In search of a Eurydice: the Orphic theme as a link between Hart Crane's The Bridge and Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land

Julie A. Minkler
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the American Literature Commons, Comparative Literature Commons, French and Francophone Literature Commons, and the Literature in English, North America Commons

Recommended Citation
Minkler, Julie A., "In search of a Eurydice: the Orphic theme as a link between Hart Crane's 'The Bridge' and Aimé Césaire's 'Return to My Native Land'" (1990). Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 118.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/118

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
In search of a Eurydice:
The Orphic theme as a link between Hart Crane's *The Bridge*
and Aimé Césaire's *Return to My Native Land*

by

Julie A. Minkler

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Literature)

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1990
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPIGRAPH</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. The Orphic Poet, a Bridge between Apollonian Dream Artist and Dionysiac Ecstatic Artist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The Myth of America: Crane's Worthy Cause</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Back to Which Roots?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. HART CRANE'S THE BRIDGE AND THE ORPHIC PREDICAMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. &quot;It May Be Too Impossible an Ambition&quot;</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Let the Journey Begin</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Kingdom of the Dead Is an Eerie Place</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. The Ecstatic Reality Destroys the Poet and Sinks His Vision</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AIME CESaire'S RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND AND THE ORPHIC REDEMPTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. &quot;My Poetry Is That of One Uprooted, and of One Who Wishes to Take New Roots&quot;</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Let the Journey of the Return Begin</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Kingdom of the Dead Is a Dreary Place</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D. The Ecstatic Reality Redeems the Poet and Elevates His Vision 

EPILOGUE

WORKS CITED

SELECTED LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED
I have . . . greatly struggled within the solitude of death
Against my nature. Such have been the task and the purgatory
of the Poet.

Author's Translation

J'ai . . . beaucoup combattu dans la solitude de la mort
Contre ma vocation. Telle fut l'épreuve, et le purgatoire
du Poète.

Léopold Sengor
In The Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche maintains that artistic creation is the product of two formative and controversial forces—the Apollonian and the Dionysiac—"rising directly from nature" (24). According to Nietzsche, the artist must appear as "imitator" of nature, "either as the Apollonian dream artist or the Dionysiac ecstatic artist, or, finally . . . as dream and ecstatic artist in one" (24). In particular, referring to the Apollonian element (as one of the two principles of artistic creativity) and to the Apollonian dream artist, Nietzsche says:

The fair illusion of the dream sphere, in the production of which every man proves himself an accomplished artist, is a precondition not only of all plastic art, but even . . . of a wide range of poetry. . . . This deep and happy sense of the necessity of dream experiences was expressed by the Greeks in the image of Apollo. Apollo is at once the god of all plastic powers and the soothsaying god. He who is etymologically the "lucent" one, the god of light, reigns also over the fair illusion of our inner world of fantasy. The perfection of these conditions in contrast to our imperfectly understood reality, as well as our profound awareness of nature's healing powers during the interval of sleep and dream, furnishes a symbolic analogue to the soothsaying faculty and quite generally to the arts, which make life possible and worth living. (20-21)

At the same time, referring to the Dionysiac element (as the second principle of artistic creativity) and to the
Dionysiac ecstatic artist, Nietzsche makes the distinction between the Apollonian principium individuationis and the Dionysiac shattering of this very principle (22). Principium individuationis is a term used by Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Idea*, with which he tried to explain man's amazing ability to preserve his individuality and independence under all circumstances and at any price. On the other hand, the shattering of the principle of individuation occurs when man "suddenly begins to doubt the cognitive modes of experience," or "when in a given instance the law of causation seems to suspend itself" (22).

According to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in his typically controversial nature man embraces the principle of individuation as well as the shattering of it. In particular, on the subject, Nietzsche says:

If we add to this awe [i.e., the awe caused by the recognition of the existing principle of individuation in man] the glorious transport which arises in man . . . at the shattering of the principium individuationis, then we are in a position to apprehend the essence of Dionysiac rapture, whose closest analogy is furnished by physical intoxication. . . . So stirred, the individual forgets himself completely. . . . Not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more by the magic of the Dionysiac rite, but nature itself, long alienated or subjugated, rises again to celebrate the reconciliation with the prodigal son, man. . . . Man now expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community . . . . Each of his gestures betokens enchantment . . . . He feels himself to be godlike and strides with the same elation and ecstasy as the gods he has seen.
in his dreams. No longer the artist, he has himself become a work of art: the productive power of the whole universe is now manifest in his transport, to the glorious satisfaction of the primordial One. (23-25)

As a result, at the stage when the process of creativity is about to begin, the artist's dependence on the Apollonian and Dionysiac elements (which are directly rising from nature) becomes a reality, especially because, in Nietzsche's opinion, the artist is an imitator of nature. Therefore, creative inspiration and drive or, in Nietzsche's own words, artistic urges, are satisfied directly "through the imagery of dreams," as well as "through an ecstatic reality [related to a Dionysiac-type exaltation] which ... takes no account of the individual and may destroy him, or else redeem him through a mystical experience of the collective" (24), toward a Universal harmony and a "vision of mystical Oneness" (23).

The present thesis is a comparative analysis from a strictly Orphic perspective of Hart Crane's The Bridge and Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land. It will attempt to demonstrate that, on the one hand, this "ecstatic reality" truly destroyed Hart Crane and drove him to his death, while, on the other hand, through a mystical experience, it succeeded in redeeming Aimé Césaire toward the attainment of a vision. For the purpose, however, of better constructing,
attesting, and supporting the main argument of my thesis, I suggest the substitution of both Nietzschean elements by the Orphic element, which, in my view combines the two in a harmonious and well-balanced symbiotic union.

Apollo (the "most Greek of the gods" [Burkert 143]) and his cult apparently originated in Greece, some time in the second millennium BC. Dionysus (an originally Eastern god for most classical scholars) and his cult were introduced later, during the Mycenaean period. Lastly, Orpheus is "dated" one generation before the Trojan war (c. 13th century BC), since he is associated with the expedition of the Argonauts. Most likely, Orpheus was a figure of the Apollonian religion and had many Apollonian characteristics, namely music skills and the calm and civilized air of the Greek god (Guthrie 42). On the other hand, he also acquired Dionysiac characteristics, such as mysticism and ecstatic elation. Already from the time of Herodotus (5th century BC), Orphic religion was mostly Bacchic. It is now believed that Orphic religion came about from a toning-down of the Dionysiac cult, with the addition of some Apollonian (i.e., more civilized) features (Guthrie 44). As a result, the Orphic element—a paradoxical combination of Dionysiac mysticism and Apollonian clarity—evolved out of the successful fusion of Apollonian and Dionysiac elements and beliefs.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Orphic Poet, a Bridge between Apollonian Dream Artist and Dionysiac Ecstatic Artist

In Orpheus and Greek Religion, W. K. C. Guthrie states that "The influence of Orpheus was always on the side of civilization and the arts of peace" (40). Although Orpheus's individuality "refuses to be submerged" (39),

There are times when he seems on the point of becoming merged with the lyre-playing god Apollo, and others when, thinking of his death perhaps, we wonder whether he is only an incarnation of the Thracian Dionysos. Always he emerges as something different, not quite like either of the gods and definitely more than a mere abstraction of certain of their qualities. The complexity of his character, indeed, has sometimes caused scholars, both ancient and modern, to suppose that he is not a single personality but two or more. (39)

A civilizer and a philanthropist in the Promethean sense, Orpheus is above all a musician. The power of his lyre "was to soften the hearts of warriors and turn their thoughts to peace, just as it could tame the wildest of the beasts" (40). In Book XI of Metamorphoses, Ovid says that "So with his singing Orpheus drew the trees,/ The beasts, the stones, to follow" (259). In his mastery of the lyre, Orpheus resembles Apollo, the Greek god of music par excellence. At the same time, however, Orpheus is associated "with charms, spells and incantations," since "Closely allied with music in the Greek mind was magic"
(Guthrie 39). In this respect, Orpheus identifies with Dionysus, who is associated with the orgiastic music of the maenads, played on such unrefined instruments as the cymbals, the tympana, and the shrill-toned flute.

In addition to his being musically comparable to Apollo, Orpheus parallels the god of the Sun in the arts of prophesying and healing, although on a lesser scale. For Orpheus, the element of healing is mainly spiritual pertaining to the appeasement of the soul, while, for Apollo, the element of healing is both physical (i.e., pertaining to the healing of the body) and spiritual (i.e., pertaining to the purification of the soul from the miasma).

Unlike Apollo, who is also the god of the bow striking from afar, and for that reason regarded as a distanced deity (Burkert 146-47), Orpheus is a consistently serene and accessible figure who taught humans the art of agriculture and husbandry, and made them give up their cannibalistic practices (Guthrie 40). Finally, according to Guthrie, Orpheus was believed to be a poet whose "teachings were embodied in sacred writings" (39), as well as the inventor of writing itself and the giver of an alphabet and the arts.

Spiritualism plays a very significant role in both Apollonian and Orphic movements. It constitutes the perfect bridge between the meta-natural, i.e., the world of oracles and dreams (hence Nietzsche's characterization of the
artist as Apollonian dream artist), and the world of the intellect and the senses related to writing, lyre-playing, and artistic creation.

On the other hand, the merging of Orphic and Dionysiac elements is even more pronounced than the merging of Orphic and Apollonian elements. Both Orphic and Dionysiac religions share certain metaphysical and ritualistic similarities, such as the belief in immortality and the afterlife as well as the extensive use of music and dancing during ceremonial practices. Above all, however, both religions seem to have based their fundamental philosophy on the importance of acquiring a mystical experience through initiation in the cult and participation in the ritual. Such an experience is liable to be gained by invocation to the patron deity and by participation in regularly performed ceremonial practices under the guidance of a priest-seer (Burkert 290-303). Hence, reliance on the mystical properties of the soul and the irrational character of faith as well as ceding in the sensual commands of the body constitute the means for gaining that type of spiritual experience. Pertaining both to body and soul, but, unlike the Dionysiac, also pertaining to nous (Greek for mind, intellect), the Orphic element seems ideally suited for the explication of the poetic process at work.

The road to poetic creativity involves a uniquely
apocalyptic process that is defined, justified, and validated by the individual poet's quest for a cosmopoietic vision. Thus, the creative process constitutes a journey. Whether ecstatic or dream artist, or, in the ideal case, the harmonious embodiment of both states (or stages), the poet, commissioned by imagination, inspiration, and aspiration, will undergo an esoteric journey. In most cases, the journey will take the poet toward the unknown and unsuspected depths of the soul, promising as a reward the partaking of a collective identity, often defined as Nature, Oneness, or Universal Soul. In this respect, through its creative process, Poetry offers a way of explicating and comprehending human nature and the philosophical and metaphysical relation of human intellect and soul to the world around us.

As an esoteric journey, the creative process does therefore require a descent into the inner-self. This figurative descent into the underworld of one's existence (i.e., one's unconscious) parallels a "literal" descent into the kingdom of the dead, which in classical terminology is known as katabasis. According to Greek myth, katabasis is the descent of a living person into Hades in pursuit of knowledge and/or fertility. Orpheus is one of the first mythological heroes to have undergone such an onerous task in order to bring his dead wife, Eurydice, back to the world
above. Classical mythology and literature provide us with a plethora of other **katabatic** examples, such as those of Heracles, Odysseus, Theseus, Demeter, Persephone, Psyche, and Aeneas. Epic literature in particular glorifies the journey in pursuit of a worthy cause, and emphasizes the significance of the hero's **katabatic** experience. Thus, it acknowledges and ratifies the Orphic element as one of the **sine qua non** premises of epic convention.

