as ominously maze-like with little indication there is a way out. '[B]ack forks of the chasms of the brain' is another one of Crane's almost materially-impossible objects, challenging sensuous apprehension. When one tries to make chasmal, rearward or reversed forks within a brain three-dimensional, one runs into trouble. Regardless, the concept is a claustrophobic and confusing one, like 'interborough fissures', insinuating narrow cracks between dense municipalities of thought.

Finally, the most excited, exclamatory part of 'The Tunnel' which has to do with mortality, begins like this:

And Death, aloft,—gigantically down
Probing through you—towards me, O evermore! [7.78-79]

'Death' bears down, maybe on the entire subway, and also moves 'through' a deceased literary forebear (Edgar Allen Poe is the 'you' in this context), imagined as—or inhabiting the body of—one of the passengers. Because eyes are mentioned three times in the two sentences preceding the one above, the image implies 'Death' is probing through a passenger's and/or Poe's eyes. 'O evermore!' likely refers to the action depicted here. As the mind is commonly pictured behind the eyes, 'Death' has taken the place of the mind. And that state will, if accepted or believed in, perhaps last forever. Thus, we could hazard this summary of 'The Tunnel': New York City's subway system in *The Bridge* stands for a *belief system* excluding the options of transcendence and/or the divine, creating a world where people feel transported ineluctably to perpetual darkness, stuck in their own cognitive loops and experiencing sexual love as deficient.

Crane's Eternal, Leaping Cognizance

There are two moments of hope in 'The Tunnel' and both are supernatural: the resurrection of Lazarus, as he attempts to 'lift[] ground' in the penultimate stanza, and a gathering 'Hand of Fire' in the last line (it is important to note that human beings are not portrayed as gathering together; the agency promising unity is otherworldly). These moments look toward 'Atlantis', to which we will now turn.

The final section of *The Bridge* offers a resplendent alternative to *The Bridge*'s preceding segment. 'Atlantis' is made up of variations on one movement, which is usually tripartite and consists of: 1) ascension, where the awareness or sight or the entire body of the speaker (sometimes pluralised) is lifted up. Ascension creates the right conditions for 2) a transformation orchestrated by a deific bridge, which is usually followed by 3) a description of how the transformation comforts or saves the speaker and/or their society. To shorten my explanation: upraise leads to an experience of the work of divinity, which leads to relief.[113] What I will call Crane's 'Atlantean movement' occurs at least seven times in *The Bridge*'s

[113] In January 1926, Crane wrote to Waldo Frank about the 'last part of *The Bridge*': 'I have attempted to induce the [...] feelings of elation, etc—like being carried forward and upward simultaneously' (*CPSL*, 431).

concluding section of twelve octaves. Sometimes the movement takes place across two stanzas, sometimes it is completed within five lines. ‘Atlantis’ is about contact with a superhuman power, an ‘Everpresence’ that amalgamates disparate bits and puts an end to time.

I will look at three movements in depth: the first, occupying the first and second stanzas, the fourth (seventh stanza) and fifth (eighth stanza). Number one begins with quite relentless arising, ‘Up the index of night’, succeeded by an encounter with a zenithal curve:

> And through that cordage, threading with its call
> One arc synoptic of all tides below—
> Their labyrinthine mouths of history
> Pouring reply as though all ships at sea
> Complighted in one vibrant breath made cry,—
> “Make thy love sure—to weave whose song we ply!”
> —From black embankments, moveless soundings hailed,
> So seven oceans answer from their dream. [8.9-16]

There are a couple of ways the first two lines could be read since it is difficult to pin down the entity to which the ‘call’ belongs (it could be the cordage’s or the arc’s or even a god’s, described in the last line of the previous stanza: ‘As though a god were issue of the strings. …’). I have opted for this gloss: The arc (of the bridge), which sums up everything beneath it, is pictures as threaded, by means of its call, through the bridge’s cables or ‘cordage’. The call of the bridge’s single curved trajectory invites ‘history’ to ‘reply’. It makes sense to conclude that without the comprehensive arc, these mouths would remain mute in their confusing network perhaps leading nowhere (they are ‘labyrinthine’). Moreover—‘So seven oceans answer from their dream’—suggests that responding to the ‘One arc’ is a waking up process, an emerging from darkness (‘black embankments’), multiplicity (there are ‘seven oceans’) and unreality (the oceans ‘dream’).

Every one of Crane’s ‘Atlantean movements’ connects temporality, whether in the guise of ‘history’, ‘time’ or ‘death’, with what supersedes it: a timeless power granting a timeless perspective (the reader often comes to feel as if they are looking *down* on time). In February 1927, Crane wrote to Winters:

> Living expansively enough in the current of the times—one becomes sufficiently infected, I suppose, to faithfully represent in one’s reactions the characteristics of the

> period. If one is an artist the harmonious organisation of such prejudices, aptitudes, etc.—*sub speciae aeternitis* [sic]—tends to determine the cultural history of the age. But I think one has to turn away from the age at times—as much as possible—in order to see it all intensely or synthetically. (*CPSL*, 525)

Put maybe more succinctly, the artist's role is to depict modernity *sub specie aeternitatis* or under the aspect of eternity. Later in the same letter to Winters, Crane explains that, though he uses his period's 'materials' to create a sense of reality, in the main he feels it necessary to 'write from the standpoint of Adam,—or rather, I must always fool myself that Adam 'felt the same way about it'' (*CPSL*, 526). So, the artist has to 'turn away' from the modern era to see it clearly in its entirety. She has to turn away from it not only to other historical eras, but to a super-historical position,[114] cultivating an 'esemplastic eye'.[115]

The 'celebrated expression', *sub specie aeternitatis*, originated with Baruch Spinoza and is usually used to describe what is universally and eternally true.[116] Crane may have found it by tracing another of Spinoza's phrases used by Eliot in the early 1920s.[117] Roughly two years before *The Waste Land* appeared, Eliot wrote in 'The Perfect Critic' that the purpose of poetry is happy cerebration of God. 'The end of the enjoyment of poetry', he stated in the *Athenaeum*, 'is pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed'. Eliot labelled 'that stage of vision' '*amor intellectualis Dei*'.[118] *Amor intellectualis Dei* can be found twice, slightly reshuffled, in the fifth part of Spinoza's *Ethics* (first published posthumously in 1677). The phrase is linked to timelessness—'The intellectual love of God [*Amor Dei intellectualis*] […] is eternal' (Prop. XXXII)—and is a highly serene state of mind.[119] *Amor Dei intellectualis* is also introduced immediately after Proposition XXXI, which contains the 'celebrated expression' appropriated by Crane: 'Our mind, so far

[114] A couple years earlier, Crane had claimed that the poet's 'picture' of 'modernity' would 'simply be a by-product of his curiosity and the relation of his experience to a postulated "eternity."' (*CPSL*, 161).
[115] Lewis, *The Poetry of Hart Crane*, 374.
[116] H. F. Hallett, 'Spinoza's Conception of Eternity', *Mind* 37, no. 147 (1928): 294.
[117] Or Crane might have gleaned *sub specie aeternitatis* directly from Spinoza. Supporting evidence for this comes in an early 1931 letter where Crane mentions reading the philosopher, calling him familiarly 'Einstein's grandpop' (*CPSL*, 658).
[118] Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', in *The Perfect Critic*, 269. This proclamation of Eliot's, written shortly after 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', could be interpreted as clarifying depersonalisation's ultimate purpose: the eternal, contemplative experience of a deity. If we weld the 'The Perfect Critic' to the earlier essay, we get a roughly tripartite scale of depersonalisation, running from the suffering personality with a separable, divine mind, to collective minds of various breadth (English, European, etc.), to the apex: God.
[119] Spinozist scholar, Diane Steinberg, writes: 'The eternal part of the mind is not in the realm where struggle takes place' ('Spinoza's Theory of the Eternity of the Mind', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (1981): 35-68 (67)).

as it knows itself and its body under the form of eternity [*sub æternitatis specie*], has necessarily the knowledge of God'.[120]

We can be sure, however, that Crane encountered *sub specie aeternitatis* in a short article, 'For a Declaration of War', published alongside his poem, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen', in the 1924 winter issue of American expatriate magazine, *Secession*. The article's author was the novelist and social philosopher, Waldo Frank, a supporter and friend of Crane's, and the 'war' he declared was against spiritual decomposition responsible for modernity's hazardously fluvial character.[121] Contemporary artists needed to create a new 'spiritual body' that would enable the ordinary, limited 'intellect' to access 'super-conscious forces of life', transcending 'time, space, matter, etc.'. For '*sub specie aeternitatis*', 'the laws of cause and effect, the laws of logic, the laws of scientific research and experiment, the laws of mathematics are null and void'.[122] Frank's argument is roughly in agreement with one of Spinoza's. In 'Pars Quinta' of the *Ethics*, the philosopher expounds:

> Things are conceived by us as actual in two ways: either as existing with the relation to a certain time and place, or as contained in God and following from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things which are conceived in the second way as true or real, we conceive *under the form of eternity* [sub æternitatis specie], and the ideas of them involve the eternal and infinite essence of God [my italics].[123]

The first way of conceiving, which looks at 'a thing in the common order of nature'—more or less empirically—is a type of cognition which Spinoza dubs 'confused and mutilated'.[124] To get beyond mutilated knowing, we have to accomplish a different kind of cognition, 'intuitive' cognition. This travels, as it were, not from the earth (knowledge of our durational selves and other things) to heaven (knowledge of God), but in the opposite direction: The intuitive thinker starts from an idea of God and then proceeds to know everything else from that position.[125] Using a metaphor, we could say that the person who practices intuition does not gaze into a sort of eternal lamp, but becomes the eternal lamp, casting that light upon

[120] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. George Eliot, ed. Clare Carlisle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 309.
[121] Nilsen has assiduously examined Frank's influence upon Crane in *Hart Crane's Divided Vision: An Analysis of The Bridge* (Tøyen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980).
[122] Waldo Frank, 'For a Declaration of War', *Secession* 7 (Winter 1924): 13-14.
[123] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 308.
[124] Ibid, 139.
[125] See Beth Lord's accessible gloss on this part of Spinoza's *Ethics* in *Spinoza's Ethics: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 150-151.

everything they turn their attention to. Most people, Spinoza speculates, have access to this type of knowledge, but their commitment to the idea of time gets in the way: 'If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are conscious of the eternity of their minds, but that they confound it with duration'.[126]

In his 1930 essay, 'Modern Poetry'—published as part of a collection of essays, *Revolt in the Arts*, edited by the theatre critic Oliver Sayler—Crane used *sub specie aeternitatis* publicly, and this time with the correct spelling. His wanted to quash the idea that literature of the early twentieth century has to be incessantly revolutionary and free from all premodern or 'so-called classical strictures'. Rather,

> The poet's concern must be, as always, self-discipline toward a formal integration of experience. For poetry is an architectural art, based not on Evolution or the idea of progress, but on the articulation of the contemporary human consciousness *sub specie aeternitatis*, and inclusive of all readjustments incident to science and other shifting factors related to that consciousness. (*CPSL*, 170)

Representing consciousness under the form of eternity means embracing its temporal readjustments and 'shifting factors' from a superior—above or beyond—position. It means aiming at a trans-durational understanding of things. In early 1926, the poet created an index for *The Bridge* and sent it to his patron Otto H. Kahn. For 'Atlantis', Crane jotted the following note: 'The Bridge—A sweeping dithyramb in which the Bridge becomes a symbol of consciousness spanning time and space' (*CPSL*, 441). Moreover, in November of the same year, he explained in another letter how he had discovered it necessary in *The Bridge* to write about important, 'mythical' elements of 'our Western world'—such as 'science and 'psychoanalysis'—'chronologically'. Yet, out of this chronology, Crane wanted the reader to experience 'a kind of bridge'. That bridge's 'quest' was 'nothing less ambitious than the annihilation of time and space' (*CPSL*, 496).