**B. The Myth of America: Crane's Worthy Cause**

In my view, Hart Crane's **The Bridge** is an epic journey in pursuit of national identity. As such, it is thematically comparable to Virgil's **Aeneid**. Like the **Aeneid**, wherein the hero is entrusted by divine fate with the founding of his nation, **The Bridge**, wherein the hero feels compelled to "re-establish" America by attributing a new identity to her, narrates the poet's ordeals to attain his vision. In particular, the **Aeneid**—an **epos** impregnated with prophetic visions and didactic messages on patriotism—emphasizes two fundamental myths: the myth of the sacred journey and the myth of the **polis** (Greek for city). The myth of the journey exactly follows the pattern of Greek epic tradition. It deals with the hero's life-threatening adventures, imposed on him by a testing and/or avenging
deity. The myth of the polis, however, is an original Virgilian "invention." Specifically, in the myth of the polis, the poet makes his hero the creator of a man-made cosmogony in contrast to the conventional god-made (god-created) cosmogony. In particular, in the Aeneid, the hero undergoes a long and perpetually-revived-out-of-its-own-ashes trifold process: the process of founding a nation, the process of "making" history retroactively, and lastly the process of bestowing on that nation its final identity. Likewise, in The Bridge, the hero goes through a similar process: the process of re-establishing America in the eyes of the world, the process of re-interpreting the American past in order to lay out the foundations of a promising future, and lastly the process of suggesting a new identity. Amidst the uncertainties of a fast-moving technocratic era rising out of the ashes of a treacherous First World War, Hart Crane (1899-1932) attempts with The Bridge to rekindle Walt Whitman's dream of "creating" a new American mythology: one that would envelop not only American but also universal archetypes. In this very sense, following the example of Aeneas, Hart Crane--Orpheus reborn, civilizer, and philanthropist, all in one--is living out his own myth of the polis, thus enacting his quest for a national vision. In a similar sense, on behalf of the poet, the hero of The Bridge, is being entrusted with, and is engaged in, the
decoding of the "myth of America." Or, in Crane's own words, The Bridge would "enunciate a new cultural synthesis of values in terms of our America" (qtd. in Unterecker 417). And, as Samuel Hazo correctly states in Hart Crane, "Crane's search in The Bridge is a search for the real American past and also for the lineaments in America's present that will determine her future" (68).

In The Poetry of Hart Crane, referring to the Aenean-type mythopoetic theme of The Bridge, R. W. B. Lewis says:

We may, however, try to determine in advance the genre of the poem. "I am really writing an epic," Crane insisted in the letter . . . ; and it was at this point that he mentioned the Aeneid as a major paradigm for his undertaking. "I feel justified," he added, "in comparing the historic and cultural scope of The Bridge to this great work."

The ground of the comparison was, of course, the subject and purpose of the two poems. Crane felt at times, or at least he tried to feel, that his subject really was the greatness of his contemporary America, an objectively and historically realized greatness, just as Virgil's subject was the achieved greatness of his contemporary Rome. Crane knew that his subject matter was rather internal than external, that it consisted rather in psychological and spiritual attitudes than in military and political actions. But there were moments when his reason deluded his imagination in believing that he was at work upon a traditional millennial epic, the purpose of which--like that of the Aeneid--was to celebrate the recent conversion of an age of iron discord into an age of golden harmony. And this accomplishment was to be made manifest, as it had been in the Aeneid, by re-enacting in the present the noble deeds (again, for Crane, spiritual and visionary deeds) of a legendary past. During the mensis mirabilis [marvelous month], Crane told
Waldo Frank how "extremely exciting" it was for him "to handle the beautiful skeins of this myth of America--to realize suddenly, as I seem to, how much of the past is living under only slightly altered forms, even in machinery and such-like." (222-23)

Hart Crane started the writing of The Bridge in 1923. This personal and poetic journey lasted for seven turbulent years. Chapter Two of this thesis will deal with the description of Crane's journey as far as the Orphic theme is concerned, and with the unexpected outcome of the poet's visionary quest.

C. Back to Which Roots?

Like Hart Crane's The Bridge, Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land deals with the hero's epic journey in pursuit of a national identity. In Césaire's case, however, national identity will be attained after the poet has come to terms with himself, and has first attained his personal identity. Thematically, the Return parallels Homer's Odyssey. But Césaire's theme is about a spiritual and figurative return to a native land that will enable him to regain his roots and determine his destiny. Like the mythological hero Antaeus (who by touching his mother Gaia [Earth] was able to regain his vigor and physical strength), the hero of the Return has to metaphorically touch (i.e.,
touch with his heart and soul) his native land in order to regain spiritual strength.

The Martinican poet Aimé Césaire (1913-), enfant terrible of a small nation just coming into being to the dismay of a rotting, colonizing French Commonwealth, represents the connecting bridge of two opposite worlds and their conscience. Behind him stands the collective shattered conscience of a group of people, who, forced into slavery, were severed from their national identity and were deprived of their African roots and language. The French, in their unyielding chauvinistic attitudes about the assumed uniqueness of their language and culture, oppressed their subjects, segregating them not so much by the common racial label of being "black, therefore inferior," but rather by the cultural designation of being "non-French-speaking, therefore subordinate." As a result, Martinicans (like the other subjects of the French Commonwealth) had to learn the language of the colonizer and embrace his culture, in order to gain some respect and move up socially, as well as economically. In Modernism and Negritude, A. James Arnold states:

Acquiring the French language and its culture was the paramount social goal for black children born into these circumstances. Creole is the first language of all black Martinicans; but it has always been the servile language in the scheme of social, economic, and political power obtaining in French-dominated societies in the Caribbean.
To be exclusively a Creole speaker is to be a nigger. In order to eventually affirm blackness as a positive value, Martinicans of Césaire's generation had first to master the language of the colonial authority. (4)

Césaire himself was no exception. Since childhood, he had to follow the inevitable path of Frenchification. Although his parents used Creole at home, and overall made an effort to preserve the old traditions, they were nevertheless influenced by French cultural domination and intellectual snobbery. Arnold says:

The family's conscious effort to inculcate French cultural norms is indicative of their middle-class aspirations. . . . The Frenchness of the family circle marked the Césaires as different from other poor blacks and made it much easier for their children to acclimate themselves in the somewhat alien surroundings of the lycée. (5)

Much later, however, "As a writer and a poet, Césaire would be faced . . . with the painful task of cutting through those knots he had tied in the process of becoming assimilated into the French world" (5).

After centuries of exploitation, now Césaire sees ahead of him a welcoming world and a promising future. Returning to the roots, the feeling of belonging to a common heritage, and above all attaining an identity, no longer seem futile and unrealistic. Aimé Césaire--Orpheus reborn, civilizer, and philanthropist, all in one--will soon undertake the role of cultural leader advocating for national identity.
Trained, however, from childhood to look down upon everything Creole as second-rate, Césaire, overlooking at first his Creole reality, is faced with a serious problem: which identity to attain. His katabatic journey in the Return will finally pull him downward into the depths of his inner-self. Until the very last moment, this frightening experience will be inflicting upon him tormenting questions on the specific nature of this new liberating identity. Should it be African at the risk of being lost for ever, or should it be rather a bastardized form of French, implying a subordination toward the white patron?

According to M. a M. Ngal, in Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie, the whole issue of identity involves "la conscience d'être Nègre, la volonté lucide d'enraciner cette même conscience" (98) (the conscience of being Black, the determination to make this very conscience take roots [Author's translation]). Or, in Césaire's own words, "Ma poésie est celle d'un déraciné, et d'un homme qui veut reprendre racine. Et l'arbre, qu'on retrouve avec tous ces noms dans tous mes poèmes, est le symbole de ce qui a des racines. L'état d'un homme équilibré est celui d'un homme 'raciné'" (qtd. in Ngal 98). (My poetry is that of one uprooted, and of one who wishes to take new roots. As
for the tree, the one we find under several names time after time in all of my poems, it symbolizes the person who has roots. The state of a well-balanced person is that of a person that does have roots [Author's translation].

Chapter Three of this thesis will specifically deal with the problem of the nature of the poet's identity and with the analysis of the Orphic theme in Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land.
II. HART CRANE'S THE BRIDGE AND THE ORPHIC PREDICAMENT

A. "It May Be Too Impossible an Ambition"

In a letter to his friend, Gorham Munson (February 18, 1923), Hart Crane writes:

It [The Bridge] is just beginning to take the least outline . . . . Very roughly, it concerns a mystical synthesis of "America." History and fact . . . all have to be transfigured into abstract form that would almost function independently of its subject matter. The initial impulses of "our people" will have to be gathered up toward the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is included also our scientific hopes and achievements of the future. The mystic portent of all this is already flocking through my mind . . . but the actual statement of the thing, the marshalling of the forces, will take me months, at best; and I may have to give it up entirely before that; it may be too impossible an ambition. But if I do succeed, such a waving of banners, such ascent of towers, such dancing, will never before have been put down on paper! (Weber 124-25)

Once Orphic elation takes command of his existence, Hart Crane sets sail for a seven-year long, visionary journey: the writing of The Bridge. Following the example of Columbus, he is in pursuit of a promised land, which in Crane's case is the conflation of Columbus's Cathay and Plato's Atlantis. Following the example of Virgil, he is after national recognition through the attainment of a new identity. Crane writes to Wilbur Underwood that he is "on
the synthesis of America and its structural identity now, called *The Bridge* (qtd. in Unterecker 276). Finally, following the example of Jason, he is after the golden bridge that connects the shore of an abiding past to the shore of a foreshadowed future. A strong nostalgic yearning for the preservation of this past and anticipation for a promising (but unpredictable) future are the Orphic poet's stimuli for the beautiful journey.

In *Hart Crane: The Patterns of His Poetry*, Margaret Dickie Uroff states that two events inspired Crane in the writing of *The Bridge*. The first source of inspiration was his own three-part poem, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen"—in Crane's own words, "a conscious pseudo-symphonic construction toward an abstract beauty" (qtd. in Uroff 4). The second source of inspiration was T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, published in 1922. In a letter to Munson (January 5, 1923), Crane said:

However, I take Eliot as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic goal. I should not think of this if a kind of rhythm and ecstasy were not (at odd moments, and rare!) a very real thing to me. I feel that Eliot ignores certain spiritual events and possibilities as real and powerful now as, say, in the time of Blake.

(qtd. in Uroff 3)
Crane called *The Bridge* his answer to Eliot's *Waste Land*, and the poem's seeming optimism an antidote to Eliot's "death orientation" (Unterecker 431). Quite ironically, however, as it turned out, it was Crane that plunged into his death prematurely, while "death-oriented" Eliot actually reached old age. Crane's legendary statement caused quite a sensation among the literary critics of his time, and continues to do so even now. Almost unanimously, critics have viewed Eliot's *Waste Land* as a pessimistic poem that lacks vision, although, according to some of the critics, it does contain a trace of hope in the end. Section VI, "What the Thunder Said," implies a possibility of rain, which, if it comes, will fertilize anew the dried-up, arid soil of the *Waste Land*. Whether such an interpretation is valid or not, however, it is my belief that in section V, "Death by Water," as if in a coded message, Eliot did already warn us about water's most dreadful power: the power to drown. With its two-sided nature, on the one hand as a purger and a source of life and on the other hand as an agent of disaster and death, water can take as well as give life. The minute possibility of oncoming rain in the *Waste Land*, therefore, does not necessarily signify hope, although one cannot totally exclude it from the poem either. Unlike the *Waste Land*, Hart Crane's *The Bridge* does have a vision but, in my view,
lacks hope (as this thesis will try to demonstrate). And not only is this vision ecstatic, but it also leads the poet to an almost (but not quite) blissful ending in "Atlantis," the poem's last section. On the other hand, the attainment of a vision that is not viable (i.e., a vision that transmogrifies death and specifically drowning, as we shall see in the present chapter), reinforces, I think, my statement about the poem's lack of hope. By having a vision, The Bridge is indeed an answer to Eliot's Waste Land, which lacks one. Presence of vision, however, is not without fail tautological to optimism, or else such an assumption would seem uncritical and unsubstantiated.

B. Let the Journey Begin

In Hart Crane's Harp of Evil: A Study of Orphism in The Bridge, Jack C. Wolf states that "Crane in announcing his candidacy for the role of the 'Pindar of the machine age,' reveals his intention of being a kind of Orphic priest whose Jason-like voyage to a higher consciousness will be utilized to reveal the redeeming Orphic belief to the remainder of the American nation" (2). In a letter to Gorham Munson (March 2, 1923), Crane did indeed call himself a "suitable Pindar for the dawn of the machine age" (Weber 129). This seems quite symbolic, especially since, according to Guthrie,
in Orpheus and Greek Religion, Pindar was the first to include Orpheus among the participants of Jason's Argonautic expedition (27). Wolf maintains that, like Orpheus, Crane is a "healer of his tribe," but that he does not follow the Orphic belief entirely. He does, however, according to Wolf,

adhere in general to Orphic myth and adopts various tenets of this religion for his own personal vision. One of the most attractive of these tenets for Crane is the affirmation of all of life, an amoral concept which denies nothing and has no arbitrary distinctions of "good" and "evil." (2)

Whether Crane follows the Orphic belief entirely or not, his search for a Vision resonates Orpheus's search for Eurydice in the precincts of Hades. Crane's search for his Eurydice in The Bridge constitutes a long, turbulent journey from the shore of a binding past to that of a promising future. In between these two shores floats the world of the inner-self, where the poet has to descend in order to recapture his nation's vanishing identity: "For here between two worlds, another harsh / This third, of water, tests the word" ("Ave Maria" 32-32). This world of water refers to the river Styx and the bordering Hades, and hinders the poet's Eurydice from becoming the new, chrysalid identity of his nation. Not only a journey, but a mystery religion in itself, the poet's quest for a vision will reveal to him
(as mystery religions assumedly do) a unique, inspiring, and mystical experience. In order for the poet to gain such an experience, he has to follow the necessary rites of initiation, namely preparation of special offerings and invocation to the patron deity by spells and hymns.

In the poem's proem, "To Brooklyn Bridge," the patron deity has many faces. At times, she is the personification of Brooklyn Bridge, whose "cables breathe the North Atlantic still" (24). At other times, she becomes the Fury to be appeased by music and sacrifices:

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. (29-32)

Often, she is the poet's Muse, the giver of inspiration: "Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend / And of the curveship lend a myth to God" (43-43). In elated mood, the poet sings to her:

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee! (13-16)

Finally, Crane calls the bridge Liberty and refers to her as freedom, "Over the chained bay waters Liberty" (4). As his liberating vision, she promises him escape from the earthly world he lives in to her eternal kingdom: "Beading thy path--condense eternity" (35), he sings to her. As
Liberty, the goddess is no longer silver-paced and sun-stricken, but on the contrary enveloped in shadowy darkness: "And we have seen night lifted in thine arms. /
Under thy shadow by the piers I waited; / Only in darkness is thy shadow clear" (36-38). And yet, she occasionally sparkles, as an "immaculate sigh of stars" (34). In her alternating stages of darkness and shine, the proem's Liberty resembles Eurydice. While in Hades, Eurydice is but a shadow, a shade of the Underworld. But on the road back to earth she slowly regains her shining glamour (i.e., life), to finally lose it again when Orpheus turns back to look at her. In the next section of The Bridge, in addition to her previous faces, the patron deity will yet obtain another new one in the eyes of her poet.

Part I of The Bridge, "Ave Maria," is a hymn to Columbus and his quest westward to Cathay:

More absolute than ever--biding the moon
Till dawn should clear that dim frontier, first
seen
--The Chan's great continent. . . . Then faith,
not fear
Nigh surged me witless. . . . Hearing the surf
near--
I, wonder-breathing, kept the watch,--saw
The first palm chevron the first lighted hill.
(19-24)

The epigraph to "Ave Maria" from Seneca's Medea, a seeming deviation from the Orphic theme, draws an analogy between Jason's voyage to Colchis in pursuit of the golden fleece
and Columbus's journey to Cathay in pursuit of literal and spiritual gold. Consequently, in this section, the poet also obtains a new face: through Jason, he now identifies with Columbus. Nonetheless, there is no deviation from the Orphic theme. As previously mentioned, according to Pindar, Orpheus took part in Jason's expedition. What's more, both Jason's quest for the golden fleece as well as Columbus's quest for the golden land imply a katabatic adventure. In the Greek world, gold is always associated with Hades. In this sense then, both Colchis and Cathay could be viewed as places in the Underworld. Whether personifying Jason or Columbus, having already made his invocation to the patron goddess (Brooklyn Bridge, Liberty, Fury, or the Muse), the poet is now ready to go on with the rest of the ritual, namely the preparation of the libations:

An herb, a stray branch among salty teeth,
The jellied weeds that drag the shore,—perhaps Tomorrow's moon will grant us Saltes Bar—
Palos again,—a land cleared of long war.
Some Angelus environs the cordage tree;
Dark waters onward shake the dark prow free.

(51-56)

According to Wolf, "Ave Maria" is a statement of Columbus' descent into Hell, a reassertion of the classical cyclic idea of death leading to rebirth and higher awareness, expressed in terms of Columbus' visit to America as giving him insight. "An herb, a stray branch among salty teeth" introduces us to the classical concept of rite of initiation voyage through Hell with the
voyager carrying the sacred herb in order to be assured of resurrection or return to the "upper" world. . . . The reference is to Virgil's Aeneas . . . [who] in order to safely visit Hell and return . . . must pluck from Persephone's sacred tree the bough with "radiant leaves of gold." (37-38)

In this section, the Orphic theme also blends in with Judeo-Christian themes. There appears to be a specific transition from classical figures (Eurydice, Fury, or the Muse) to Mary, mother of Christ. Wolf says that in "Ave Maria," Crane "identifies the Virgin Mary with the Earth Mother or Primordial Goddess" (31), who also identifies with the Goddess of the Underworld, "for the Great Mother was initially goddess of Death also" (38). In "Ave Maria," Eurydice has been replaced by Mary, and Eden--the Christian Paradise of spiritual and physical wealth--symbolizes Cathay:

O Thou who sleepest on Thyself, apart
Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth,
And all the eddying breath between dost search
Cruelly with love thy parable of man,--
Inquisitor! incognizable Word
Of Eden and the enchained Sepulchre. (57-62)

Te Deum laudamus, for thy teeming span! (72)

Te Deum laudamus
O Thou Hand of Fire (92-93)
C. The Kingdom of the Dead Is an Eerie Place

In Section II, "Powhatan's Daughter," the poet returns to the Orphic theme, but he enriches it with few additional elements. This time, Eurydice identifies with Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, a figure about the American Indian folklore. Wolf says that Pocahontas symbolizes "a number of primal female concepts" (47). She is the American Earth-mother; she is the experience of Columbus as symbol of the American nation; and she is also Sphinx—the destroyer of men. But most of all, she is "Moon-goddess, the imagination which leads men, and as such suggests that Columbus' voyage is an imaginative voyage into the depths of the soul as well as through time and space" (47). In "The Harbor Dawn" (first part of "Powhatan's Daughter"), the voyage to the unconscious has actually begun:

Insistently through sleep—a tide of voices—
They meet you listening midway in your dream,
The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:
Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
Far strum of fog horns . . . signals dispersed in veils.

According to Wolf, "'Dawn' relates to the beginning of life, love and perception of vision" and is "expressed symbolically in the relationship between sleep as a form of death and the arousing faculty of love" (57). After all,
love and death are the *sine qua non* elements of the Orphic myth: in order to regain love (fertility, wholeness), Orpheus has to first conquer death (sterility, void). This, as a matter of fact, constitutes a recurring archetypal theme in world mythology and folk literature.

In "Van Winkle" (second part of "Powhatan's Daughter"), Rip Van Winkle resembles Charon—the *chthonic* servant of Hades—who for a fee (a coin) placed in the mouth of the dead at the time of burial ferries the souls over the rivers Acheron and Styx to the infernal regions:

And Rip Van Winkle bowing by the way,--
"Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend--?"  And he--

Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate. . . .
Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,--
Have you got your "times"--?
And hurry along, Van Winkle--it's getting late!

"The River" (third part of "Powhatan's Daughter"), actually referring to the Mississippi river, is identified with the rivers Acheron and Styx—the last stops before the Gates of Hades:

Down, down--born pioneers in time's despite,
Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow--
They win no frontier by their wayward plight,
But drift in stillness. (113-16)

The River, spreading flows--and spends your dream.
What are you, lost within this tideless spell? (121-22)
The Orphic poet, not quite lost yet, is about to transgress the boundaries of death. There is only one thing that keeps him going and sane: the thought of his Eurydice and how to bring her back to the upper world:

(O Nights that brought me to her body bare!) Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name. (73-74)

--Dead echoes! But I knew her body there, Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark, And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair. (79-81)

Wolf says that "The use of the river as a symbol of time and change is ancient" (58). What's more, if indeed the river described in this section identifies with the river Styx, then the river also symbolizes the inescapable and eternal grasp of death.

In "The Dance" (fourth section of "Powhatan's Daughter"), the hero has already crossed the river Styx and is now ready to perform a ritual dance in order to appease Pluto, who "holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne" (8). Dancing is an important ritual of the Orphic religion, and has the ability (like music) to soothe and warm the hearts of warriors, tame the beasts, enchant trees, and even move stones. In "The Dance," the winter king (1), the glacier woman down the sky (2), Pocahontas (14), Maquokeeta, the Medicine-man (52-59), a distant cloud and a thunder-bud
(41), a cyclone swooping in eagle feathers (45-46), a birch and an oak (49-50), the lizard (73) and the serpent (104), the llano grass and the vineyard (94, 96), are all enticed into a tribal dance to appease the spirits of the Underworld. Wolf says, that in "The Dance," the Orphic hero becomes medicine man and "even scapegoat or sacrificial figure for his tribe" (65). In addition, Orpheus "is such a figure-poet, musician, priest, healer, and sacrificial victim--and as such, Crane suggests, he defines the poet's task in all societies" (66).

"Indiana," the last part of "Powhatan's Daughter," can be seen as the personification of the first soul the hero meets in Hades. Indiana, originally a land of golden promises, symbolizes the Earth-mother of the pre-Christian era, the primordial mother of all humans. Now, a shadowy figure in Hades--a "gilded promise" (27), "barren tears" (28), "half stone" (52)--she recollects her own son, while she sees the Indian woman cradling a "babe's body" (33):

Her eyes . . . were not black
But sharp with pain
And like twin stars. They seemed to shun the [t/o]
gaze
Of all our silent men--the long team line--
Until she saw me--when their violet haze
Lit with love shine . . . (34-39)

In this respect, Indiana resembles Anticlea--the mother of Odysseus. In the _Odyssey_ (XI), Anticlea is the second soul
of the dead that the hero encounters in Hades. A symbol of maternal wisdom, Indiana also signifies the mother of the prodigal son. She says to him:

How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too-- (13)

You were the first--before Ned and this farm,--
First born, remember-- (46-47)

I'm standing still, I'm old, I'm half of stone!
Oh, hold me in those eyes' engaging blue;
There's where the stubborn years gleam and
atone,-- [t/o]
Where gold is true!
Down the dim turnpike to the river's edge--
Perhaps I'll hear the mare's hoofs to the
ford . . . [t/o] (52-57)

Come back to Indiana--not too late!
(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)
Good-bye . . . Good-bye . . . Oh, I shall always
wait [t/o]
You, Larry, traveler--
stranger,
son,
--my friend-- (60-66)

In the following four sections of The Bridge, "Cutty Sark," "Cape Hatteras," "Three Songs," and "Quaker Hill," the poet continues his long walk through Time, among the shades of Hades. He meets with the souls of prominent literary figures and artists, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Christopher Marlowe, Isadora Duncan, and Emily Dickinson. Crane's encounter with these people becomes a type of Orphic pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the mind, and signifies
Crane's own recognition of these people's collective influence on American letters and their contribution toward a national identity.