Resembling Spinoza then, we might say Crane thought there were more or less two types of cognition or two ways of being conscious. You can possess a mindset defined by temporal and spatial perimeters or a mindset aspiring to span them.[127] Again, I believe the former is

[126] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 311.
[127] Though the adoption of the latter—cognition under the aspect of eternity—might demand a kind of death of the time-bound mindset. Does the pursuit of immortality (in a poem) mean the sacrifice of the poet's durational

described in ‘The Tunnel’, while the latter is most forcefully and consistently depicted in ‘Atlantis’. For a final illustration, we might compare the ultimate stanza of ‘The Tunnel’ with two stanzas in ‘Atlantis’, the seventh and eighth. ‘The Tunnel’ ends with a rather still thirteen-line unit (plus a fragment) after the subway train’s ‘Demented journey’. A tugboat sounds its horn, the speaker addresses their surroundings:

> And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
> Tossed from the coil of ticking towers. … Tomorrow,
> And to be. … Here by the River that is East—
> Here at the waters’ edge the hands drop memory;
> Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
> How far away the star has pooled the sea—
> Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die? [7.130-136]

That the speaker is ‘tossed’ from tall buildings suggests they are rather limply at the mercy of the time-keeping such ticking signals (also—‘Tomorrow, / And to be …’—adds to the emphasis on temporality). Then, in the third line, we find the individual standing at the edge of water, letting memories ‘drop’; the verb recalls ‘Tossed’ and so keeps up the momentum of descent. These memories are described as ‘shadowless’, indistinguishable from the ‘abyss’ into which they fall. Despite the faintly hopeful image of the last sentence—‘How far away the star has pooled the sea’—the stanza’s end is lonely.[128] The hands mentioned a second time appear cut off from everything else; the synecdochic element of the image has been weakened at this point by the sprawling notions of an abyss, distant stars and seas. Though the question—‘Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?’—is answered by the concluding fragment of ‘The Tunnel’ (in which a deific ‘Hand of Fire’ gathers the ‘Kiss of our agony’), it can be read as the negative climax of the penultimate section. The line sums up, perhaps, durational cognition, the fear that every ‘Tomorrow’ is ineluctably leading to an abyss in which all evidence of one’s life will be swallowed up.

The word ‘harbor’ appears again, however, in the fifth stanza of ‘Atlantis’:

> We left the haven hanging in the night—
> Sheened harbor lanterns backward fled the keel.

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self? Michael Symmons Roberts and Paul Farley wrestle with this question in their *Deaths of the Poets* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017).

[128] Peculiarly to my mind, Kramer, in his annotated edition of *The Bridge*, glosses these lines as optimistic, writing: ‘The hands in Crane’s text release the burden of memory and extend, palms open, into the “abyss” of the future’ (*Hart Crane’s ‘The Bridge’*, 123).

Pacific here at time's end, bearing corn,—
Eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel.
And still the circular, indubitable frieze
Of heaven's meditation, yoking wave
To kneeling wave, one song devoutly binds—
The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings! [8.49-56]

'We' are located 'at time's end', just as the speaker in the concluding passage of 'The Tunnel' is located 'at the waters' edge' that is abyssal. Instead of looking down, however, now we are invited to look up and witness the 'circular, indubitable frieze / Of heaven's meditation' as it bonds separate waves. This bonding action enables it (heaven) to create a single choral ode, sung to a 'deathless' instrument (the content here is extremely similar to that of Crane's first 'Atlantean movement' we looked at earlier). 'Time's end', if peered beyond—though this is not an easy task: 'Eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel'––effects a realisation of deathlessness.[129] The next stanza is the last to explicitly mention thought:

O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
The agile precincts of the lark's return;
Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing
In single chrysalis the many twain,—
Of stars Thou art the stitch and stallion glow
And like an organ, Thou, with sound of doom—
Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm
As love strikes clear direction for the helm. [8.57-64]

Here Brooklyn Bridge is charged with a consciousness ('Cognizance') that leaps, and within which birds or perhaps people are 'encinctured' as they sing. The bridge-mind also leads the senses—'Sight, sound and flesh'—beyond 'time's realm', hinting the speaker could not have moved into timelessness without the help of a powerful, overhead (the 'Cognizance' is likened to larks and therefore located high in the air), combinatory mind. The last two lines could be read as a simile: The bridge's movement is compared to love heading for the wheel that steers a ship. Or it could be read more causally: such 'Cognizance', represented by the bridge, is able to lead us to eternity. And because of this, love is loosed to move into a

[129] Crane's approach to death might have been inspired by *Democratic Vistas*. What America really needs, Whitman opines in that text, is 'great poems of Death', which, by drawing strength from '... the idea of All, with the accompanying idea of Eternity', will demonstrate 'death is not the ending, as was thought, but rather the real beginning'. Whitman acknowledges the 'poems of Life are great, but there must be the poems of the purports of life, not only in itself, but beyond itself'. Poems of Death are those which make sense of Life by declaiming that its meaning might lie where Life is commonly thought not to be (*Democratic Vistas*, 68-69).

position of leadership (‘the helm’). Finally, I think it is not an exaggeration to say that the last line recalls the image of erotic love between people in ‘The Tunnel’: ‘and love / A burnt match skating in a urinal’. The context of the ‘Atlantean’ love is nighttime, which was established in the previous stanza and has been sustained by mention of ‘stars’: ‘Of stars Thou art the stitch and stallion glow’. Yet the direction of love can be ‘clear[ly]’ seen. This encourages the mind’s eye to picture love as something bright, or its course could not be discerned. The verb ‘strikes’, in the sense of striking out, denotes vigour and purpose. Love is something both bright and quick. The vitality and quickness of this meaning of ‘strikes’, in turn, suggests another: to ignite (a match) by rubbing it briskly. Eternal cognition sparks a powerful love that, unlike time-bound versions, never burns out.

Eliot and his Problems

We have seen that, for Crane, the principal plight of ‘The Tunnel’ is the experience of finitude. The ‘Atlantean movements’ of the last section of *The Bridge* portray contact with a godlike power—the contact appears to make possible undying love and synthesis of the durational world *sub specie aeternitatis*.

What follows is a reading of the finalé of *The Waste Land* partly through the lens of Crane’s effort to wrestle with Eliot’s purported stern belief in death. The themes I will examine in ‘What the Thunder said’ are those I have already looked at with respect to Crane: 1) finitude, which splits into two components: a) being stuck in one’s head and b) mortality; 2) the inadequacy of intimacy between humans in the absence of something extra-human; and, finally, 3) a potential solution to the aforementioned in the form of supernatural power. The conclusion of *The Waste Land* is not as neat as Crane’s conclusion, where one section is dedicated to mental stuckness, death and failed erotic love, followed by another dedicated to the remedy. Therefore, to analyse 1) and 2) I will have to jump around, citing passages from both before and after the advent of the thunder’s speech. I will then move on to look at 3): how the thunder works as a possible supernatural saviour, while comparing its nature and impact with Crane’s bridge-deity.

‘What the Thunder said’ starts with dying. The perspective is adamantly retrospective. ‘After’ is repeated three times and life’s winding-down is presented as the chief activity: ‘We

who were living are now dying / With a little patience'.[130] One non-ironical reading of this line is that only a *little* patience is needed because only a *little* more of living remains. Very soon 'We' will be dead just like 'He' already is—'He' most likely referring to the 'Prophet mighty in deed and word before God', Jesus (Luke 24:19 [KJV]).[131] However, the subsequent stanzas are not patient. In fact, they are full of fret. The protagonist, who sometimes stands for everyone when using the third person singular 'one', is described as experiencing a kind of terrible, ineluctable momentum, unable to stand, sit or lie down. At the same time, the repetition of 'no water' (stated or implied no less than fifteen times in the section) gives rise to a sense of stasis, of encountering the same deficit over and over again.

The most famous moment of paralysis comes after the thunder's second clap: 'DA / *Dayadhvam*' (or 'sympathise'). The speaker longs to 'stop and think' among the mountains, but here thinking is shown to be part of the predicament:

> […] I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus [411-416]

Citing the above passage, and Eliot's footnote attached to it, which excerpts a paragraph from F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1893), James Matthew Wilson has labelled the 'nightmare' of *The Waste Land* 'solipsism': 'the absolute isolation of the self from being outside of it; the lonesome modern subject knows nothing but himself [or themself or herself]'.[132] Jewel Spears Brooker sees things in a similar light. For her, the *Dayadhvam* passage expresses a wish for 'self-transcendence' by means of re-immersion in Bradley's 'immediate experience', which precedes and surpasses entrapping discursive thought. Yet she finds little evidence that the prison is *un*confirmed in the lines that follow, concluding on a doubtful note: 'Perhaps immediate experience, like April, is cruel, promising what it cannot

[130] It is not hard to imagine this line feeding into Crane's narrative about Eliot as purveyor of the 'easy acceptance [...] of death' (*CPSL*, 435).
[131] The possible Christian cast of this section of *The Waste Land* has been mined by scholars for decades. See, for example, Leon Surette's 'The Waste Land and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment', *Twentieth Century Literature* 34, no. 2 (1988): 223-44.
[132] James Matthew Wilson, 'Style and Substance: T.S. Eliot, Jacques Maritain, and Neo-Thomism', *Religion & Literature* 42, no. 3 (December 2010): 57.

deliver'.[133] It is quite clear from the passage above that merely thinking about the solution—the 'key'—is not going to work. The prisoners cannot admit anything outside their crania, except perhaps 'ethereal'—otherworldly or celestial—'rumours' which might reanimate Shakespeare's tragic, obstreperous Roman general. Much could be read into Coriolanus. What is for certain, though, is that the character's name marks the first canonical literary reference in 'What the Thunder said'.