In "Cutty Sark," with its epigraph from Melville's "Battle Pieces," it is Melville's soul that the poet meets first. In a letter to Otto Kahn, Crane says about "Cutty Sark" that it "is a phantasy on the period of the whalers and clipper ships. It also starts in the present and 'progresses backwards'" (Weber 307). In the same letter, analyzing this section, Crane says that "'Cutty Sark' is built on the plan of a fugue. Two 'voices'--that of the world of Time, and that of the world of Eternity--are interwoven in the action" (Weber 307). According to Wolf, Melville, the "man in South Street" (1) with the green eyes (7-8) might still be "very much alive to Crane, murmuring of Leviathan and reminding Crane that he [Melville] had also pondered the problems of time and recurrence" (91).

In "Cape Hatteras," whose epigraph comes from Whitman's "Passage to India," it is Walt Whitman's soul that now greets the poet. Wolf says:

"Cape Hatteras" begins the examination of what has happened to the American dream in the process of development of the American nation. The conventional dream of another Eden and of a wholeness of life which was to come from the westward thrust of America is revealed as illusion. (99)
In real life, it might have been an illusion indeed. But in The Bridge, and especially in "Cape Hatteras," the poet still undefeated moves along through Hades's dark alleys. Hart Crane admired Whitman and liked his poetry. He soon became obsessed with the Whitmanesque vision of America, as it was presented in Leaves of Grass, and wanted to preserve it in his own poetry, at all costs. But most of all, he wanted to be able to follow Whitman's example as the Great American Poet (Unterecker 431). In a letter to Munson (March 2, 1923), Crane says: "I begin to feel myself directly connected with Whitman" (Weber 128). According to Katherine Anne Porter (a friend of Crane in Mexico), in moments of despair and loss of personal control due to excessive alcohol consumption, Crane would weep and shout, shaking his fist, "I am Baudelaire, I am Whitman, I am Christopher Marlowe, I am Christ" (qtd. in Unterecker 659).

By 1926 (three years after he started writing The Bridge), Crane seems already disenchanted with his vision of America. In a letter to Waldo Frank (June 20, 1926), he writes: "If only America were half as worthy today to be spoken of as Whitman spoke of it fifty years ago there might be something for me to say" (Weber 261). Crane's qualms about the "worthy cause" are present in "Cape Hatteras," where he meets and converses with Whitman's soul:
Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact
From which we take into the dream of act; (42-43)

"--Recorders ages hence"--ah, syllables of faith!
Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
Be still the same as when you walked the beach. (46-49)

For you, the panoramas and this breed of towers,
Of you--the theme that's statured in the cliff,
O Saunterer on free ways still ahead!
Not this our empire yet, but labyrinth. (52-55)

While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
Hell's belt springs wider into heaven's plumed side. [t/o]
(95-96)

Yes, Walt,
Afoot again, and onward without halt,--
Not soon, nor suddenly,--no, never to let go
My hand
in yours,
Walt Whitman-- so-- (229-35)

In real life, recovering the vision might have been an
illusion indeed. But in The Bridge, recovering Eurydice is
still the Orphic poet's "reality." His faith and
perseverance will help him undergo the fiendish experience
with the Underworld.

In "Three Songs," the Christian theme is re-introduced,
but with Orphic overtones. This time, Eurydice has once
again become the conflation of several Earth-goddess
figures: Eve, Magdalene, and Mary of the Judeo-Christian
tradition as well as Venus of the Greco-Roman mythology.
"Southern Cross," "National Garden," and "Virginia," are
virtually wailing love-songs of hope and despair, addressed by the poet to Eurydice in anticipation of their climactic encounter. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid says:

Through the phantom dwellers,
The buried ghosts, he passed, came to the king
Of that sad realm, and to Persephone,
His consort, and he swept the strings, and
chanted: [t/o]

I came
For my wife's sake, whose growing years were taken
By a snake's venom. I wanted to be able
To bear this; I have tried to. Love has conquered.

By this vast kingdom's silences, I beg you,
Weave over Eurydice's life, run through too soon.

She will be back again, to be your subject,
After the ripeness of her years; I am asking
A loan and not a gift.

And with these words, the music
Made the pale phantoms weep. (235)

The epigraph of "The Three Songs" is from Marlowe's love poem "Hero and Leander." According to the myth, Leander swam each night from Sestos to Abydos (the two cities mentioned in the epigraph) to meet with his beloved Hero. One night, however, Leander drowned in the dark waters of Hellespont (in Greek, bridge [pont] of Brightness [Helle]). The fact that Crane uses the theme of drowning right before the hero of *The Bridge* is about to meet with his vision, Eurydice, is not accidental. In my view, Crane
is preparing the ground for the unfortunate outcome of the Orphic hero's quest for his Eurydice. Wolf says that Leander himself "was an Orphic hero who bridged Grecian Sun-Apollonian culture and Trojan Dionysian or Aphrodite-moon cultures when he swam from Sestos to Abydos, near the location of Troy" (111).

The section of the "Three Songs" is crucial for the course of the poem, because it determines the voyage's turn of events. The hero suddenly shows signs of confusion and mental fatigue (renouncement?). Confused about Eurydice's real identity, he wonders if she is ever going to appear and, if so, under what disguise. In "Southern Cross," the first of "Three Songs," calling her "nameless Woman of the South" (1), he says to her:

Eve! Magdalene!
or Mary, you?
Whatever call--falls vainly on the wave.
O simian Venus, homeless Eve,
Unwedded, stumbling gardenless to grieve
Windswept guitars on lonely decks for ever;
Finally to answer all within one grave! (9-15)

A premonition of death penetrates his soul. Perhaps the vision he so fervently longs for will never appear. Or, even if she does, she will utter secrets that are unworthy of his noble aspirations. Nightmares of a "Cross, a phantom," "black insolence," "water rattling a stringing coil," "blood to remember," mind "churned to spittle,
whispering hell," "bandy eyes," "silly snake rings," "her belly buried in the floor," snow, rain, "crap-shooting gangs," inundate the hero's existence in waves of vile horror. In "Virginia," the third of "Three Songs," still strengthened by hope, the poet implores:

Mary (what are you going to do?)
Gone seven--gone eleven,
And I'm still waiting you--
O blue-eyed Mary with the claret scarf,
Saturday Mary, mine! (1-8)

O Mary, leaning from the light wheat tower,
Let down your golden hair! (15-16)

Out of the way-up nickel dime tower shine,
Cathedral Mary,
Shine!— (23-25)

The poet is gradually being prepared for the oncoming doom: the sinking of his vision in "Atlantis," and his own literal drowning (Death by Water) in the Caribbean Sea. Wolf says, that "what is being recorded in the versions of this old myth [the myth of the hero's sacrificial death] is really the Primal Marriage again--the marriage of the Sun-god and the Earth-goddess" (111). This type of marriage, Wolf concludes, is a form of death, "death as transformation or as achievement of a higher consciousness rather than necessarily a physical death" (111).

Section VI, "Quaker Hill," is the hill of recollection and meditation. At this stage, the Orphic hero seems convinced that Eurydice will not come. He fears that a
lifeless, macabre clone will take her place instead, to scourge and discourage him. According to Wolf, the double epigraph in this section from Isadora Duncan and Emily Dickinson, involves "the idea of death, fundamental in 'Quaker Hill' and also expresses "an acceptance and need of this mundane world as a precursor of a more ideal or visionary world" (122), perhaps that very world of the dead. In Crane's own words, both Dickinson and Duncan "know the poet's pain, . . . for they have suffered similarly--islands of sensitive vision in a materialistic culture" (qtd. in Wolf 127).

In "Quaker Hill," the Orphic poet is contemplating death, his own death. He wonders if the world above, without Eurydice, is in fact worth going back to: "If fate denies us / This privilege for my wife, one thing is certain: / I do not want to go back either" (Ovid 235).

In Wolf's opinion, Crane's use of the Quakers as an example of people with a simple single vision on the one hand, and on the other hand "humans who pursue the material and know only material life and death" (125), demonstrates Crane's own disillusion over the years about the American ideal:

```
These are but cows that see no other thing
Than grass and snow, and their own inner being
Through the rich halo that they do not trouble
Even to cast upon the seasons fleeting
Though they should thin and die on last year's stubble.
```

[t/o]
(4-8)
Wolf states that Crane's conviction about "The dissolution of the American ideal through corruption and commerce is given further attention with the observation that history is determined by anything but idealistic attitudes" (125).

"Quaker Hill" is really a prematurely sung epitaph to the poet's vision. After this hill, the road to "Atlantis" passes through a "Tunnel" of death and apparitions. Edgar Allan Poe's soul will be the hero's last encounter, before that fatal one with his numinous woman, Eurydice. Wolf maintains that "it is already too late for the poet to redeem America completely, and certainly Crane's news or spiritual message is already told by Whitman, but it is the poet's task to speak out even though the heart is heavy and the poem is as wormwood on the tongue" (126).

"The Tunnel," a literal plunging from "Quaker Hill" into the insolent "subway underworld of empirical knowledge" (Wolf 129), signifies the Orphic poet's secretive and unsuspected inner-self, the very core of his unconscious. This section's epigraph, "To Find the Western Path / Right thro' the Gates of Wrath," comes from Blake's "Morning." Self-explanatory, the epigraph clears the path for the final outcome of the ecstatic voyage. The Western Path is obviously the path leading to the promised land of self-knowledge and redemption. The Gates of Wrath, on the other hand, identify with the Gates of Hades and imply the hero's
katabatic journey into the depths of his soul.

You shall search them all. Someday by heart you'll learn each famous sight And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite; You'll find the garden in the third act dead, Finger your knees--and wish yourself in bed With tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight.

Then let you reach your hat and go. As usual, let you--also walking down--exclaim to twelve upward leaving a subscription praise for what time slays.

Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride; (5-18)

The subway yawns the quickest promise home. (23)

Which will be the "home," implied here by the poet, remains yet to be seen and clarified.

Inside "The Tunnel," the Orphic poet meets Poe, the enfant terrible par excellence of American letters. Poe's apparition does not merely signify the occurrence of another fallen-Angel or Orphic daimon in distress, but primarily acknowledges and glorifies the pathos (suffering) of the sacrificial victim on the altar of absolute knowledge and truth.

And Death, aloft,—gigantically down Probing through you--toward me, O evermorel And when they dragged your retching flesh, Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore-- [t/o] The last night on the ballot rounds, did you, Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe? (77-82)
D. The Ecstatic Reality Destroys the Poet and Sinks His Vision

"Atlantis," the last section of The Bridge, is "home" for the Orphic poet. "Atlantis" represents his vision, the numinous woman of his life, his much desired Eurydice. As we shall see, however, she is at the same time a misbegotten ideal, an effigy of a vision, and the illusion of reality. Like all illusions, by herself a luring distortion of the mind, she reflects an erroneous perception of reality and appears as something she is not. For the unwary traveler, "Atlantis" is a promising (but false) Eden. But for the gnostic, the one who has already looked within the unconscious, she is the golden trap, where "sibylline voices flicker" (7) with "their labyrinthine mouths of history" (11). Where, "tomorrows" blend "into yesteryear" (29), "eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel" (52), and "the vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings" (56) in the "intrinsic Myth / Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound" (65-66).

What does "Atlantis" really represent, then? Does she represent Music, "the knowledge of that which relates to love in harmony and system," as this section's epigraph from Plato proclaims? Or, does she in last analysis represent the foghorn of an impending doom? "Atlantis" was the first section of The Bridge, in order of composition. Crane
wrote "Atlantis" when he was still exalted with the idea of "making a synthesis of America," eulogizing the amazing technological achievements of his era. Soon, however, his doubts about himself and his anxiety about the unpredictability of the future turned this spiritual elation into despair and skepticism.

In a letter to Waldo Frank (June 20, 1926), Crane states that he is "playing Don Quixote in an immorally conscious way" (Weber 261). In particular, he says:

The darkness is part of [the artist's] business. It has always been taken for granted however, that his intuitions were salutary and that his vision either sowed or epitomized "experience" (in the Blakian sense). . . .

All this is inconsecutive and indeterminate because I am trying to write shorthand about an endless subject--and moreover am unresolved as to any ultimate conviction. . . . Emotionally I should like to write the bridge; intellectually judged the whole theme and project seems more and more absurd. A fear of personal impotence in this matter wouldn't affect me half so much as the convictions that arise from other sources. . . .

The form of my poem rises out of a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I'm at a loss to explain my delusion that there exist any real links between that past and a future destiny worthy of it. . . . The bridge as a symbol today has no significance beyond an economical approach to shorter hours, quicker lunches, behaviorism and toothpicks. . . .

A bridge will be written in some kind of style and form, at worst it will be something as good as advertising copy. (Weber 260-62)

As a concept, Atlantis includes elements of insolence and doom, in the same way that Utopia, for example, includes elements of un-reality and impracticality, Eden of shame
and loss, and Nirvana of happiness and serenity by way of death. At this point, a closer look at the myth of Atlantis from Plato's *Critias* seems necessary.

At first, Atlantis was the ideal state. Her people, the Atlantids, were perfect in every way and, above all, renowned for their amazing technological achievements. They were especially famous for their mastery in laying out canals and building tunnels and bridges all over their island. It is worth noticing that the internal "construction" of *The Bridge* (i.e., the way it is conceived and the images it implies), echoes the actual construction of Atlantis. In particular, it is worth noticing that in *The Bridge* a "Tunnel" leads to "Atlantis," the same way a subterranean passage did lead to the capital city of Atlantis.

They first bridged the rings of the sea round their original home, thus making themselves a road from and to their palace. . . . They began on the seaside by cutting a canal to the outermost ring, . . . the 'ring' could now be entered from the sea by this canal like a port, as the opening they had made would admit the largest of vessels. Further, at these bridges they made openings in the rings of land which separated those of water, just sufficient to admit the passage of a single trireme, and covered the openings in so that the voyage through them became subterranean [like that through a contemporary tunnel(1)] for the banks of the rings of earth were considerably elevated above sea level. . . . So they enclosed this islet with the rings and bridge, which had a breadth of a hundred feet, completely by a stone wall, building towers and gates on the bridges at either end of each passage for the sea.
water. . . . The whole circuit of the outermost wall they covered with a coat, a ceruse [ointment], as one might say, of copper, the inner with melted tin, and the wall of the actual acropolis with orichalch, which gleamed like fire. (1219-20)

Were, however, the people of Atlantis contented with such an abundance of material wealth?

For many generations, while the god's strain in them was still vigorous, they gave obedience to the laws and affection to the divine whereto they were akin. They were indeed truehearted and greathearted, bearing themselves to one another and to their various fortunes with judgment and humbleness. . . . Wealth made them not drunken with wantonness; their mastery of themselves was not lost, nor their steps made uncertain. . . . But when the god's part in them began to wax faint by constant crossing with much mortality, and the human temper to predominate, then they could no longer carry their fortunes, but began to behave themselves unseemly. To the seeing eye they now began to seem foul, for they were losing the fairest bloom from the most precious treasure, but to such as could not see the true happy life, to appear at last fair and blessed indeed, now that they were taking the infection of wicked coveting and pride of power. (1224; emphasis added)

The fate of the Atlantids and their city is well known. Lured by Zeus into attacking Athens for absolute control of the sea (a power they did not need), they were destroyed by a cataclysm in reprisal for their hubris. In one night, the whole island sank into the sea and was reduced into a mass of impervious mud. What Plato tries to convey with this myth is that pride and arrogance inevitably lead people to perish. But above all, pride that is based
on material (technological) achievements and wealth may also lead people into a moral and spiritual vacuum.

"Atlantis," within the context of The Bridge, conveys in its way a very similar message. As the vision of the Orphic poet, she transcends doom and death. As symbol of a national identity, she projects a warning against pride and misuse of power. Lastly, as Hart Crane's personal Will (after the completion of The Bridge, in 1930, until his death two years later, Crane did not write anything else), "Atlantis" reminds us that unwise allotment of wealth without spiritual and intellectual foundation is by itself destined to fail.

In "Atlantis," the poet finally comes face to face with his Eurydice, despite the original warning never to turn back and look at her. The moment of their union is dramatic and exhilarating. After years of longing, the mystical journey has come to its end. The anticipated vision is no longer an unattainable dream, but an ecstatic reality: Eurydice. As expected, there is rejoicing on the part of the poet:

Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!
So to thine Everpresence, beyond time,
Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
That bleeds infinity--the orphic strings,
Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge:
--One Song, One Bridge of Fire! (88-93)

But, there is no redemption. Eurydice will not follow her
poet back to life. And, without her, the poet no longer wishes to go back to the world of the living:

Is it Cathay,
Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring
The serpent with the eagle in the leaves . . . ?
Whispers antiphonal in azure swing. (93-96)

On April 24, 1932, returning from Mexico on the Orizaba, one night before the ship was to reach Cuba, Hart Crane jumped overboard. His last words, according to Peggy Baird Cowley, were: "Everything is lost. I've got to go," and "I'm not going to make it, dear. I'm utterly disgraced" (qtd. in Unterecker 757). His fiery vision about making a synthesis of America apparently did not turn out the way he imagined it nine years earlier, when, fresh under the inspiration of his Muse, he started the composition of The Bridge.

According to the prevalent version of the myth, when Orpheus came back from Hades, "he lived without a woman" but "His love was given / To young boys only" (Ovid 236) He died a few years later killed by maenads, who, frenzied by his rejection of women, tore his body apart. His head was thrown into the sea, "And here a serpent struck at the head, still dripping / With sea-spray" (Ovid 261). This serpent is perhaps "The serpent with the eagle in the leaves" (95) of Crane's "Atlantis." According to a more peaceful version of the myth, when Orpheus returned from
Hades, he spent some time, as a healer and a teacher of writing, music, and the arts. Unable, however, to enjoy life without Eurydice, out of grief and despair, he drowned in the Thracian sea. In both Orpheus's and Hart Crane's stories, death by water took its course.

Hart Crane's quest for a vision did fail. Nevertheless, the Orphic poet in The Bridge justified himself. He did set out for the magnificent journey; he did descend into his inner-self for knowledge and spiritual fertility; and he did endure the ordeal to the end, regardless of the unfortunate turn of events and his lack of hope. According to Wolf, Crane

can never be certain of the complete identity of the new vision. . . . There are earlier indications of the difficulty of achieving a vision through the obscuring pressures of modern culture. . . . and though Crane has vowed to bring back a higher consciousness of vision in the "Ave Maria" section ("I bring you back Cathay") he cannot be certain he has done so because he cannot know if his myth is successful. All he can be sure of is that his presentation of a cyclic pre-Christian mythology offers a doctrine of compassion and wholeness which can provide a vision transcending time, space, and death through union of spirit with matter. (152)

Paradoxically, "Atlantis" is a doxology (!) of death—a mystical death perhaps, as ecstatic and irresistible as the poet's enticing Vision. "O Thou steeled Cognizance" (57), he sings to her,
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.
Swift peal of secular light, intrinsic Myth
Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound.
(62-66)
III. AIME CESaire'S RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND
AND THE ORPHIC REDEMPTION

A. "My Poetry Is That of One Uprooted, and of One Who Wishes to Take New Roots"

my Negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral . . .
it digs under the opaque dejection of its rightful patience. (Césaire 116)

In Modernism and Negritude, A. James Arnold calls the Notebook of a Return to the Native Land (the exact translation of the French title) the epic of Negritude. He describes it thus:

It is in every sense a political poem as well as the account of the poet's effort to establish contact with himself by breaking down the barriers of alienation. From the first Césaire conceived of negritude as the struggle to transcend racism and the effects of colonization, including the colonization of the mind. The Notebook was a political act in that it plumbed the depths of the black Martinican's experience [under French domination] and revealed its horrors. The struggle, composed or recomposed so as to render a sense of process, gives the poem its ternary structure: an initial revolt against an intolerable present; a recollection of childhood and early youth that calls up images both fascinating and revolting, culminating in the recognition of an awful personal reality; and finally a shorter movement that swells with the surge of vital force renewed. (133)

In 1931, at the age of eighteen, Aimé Césaire left his native Martinique to go to Paris as a candidate for the
École Normale Supérieure, "the premier institution of the French intellectual meritocracy" (Arnold 8). While in Paris, Césaire became involved with a group of students from Africa and the West Indies who joined their forces and voices in a collective effort advocating cultural and political independence from the colonizer. Their venture gradually grew into a considerable movement, which in 1948 became known as the Negritude Movement. Léopold Senghor from Senegal, Leon Damas from French Guyana, and Aimé Césaire from Martinique were the initiators of that movement. In "Negritude Today," Charlotte H. Bruner says that "Their color was a bond, but so were their reactions to the Europeanized metropolis of Paris" (34), and regardless of their geographical origin, they saw "themselves as at last freed from centuries-old bonds of servitude, actual, educational, social, [and] intellectual . . ." (39). In the Return, Césaire (who coined the term "négritude") gives a wonderfully poetic definition of Negritude:

My Negritude is not a stone, its deafness thrown against the clamour of the day
my Negritude is not a speck of dead water on the dead eye of earth
my Negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral
it thrusts into the red flesh of the soil
it thrusts into the warm flesh of the sky
it digs under the opaque dejection of its rightful patience. (116)
In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon claims that "The concept of negritude, . . . was the emotional if not the logical antithesis of that insult which the white man flung at humanity" (212). And he concludes by saying that "This rush of negritude against the white man's contempt showed itself in certain spheres to be the one idea capable of lifting interdictions and anathemas" (212). Describing the conditions which gave rise to the concept of negritude, Césaire himself has said:

We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are--that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we were black and have a history, a history that contains certain cultural elements of great value; and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilizations. . . . [I]n sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world.

(qtd. in Nkosi 10-11)

Eighteen years after the introduction of the Negritude Movement, however, in an answer to André Malraux (April 1966), Césaire also said:

Je dois vous dire tout de suite qu'aucun mot ne m'irrite davantage que le mot négritude--je n'aime pas du tout ce mot-là, mais puisqu'on l'a employé puisqu'on l'a tellement attaqué, je crois que ce serait manquer de courage que d'avoir l'air d'abandonner cette notion. (qtd. in Condé 43)
I have to tell you right away that no other word irritates me more than the word negritude—I do not like this word in the least, but since it has been used and since it has been refuted so much, I believe that pretending to ignore this notion [now] would signify a lack of courage. (Author's translation)

Bruner says that the Negritude Movement, "initiated by a group of Black Third World students in Paris and officially introduced to the world by Jean-Paul Sartre and Pablo Picasso, made some stir in the Paris society of the time" (33). But it also made, and this is significant, "some impression on a group of Afro-American writers then in and out of Paris" (33). Since the early thirties, Aimé Césaire knew of the Harlem Renaissance poets, who, as a group, had a great influence not only on him, but also on other black intellectuals in Paris. According to Arnold, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer (a close friend of Hart Crane [Unterecker 320]), James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, and Countee Cullen, "enjoyed a heroic status" (27) for Césaire and the other Negritude writers. The Harlem Renaissance poets were revered by the latter as the revolutionary black poets who brought to the West "the African love of life, the African joy in love, [and] the African dream of death" (Etienne Léro; qtd. in Arnold 27).