Some critics, like William Charron, have argued Eliot's theory of 'depersonalisation', outlined most explicitly and comprehensively in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), can be detected in *The Waste Land* as offering a way out of solipsism—or, feeling like a 'circle closed on the outside', as Bradley phrases it in Eliot's footnote.[134] To test the validity of this reading, we will have to first glance at the theory in question. There are two major concepts in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. These are: the 'existing … ideal order' or 'tradition' of the collective mind, and the poet's private mind as a 'transforming catalyst'.[135] Let's start by working descriptively from the bottom up; that is, from the least important and most expendable entity, which is the 'man himself' who 'suffers'. The personality experiences emotions and feelings, but also has a mind which is separable from it. This mind can be 'inert, neutral and unchanged' like a shred of platinum in the presence of gases which mix to form sulphuric acid. By means of the mind's inertia, detachment and passivity, the poet is able to 'transmute the passions' which rock the suffering personality. It is tempting to think that once the mind has separated itself from the personality, reaching impersonality, it then becomes ready to contribute to the 'ideal order' of civilisation's collective mind. Yet the 'process of depersonalisation' is not unidirectional. Significantly, I think, the poet does not surrender her personality to her own mind, but to the 'mind of Europe'. The poet, Eliot writes in the first part of the essay, 'must develop or procure the consciousness of the past'.[136] The next sentences jumps to self-sacrifice: 'What happens is a continual surrender of himself as

[133] Jewel Spears Brooker, 'F. H. Bradley's Doctrine of Experience in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets"', *Modern Philology* 77, no. 2 (November 1979): 156.
[134] William Charron, 'The Mind That Suffers, the Mind That Creates, and the Mind of Europe: T. E. Eliot's Use of Aristotle's *De Anima*', in *T. S. Eliot and Christian Tradition*, ed. Benjamin G. Lockard (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 113–124.
[135] An example of a collective mind is the 'the mind of Europe', though Eliot also mentions 'the mind of [one's] own country'. The collective mind, Eliot's essay suggests, *contains* 'the past' and 'tradition' ('Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Perfect Critic*, 105-114).
[136] Brooker, in agreement with Charron, also sees this kind of 'historical sense' on display in *The Waste Land*. See 'Dialectic and Impersonality in T. S. Eliot', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 3, no. 2 (June 2005): 129-151.

he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice […]'. Eliot does not define that 'something which is more valuable'. However, because of the proceeding passage about the past, it seems safe to assume that the personality must sacrifice itself to 'the consciousness of the past', which contains superior thoughts, meanings, morals and so on. My interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the 'mind of Europe'—which, the essay suggests, encompasses 'the past'—is described as being 'much more important than [the poet's] own private mind'.[137] The starting-point of depersonalisation, therefore, involves becoming 'conscious … of what is already living' beyond individuality. Once such consciousness has been achieved, the poet can discern how they are to contribute to tradition's order. They must realise 'what is to be done' in order to 'fit[] into' Europe's mind *before* being able to surrender their uniqueness to that work and reach impersonality by means of—not for the sake of—the private mind.

Projecting Eliot's process of depersonalisation onto the *Dayadhvam* passage, we might argue the prisoners are people who have not yet been able to escape their personalities. They are separated from each other by what they experience as their uniqueness. We might also claim that Shakespeare's Coriolanus, certainly a resident of Europe's 'ideal order', stands for a possible means of escape. This means if the prisoners were to 'develop and procure' a consciousness of Coriolanus, that consciousness might enable them to slough off their incarcerating personalities and join the 'mind of Europe'. Coriolanus, however, is dubbed 'broken' and only fleetingly reanimated by hearsay. Extreme insubstantiality concludes the *Dayadhvam* passage: 'nightfall' indicates lack of light and lack of definition, 'ethereal' means something too delicate or fine for this world. What is too delicate or fine for this world are 'rumours', and rumours suggest doubt. Added to this, the revival of the wrecked general can take place *only* at dusk, and then *only* 'for a moment'. Coriolanus, I believe, cannot be a symbol for solipsism solved. If Eliot really did intend for the character and/or historical personage to synecdochically represent European tradition, Coriolanus's flimsiness undermines the argument that what we see in the *Dayadhvam* passage is the possibility of depersonalisation via an 'ideal order' of cultural heritage.[138]

[137] Again, Eliot's description of the 'mind of Europe' as something 'which changes', though without superannuating 'either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen', implies it includes the past ('Tradition and the Individual Talent', 107).
[138] Moreover, even if Coriolanus were not portrayed as insubstantial in Eliot's poem, his association with hubris, because of Shakespeare's portrayal, would likely work against the reanimation of the Roman general as a successful saviour of the atomised collective.

The only other excerpts from European literary monuments in 'What the Thunder said' are found in the final stanza. The famous 'scrap-heap of quotations', as E. M. Forster called it, chronologically ranges from the Latin poem, *Pervigilium Veneris*, to a sonnet by Gérard de Nerval (taken from *Les Chimères*, published in 1854, a year before Nerval's suicide).[139] These 'fragments', dealing with distressed poets, are 'shored'—used as props or beams to support something unstable—against the speaker's 'ruins'.[140] Like Coriolanus, it could be said that they stand for Europe's 'tradition' or 'mind', possible succour for the individual (talent).[141] However, the image—or, if it cannot be visualised, the idea—of shreds of text being used to prop up ruins is exquisitely tenuous.[142] The interpretation which seems most suitable, then, is that great poets and their poetry *cannot* rebuild the speaker's ruins nor anyone else's, they can only confirm the wreck, just as thinking can only confirm the prison of thought.[143] Basically, art won't help and intelligence won't help.

The experience of being an individual is represented negatively in the *Dayadhvam* passage, but the group is also represented in a rather bad light and this holds true throughout 'What the Thunder said'. Much of Eliot's last section is written from the perspective of a collection of people, not a lonely figure. For example, the text begins with multiple individuals: 'After the torchlight red on sweaty faces'. In the second stanza the speaker bemoans the lack of privacy: 'There is not even solitude in the mountains / But red sullen faces sneer and snarl'. When 'I' does appear, it is often compared to, or in dialogue with, others. Furthermore, whereas the majority of Crane's 'The Tunnel' sticks to a single scenario or *origo* (a subway train), Eliot's

[139] Quoted in D. C. Fowler, 'The Waste Land: Mr. Eliot's 'Fragments'', *College English* 14, no. 4 (January 1953): 234.
[140] See Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue's excellent notes on these quotations for further context in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 704-707.
[141] This is a well-established reading of the quotation. Margaret Dickie Uroff's summary is typical: 'Eliot's allusions do function [...] to resurrect Western literature, to make his readers conscious of what they already know and what Eliot imagined every working poet must know in order to place himself in that tradition' ('The Waste Land: Metatext', *The Centennial Review* 24, no. 2 (April 1980): 157).
[142] A mid-century article on the relationship between Einstein's theory of relativity and *The Waste Land* by Steven Foster asserts: '[Eliot] faced a crumbling tradition and affirmed its bootlessness'. The poem shows that 'a fractured past' cannot 'undergird the discomfited present' ('Relativity and The Waste Land: A Postulate', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 7, no. 1 (April 1965): 94).
[143] William Marx reads Eliot's early-1920s desire to go beyond local colour and historical traits in terms of Charles Maurras's threefold programme (described by James Torrens as '*classique, catholique, monarchique*'), which lionised 'uchronia and utopia' and saw great literary works as located in a kind of Eden outside history. But if Eliot did believe in an Eden of magnificent literature, he did not portray it as a robust answer to the protagonist's predicament at the end of *The Waste Land*. See Marx's 'Eliot and Maurras on Classicism', in *T. S. Eliot and Christian Tradition*, 58-111; and Torrens' 'Charles Maurras and Eliot's "New Life"', *PMLA* 89, no. 2 (March 1974): 312-22.

final part of *The Waste Land* ranges between different, quite well-populated spaces.[144] At least two thirds of 'What the Thunder said' is written from an elevated or aerial position. Here is a stanza from the middle of the section:

> What is that sound high in the air
> Murmur of maternal lamentation
> Who are those hooded hordes swarming
> Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
> Ringed by the flat horizon only
> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal [366-376]

Asking about an unidentifiable sound 'high in the air' lifts the reader's attention and we stay hovering as the answer is supplied: 'Murmur of maternal lamentation'. Then another question—'Who are those hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains'—invites us to look down from an airborne position. The prospect is curbed by 'the flat horizon only'. What is being scanned seems much of the Western peninsula of Eurasia. The key urban centres of Europe and the Levant are pictured collapsing. A number of critics have maintained that *The Waste Land*'s expansile perspective—or, to borrow a metaphor from photography, Eliot's proclivity for wide angle lenses—encourages detachment or a sense of simultaneity.[145] For example, Alan Williamson and Clare Regan Kinney have both argued *The Waste Land* achieves a positive historical picture because that picture strikes the reader as inclusive.[146] Williamson goes so far as to say Eliot's text conjures 'a healing moment' beyond the present where all events 'seem to take place simultaneously, without excluding each other'.[147] Returning to Charron, we find a comparable interpretation: *The Waste Land* gives us an 'impartial and comprehensive vision of terror', comprising mentally and physically maimed characters who are brought 'within a single apprehension' that is Tiresias's. The 'first

[144] Paterson, *The Poem*, 286.
[145] Robert Lehman's recent take on *The Waste Land*'s simultaneity-effect argues it is rather ominous however. Eliot's text freezes history as a neatly progressive phenomena, thereby announcing its end: 'The poem insists, then, through the real or proleptic inclusion of all of (literary) history within itself, that there is nothing (historically, aesthetically) beyond it, nothing but more of the same' (*Impossible Modernism: T. S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 106).
[146] Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170.
[147] Alan Williamson, 'Forms of Simultaneity in *The Waste Land* and *Burnt Norton*', in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 154.

emotions provoked are horror and pity', but then a sort of *shantih* is achieved by means of contemplative distance.[148]

Yes, one could argue the simple fact of being able to zoom out, to the extent that it is possible to see history's tumult *in toto*, is unifying. However, if integration is present in 'What the Thunder said' it is to do with scope of awareness, not the content of that awareness. The species of timelessness in the passage is about repeated disorder—cities crack, reform and then burst again. There is a difference between a picture of historical chaos *sub specie aeternitatis*—under the aspect of eternity—and a picture of historical chaos going on and on.[149] Moreover, prior to the advent of the thunder, the viewpoints Eliot adopts are able to comprehend—in both the sense of understand and encompass—the waste land, but they are not able to fix it, remaining apparently powerless to do more than spectate. The towers and bridges continue to fall despite being captured from above. Brooker has asserted that community was one of Eliot's great desires throughout his lifetime—the move, that is, from isolation to unity with others.[150] Yet, in *The Waste Land* society is portrayed as badly disintegrated and helpless.[151] In addition to thought and great culture, then, it would appear community is represented as unable to save the speaker and humanity.