According to Bruner, "The effect of the Harlem Renaissance and of the American Black writers in Paris on the Negritude writers is demonstrable" (42). On the other
hand, the Negritude writers also had an impact on the Afro-American Movement. It is not until later in America, Bruner adds, that the usual reader became "aware of such terms as 'Black is Beautiful,' 'Black Power,' now reintensified with political overtones, but beautifully developed poetically in French thirty years ago [i.e., during the late forties]" (42).

Speaking at the Conference of African Writers of English Expression (Uganda, June 1962), Langston Hughes confirmed the Negritude writers' impact on the Afro-American Movement, but was dubious as to its extent. He said he found nothing mysterious about the notion of negritude, and that "Césaire had done exactly what the writers of the Harlem Renaissance did before [him], back in the nineteen-twenties; only the Harlemites had not given it a name" (qtd. in Arnold 33). On the other hand, in "To the White Fiends," Claude McKay extolled the concept of negritude as expressed by the Negritude Movement (Cailler 131-32) and referred to it as radiance:

Even thou shalt be a light
Awhile to burn on the benighted earth,
Thy dusky face I set among the white
For thee to prove thyself of higher worth;
Before the world is swallowed up in night,
To show thy little lamp: go forth, go forth!

(McKay 38)

And in particular, in a speech for the International Conference of Black Writers and Artists (1956), James
Baldwin said about Aimé Césaire:

Césaire had spoken for those who could not speak and those who could not speak thronged around the table to shake his hand, and kiss him. . . .
What made him so attractive now was the fact that he, without having ceased to be one of them, yet seemed to move with the European authority. He had penetrated into the heart of the great wilderness which was Europe and stolen the sacred fire. And this, which was the promise of their freedom, was also the assurance of his power.

(qtd. in Frutkin iii)

Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land (a long poem in prose and verse) was published in Paris in 1947, with an introduction by the French surrealist poet André Breton. The same year, Ivan Goll and Lionel Abel produced the first bilingual edition of the Return in America, published under the title Memorandum of My Martinique.

Reflecting the overall philosophy of the Negritude Movement, Césaire's philosophy in the Return focuses on a spiritual return to Africa "by a supreme act of poetic imagination" (Arnold 33). In particular, the poem advocates a spiritual return to the poet's native Martinique via Africa, the primordial Earth-mother. Arnold defines this spiritual return of the uprooted back to their African roots as a "postulation of the spirit" (33). In Black Orpheus (originally published as an introduction to Léopold Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de la langue française), Jean-Paul Sartre states that the
Negro (Samuel W. Allen's translation of the French "Nègre") must eventually breach the walls of his culture-prison, and return to Africa.

Thus, with the apostles of negritude, indissolubly fused are the theme of the return to the native land and that of the redescent into the bursting Hell of the black soul. It is in the nature of a systematic quest, a divestment and an asceticism which accompanies a continuous effort toward a penetration. And I shall name this poetry "orphyic" because this untiring descent of the Negro into himself causes me to think of Orpheus going to reclaim Eurydice from Pluto. (20-21)

In the Return, Césaire creates a mythology of his own personal past. At the same time, he creates the cosmogony of the black people; a cosmogony that no longer advocates physical return to Africa, although it originated there. According to Arnold, "Neither Césaire nor any of the other non-African proponents of negritude ever espoused a back-to-Africa movement, although Césaire manifestly began his literary career by opting for an Africa of the heart" (29). Just as Hart Crane's The Bridge is a "synthesis of America," Return to My Native Land is Aimé Césaire's own synthesis of "an Africa of the heart." In other words, it is a poetic return to his personal and Afro-Martinican roots through a mystical descent into the depths of his soul.
B. Let the Journey of the Return Begin

In *Profil d'une œuvre: Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Maryse Conde says that "Le sens profond du poème est la modification essentielle, la renaissance du nègre qui doit parvenir à se libérer de ses chaînes, à se guérir de son sentiment d'inferiorité et à se prendre en main son destin" (34). (The profound meaning of the poem is the essential modification, the rebirth of the Black that must by all means succeed in enabling him to free himself from his chains, to cure himself of his inferiority complex and to take his destiny into his own hands [Author's translation].) In Conde's view, the first part of the *Return* is impregnated with a dramatic denunciation of "des maux qui affligent le peuple antillais" (34), (the ills that afflict the people of the Antilles [Author's translation]). Césaire's poetic voyage in the *Return*, "from alienation to authenticity" (Arnold 168), begins right at home. In Césaire's own words, it begins "At the end of the dawn" (28) in his small native town. Metaphorically, both dawn and sunrise signify the awakening of negritude as the foundation of a national conscience. The native town, on the other hand, is really a metaphor for the poet's own soul and inner-self.
At first, his town's ugliness and its people's pathetic renouncement of life strike the poet:

In this inert city, this brawling crowd which so astonishingly by-passes its cry, its motion, its meaning, calm, passive to its true cry, the only cry you want to hear for it is all the city can say, because the sound inhabits some refuge of shadow and pride in this inert city, going by its cry of hunger, of grief, of revolt, of hate, this crowd so strangely blabbing and mute.

In this inert city, this strange crowd, which does not mix, which knows how to evade, dodge, disintegrate. (32)

Even nature herself, with her "hill forgotten" (36) and her "restless docile feet--malarial blood routing the sun with overheated pulse" (36), has renounced life; "slowly vomiting its human fatigue" (36), nature follows the example of "this sleepy Negro lad" (36), whose voice is "engulfed in the swamps of hunger" (38). From the opening stanzas of the poem, as one can see, the evoked poetic images pertaining to the dead and to the disintegrating world of Hades are clearly repugnant.

In La cohésion poétique de l'oeuvre césairienne, as he analyzes another work by Césaire, Keith Louis Walker says that Césaire's poetry in general evokes images that correspond to oneiric and subconscious universals (70). By analogy then, this movement from reality into the collective world of dreams and of the unconscious (i.e., the world of the Apollonian and Dionysiac range described by Nietzsche)
signifies the Orphic poet's katabasis into the depths of his own innermost existence. In particular, in Césaire's universe, such a descent constitutes an especially frightening experience, because the kingdom of the dead (i.e., the unconscious) is a repulsively horrifying place. In its totality, it pertains to

- the odd stranding, the exacerbated stench of corruption, the monstrous sodomies of the offering and the sacrificer, the dauntless prows of prejudice and stupidity, the prostitutions, the hypocrisies, the lubricities, the treasons, the lies, the frauds—the concussions, the breathlessness of half-hearted cowards, the smooth enthusiasms of budding bureaucrats, the avidities, hysterias, perversions, the harlequinades of misery, the injuries, itchings, urticarias, the dreary hammocks of degeneracy. (38-40)

The world in the poem is a world of vile horror and shame. Every morning, the sun rises not to give light and warmth but rather to reveal more horror and more shame. And thus, day gives way to "The monstrous bulb of night, sprouting from our vile renunciations" (40), and night in turn gives way to day, the "deceitful, desolate scab on the wound of the waters" (30). Maryse Condé says that "Pour l'Occidental, le soleil . . . assume une certaine fonction mythique. L'homme des tropiques nuance cette vision du soleil. Il sait bien que c'est une sorte de Janus . . . dispensant le bien et le mal a volonté" (55). (For the Westerner, the sun . . . assumes a certain mythical
function. This vision of the sun changes from clear to cloud to the person from the Tropics. Such a person knows well that it [the sun] is a sort of Janus . . . dispensing at will both good and evil [Author's translation].)

Although without fail a katabatic descent per se, Césaire's venture in the Return does not lead the hero from the beginning directly downward as Crane's did in The Bridge (even though Crane's descent also had its moments of confusion). Of a much more labyrinthine nature at first, this descent takes black Orpheus from deceit to misconception, from make-believe to hallucination, and from utopia to illusion, thus paralleling Odysseus's misleading journey from place to place and from adventure to adventure. While in pursuit of personal identity—his black Eurydice—the hero of the Return undergoes a series of deceitful revelations (which I will call the Orphic poet's "false-Eurydices"), before he finally meets with the true one and brings her back to the world above. As in the Odyssey, wherein Odysseus and his companions become victims of false promises (bewitched by the charms of the Lotus-Eaters, the Sirens, and Circe), in the Return, these false-Eurydices (clones of the poet's true vision) make the poet deviate from his purpose to become Orpheus reborn, civilizer, and philanthropist, all in one. The illusions vanish away eventually, but their impressions linger for a short time in
and out of the poet's confused mind, while he is still pursuing his true Eurydice. These false-Eurydices fill the poet's heart with anger, counterproductive hate, destructive desire, and above all contempt for his own people.

C. The Kingdom of the Dead Is a Dreary Place

1. First false-Eurydice: Despair

The Orphic poet's first revelation is the realization of his nation's uttermost misery—resulting from a colonized white-ruled society, whose economic, social, political, and private institutions are decreed by the colonizer. The poet resents the fact that his country, "this most essential country" (42), has become the colonizer's private property. Treated by the white ruler as if he were lacking intelligence and skills, he particularly resents the master's demeaning ways toward him and his people. In The Colonizer and the Colonized, Albert Memmi says:

The point is that the colonized means little to the colonizer. Far from wanting to understand him as he really is, the colonizer is preoccupied with making him undergo this urgent change. The mechanism of this remolding of the colonized is revealing in itself. It consists, in the first place, of a series of negations. The colonized is not this, is not that. He is never considered in a positive light; or if he is, the quality which is conceded, is the result of a psychological or ethical failing. (83-84)
Christianity, not so much as a doctrine, but as an organized white-oriented religion with suspiciously double standards about humbleness and love for one's neighbor (as long as he is white, wealthy, and a Westerner), is the first foreign-imposed institution the poet resents and ridicules in the Return.

Christmas was not like other holidays. It didn't like to go out, to dance at street corners, to ride on hobby-horses, to pinch women in the crowds, to set off fireworks in front of the tamarind-trees. This Christmas had agoraphobia, liking to be busy the whole day, to make preparations, to cook, to clean, to worry, for fear there would not be enough, for fear something would be lacking, for fear it would be dull. (44)

According to Arnold,

The Catholic church, into which Martinicans are customarily born, came to represent for Césaire at an early age the spiritual arm of French colonialism. There was never any question in his mind of reconciling Catholic belief with the values of the black world... (44)

Distinguishing between the way that black and white people perceive religion and the significance of God,

Sartre says:

For the white technician, God is primarily engineer. ... [T]he Christian God conceives the world by his understanding and realizes it by his will. The rapport of the creature with the creator is never carnal, except for certain mystics whom the Church holds in great suspicion. (46)
On the other hand, for the Martinican of the Return, religion has a meaning only when "the whole being is liquefied in sound, voice and rhythm," and when "not only the mouth sings, but also the hands, feet, buttocks, sexual organs" (48). Therefore, for the Martinican (and black people in general), religion and the rapport of the creature with the creator are primarily carnal (in the Sartrean sense). What's more, according to Sartre, religion for the Black is also "spermatic"

like a tension of the soul balancing two complementary tendencies; the dynamic emotion of being a rising phallus, and that softer, more patient and feminine, of being a plant which grows. (47)

At this point in the Return, the poet's confrontation with Despair--his first Eurydice--is not only dramatic but also dangerous. Distorting his mind beyond control, this first dreary apparition suffocates him with contempt for his own people's renouncement of action:

Mine, these few thousand death-bearers who circle in the gourd of an isle, and mine, too, the archipelago bent like the anxious desire for self-negation. (64)

Despair has penetrated the poet's soul entirely. What he thinks he really wants now is to "To flee" (60); to flee and totally forget about the miseries of his small native town:

this life limping before me, not life but death, death without sense or piety, death wherein grandeur pitiably miscarries, the shining
pettiness of this death; . . .
and I alone, sudden scene of this dawn
in which the apocalypse of monsters parades. (62)

In this stage of mind, the poet wishes rather to leave
his island in order to join others, who, unlike his own
people, have not given up yet in spite of their equally
unfortunate lot in life:

To leave
As there are hyena-men and leopard-men, I
would be a jew-man
a kaffir-man
a hindu-man-from-Calcutta
a man-from-Harlem-who-doesn't-vote . . .
a jew-man
a pogrom-man,
a little-tyke,
a bum. (56)

To flee. My heart was full of generous hopes. (60)

Who can boast of having more than I?
Monstrous putrefaction of ineffective revolts,
swamps of rotten blood. (66)

Arnold maintains that the poet's short-lived negation
of reality underlined by his desire to leave is indeed
justifiable, since "One cannot pass directly from oppression
to a glorious future in freedom" (158), without first
having passed by an "intermediary stage--the dialectical
antithesis or moment of negativity," which "involves the
dredging up of the repressed contents of the psyche . . . ." (158).
At this instance in the poem (i.e., after negativity has totally inundated the poet's soul), the false-Eurydice's eerie phantom of despair begins to fade, until it finally vanishes away completely. The poet comes back to his senses. To flee is obviously not the answer, and his people's resignation to subordination might be contemptible but by no means irretrievable. Resignation is a normal reaction of the oppressed, and, according to Arnold, it reflects the "introjection by the blacks of their image as it has been disseminated by a white society" (159). Such an image can "be challenged and effectively destroyed only if one recognizes that it has determined the mode of one's behavior, both imaginary and real" (159).

Once the deceitful incitements of despair in his mind have been appeased, the poet (now repentant) wants to return to his native land in soul and in thought—since physically he never left it—and start restoring the ruins brought about by hate:

And I should say to myself:
"And most of all beware, even in thought, of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear . . . ."

And now I am here again! . . . (62)

Orpheus's role as a purger of the soul—poet, story-teller, and musician—has indeed prevailed. By
nature a singer and a narrator, the poet must tell the stories of the past (in primeval societies, story-telling is a divinely sent and efficient remedy for an ailing soul). He must tell and retell stories of suffering and injustice drawn from the black people's common heritage originating in Africa, "the womb which spills towards Europe the good liquor of the Gulf Stream" (64). Arnold maintains that at this point the "poem takes a decidedly narrative turn . . ." (158). And he concludes, by saying that there is also an unavoidable divergence "between the response of the black and the white reader, at least in the Americas. If the black reader is called upon to recognize his collective past in slavery, the white reader is called upon to recognize his collective past as slaver" (158).

And my unfenced island, its bold flesh upright at the stern of this Polynesia; and before it, Guadeloupe slit in two at the dorsal line, and quite as miserable as ourselves; Haiti, where Negritude stood up for the first time and swore by its humanity; and the droll little tail of Florida where a Negro is being lynched, and Africa caterpillaring giganticly up to the Spanish foot of Europe, its nakedness where death cuts a wide swath. (66)

Chilled and discouraged by the inevitability of death (a relapse into despair is once again present in the poet's attitude), the poet reverses the rules of that stereotypically white-oriented imagery, wherein Death is always depicted as a black man. In Césaire's eyes, Death is
now associated with snow and the color white, both of which become for him the prevailing elements of the underworld. Césaire is not the only Negritude poet to have reversed this traditional symbolism. Other poets, and especially Léopold Senghor, have created images that are similar to Césaire’s, wherein the color white signifies evil and death. Referring to the black hero Toussaint Louverture (Haitian by origin), the poet says:

the snow adds white bars, the snow a white jailer guarding a prison cell . . .
A single man defying the white cries of white death. (68)

Death gallops in the prison like a white horse
Death wanes
Death vacillates

Death expires in a white swamp of silence

What does it matter?
We shall tell. Sing. Shout. (70)

2. Second false-Eurydice: Scorn

Who and what are we? Excellent question! (74)

According to Ngal, in the following section of the poem, "Le poète chante la non-technicité du Noir" (100). (The poet sings the non-technical nature of the black person [Author’s translation].) Besides Christianity,
Western civilization—a highly idolized civilization, utilized by the white people as the sole sound measure of evaluating the rest of the world—constitutes this time the second foreign-imposed institution the poet criticizes and ridicules. And above all, the poet specifically despises and ridicules Reason—mathematical reason, especially—which has always been regarded as the highlight of western culture and thought. According to his critical eyes, Reason has almost become the aberration of an aberration. In this very sense, the poet of the Return refutes from an altogether antithetical angle exactly what constitutes the driving force behind Hart Crane's *The Bridge*: technology and its achievements. Arnold says that "The dialectic of negritude, at this moment of negation of the dominant value system, articulates perfectly with the same moment in the dialectic of reason and order" (157). Scorn—personified as the poet's second false-Eurydice—inundates his soul (i.e., his unconscious); then, it slowly surfaces to the world above (i.e., his consciousness), thus trying to drown anything that would stand in its way.

Words?
Ah yes, words!
Reason, I crown you the wind of the night.
Your name, the voice of order?
It becomes the whip's corolla.
Beauty, I call you the petition
of the stone. . . .
Because we hate you, you and
your reason, we call upon
the early dementia, the flaming madness
of a tenacious cannibalism
Treasure,
Let us count:
the madness that remembers
the madness that shouts

the madness that sees
the madness that is unleashed
And you know the rest
that two plus two makes five . . .
etcetera etcetera . . . (72)

In addition to his direct criticism of the dominant
value system, the poet gives in turn a definition of his
race and its values. He defines black people by stating
first what they have not achieved (especially, in contrast
with what has been achieved by Whites), and secondly by
stating instead what black people have become under white
domination and its corrupting influence. This definition
implies the poet's strong disapproval of the western values
of progress and scientific advancement, as values which have
contributed in the exploitation of nature and the
dehumanization of the human soul.

Who and what are we? Excellent question! (74)

Those who invented neither powder nor compass
those who never tamed steam or electricity
those who did not explore sea or sky
but know in their innermost depths
the country of suffering
those who knew of voyages only when uprooted
those who are made supple by kneelings
those domesticated and Christianized
those inoculated with generacy
tom-toms of empty hands
tom-toms of sounding wounds
burlesque tom-toms of treason. (110)

Scorn, instigated by someone's undeservedly acquired credit (as it has happened in the case of white people, who have been solely accredited for the advancement of civilization in spite of the "dark side" of this very civilization), is indeed a deceitful counselor, although on a long-term basis it is not as counterproductive as despair. On the other hand, inherently lacking a positive character, scorn can never be disguised as the Orphic poet's long-sought vision. What scorn does do, however, is to make the poet focus on his important role as prophet and leader of his people who must interpret their values as they are, without trying to mystify or mythicize reality and history.

No, we have never been amazons of the king of Dahomey, nor princes of Ghana with eight hundred camels, nor wise men in Timbuctoo under Askia the Great; nor architects in Djene, nor Madhis nor warriors. Under our armpits, we do not feel the itch of those who bore nothing of our history (I who admire nothing so much as the lamb chewing his afternoon shadow), I want to declare that we were from the very first quite pitiful dishwashers, shoeshiners without scope and, at best, rather conscientious sorcerers whose only incontestable achievement has been the endurance record under the lash. (96-98)

According to Arnold, "The black reader is thus obliged to refuse the temptation to project his cultural identity backward to an ideal Africa" (158; emphasis added). In
Arnold's view, "The resolution of the black's dilemma through mythic projection--the attempt to identify with someone else's African history--is thus presented as a false synthesis, the project of a false consciousness of one's present condition" (159). Therefore, the black person's goal is "the stimulation of an awareness of black history" (159); not the attempt (by misquoting this history) to justify pathetic inertness and/or excessive use of action leading to violence and destructiveness.

3. **Third false-Euridice: Disgust**

This particular section of the Return is affluent in deprecatory terms and demeaning language, employing all those negative connotations that the white colonizer has repeatedly assigned to terms for his black colonized subjects. According to Arnold, the term negritude, used here for the second time in the poem, no longer signifies elation and pride. Instead, it "signifies the abjection of the nigger while denoting his blackness" (161). Disgust for his own race and its people appears as the poet's third false-Eurydice. A dreary phantom rising out of Hades's slimy bilge, disgust represents for the poet the most dangerous counselor of all three. The driving force behind this section's particularity, disgust totally disorients the
poet, who, under its misleading and corrosive influence, is driven to detesting his own people's features, traits, and attitudes:

One evening in the train sitting across from me, a Negro.
A Negro big as a pongo, who tried to make himself small on the tram bench. He tried to relax his gigantic legs and trembling hungry pug's fists on the dirty bench. And everything left him, left him. His nose seemed a peninsula adrift, his very Negritude paled under the action of a tireless tawing. And the tawer was Poverty. A sudden fat lop-eared beast whose claws had scarred his face into scabby islets. . . . One could see how the malignant and industrious thumb had modelled the brow in bumps, pierced the nose with two parallel and disquieting tunnels, prolonged the underlip beyond all measure . . . .
A shameless Negro whose toes sneered in a quite stinking way from the half-open lair of his shoes. (100-02)

A comical, ugly Negro, and the women behind me laughed as they looked at him.
He was RIDICULOUS AND UGLY RIDICULOUS AND UGLY to be sure.
I hoisted a great smile of complicity . . .
My cowardice restored to me! (104)

Arnold says that "This self-deprecatory tone—which requires that nègre be translated as nigger, rather than either black or Negro—is maintained for several pages . . ." (161), in this section of the poem. Analyzing Césaire's use of derogatory terms against his own people, Condé states:

Nous avons déjà signalé l'utilisation de mots considérés comme injurieux et soudain placés dans un contexte valorisant: nègre, negraille, cannibalisme, idole, relaps, puanteur, laideur, bête, brute, fumier, vomissure . . . C'est, nous l'avons dit également, la fonction psychiatrique

We have already pointed out the use of words considered as derogatory and all of a sudden placed in a significant context: nigger, niggerness, cannibalism, idol [in a negative connotation pertaining to paganism], relapse, stench, ugliness, beast, brute, dung, puke . . . . As we have also said, this constitutes a psychotherapeutic function inherent in language. Name the evil. Destroy the inhibitions. Cure the traumas. In one word, liberate.