DA DA DA

If there is a quenching fix in 'What the Thunder said', it is not to be found in the mountains or on the plains. Nor is it to be found in the observation of never-ending civilizational disasters. If there is something approximating an answer in the last section of *The Waste*

[148] Charron, 'The Mind That Suffers, the Mind That Creates, and the Mind of Europe', 128.
[149] Though, according to Hannah Sullivan, with *The Waste Land* Eliot tried to 'produce a poem that surveys past and present with the cool, classical perspective of *sub specie praeteritorum*', or under the aspect of the past (*The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 144-145.
[150] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*: *T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 122.
[151] In the Clark Lectures, delivered in 1926 at Cambridge University and originally intended for publication as a book titled *The Disintegration of the Intellect*, Eliot painted a chilling picture of long-term societal disunity. The eighth and final lecture, 'The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison', is a particularly good example. Eliot avers that the 'most awful state of society' is one divided between 'acute thought' (found in the scientific disciplines) and 'acute sensation' (found in the arts). In this state, humanity becomes no more than 'a highly perfected race of insects'. Though the term 'tradition' does not appear in Eliot's lecture, the concept of a common mind, to which the individual can contribute, does. Thus, the solution to a disintegrated, insectile society is mental cohesion on the collective level: 'The role of the artist' should be 'the development and maintenance of the mind' so that it might achieve great 'range' and 'unity'. For Eliot during the mid-1920s, humanity ascends to higher levels of civilisation the more its shared intellectual components cohere ('Lecture VIII: The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison', in *The Perfect Critic*, 749).

Land, it is to be found in a dark, cloudy sky—or, more accurately, in thunderous detonations of wisdom and peace.[152] The thunder is probably the most god-like thing in *The Waste Land*. The only other contender, to my mind, would be the 'hyacinth girl', though she is more portal to the extraordinary than light's heart and silence. Indeed, the recently-unsealed 'Hale Letters' collection at Princeton University Library reveals Eliot saw the passage as autobiographical, based on his memory of young Emily Hale.[153] The thunder is, moreover, positioned as superior—larger, louder and more conclusive (it gets the last word)—than the speaker, as well as European/Levantine societies. As we have seen, the perspective adopted prior to the thunder's triple-DA stanza is often an aerial one. However, directly before the claps arrives, at the beginning of the eight stanza, the poem's point of view descends. No longer soaring above 'endless plains' or 'among mountains', it appears to lie with the 'sunken' Ganges, and with the lacking and anticipant earth: 'limp leaves' are 'wait[ing] for rain'. The posture of everything is low—the jungle is 'crouched, humped in silence'. What is important to note is the fact that, for the first time in *The Waste Land*, the speaker is positioned beneath a force which is unearthly and magisterial ('thunder' is mentioned twice earlier in the text but passingly and as something far off and 'sterile'). In other words, hitherto the awareness or ego (sometimes pluralised) of the poem has been mostly sovereign. Though the speaker is described as dreadfully uncomfortable and relatively helpless for the first two thirds of 'What the Thunder said', nothing obviously more powerful or wiser than their thinking is portrayed. What keeps the point of view below the thunder is not only the 'sunken' prelude to the DA's, but the postlude: 'I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me'. This scene comes after the response to the third and final thunderclap: *Damyata* (or 'control'). What it accentuates, retrospectively, is our hunch that the speaker has been rooted to the parched ground the entire time the thunder has been speaking. We see an 'arid plain' instead of a crouching jungle but this is not too perturbing a scene-change as the lack of water brings the regions together.

[152] Year ago, Michael Holt made the beautiful observation that the repetition of 'shantih' onomatopoetically reproduces 'the sound of steadily falling rain', stating that such 'an ending is meant to communicate breakthrough and resolution' ('Hope and Fear: Tension in "The Waste Land', *College Literature* 8, no. 1 (January 1981): 29).

[153] Frances Dickey, who has been relaying the contents of the archives to the academy and general public, remarked recently: 'Eliot's identification of Hale as the Hyacinth girl and "my friend" in *The Waste Land* [...] finally puts an end to any lingering plausibility of Eliot's theory of "impersonality."' ('May the Record Speak: The Correspondence of T. S. Eliot and Emily Hale', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 66, no. 4 (December 2020): 443-444).

The thunder's three claps elicit three responses which emphasise the fundamental powerlessness of the speaker and of the speaker's hazy interlocutor(s) ('my friend' in the *Datta* passage and 'you' in the *Damyata* passage, for instance), and of humanity (when 'we' is used in the *Dayadhvam* passage, since there are no parameters to numerically curb it, the pronoun instantly encompasses every human being). In the *Datta* passage, the 'we' is shown to be transitory, depending on *Datta* for existence; in the *Dayadhvam* passage, as I have already shown, everyone is trapped. In the *Damyata* passage, 'you' is placed in a subordinate position—with heart 'beating obedient' to unspecified 'controlling hands'. It could be argued these 'controlling hands' are the speaker's but the next line undercuts this interpretation as it depicts the 'I' in a position of relative impotence, sitting on a shore surrounded by barrenness.

The experience or practice of *datta* ('give') is something which requires 'awful daring'. Despite thunder-commanded generosity being incredibly difficult and wracking, it is also, apparently, the *sole* thing that really powers and lends meaning to life: 'By this, and this only, we have existed'. Live by anything else, and you have not really lived. However, the thunder's *datta* goes undetected by the ordinary, tangible world—the world of obituaries, cobwebs and empty rooms. From the solicitor's point of view, from the point of view of physical walls and memories taken over by spiders, *datta* never was. The great moral force leaves no vestige though it rocks the heart. Such a stark opposition suggests *datta* transcends time; time as composed of obituaries and deteriorating memories, as a measurement of the process of dying.[154] For Shire Wolosky, *The Waste Land* exhibits Eliot's 'negative, transcendent impulse' which attacks attachment to the world.[155] Apparently this impulse is *not* accompanied by a compensatory vision. Wolosky's interpretation side-lines the speaking thunder, however, which offers powerful, positive principles without which one ceases to exist/have existed. It has to be conceded, though, that Eliot's *Datta* passage ends with 'empty rooms', the world continuing on after our death and without proof we dared so awfully. It seems there is no doing away with the disjunction between the thunder's precept and the solicitor's realm.

[154] In 'Burial of the Dead', Saint Mary Woolnoth keeps the hours with 'dead sound[s]'.
[155] Shire Wolosky, *Language Mysticism: The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 18.

Thus, the primary difference between the godlike bridge in Crane's text and the godlike thunder in Eliot's text, is that the effects of the latter are hard to make out. As we have seen, Crane's bridge-deity takes control of reality, transforming it into something eternal and united. There is usually no doubt where the power lies: 'the circular, indubitable frieze / Of heaven's meditation' 'yokes' 'wave / To kneeling wave'—to take an example from the fourth Atlantean movement. This yoking prompts deathless music and is not contradicted by anything—is not occluded later by more descriptions of isolation or perishability. Contrastively, the numinous intervention of *datta*, though showing up the emptiness of human existence without it, is elusive. *Datta* is 'not to be found' in the material traces of any person, which plausibly includes the poem we are reading, *The Waste Land*.

After the third DA (*damyata* or 'control'), more ambiguity ensues. As Giles Mitchell has pointed out, the counter-factual conditional tense ('your heart would have responded') suggests the chance of achieving *damyata* has passed.[156] Furthermore, as we have seen, this moment is followed by an abrupt return to the solitary 'I', which led F. R. Leavis to the conclusion that *The Waste Land* 'exhibits no progression'.

Leavis's position was countered by Cleanth Brooks in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1948):

> It is true that the protagonist does not witness a revival of the waste land; but there are two important relationships involved in his case: a personal one as well as a general one. If secularization has destroyed, or is likely to destroy, modern civilisation, the protagonist still has a private obligation to fulfil.

'Shall I at least set my lands in order?' is apparently the voicing of this 'private obligation'. Brooks then went on to argue the 'bundle of quotations with which the poem ends' bears witness to the protagonist's resolve to 'claim his tradition and rehabilitate it'.[157] A number of factors appear to undercut this uplifting interpretation of one human's determination to make things right for himself. First, 'Shall I at least set my lands in order?' is followed by childish, jingling, 'London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down'. This not only infects the foregoing with a tone mockery but suggests that London Bridge and its environs might be

[156] Giles Mitchell, 'T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land": Death Fear, Apathy, and Dehumanization', *American Imago* 43, no. 1 (April 1986): 31.
[157] Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (London: Poetry London, 1948), 162-163.

those ‘lands’ the speaker wonders if she/they/he should order. If this is the case, then the endeavour comes across as futile. What could be gained from righting wreckage? Moreover, the ‘I’ in the final lines admits to possessing ‘ruins’. Because of the proximity between ‘my lands’ and ‘my ruins’ (only four lines separate them), the text invites a retrospective blending of the two once we reach the latter. The individual speaker is therefore not portrayed, minus the thunder, as a bearer of hope or capable of positive action on her/their/his own.

O Answerer

Both *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land* climax with overhead, otherworldly powers eliciting responses from below. Each poem depicts a kind of subordination of ‘I’ and ‘we’ to something greater. The deific bridge of Crane’s ‘Atlantis’ is repeatedly portrayed as an eternal power well able to solve the problems of finitude. The speaking thunder in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, instead of acting upon and changing reality like the bridge, offers a moral way and pacification. What precedes these powers are individuals often mentally stuck and facing death minus the possibility of anything beyond death, as well as descriptions of human disconnectedness.

The outlook Crane and Eliot render as torturous—where there is no recourse to divinity—could be compared to the one Charles Taylor attributes to the thoroughgoing materialist ‘buffered self’ in *A Secular Age* (2007). Building on Max Weber, Taylor describes ‘disenchantment’ in the book as the process whereby a cosmos of spirits, demons and moral forces disappears to make way for what many ‘North Atlantic’ people experience as a truth today: The isolated human mind is ‘the *only* locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan [my italics]’. According to Taylor, then, the ‘inner’ side of disenchantment involves the ‘replacement of the porous self by the buffered self’.[158] The latter tends to see people as axiomatically discrete, autonomous capsules of thought and meaning in a disenchanted—thoughtless and meaningless—universe.[159] As far as thinking is concerned, the buffered self is the highest power, thrillingly or frighteningly alone. Yet, this view usually includes a significant circumscription, which is finitude. The buffered view seems to necessitate

[158] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 33-34; 539.
[159] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32.

interpreting death as 'simply the negation, the ultimate negation, of flourishing' and the self's existence.[160] Basically, it would appear that one cannot be both individuated master of the universe's meanings *and* immortal. Choose to see yourself as separate, sealed off from the world/others and you choose mortality. By contrast, the 'porous self' participates in an enchanted world filled with spiritual forces. The source of *this* self's most powerful and important experiences are 'outside the "mind"; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area […] which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense'.[161] Using Taylor's terminology, then, we might put our summary this way: *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land* seek to represent the anguish of the buffered worldview, while encouraging movement in the direction of porousness, or becoming open to powers beyond the apparently finite, human ego.

However, as have already discussed, the impact of Eliot's divine force is much less straightforward than the impact of Crane's 'one Bridge of Fire!'. Ted Hughes, in his introduction to a reading of *The Waste Land* at the Palace Theatre in late 1988, characterised 'the voice of the Thunder' as 'like the voice of the Creator'. He went on in a qualifying vein, however: 'As a final blessing, this evocation of the limits and perimeter of human awareness, in the terms of a great ascetic religion, can seem precarious. Little more, perhaps, than a frail, containing sphere'.[162] '[F]rail containing sphere' is a fantastic description, capturing the fact *The Waste Land* introduces us to something apparently higher than 'human awareness', though that something—in terms of its proximity, accessibility and intelligibility—is delicate, maybe even weak. And it bears repeating that, in the last stanzas of Eliot's text, two distinct realms persist: the human-society-falling-down realm and the supernaturally-speaking-thunder realm. How they might become joined is not really adumbrated in the poem. Nor is possible contact between the earthly ('I'/'we'/European/Levantine civilisation) and unearthly (thunder) described as happy or elevating.

At the end of Crane's 'Atlantis', the speaker of the poem is claimed by the supernatural bridge with which they have been in a kind of dialogue, while suspended above the earth:

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[160] Ibid, 320.
[161] Ibid, 38.
[162] 'Typescript draft of Ted Hughes's introduction to a reading of *The Waste Land*', British Library, accessed 15 March, 2022, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/typescript-draft-of-ted- hughes-introduction-to-a-reading-of-the-waste-land.

Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower,
O Answerer of all,—Anemone,—
Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold—
(O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)
Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late! [8.84-88]

Eliot's protagonist in 'What the Thunder said' remains on the ground even after hearing 'the voice of the Creator'. In *The Bridge*, by contrast, the 'singer' (along with 'us') is answered, brought to the centre of a holy flower larger than multiple suns, the light of which possesses––inherits—the poet. Because 'hold' is repeated twice, I think it is safe to say the word is probably the passage's key verb, denoting how the supernatural relates to the human. The latter, the person who is part of 'history' is raised and embraced 'late'—that is, after the usual or expected time, perhaps after time itself.[163] In this section, what lives beyond the chronological grasps the speaker and probably everything else with its 'radiance'—Atlantis disburses suns, implying it is vaster than solar systems. It would not be accurate to label what occurs in these lines as transcendence, however, in the sense of 'going beyond oneself', as Sarah Allen puts it.[164] The singer remains delineated. The historical/collective and the individual are gathered by the divine, not totally subsumed or transformed, and the effect of experiencing intimacy with something greater than the self is delightful: 'Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring'. In the last line of *The Bridge*, the heavens speak like they do in Eliot's text, though the style is not thunderous, but gentle and jivy: 'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing'.

[163] Though 'late' could refer to the singer, evening meaning dead. If we choose this interpretation, the plea or exhortation comes across as something like: hold me in the afterlife. Either way, I think 'late' gives an air of *afterness* to the whole line which it finishes as the stressed syllable of the final iamb.
[164] Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving Beyond Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 15. See also Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, 'Immanent Transcendence in Rilke and Stevens', *The German Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 275-296.

Coda

Eliot's estimation of Crane was high, though this assessment is based on lean evidence. Eliot accepted 'The Tunnel' for publication in *The Criterion* in late 1927 and wrote to Crane's mother soon after her son's suicide in a letter dated 29 June 1932, remarking that he 'admired' Crane's poetry: 'There are very few living American poets in America of equal interest to me'.[165] To a certain extent, then, Eliot and Crane esteemed each other's work. Indeed, though *The Waste Land* and *The Bridge* frequently differ formally, in terms of their dictional and figurative choices, they do not differ so much regarding final, focal message. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, *The Bridge* is a magniloquent poem for the most part, while magniloquence is used sparingly by Eliot in *The Waste Land* to represent scenes which are out of joint with modern times. In Chapter 3, I argued Crane deploys catachrestic metaphors which dematerialise his contemporary world by representing it as impossible in physical terms, though not impossible when comprehended metaphysically. The result is an emphasis on the ultimacy of abstracta—meanings which 'cannot be grasped by appeal to any of the senses'.[166] Eliot, on the other hand, criticises early twentieth-century city life by giving the reader the option of interpreting *The Waste Land* allegorically. Dematerialisation results, though the hellish realm which is revealed in Eliot's London Bridge passage is more a function of the physical scene than any sort of desirable alternative to it. The two (originally) Midwestern poets align with regards to the thematic *teloi* of their poetry however. And this was the concern of my final chapter. Together, *The Waste Land* and *The Bridge* can be read as offering divergent paths to the same peace passing understanding. Each text ends with descriptions of something higher than the mortal monadic thinker—ends with endlessness. The key difference is that Crane's endlessness is more obviously effective than Eliot's, in the sense that Crane details the happy outcome of contact with the 'Answerer of all'.

Before closing, I would like to briefly reflect on how the imperatives discussed in my critical thesis manifest in the creative work. The idea of writing *Aeneas* was sparked by *The Bridge*'s sweeping exuberance and my feeling that here was a poem intensely committed to depicting scenes of sublimity and salvation; the optimal. I wanted to write something which would also convey trust in overarching good. I called my project an 'ecstatic epic' and began casting

[165] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, vol. 6, 1932-33,* ed. John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2016).
[166] Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', in *The Perfect Critic*, 266.

about for a structure, some narrative or system, to found it on. After sifting through a range of texts, I read the *Aeneid* and decided it might work for what I had in mind, aware Crane had compared *The Bridge* to 'that great work' on more than one occasion (*CPSL*, 558). Fortuitously, the more I studied the Latin poem, the more I discovered themes which suited my Crane-inflected vision, themes like the supernatural and journeying toward a redemptive goal.

My wish was to create a lengthy document as seamless and magniloquent as possible. It was not to be. The poem which started taking shape was composed of short texts, usually no more than ten lines, strung (sometimes quite loosely) together by the plot of the *Aeneid*. I found myself writing in a compressed rather than expansive way, liking the effect of inwardness achieved by means of techniques such as parataxis and alliteration. The former creates density, for me at least (phrases come across as jammed together when they lack coordinating and subordinating words), while alliteration stresses strong binds between phonemes. Moreover, no matter how hard I tried, I seemingly could not keep my diction consistently high-flown. *Aeneas* became a wrought text, but not one regularly emphasising dissonances between exquisite language and downcast subject matter. However, the argument I think magniloquence makes in Crane's poetry—that everything is worthy of magnificent representation—is spelt out in my work, e.g. 'the universe is much more sumptuous / than these thoughts can sketch' ('12.3 Aeneas And Ascanius').

In fact, much of my optimism in *Aeneas* relies on relatively straightforward arguments. Taking inspiration from Crane's proem to *The Bridge*, I decided to outline the purpose of my text as I saw it early on: The 'gist' was to show everything, even the apparently terrible ('lions' claws'), united as benign ('1.1 Prelude'). This tack risks didacticism, though, and I worried quite a bit about my speakers communicating in an irritatingly know-it-all manner. How to dampen preachy elements? One solution was to have characters impart their beliefs to other characters. For instance, in Book 6, Anchises, Aeneas's dead father, tells his son about the 'truths' he has managed to find in the underworld (though Aeneas as interlocuter is only implied). The pattern repeats in Book 12 when Aeneas passes hope to *his* child, Ascanius: 'You will be shown. / You think your body is falling / but there is a trapeze of contentment waiting to catch you / below, / below.' There are also times when my speakers concentrate on rallying themselves, as in the first section of '7.1 The Sun … Then A Daughter Of The Sun', which ends: 'Don't start that dejection thing again. / There is not a

niche / that doesn't hold a sign for you— // that won't offer, in the name of its source, one more clue'. The 'you' here is not the reader, of course, but the ego of the text.

So, formally *Aeneas* diverges from Crane's *The Bridge*. It also diverges regarding dematerialisation. Despite this being one of Crane's important tactics, it rarely occurs in my work. That is, there are few extended descriptions of the material world in *Aeneas*, and the instances where I focus on physical objects and scenes are almost always metaphysically framed. For example, in '10.5 The killing of Lausus', the earthly stanza which concludes the section is spoken by a character who is already dead. To risk a generalisation, I would say *Aeneas* starts from a place of dematerialisation, rather than ending there. That the poem is an upfront adaptation of the *Aeneid* means it is strongly allusive, triggering many potential Virgil-related 'vista[s]'.[167] The geographical *origo* of *Aeneas* is not Chicago or London in the last decade, but a mixture of contemporary, ancient and spiritual landscapes. All scenes, as a result, come across as rather bodiless, often from the outset.

Crane's use of Brooklyn Bridge as a presiding symbol makes his poem fairly deictically stable. However, at the same time, and as we have already seen in Chapter 4, the bridge is intended to represent consciousness spanning space and time; an eternal cognizance which enables the reader to know their present *sub specie aeternitatis*. Figures and cityscapes from the past are incorporated—Tyre and Troy in 'Atlantis' for instance—but the overriding impression is one of timelessness, not simply temporal or historical simultaneity as with *The Waste Land*. In *Aeneas*, I have likewise aimed to convey struggles to transcend compartmentalised time. Most often and obviously, this is accomplished by what I described in the previous paragraph: mixing temporalities, figures and scenes from different periods. A good example is the first text of '2.2. Excutior Somno', where **'**the ample houses of Deiphobus' (lifted from Virgil) are mentioned alongside 'South Circular' (a major road in London five minute's walk from where I live). On occasion, my lyrics are clear that eternity is real and something the speakers seek. For example, in '3.3 The Seer', one of the poems finishes, 'Take our best parts and uphaul—Lord— / so that we end alert constituents / of the starred commonweal', while in '4.3 Rapt II' there is a yearning for 'fairy moods / fully healed from the clockwork'.

[167] Eliot, 'A Note on Ezra Pound', in *Apprentice Years*, 751.

Looking at time more technically, my approach to the apparently bygone world of the *Aeneid* can be divided into three categories. The first, rough translation, is the most faithful. When I was relating to the *Aeneid* as someone wishing to paraphrase it, I would read excerpts in Latin, alongside one or two English translations, before attempting my own rendition with the aim of wholly updating Virgil's lines (see, for example, the first poem of '1.2 Flung'). However, I only tried this a few times as it was never my intention to create another English-language adaptation of the epic. The second approach usually involved picking a phrase or sentence from the original text and using it as a basis for exploration. For example, I became fascinated by the famous piece of advice, 'omnis fortuna est superanda ferendo' (or, 'all misfortune is overcome by bearing it'), which appears in the fifth Book of the *Aeneid*. Repurposing the fragment as a section title, I tried to write everything for that section under its influence. Then there is the third approach, which I could sum up as: new wine, old bottles. With this method, I would use the general contours of Virgil's narrative and/or characters as vessels, filling them with autobiographical details. While the shape of the episode was preserved, I threw specifics out to make way for those from my life.

Aeneas is explicit about the sealed-off, mortal human being finding little relief without connection to something greater (not sealed-off, eternal). Thus, my work syncs with the conclusions of both *The Bridge* and *The Waste Land*. Yet *Aeneas* is closer to *The Bridge* in that it seeks to depict struggles for union with the divine, rather than accent distinction or distance between human and numinous as Eliot appears to do. I believe the urgency of the exertions I portray—to feel close to, or at one with, the supernatural—makes for the most obvious affinity between my work and Crane's.

Without exception, every Book in *Aeneas* touches on the theme of human-divine connection. Some of these moments of contact are represented as happening in 'real time'—where the speaker is usually represented as crying out to deific power and asking for a response (see '1.2 Flung')—whereas others are recollected (see '2.1 Hector Appears'). In roughly equal parts, the connections are negative, hopeful and celebratory. When negative, the speaker is generally dismayed and panicky. Distress is what prompts them to entreat the supernatural. The *de profundis* mode is represented a few times in Virgil's text. As it happens, the first poem I worked on for my thesis was a rendition of a scene where the hero, terrified in the midst of a massive storm at sea, asks the heavens why he is still alive. My prose translation of the Latin runs:

> Immediately the limbs of Aeneas are slackened with fear. He groans and stretching both hands to the stars, relates such things with his voice: O both thrice and four times happy they, to whom death came before the faces of their fathers, under the lofty walls of Troy! O Diomedes, the bravest of the nations of the Greeks, why is it that I have not been able to fall on the Trojan plains and to pour forth this soul by thy right hand? […] where the great Sarpedon lies […]'.[168]

I transposed this desperation to the skies, seating Aeneas on an airplane flying through turbulence. My poem ends:

> Looking out the polycarbonate windows
> that have been crazed by ultraviolet exposure, I, Aeneas—
>
> thinking: *shit, shit …*
>
> attenuated December.
> And why didn't you, Lord,
> let me die back with Sarpedon—
> in Chicago, next to canal corridors
> cut into sandbar, instead of
> keeping me chasing after these aurora-lines, so high?

Then there are the positive requests meant to muster courage in the speaker and sustain momentum: 'Keep away anguish / and show me how to fill the daily cracks with goodwill' ('4.5 Sub Umbras').

The most positive interactions are ones which echo the final stanzas of Crane's 'Atlantis' to the extent that they report the results of intimacy with the divine (though the big difference is that, in *Aeneas*, there is no object like Brooklyn Bridge acting as intermediary). I will use an example from my ultimate section. Virgil's poem ends with Aeneas's frenzied killing of Turnus. The last line describes the latter's indignant spirit fleeing, with a moan, to the underworld ('que vita indignata fugit cum gemitu sub umbras').[169] My conclusion, however, attempts to broadcast hope by depicting Turnus's departure from a world of suffering and entry into a world of pervasive kindness. That kindness is given a couple labels: 'God',

[168] The translation I have relied on most heavily for my creative component is an interlinear one, first published in 1882. *The Works of P. Virgilius Maro, Including the Æneid, Bucolics and Georgics, with the original text reduced to the natural order of construction*, trans. Levi Hart and V. R. Osborn (New York: David McKay Company, 1969), 12-13.
[169] *The Works of P. Virgilius Maro*, 384.

‘Love’, ‘something that cares / forever in the farthest reaches of dead space’. As we have already seen in Chapter 4, at the end of *The Bridge* Crane’s ‘singer’ is inherited by the divine while grass is steeped in pity and the sky filled with whispers. The conclusion of *Aeneas* is similar as it depicts the speaker’s realisation that emptiness does not exist—every place is crowded with benevolence. In this way, I have tried to do what Eliot thought Virgil did not do: make a case for God/Love as that which ‘causes *fatum*, or moves the sun and the stars’.[170]

Crane once wrote that the dour stoic looks at apparent badness and says, perhaps rather arrogantly: I can bear this (*CPSL*, 599). It can be inferred, then, that the optimist looks at badness and says, perhaps more humbly: I cannot bear this. Crane’s sort of optimism, which I have tried to uphold in my own work, is grave and well-acquainted with a pessimism that is experienced as unendurable. *The Bridge*’s hopefulness is grand because the extent of its grandness, magnificence or ‘hysteria’ (Winters) is proportionate to the terror it has to beat out.[171] In Crane’s work the positive—beauty, bliss—must have sway over everything else, or else. I want to end with what I think is an illustrative biographical example: the poet’s romantic relationship with Emil Opffer. After experiencing an ‘ecstasy of walking hand in hand across the most beautiful bridge in the world [Brooklyn Bridge]’, Crane wrote in the spring of 1924 to Frank that the love between himself and Opffer—denominated ‘indestructible’—had not only made the pains of the past worthwhile, but every possible misfortune to come. The blessedness Crane tasted in the arms of his beloved, and in the night-lifting arms of Brooklyn Bridge, cast the world for all time right: ‘It’s true, Waldo, that so much more than my frustrations and multitude of humiliations has been answered in this reality and promise that I feel whatever event the future holds is justified beforehand’ (*CPSL*, 384).

[170] Eliot, ‘Virgil and the Christian World’, in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 131.
[171] Winters, ‘The Progress of Hart Crane’, 157-162.

Appendix: *Aeneas*

1.1 Prelude

Virgil:

This poem's gist? To promote visions
of us as single social cloth
made from both lambswool
and lions' claws—
soft, white corkscrews closed around cutting tools.
The entire thing patterning
surrender.

1.2 Flung

Virgil:

I sing of tattered Aeneas
who was driven from home
by nothing he could make out clearly,
who found on all sides rocky waves.

I sing of him as I look for help, as I look up from the page.
Tell me, someone,
how did rage get inside,
the first time, our pristine brain?

—

Aeneas:

Turbulent Heathrow-bound flight.
I'm holding cutlery, white like over-stressed coral,
as the luggage
bins clatter.
Looking out the polycarbonate windows
that have been crazed by ultraviolet exposure, I, Aeneas—

thinking: *shit, shit …*

attenuated December.
And why didn't you, Lord,
let me die back with Sarpedon—
in Chicago, next to canal corridors
cut into sandbar, instead of
keeping me chasing after these aurora-lines, so high?

1.3 New Home

Aeneas:

I am a stranger come here by way of
cloverleaf junctions,
my shoes through ryegrass dragging and scattering seeds
like hardened tears—
Iowa, Skipton, Kentucky, Chicago, London—
household gods in tow.

What should I call you;
woman, shade …
miraculous catch of the retina?

—

There was very little ground yesterday, but it is here today:
a kind of paving that materialises
the moment it is hit
by my boot
and not a second beforehand.

I could say, *this is God's hand*.
All the power there is weightless with cheer.

Simply, elementarily: one foot in front of the other,
as more affluent versions
of myself lean overhead—
letting their sight-lines dangle down
onto placard paint bubbling,
white architraves
and disposed-of coffee stirrers.

1.4 Take Heart

Aeneas:

When I arise from this lashing life at last,
there won't be any dirt crusted
about my chest or legs.
I will claim
the lightness of a dragonfly, as well as its jeweled abdomen,
and sing clear.
I'll rebound to what I have always sensed—
not believed, believed,
not believed again, and then ... cargoed deep:
the peace
which centrifuges
and will save us.

1.5 Feast

Aeneas:

In the park’s botanical murk
where the roundabout is,
she walked by trailing—
like young clubbers their strong deodorants—
a kind of case
for ubiquitous grace.

—

If you reach inside
your heart
and I reach inside
mine—
at some plush,
red point,
won’t our fingers
interlock?

2.1 Hector Appears

Hector:

Needing to tell you this,
I have draped myself
in the gauze of your sleep:
the night of our battle's windup
no human came
to my rescue.
I remember thinking distraught:
all my graft for nought—
filigree gravel, tipped by a fly's wing—
before something
fell
on my sticky corselet:
a caress.
One hand wasn't responsible
but the whole, flake-light soul of love
focused, I swear.

2.2 Excutior Somno

Aeneas:

Here I am alone and coming—
manifold combustion engines going over,
getting older.
Having not yet been able to sustain partnership,
having not yet.

Bland breezes because the elms have stepped out of space,
as well as the ample houses of Deiphobus.

Curious and curiouser.
I overheard a man singing by the side of South Circular:
through the darkness, we'll go.

It was the most sweltering May Bank Holiday.

Curious and curiouser.
Decades slid into a mental sachet.

He's ever but slenderly known himself—
webbed with drowsiness and taints.

Huff-puff, strut-strut … here with my hands between my legs,
as the small leaves coin themselves.

—

Pantheus, the priest:

Now I see my city is sand and wind, uncontrollable.
The Lord has decided to remove—
ferus Jupiter—the Lord has decided to unnerve.

Go, young fighter, and find something broader than life
for your brace.
Alone in our bodies we can't convey the loss.

2.3 Sacked

Aeneas:

Stack of polyethylene panels,
soot bulk, my city.

Your people dumbfounded.
Your people dragging sacks,
light fixtures, gym-equipment, baby-food—
stepping over scaffolding tubes.

Your lordly doorposts
and colonnades of fluted sun,
my home, my Ilium—
headlong
London.

2.4 Small Signs

Aeneas:

Bee, flying straight, then at inebriate angles,
where did you, how did you, get your
bravery? To make the attempt,
just go for it—
breaking apart with your small shuttle-like shape
blackthorn-gazebo
shadow, where it shall be offloaded:
your painstakingly saved
& sunny sweets.

—

Virgil:

Treat me as you treat the dandelion clocks, wind.
Pick out my ideas and throw them about
& do not stop until I am a bald dial—
small round white in your wake.

—

> Calm. You don’t have to get frantic.
> There is an always and steady daybreak inlaid.
> Isn’t everyone pulled up to this table
> of the same stuff? None subpar?
> Look at her forearms—
> how it is like
> her sugars are giving off light.
> What plants do, but in reverse.

2.5 Nothing Is Happening Without Decree

Aeneas:

For the brightness of these hills
pain should get the credit.
And for the cloud-shadows,
like magician's cloth,
draped and then pulled away—ta da!—
revealing yellow buttercups
nodding hard against
the named world's frame.

—

I sat down in Russell Square park and wept,
facing, in white sacks, laurel cuttings swept
up—with a couple of packets,
likely dropped by lunch-breakers (just gone away)
under the silk racket
of pigeon wings.

3.1 Setting Out

Aeneas:

Driven by the warnings to search out exile,
we collected those who were willing
on the shores.
Neptune's buildings lay smoking—
tall offices, warehouses.

Told to commit our sails to the fates,
wind pummelling the deep, I hurled my voice:
since I didn't see what was coming,
from now on trust
will be the way my blindness navigates.

—

Setting out with the birds teasing our plans.
Setting out and chucking the usual.

Setting out with zeal. Setting out with resolutions to investigate deeply:
the fog clinging to the complexness of larch.

Rowers, cyclists, bus-riders—*en masse* setting out.
Climbers setting out.

The earth less and less offhand,
and more, instead, like the dark zeal of a cat's pupil.

—

Virgil:

The relief's to cede outcomes, yes, that's sure,
while the not-knowing—God—goads to labour.

3.2 Bizarre Pollution

Aeneas:

When raked up from the dirt,
these bristling myrtle shoots
drizzle black blood instead of sap.
I examine the roots,
hearing a thin whining at their ends.

Yes, some story is coming out
with the fluid:
about how Polydorus swapped his country-love
for a heap of cash
and is now the reason for this bizarre pollution under our feet—
a crop of plastic-tipped
spritzers inside him.

—

> London, stubborn against the wind's broom.
> London, smelling like an air-field.
> London, I have got that thought again
> alighting in the gloom,
> where conkers lodge, the mucky floor:
> can't seem to do
> what would give
> my looping blood the verdict: valid.

3.3 The Seer

Aeneas:

Wed our minds to your promise.
Wed our minds to your super-still.

On one side, leaves looking like tired money.
On the other, a queue of airplanes toy-white.

Don’t let us lolly-gag,
don’t let us go back to when we were unaccompanied selves and sad.

Take from us what you gave in the first place!
Take our best parts and uphaul—Lord—

so that we end alert constituents
of the starred commonweal.

—

Virgil:

Crow wings cut the frost.
The frost, like it has been grown
from some uncommon concentration while we were unconscious—
glass-edged conceits
where there used to be
grass pieces—
inside the morning’s hush hard-won.

I have looked on
and here is the receipt.

3.4 Looming

> O nothing’s to be done
> except drop control—
> seeing as I have ever been
> in earth’s ghostlike, good hold.

—

Virgil:

Baldly put, I don’t really want to live
if I can’t tell well how it is,
how it was!

If I can’t quell
the clock’s mock
by restyling some of its ticks
into stubborn print.

3.5 Gone

Aeneas:

Next the harbour and joyless coast of Trapani
received our *Speedrunner*—
the gummy strips of seaweed
and petrol tetra-cans with the mooring buoys …

and along the quay crown daisies in bunches, lame with sleep.

It is intenser than the one we grew up with—
this type of death—
if you could call it death …
involving the young sparrow, involving the striped jellyfish.

4.1 Ignition

Dido:

Expectation of our minds doing things to each other,
bent on each other.
Expectation of bringing into contact—
primed notches, femoral depressions.

Expectation of bungling after that.
Each good skipping away
from hands very small compared
to not-you space.

—

Aeneas:

Let this be the resting place, lying against her,
Lord. Don’t hurt
by throwing me back
seaward.
The fate so far I’ve been ruled by
—full of idiot cannon—
break to powder please
permanently here,
and end these thoughts that feud
beside our rocking, happily headed nowhere.

4.2 Rapt I

Dido:

Feet planted on broken membranes of plastic,
I see the flight-lines
of the jackdaws
and the airplanes veering—
newly trained to a stand-still true,
that is the idea of you.

—

Aeneas:

I can find no deadliness
in the subsided headstones under our shoes
as we walk
and you laugh softly.

Stick, time,
with this one tie … of what substance?

It is as if the sun is singing through us.

4.3 Rapt II

Aeneas:

Astoundingly good thing,
constellation of thoughtfulness beside me,
somehow also a frank body
buying parsley at the counter,
hair branching the pillow later,
at night when it pleases the universe—or my Lord
—to let me catch your
small, magic floods.

Because a vision written is stronger: I see ahead
our days
lit by that calm which comes
from the unashamed grapple to be one, done.

—

Dido:

This is not the first time
one person's weight has climbed me
and I've felt tempted to show
marks made by teeth
as signature
for officials—
forgetting business deeply.

Again that boy with the quiver is to blame
and his mother,
genital-loving goddess as she's been called,
standing behind him
in wet clothes.

—

Aeneas:

Hauling my stiff self to the slope
of your stomach,
as the 8am moon implies precincts where they woo:
fairy moods
fully healed from the clockwork.

4.4 Decline

Moving outside, Aeneas notices
the piazza is toned like yesterday or like months ago,
as if memory's already beaten him to it
and candied over
with its sad solution:

the benches,
the plant-pots,
the automatic door.

—

Aeneas:

It has been gently explained:
the saboteur is me.
Against the great dimensions of May,
I am the one squeezing—
pinching down
to a point,
what might still be
the blue and abounding
magic trick of we.

4.5 Sub Umbras

Dido:

Keep away anguish
and show me how to fill the daily cracks with goodwill.
Clear heartache from me—
you dawn,
you thrown light like a harness, falling upon
the fragrant herds
and the footprints left in sand
by a fractal bird.

—

Aeneas:

Why can’t I be who I am?

Because your brain has blown these great, lightless bubbles
and they have stopped
you from seeing
we are not here and there,
marking the park—

we are one, gladsome muscle.

5.1 Game

Inside, & all over, you are tattooed with mission.
And every brick of protein constituting you
knows that too. You've been equipped
for the notice—and the attrition.
Step then from the nought-
wetsuit of your hiding
and shout—*halloo.*

5.2 Blaze Of Discouragement

Beroë:

Still much trash to cross.
Seabirds wink pure options, though
we can't pocket them.
Most days my crew caterwauls:
when's payday,
when's payday?

I want proof as well
these won't go on forever:
jerking exile,
sunsets hammering harder every year,
disputatious seafoam …

Hell, the more I keep venturing,
the more I keep losing,
my shins slipping into sand
and my mind
into slight pieces
of space-destroying laughter.

5.3 Our Frail Affairs

Aeneas:

> Like a dozy mega-rose,
> what has already been lived
> breaks up from somewhere secret—
> and throws
> an aromatic dragnet across the street.
> It is hard to keep walking.

5.4. Omnis Fortuna Est Superanda Ferendo

Nautes:

Slip your feet into the seconds
that were designed for you.
And buckle your head with patience—
it is a silken helmet.
Relax,
go grip-less,
while at the same time waiting
for Eden, which likes to leap from under the treads
of our worldly stair.

—

> Unrushable clouds,
> moving with radiant sticks in their backs
> like the banderillas
> of a matador.
> Looking up, I feel no affiliations are allowed
> nor job-titles.

5.5 Sleepy

The ladder leading up and up.
The ladder Jacob lay at the foot
of—fixated on
its side-rails braced
by scattergun birdsong.
Weird how anyone manages to get a good grasp,
let alone climb (my eyes foresee
so much travail, I want to shut them tight
for a shield),
this is craziness!
lifting the neck-hairs,
while we keep at it.

6.1 Going Down

Aeneas:

I ask one thing. Since here is the trapdoor
that leads to where
Acheron swamps the marshes below,
may I be allowed to go
and look at my dead?

I am eligible,
having hauled my boyhood
through flames, shit.
Pity, goddess, these ties between us,
they feel endless!

If Orpheus
was rewarded with the holographic shape
of his wife climbing from a tree trunk
because he sang
and plucked strings for her—

if Pollux
was permitted his brother's nearness again
by decomposing half the year,
and now comes and goes as he pleases,
in and out of forgetfulness—

why can't I keep my breath
and walk deep?

6.2 Sybil's Reply

Sybil:

So you want to scout hell?
Foretasting loot perhaps—
an armload of Persephone's
blinding pomegranate seeds?
Mad workman,
I can see you are tired of the firm,
grooved, weedy earth
and reckon your mind more athletic than death.
Well, let me just say this:
easy the descent.

6.3 Empire Of Souls

Virgil's second proem:

God help me to sketch
the shades I have tried to hold
in the cold
bulrushes that flank Acheron.

Behind my black letters,
swing your lantern.

—

> You, slim bird, flying from thunder cloud to thunder cloud,
> and across the spiritual monitor … from pylon to overhead power line
> and across the mind.
> There is an invincible heart inside
> your slimness. And your split
> tail shows a way.
>
> That should be sufficient.
> I am a worrier,
> but that should be sufficient.

6.4 Fresh From Her Wound

Aeneas, after seeing Dido in the underworld:

She didn’t say a word,
then moved as a shade quickly
across the weird tundra,
away. Left
to remember our fling,
one morning came to me when,
over breakfast,
her forearms looked so lovely
it was like they were burning through the netting that is normal light.

I can’t work it out:
the equation equaling this hurt.

6.5 Resurfacing

Anchises:

These three underworld truths I have saved for you:

There is a power,
which looks after everything.
We are one
but calculate like lone-rangers.
The end’s
regaining
unalloyed eye-shine.

—

Aeneas:

Apparitional I tore as through tissue
paper into my wrong life
and hiked the sunk paths for
as long as my prime
lasted. Grey now looking back,
I thank the one who did not forsake
while my wit went crack,
before I rose again
to the grass, feet chill,
knowing the sun, then, for myself.

7.1 The Sun … Then A Daughter Of The Sun

Aeneas, to himself:

Flick the grains of night
off your puffer jacket
for the eleven thousandth time
and get yourself out the door.

Here is dawn without a single need.
Observe her rosy carts
trundling by the side of the Thames,

observe South Bank's junked food cartons outlined,
and the magpie's wings where an unearthly bleach has splashed them.

Don't start that dejection thing again.
There is not a niche
that doesn't hold a sign for you—

that won't offer, in the name of its source, one more clue.

—

Circe:

They come to me crying for asylum.
Oh, I tell you. They come here
to this island
making such a fuss!

Tourists,
veterans,
people who think they can slip like guilty stoats
between my sheets—
hoping by means of me
to grab a reprieve
from the general blitz:
the undirected, falling minutes.

7.2 Wonderful To Tell

Our gazes lock
and become like two dragonflies
mating in the air,
over the rubber handrails
and rubber-soled feet,
carried by the cleats of the escalators …

wonderful to tell.

7.3 Rage

Amata:

She moves in me: exasperation
without an off-switch.
And I cry like a baby on occasion
for the collapse
of my measure,
for the collapse of the planet,
so as not to see
more land defrocked
and brown-frowning.

—

These mild searchlights of God
coming through the clouds,
look at them!—
how they touch the vulnerable
oblongs of the woodlands
and the dead tubes of the weeds
and the plexiform dew covering the tubes.

We are touched as well.
And the harsh riddle
the child fell into
is smoothed like the river’s brow.

7.4 Turnus Visited

Turnus:

Then I heard from well inside:
I am with you.
Everything needed in those words,
more loyal
than myself when it comes to myself.
And the sweetness
of it—
like a flood
to the brim of each cell,
making liquorice relief of the body's shadow.

7.5 King Latinus Shuts Himself Away

Latinus:

In my distress, which I kept seeing
under my boots
mixed with the mud-argumentation
of a logger's pathway, I cried

and the Lord heard me
and—shedding gentleness—

he took up residence
between my eyes,
in the non-dimensionality there,
where direction—the *go*—materializes.

8.1 Now Here, Now There

Aeneas:

6am. She suggests rough sex,
her shoulders and knuckles sparkling with loneliness
that has been rising
for hours like a bunch of underwater
air pockets—
up, up
from the coralline bed.

8.2 Nymphæ

Aeneas:

You nymphs braceleted with grass
and bottle caps,
your hair jabbed at
softly by polarized light.
And you, horn-bearing river,
sanctum foaminess
building up by the towpath beneath
an evening sky
like occult kerosene burning blue—
confirm please
your godhead soon.

8.3 Golden Age Recalled

Sky, where the birds remind
the bus-riding pilgrims
of the gardens
that grow
above the sky.

—

Others—who are not really others—
bend their necks over
their daily tick boxes and whisper:

we are the prisoners you have to set free,
as you—who are not really you—learn to see
the gravestone
as a glitch
in the honeybee's dream,
yellow-drizzled—

and that's it.

8.4 Venus + Vulcan

Vulcan:

Her arm reaches across the bad dream of division—
her arm reaches across, upsetting
gizmo barriers
(sunglasses,
passwords,
display cases).
And don’t think she’ll stop—no,
until she’s struck your
crystal core.

—

Venus:

Come over here,
and put your weight on my chest.
My hair sulks.
I want to playact
on your basement mattress
thuds of fate,
until it feels like being simply anointed
with my wetness
darkening
small islands of denim.

—

Vulcan:

This poem is a subtle bridge.

I built it to hang for as long as you don’t kiss me.
I built it to be buckled by your mouth.

They are keen
for redundancy; these thin, singing cantilevers.

8.5 The Maker

Vulcan:

Use the black supernova of your attention.
Tear up the first storybook terror drew.
Do not listen to those sprites either—
the ones wishing your eyes to believe themselves
temporary orbs of dust.
From my subsurface studio
I say: *man, trust.*

—

No, not to get myself spotted
before my mouth
thins to less than a line across my teeth.
The pure purpose,
cascaded with laurel, should be:
piecing the mind back
together—which is in shards
on our level
and storm-wreathed.

9.1 Pause In A Grove

My gold-standard quotations crushed
in the darkness.
My hair’s flustered brakes of grey.
I have been emptied
by life—
prepared for the air high above the motorways,
where I shall drift
light
and thought-laved as hay.

9.2 Bad News

Turnus:

The cave of my eye flared by
emerald of vanished
forests, displacing the departure times
and fume-blent rain
outside King’s Cross station.
One strong wish to follow, after that,
whichever Javan Tiger
last stalked out of life—
better than dragging deletion here,
o, like an edgelessly sad net
whenever I move.

9.3 Battling, Battling

Soldier:

Lying under the white meshes of March.
I think I am done with combat.
I think I would like my foes to remove my visor & pour their eyes into my eyes.

Lying under exfoliations of bark and the palm tree's cloud-triangulating tips.
I think I miss myself.
I think I am missing some immortal, microscopic puzzle piece of myself.

Hence this massive page of war.

—

Clownish under a frowning zodiac.
I am for surrender at last,
having seen that the enemy's body is the same as mine:
the pain
sweeping soft-edged organs
like a lighthouse light.

—

Lord, my wounds smell bad.
I have tossed my sword on the floor.
I am willing to trade
the fight in
for an unfractured clearing—
and the people I remember like cut-outs of Eden
walking around, hair flowering.

9.4 Turnus Dubious

Turnus:

What keeps the goodbye gulls in the air?
How they were made, they parade.
Saints of the swerve paths
letting themselves be led
by the silent,
unrolling,
on-fire blankness.

9.5 Notes On Leaping And Escaping

Virgil:

We were six or seven, was it?
And friends with ourselves.
Then came wrestling with that inverted angel
named *Subpar*
beneath the dying-back crowns of ash trees
gone crumbly
in saw dust colours,
while our classmates from the girls' school
kept jogging,
farewell light
trapped in their ponytails.

—

Notwithstanding the blunders
and the book of days being unreal,
surely goodness will follow me
because surely
I matter—
ah, that idea ascends like a bubble
from my chest to roaring jets—
by way of September air nibbling
with cool, leafy teeth.

—

But we are in common and really need do nothing.
Drinking from a dimpled glass
as the rosemary
on the chopping board contributes to the centre.
If I stay, it becomes more noticeable:
the gorgeous foam of the unplural mind.

—

This will stop when you, in league,
lift up your head and see—
your blood's always been
yesses of poppies.

10.1 Everyone Left To Their Fate

Aeneas:

My nondescript and childish season, the ear
dinging with crickets,
walking across tarmac
that was like the giant, sunned, sleeping back of a friendly python.
Hot, hot!
When just to be
was brilliant enough.

Staunch to improve,
I turned grim against the simple years later,
rapping my gavel at picnics—
while the grass flared
and the sycamore trees
continued to let fall
to the ground, their sound:

shhhhhhhhhh

10.2 Awake

Aeneas:

I won’t give up on my climb to the sun
despite the hard-driving angles
of grief,
sore feet,
despite the fear.
I deserve that gold—
streaming to unending radius—damn it,
it was my own
before I stumbled and
found myself fallen distantly.
Who is with me?

10.3 Wreck

Aeneas:

Let it be true—
that we are all coaxed
to do what we crave.
That we'll get the hug in the end,
two arms wrapped around
which will not
be offended
no matter how we behave
because what we are
is known
through and through:

blood somersaulting the moon.

Let it be the case—
that everything
is calling
uninterruptedly: *child*.

10.4 One Wide Strife

Virgil:

My soul looked down from high above,
from the cloud-house—
and became sad,
scanning the unavailing wrath of this foe
and that foe,
and the measureless difficulties,
like great, tar pyramids
balanced on this and that head.

10.5 The Killing Of Lausus

Lausus:

My long sickness,
my cutoff from the freshets of grace—long,
the shiver to be here
year after year
bitten by the gloom
—who cares!—
if it will end like this:
in praise as widening circles of broken air,
in praise
of the high child held safe
on night's other side.

—

With the carpenter ants sawing a pile of birch logs
in a bog,
with the earthworms weaving the topsoil,
hearing rainfall.
Leaves for eyes in an ergonomic,
clay nave—
hiker's boot on my sternum
as I smile.

11.1 Exhortations Of Aeneas

Aeneas:

You who are discouraged by the weight of the sky
like a slab, like a gravestone sometimes,
scored with the white,
pollutant lines of jets.

Keep on!
Keep on!

As I would venture this:
wrongs we have met with—
they will never tally to more
than the good crux
in us each.

—

Lay to one side
the effort to prove your price,
and let your being breathe simply.

Tonight
is a pewter plum,
low-hanging and available to everyone.

11.2 Despair And A Promise

Today you will be with me in my garden.

For that fletched faith,
which might help my mind to its target
I would give what I've lived,
sensing now as I do
the field ahead,
plain in the world's wake,
and rage absorbed—
my roared, drawn, eerie dream
conciliated to a blade of green.

11.3 Various Dead Looking At The Sky Waiting For The Pyres To Be Lit

Soldier:

My life has been like a shock of needling light,
nothing apparent beyond me
except the green stylus of one tree leaf falling,
broken off. The pain.

—

What has your experience of heaven been like here?

Like a blue illumination of the intricate damage
of a burnt pier.

Or like a wave, tall as the sky, breaking over my crown,
which used to be neutral
and sleek with ease as a seagull's.

—

Now laughter skates through the trees
and relief paints
the blue-black beads
of the asphalt,
as my chest answers something
which is
brightening of space:
there is no wrong here—
there is no wrong here—
only singsong mind.

—

My head is a happy scepter lying in the sun's hand.
Nowhere to go
and no one to talk to,
apart from the gnats and a few fair fields
that know how to lie
and shimmer
their empty contentment beside me.

11.4 The Field Bristled

In Camberwell Cemetery I found,
tweaking the grass,
no harm, not anywhere—
only ten thousand green flagpoles
flying banners of sun.

11.5 Death Of Camilla

Camilla:

There were times
I was like ash falling
outside the rich houses
of days.
And had not one human friend.

Never mind that—
as now we are headed
there where
it is real
and hangs like fruit perpetual.

12.1 Borne Back So Often

Virgil:

Lord, make alone no more.
I don’t want to plant another print
unless I can grip the earth sure
guaranteed sense.

Lord, take the grave away
and put in its place,
one wren singing notes
unwaning.

—

Aeneas:

The swallow takes off from an electrical wire,
wings jointed by cloud-knowledge and sun-combed. I
watch it head straight for the late fire, trusting in God when I can’t.

12.2 Aeneas Wounded

Aeneas, on the stretcher:

Lord, is it true as I've heard,
ease follows hardship?
Draw me, if so, to that ease.
Seems there is near nothing of the known
world left to put weight on,
my trust in.
Pressed by a ruckus
that won't let me focus—
I've only your way
by strange flex,
and lawless lightning-strikes made.

—

Iapyx, after Aeneas is healed:

Wonderful find;
that something godlike lives with us
in the half-light here:
I will sing nothing else
henceforth as I walk
with my steps steered by the wind
and crows circling
dark fineries
of a dead and rising tree.

12.3 Aeneas And Ascanius

Aeneas, to his youth:

You, with traffic lights tidal across your face
driving the midnight anatomy of earth.
You, who are discovering the burn of inborn joy
unreachable.
Drugged one,
herein lies my faith:

the universe is much more sumptuous
than these thoughts can sketch.

—

You will be shown.
You think your body is falling
but there is a trapeze of contentment waiting to catch you
below,
below.

I was scared all my life,
sometimes the most fantastic fool in the room,
feeling like the sky's dome cracked—
that noticeably wrong.

And yet I have never not been shown.

—

> Are you empty enough to hear the perfect whisper?
> Do you feel enough like a kicked dog?
> Not only to hear,
> but also to follow
> on susceptible paws—
> ears trained for that *come closer* solely,
> the nightsky's horn
> and starfire *hark.*

12.4 Sister, Brother

Turnus, pursued by one of the Dirae:

My sister across the field calls for me
but my legs are mud-clumsy
in their greaves.
My sister, in the singing damp,
calls out my name
but I am not the same as I was.

Lacework of mist—o whoever made us,
bring your unseen strength
where I have none
and am done
as soldier and man,
wild willing to be otherwise now.

—

Juturna, Turnus's sister:

This afternoon I would toss my detachment
to be with you again.
Young—
and the seasons like clean sheets
stacked inside the chests of clouds
(I can picture precisely
our death-proof brows).

It is amazing, isn't it,
how we have been so disgusted by the adult findings,
my friend
and brother in this slow, meticulous, graceless
fight for grace.

Likewise, amazing, we're both still here—
bleeding a red which is becoming
with time,
more and more clear.

12.5 The Death Of Turnus

Turnus:

No more world-hope
and yet I keep swinging my legs.
The next day is hung
with unknowable dawn-fire
and inside ten thousand dewdrops
the why of everything
colourfully refracted on the lawn.

I roll questions about
like gobstoppers. Such as:
What need have I for knowledge?
Only teach my unripe heart love for God!
No more world-hope
and still I persist in finding some
shy-smiling way forward.

—

There is no recovering,
I don't think.
The faraway star has thrown
its spear of light,
and I am run through—
footed with frost,
on all sides rounded by
the blue,
the blue,
and crows breaking, flapping from each thought westward.

Love—that can't sit tight for long in a body—
shall have its way
and be the end of life.

—

For all my stupidity and terror,
this cannot be erased:
I was made
by something that cares
forever in the farthest reaches of dead space
even between the outpost, the loneliest stars. Hallelujah.

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