(Author's translation)

This is exactly what is about to happen in the last section of the Return: naming the evil (i.e., despair, scorn, and disgust), destroying the inhibitions (i.e., false pretense, vanity), curing the traumas (i.e., inferiority complex, self-pity), and lastly liberating the poet from his insidious form of "racism" toward the people of his own race. Having been wandering for quite a long time through Hades's misleading paths, the poet comes at last face to face with his true Eurydice. This last Eurydice--a benign spirit of life--symbolizes the poet's reconciliation with his own nature and reality. She also symbolizes the Orphic poet's redemption, moving him toward the attainment of a mystical vision, which consists of the spiritual liberation of the soul.
D. The Ecstatic Reality Redeems the Poet
and Elevates His Vision

The last part of the Return to My Native Land is by far the most poetic. Arnold suggests that this particular section has a magical influence on the reader as well as on the poet himself. According to him, "The opening of the final movement is startling: the focus shifts abruptly from the specifically historical context of negritude to a cosmic vision of the speaker-hero giving new life to his world" (163):

And now suddenly that force and life assail me like a bull, and the wave of life encircles the papilla of the hill, and all the arteries and veins move with new blood, and the enormous lung of breathing cyclones, and the hoarded fire of volcanoes and the gigantic seismic pulse which beats the measure of a living body in my firm embrace. (136-38)

In my view, not only is the poet being redeemed by his vision, but also the reader, who has thus achieved through pity and fear (the Aristotelean elements of tragedy) the purification of his/her soul. In this sense, Césaire becomes the conflation of Orpheus, i.e., the poet-purifier, and the African mystes (Greek for initiator to rites), i.e., the poet-priest. In Arnold's view, "The transformation of the speaker from observer to committed participant and then to inspired leader involves in this final avatar, a very..."
considerable leap" (164). This leap is analogous to the poet's leap from inactivity to pathos (i.e., suffering evoked by the misleading influence of the false-Eurydices), from pathos to katharsis (purification of the soul), and lastly from katharsis to personal elation and redemption.

Once the phantoms of deceit are vanished, the poet senses his oncoming encounter with Eurydice. Immersion in the water of his soul's ever-purifying spring takes place as a form of ceremonial rite in order to appease the forces of darkness.

I force the vitteline membrane that separates me from myself,
I push through the great waters that girdle me with blood, . . .
I alone get acquainted with the last anguish,
I alone
Sip with a straw
the first drops of virginal milk! (86-88)

Immersion in water, however, can be both a frightening and a liberating experience. As a frightening experience, it pertains to death (water as an agent of destruction and drowning), while as a liberating experience, it pertains to life (water as a purifying agent and giver of life). One way or another, immersion in water implies acknowledgement of the perpetual cycle of birth-death-rebirth (a common theme in world mythology). This theme also applies to the nature of the Greek god Dionysus, who, according to myth, died in order to be reborn purified and
redeemed. At this stage of mystical elation, the poet of the Return exclaims: "My memory is circled with blood. My remembrance is girdled with corpses" (90)! These two lines perfectly illustrate the cycle of life and death, inseparably tied with the human condition. The first line of "memory circled with blood" implies the blood shed at the moment of childbirth (i.e., blood giving life), while the second line of "remembrance girdled with corpses" implies the blood shed at the moment of violent death (i.e., blood taking life).

According to Sartre, "The secret of the black [sic] is that the sources of his existence and the roots of Being are identical" (44). Thus, they demonstrate the Nietzschean (and, according to my interpretation, also Orphic) nature of the black person's personality:

As the dionysian [sic] poet, the Negro seeks to penetrate beneath the brilliant phantasies of the day and encounters, a thousand feet under the apollinian [sic] surface, the inexpiable suffering which is the universal essence of Man. If one wished to systematize, one would say that the black [sic] merges into all of Nature insomuch as he is [in] sexual sympathy with Life, and that he indicates himself as Man insomuch as he is the Passion of suffering in revolt. (49-50)

In Sartre's view, fecundity of Nature (i.e., life) and proliferation of misery (a euphemism for death) can be assimilated. The fecundity of Nature, however, "surpasses by its exuberance the misery [and] drowns it in its creative
abundance which is poetry, love and dance" (50), said to be the indispensable characteristics of a black person's nature.

Once the purifying immersion is performed, the poet finally meets with Eurydice face to face. Disregarding Pluto's warning, he turns back and looks at her exclaiming: "0 friendly light / 0 fresh source of light" (114). In an unexpected turn of events and in direct defiance of the Greek myth, this last Eurydice does not disappear. She is here to utter her secrets to the poet—secrets worthy of his noble aspirations. She is here to reveal her truth, which will soon become the poet's own truth: "Take me as I am. I don't adapt to you" (86)! He finally understands that Eurydice had never left in the first place. He says to her: "I salute the three centuries which support / my civic rights and my minimized blood" (104). At last, Eurydice reveals her identity to him: Eurydice is Negritude; not a remote concept of awe and unattainable grandeur, but a mere and simple reality of every-day life:

my Negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral
it thrusts into the red flesh of the soil
it thrusts into the warm flesh of the sky
it digs under the opaque dejection of its rightful patience. (116)

Eurydice also identifies with the poet's own soul:

Here was a man brought down
and his soul was naked
and destiny triumphs by contemplating the changing of his soul which defied it, in the ancestral puddle. (108)

Eurydice represents the ugliness of death:

How much blood in my memory, how many lagoons! They are covered with death's heads. They are not covered with water-lilies. (90)

On this old dream my cannibal cruelties. (106)

Eurydice personifies the beauty of life:

Eia for joy
Eia for love
Eia for grief at the udders of reincarnated tears. (120)

Eurydice finally signifies the poet's own native town, the poet's own self:

This city is cut to my size.
This city, my face of mud. (104)

Arnold says that the fundamental thematic trait of the poem, "the struggle between the 'bon nègre'--the 'good nigger' or Uncle Tom--and the 'mauvais nègre,' who represents the black man of the future" (163), has finally prevailed. This "mauvais nègre" (the "bad nigger," who represents the black man of the future) is "bad" not by any universal code of ethics but simply by the colonizer's own code of "ethics," which are unyielding and cut exclusively to his size. In his born-again identity as prophet-leader, the poet of the Return is at last rejoicing. This new birth, a "painful birth of the new Black out of the
transformation of the old nigger" (Arnold 166), signifies the triumph of life (fertility, wholeness) over death (sterility, void). The poet says: "I accept . . . I accept . . . totally, without reserve" (128). This acceptance--an acceptance of "his history in slavery and its present-day aftermath in poverty"--is no longer a resignation to colonialism and fate, but an "acceptance that transmutes degradation into patient strength and that finally transmutes negritude itself" (Arnold 163).

Look I am only a man (no degradation or spit disturbs him)
I am only a man who accepts having no wrath any more
(having nothing in his heart but an immensity of love burning him)
I accept . . . I accept . . . totally, without reserve . . .

The climactic moment of the poet's redemption through reality (the ecstatic reality described by Nietzsche) has finally arisen. United with Eurydice, the poet leads her back to earth triumphantly. Retracing their steps through Hades's Gates (disgust), across the river Styx (scorn), and out of the dark cave-entrance of the underworld (despair), Eurydice and her poet return to the world above, which is the world of consciousness and awareness:

Bind, bind me without remorse
bind me with your vast arms of luminous clay
bind my dark vibration to the very navel of the world...

rise, Dove,
rise
rise
I follow, you are stamped on my ancestral white cornea
Mount toady to heaven
great black hole where I wanted to drown myself last month

There I will fish now
for the malevolent tongue of the night, its unmoving flick. (154)

According to Arnold, "The pitch of the poem has been rising too in an insistent staccato rhythm that, like a tom-tom, bursts forth in an explosion of energy, a paroxysm of desire accomplished" (167). Once back to earth, black Orpheus did not drown, nor did he get killed by frenzied maenads. Having defied the Greek myth, he rose out of his soul's marshy waters into the light. Commissioned by his vision to reveal the hidden paths of ecstasy and destined by his Muse--Poetry--to unveil the secrets of life, black Orpheus finally conquered the forces of Hades. Arnold suggests that Césaire's Return "makes a deep existential appeal to its reader," and that it "speaks to those who have yet to make the painful voyage from alienation to authenticity" (168).

At last, the Orphic myth has been enriched with a happy, enlightened version: a version of Life.
under the stars
  upright
  and
  free
and the lustral ship advances unafraid on
the crumbling water. (148)

mine the dances
the dance which breaks the iron-collar
the dance which opens the prison
the dance it-is-good-and-right-and-glorious-to-be-a-Negro
Mine my dances, when the sun vaults on
the racket of my hands. . . .

I give you my conscience and its rhythm
of flesh
I give you the fires where my weakness
sparkles . . .

Embrace, embrace US. (152)
In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche defines "ecstatic reality" (through which artistic urges are directly satisfied), as a determinative factor of the artistic (and poetic) process. According to him, not only does this ecstatic reality play a decisive role in the process of artistic creativity in general, but it even determines the artist's own future by either destroying him completely or else, redeeming him through a mystical experience of the collective (24).

In particular, one can actually see what an impact this ecstatic reality had on the lives of both poets. In Crane's case, it finally destroyed the poet, driving him to an unhappy life and to a premature death, while in Césaire's case, it succeeded in fully redeeming the poet through a mystical experience: the attainment of a viable vision.

The writing of *The Bridge*, instigated by the poet's own adulation of Brooklyn Bridge, signified Hart Crane's ecstatic reality. For the poet, Brooklyn Bridge represented the "most superb piece of construction in the modern world" (Unterecker 364), and symbolized the most glamorous achievement ever accomplished by technology. On the other hand, *The Bridge* (his most important synthesis) became the inducement of "feelings of elation, etc.---like being carried
forward and upward simultaneously—... in imagery, rhythm and repetition" that Crane experienced walking across his beloved Brooklyn Bridge (Unterecker 426).

Overlooking the present (which had been already outshined by the ephemeral glamour of Brooklyn Bridge and the technology behind it), Crane longed to build with his poem a mystical bridge that would successfully connect America’s binding past with a promising future. Having always looked either forward or upward (as confessed to Waldo Frank), Crane had not looked downward, underneath the surface of that bridge, until it was already too late. Had he done so from the very beginning—before he became bewitched by the actual glamour of the bridge—he would have realized that this most superb construction was really hollow, gaping over water and lacking in foundations. As indicated in Plato’s Critias, material achievements and wealth are destined to perish, unless they are safely constructed on top of a spiritual and intellectual foundation. Crane finally realized the fallacy of technology without the necessary spiritual and intellectual backing, but, by then, it was already too late for him to reconsider and start all over again.

Aimé Césaire came from a diametrically antipodal position. His ecstatic reality was materialized in the reconstruction of a solid present. Opting for a movement
that would enable him and his people to liberate themselves from a centuries-old political, cultural, and intellectual slavery, Césaire engaged himself in the most important trifold role of poet, prophet, and leader of his nation. His main task was to finally help the uprooted take new roots and thus gain a national identity of their own.

Unlike Crane, Césaire looked primarily downward. Although appalled from the very beginning by the repugnance of his small native town, he soon learned to look at it straight in the eyes. He realized that in order for him to criticize, accuse, and condemn this reality, he had to first learn how to accept and cherish it as his own. Every morning, he had to face the ugliness of a town splattering in its own vomit, suffocating by its own filth, and renouncing life due to its own lack of will. Once he realized he was an indispensable part of this reality, he finally came to terms with himself and with his troubled mind. His worthy cause was now solidly devoted to the finding of a new identity, which would eventually enable his people to partake of a common heritage and culture.

Two poets, two parallel stories, a common vision: the attainment of an identity. But as it turned out, Crane's was a vision of doom and death, while Césaire's was a vision of redemption and life. Orphic by nature, both poets
endured their ordeal to the end. No matter what the outcome of their journeys, both were determined to solely obey their Muse, Poetry. No matter what the outcome, both struggled within the solitude of death against their nature. And no matter what the outcome, both became intoxicated with the spells, charms, and incantations of their patron goddess: Poetry.

In "Énivrez-Vous," a small poem in prose form, Charles Baudelaire says:

éivre expliquez-vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie ou de vertue, à votre guise . . . (168)

intoxicate yourselves without ceasing! With wine, with poetry or with virtue, as you will . . .

(Author's translation)

It seems to me, that of all three, intoxication with poetry is the only one that does not become an aberration.
WORKS CITED


SELECTED LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED


