The Poet and His Bridge
by Hugh Cook

Because I am a college instructor, my hands have a tendency to get soft (as does my belly). You pay a toll for pushing a pencil all year. The last sentence, as it is turned out, was prophetic; for last summer I decided to join the world of manual laborers and managed to find a job in bridge building.

Now, you've got to understand that my bridge was nothing in the height of the Golden Gate; rather, it was fairly little span on a highway running through the cornfields of northwest Iowa. Nevertheless, to a guy who gets queasy putting up second story storm windows, this bridge was high enough let me tell you.

As I was numbly flitting from girder to girder with the greatest of ease, I was unable to get rid of the teacher of literature in me, and I found my thoughts often going back to Hart Crane and the story of his bridge. Hart Crane was a poet who lived in the first part of our century, doing his most important work in the 1920s, and in order to tell his story adequately, I've got to do it in some-what circuitous route. So let me give you a bit of background first.

The 1920s were a fantastic decade in America. It was the period now known as the Jazz Age, a time of flagpole sitters, silent films, gangsters, speakeasies, flappers, bootleggers, prohibition, the fix of the World Series (really!), the Charleston, Charlie Chaplin, and Charles Lindbergh—a time of high-living, fun-loving aristocratic rich, of fortunes made overnight on the stock exchange, and spent almost as quickly.

America had just gone through a World War, and the younger generation who had started the century with optimism, were disillusioned, were tired of great causes. They decided to live it up instead.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, an American novelist and participant in the sevelry, has said,

Scarcely had the staid citizens of the republic caught their breaths when the wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the war...danced into the linelight. This was the generation whose girls dramatized themselves as flappers, the generation that corrupted its elders and eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste. May one offer in exhibit the year 1922! That was the peak of the younger generation...and with a whoop the orgy began. A whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure.

To the poet T. S. Eliot, slowly on his way to Christianity, the orgy was not exactly a pleasurable one. Struck by the spiritual sterility and emptiness of his age, Eliot characterized it as "The Wasteland," which was the title of his long (Continued on page 5)

"They Say..."

As long as he's up there looking down at Us
The World will carry on and We'll
Be able to have a great old time with Each other
(Friend and family) anywhere We
Please because god is Good and
Kind and
Nice and
Sweet and...he watches over Us
And We don't have to worry if Our
Money is low or if our
Cars need repair or if Our
Earth is full of poverty and
death and
suffering and
sickness and...We
don't have to worry or
Do anything special or
Get shook over it because
As long as he's in heaven
god will take care of the whole mess
Barb Walvort
to Frannie as they take her back to The Retreat
good-bys
I will not say remember me for you
cannot, did not know me while I tied your shoelaces, tucked you into bunk, put food within your grasp, removed before you shoveled in too much, abruptly ended the three times a day meaningful happening.
but water touched you too, the up and down and up and down and splashy cool, above all changed you into light and free. more than enough of heavy in a life taught you to sit immovable in sand faced by a futile climb, not angry or with stubbornness, only but surely there. yet not just there, a rock, no, you can love (grab).
chunky damp arms circle me neck, hands locked, fists pound my head until I say enough, Frannie, enough, you understand what else? does it matter to you if I love you or how I feel so glad to see you go? a trying time unless it meant to one of us something.
what means to you? are you the happier of us that is and mean are synonyms? no why.
or is the ringing in my head, “buh-buh-buh-guh,” your question-answer? or just mine, my intellect imposed on you? my question for you but for me as well. oh Frannie let me tell you what I think I know
oh Frannie let me tell you
oh Frannie .
Pat De Young

First Day
they were best of friends Toby and Mom they had just spent five years and two months together and now the day came Mom and Toby walked the three and a half blocks that ended their path by the large red brick building Mom pulled the huge green door open while Toby jumped up and in and looked and way up somewhere there was a grey ceiling red sign hanging down blinking words that Toby couldn’t read
Mom started up the steel stairs with painted red tops come on Toby whispered Mom’s heart they say its for your own good
Toby followed Mom step by big step Hanging on to the black steel bars topped with a role of wood
Toby got to the top where Mom was standing next to a younger woman who looked like Mom did on those wedding pictures that Mom showed him the woman with a big smile put her hand on his shoulder to lead him to another smaller door he looked back trying to run with mom but she waved with a lined face so he went like many others has been done before and she went like many mothers had been done before and cried in her house work wondering how education would solve this problem
Kay De Jong

the visionary
i’d be a priest a thousand years ago, and prefer anemones to corn fields. Half a century beyond would i, perhaps, stretch my length in dahlias and overcome this listlessness. i’d wax melancholic. i would paint signs in beach sand, point sea-ward and sigh as the letters and forms dissolved and think myself a paragon of truth. there would be a fedual lord to flee from, to dart into thickets to die hunted and starving, berriden with plague, perhaps? and my tongue would be too large for my mouth so i’d suffocate myself. No need of sheriffs. but, instead of this escape, this epic, i lapse into fatigues of fact and matter and see again the good old cornerroom.
yet i can’t forget i might have been a priest a thousand years ago and would’ve preferred anemones to corn fields. 
Tina LaBrenz
The Locust
by Tina LaBrenz

bugs. I ain’t the violent kind, my Barbie’ll tell ya’ that, and I ain’t got nothin’ personal ‘gainst these little critters, but land, them things are like little demons to me. They click their legs together like locomotive wheels a’ turnin’, and their eyes is bugged out and big like they was doi’n all that eatin’ out of a fear of Lucifer himself.”

Heather paused and looked genuinely puzzled—her expression foreign to a normally placid face.

“Never mind, Heather, they’re making a lot of extra work for you here. It’s only right that you should hate them,” Miss Laney said, attempting to console Heather and hide her own embarrassment at the same time.

“No ... no, that ain’t no excuse to hate. My children all gave me more work than I ever had in my life, and I never once hated them,” Heather replied slowly. “Livin’ things are Livin’ things. They all got their purpose, but sometimes I don’t see why they got to do the things they do. I try to accept, but it gets harder ever’ day.”

“Now Heather, you mustn’t feel that way,” Miss Laney began again.

“They’re all just little insects. They’d go away soon, I’m sure.” But even as she said this, Miss Laney had to admit she felt a terrible revulsion to the little specks on the floor.

There was a long pause now as Heather rocked her chair slowly and unevenly while Miss Laney sat uneasy and speechless across from her. Heather looked almost peaceful at first glance, but her rheumy, aged eyes were glazed not from contentment or absent-mindedness, but from the private memories running behind them in Heather’s eighty-year-old mind.

“You know, Miss Laney,” Heather said as she became conscious once more of her guest, “I been here on this land for nigh onto sixty years. My man and I cleared these woods and built this house with a lot of sweat and toil. He grew callouses thicker than a thin place and broke back a’ plowin’ and shovelin’ and fightin’ the snow and drought and an’ tryin’ to scratch out a livin’ from the earth. And me, I almost scrubbed my skin off cleanin’ and cookin’ and lookin’ after my man. When my children were borned, I nursed and raised them. I saw them all grow to be just little tykes, and I watched ‘em die. Out of a four little babies, two died a’ tet’nus that winter when they cut themselves playin’ on Sam Jennings’ rusty plow and one was killed when Mack Flannigan’s new-fangled tractor accidentally ran over him.”

“When my old man Tom died, I near starved that first winter, but me and little Barbie made it through, and I sold most a’ the land ’cause it was too much for me. You know, Miss Laney, with all the troubles and hard times I seen in my life these eighty years, I never lost faith that I could overcome them. I’ll just left right back and worked them out. But now ... Miss Laney ... now I don’t know. I feel tired and wore down. I think I gonna have to quit this place. I can’t do it no more.”

Miss Laney took advantage of the lull in Heather’s speech to say what she thought was appropriate. She leaned forward in her chair and said in an earnest tone. “Maybe it’s God’s will that you go to live in your daughter in Preckett City. Maybe the locust aren’t your enemies, but your sign that it is time you gave up your life here and—”

“I’m goin’ to leave here, Miss Laney. I have to. I ain’t got no food nor no means of acquirin’ any, since them locusts done ate my whole garden.”

But she didn’t want her or any of her children to know. Besides, she didn’t want to face the reality of living in her daughter’s house. They had been a part of her so long, she felt like she owned them or on them or on me. I can’t see how God could will that I should move out a’ here. Maybe that’s what he wants, but I feel like the devil’s forcin’ me out.”

Miss Laney sat back in her chair. Once again she thought how senseless it had been to introduce God into the situation. She had wanted to console but had recoiled in only making the old woman blame her troubles on the devil. When it was really the fault of a bunch of little bugs. She resolved to herself that next time she would know better and stick to her profession as a nurse—healing the body—and not branch out into theology or psychology.

Seeing that Heather was preoccupied with her thoughts and realizing that she was a full nine minutes late already, Miss Laney stood up and crossed over to Heather, saying goodbye and touching Heather’s hand simultaneously, only to find it a cold and dead one. She turned away with a resigned expression, knowing as she did so that Heather noticed neither. She searched Heather’s face once more, and finding nothing there of depression or physical ailment but age, she turned and left.

Heather did not stir from her chair until the sun was low in the sky, burning the western clouds deep shades of orange and red. Stiffly and slowly, she rose from her rocking chair and limped to the dressing room to begin packing for her trip to Preckett City and Barbara. With the meticulous care of a nurse, she folded each piece of clothing neatly and placed them in the ancient brown suitcase she kept under her bed. When she was finished with this, she carried and pushed the suitcase to the opposite side of the house, near the front door, ready to be picked up when she left.

Then she painstakingly scooped up the remains of the dead locust and threw it out into the dirt beyond her bedroom, swept the sparse pieces of furniture and lit the gray oil lamp on the kitchen table since the sun had now set and all daylight had gone with it.

Heather once more sank into her rocker to rest a moment. While she rocked, she murmured to herself that perhaps it would be best to leave for Preckett City tonight instead of waiting for morning. “I’m ready now and I ain’t particular fond a’ seein’ them little devils anymore nor my ruined garden,” she whispered.
Scholarship

September
They said
we're going to the drive-in
for an hour
come along
I can't
I said
I got to study
you have next mornin off
They said
I went along

November
They said
we're going to the movies
for the evening
come along
I said
it's not that I don't have time
but
I got to study
I went along

February
They said
we're going to the city
for the day
come along
(I had to study)
I went along

April
They said
we're going to the lake
for the weekend
I went along

May
He said
I'm going to my office
for a moment
come along

He looked at my transcript
looked over his glasses
over his desk
over at me
young man
He said
you should have studied
so-{uh} long

Yawn Sun Song

Shine early morning
Light in this cave place
Don't waste no sunshine
Don't waste no blue sky
Warm that north wind and
Let me be in it
Florescent lighting
Illumination
Topping thin windows
Fly three white pigeons
Black dots in blue sky
Black in white sunshine
Don't waste no sunshine
Let me be in it
Drowning farm acres
Illuminated
Wring out sponge acres
Sunny warm blue day
Thousands of volumes
Illumination
Outside blue sunshine
Inside it's class time
What if I miss mine
Yawning and nodding
Hey
Dreamer
Wake up
Live!!

Ron Rupke

Allen Vander Pol
THE POET AND HIS BRIDGE — (Continued from page 1)

A poem published in that same year, 1922. Using imagery from Ecclesiastes, the book describing vanity of vanities, Eliot characterized his generation in these words:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

To the neo-Romantic poet Hart Crane, Eliot’s bleak picture was too harsh a judgement. When Crane read Eliot’s indictment of the 1920s in The Wasteland, he resolved to answer the pessimism of Eliot’s poem with a long epic saluting America’s limitless past, present, and future. Out of that resolve came Crane’s major work, The Bridge.

America at the time was a rapidly emerging industrial power, flexing its steel muscles, and Crane wanted to see a visionary, apocalyptic song of America’s resplendent future, taking into account the industrial character of the machine age. As Crane himself said, “Unless poetry can absorb the machine . . . then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function.” Crane began a search for the proper symbol for his visionary celebration of Industrial America, and he soon found his symbol in the Brooklyn Bridge.

Admittedly, to us today that Bridge may not be a particularly romantic symbol of technology, for the Bridge is now an old structure, reminding Vanquerveires, perhaps, of the now defunct Georgia Viaduct, or Sarnians of the Blue Water bridge. But we have to see the Brooklyn Bridge as it was then. As Margaret Foster Le Clair has written:

To understand even in part what Brooklyn Bridge meant to Hart Crane, we must travel backward through many springs to the 1870’s when . . . Washington Roebling, paralyzed, his sight and hearing impaired, supervised the building of the bridge. He was the son of John Roebling, who designed the bridge and whose persistence overcame a doubt that he had gradually convinced skeptical business men and incredulous state senators that a suspension bridge one mile and 709 feet long was not an impossible dream—that it was feasible to sink supports 75 feet deep in the sticky mud of the East River to bear a weight of 80,000 tons. We must remember, as his son must have remembered, the accident that took the life of John Roebling in the early days of the project. We must hear the screams of men permanently paralyzed as they returned to the normal air from the pressurized caissons in which they had to work under the river—among them Washington Roebling himself. We must see his wife, equipping herself with the necessary technological knowledge, become his husband’s hands and feet. We must hear a disastrous explosion and watch the flame of a careless torch almost destroy the work of months. We must see the breaking cable lash 900 feet through the air to kill two men; we must watch eighteen others die during the thirteen years it took to translate John Roebling’s dream into reality through the toil of many hands and the strength of will in a paralyzed body.

So for Crane, the Bridge became a symbol for man’s mastery over material through technology and vision, a symbol for man’s ability to shape steel and cement for his use. As Samuel Hazo says in his book about Crane, “As ancient man left pyramids as his testament and as medieval man strove to realize his vision in the great Gothic cathedrals, so did the inventiveness of modern man make possible the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge in the twentieth century.” At least, that is how Crane saw it.

Crane’s epic poem (it is much too long to quote in its entirety) is not only a hymn to American industry, however, Crane’s epic wants to do more than celebrate the Bridge as a symbol of man’s timeless and universal attempt to use the material world for his purposes. And here, Crane’s basic humanism appears.

For the Absolute, for God, even though Crane rejected Him. It is a humanist’s grasp for a substitute. That Crane is on a spiritual quest is clear. As he himself has said, the “very idea of a bridge, of course, is a form peculiarly dependent on . . . spiritual convictions. It is an act of faith besides being a communication.” For that reason, the Bridge is described in the poem as a Mary-figure, for Roman Catholics the “bridge” between man and God.

Or, as the poem puts it, as Crane addresses the Bridge:

O sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies’ dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curvisheme lend a myth to God.

For Crane, then, the Bridge covers all of reality, for it spans the world of concrete reality and, ultimately, the divine. It is a symbol for Crane of man’s inclination to communicate with some idea that he has of perfection, of the Absolute.

That poem, although written in the 1920’s, is still very timely, very contemporary. Crane’s “bridge” is not Christ, but human vision and creative energy. And that ideal is still with us, perhaps in even greater power than in Crane’s day, for that same human vision of man’s mastery over God’s creation (let’s not forget that) has created our present industrial, mechanized monster.

I’m not intending to fall into the trap that many fall into of letting art or poetry be modern man’s saviour from the impersonality of technology. Only Christ can be our “bridge.”

Perhaps Crane came to realize the falseness of his idol. Two years after publication of The Bridge, Crane took a trip to Mexico. On an appeal from his family to return home, Crane boarded the steamship “Oriëtiba.” On the second night out, the night watch had to prevent Crane from jumping overboard, but on the next morning, the morning of April 26, 1932, Crane calmly walked to the stern of the boat, and, in the sight of a number of passengers, leaped into the sea. The boat stopped and searched for an hour, but futilely. Hart Crane was never seen again.

ENCOUNTER WITH LOVE — (Continued from page 1)

watched Teresa drive around in the beautiful new car which he let her use. God had blessed him with a sizeable income while he was back home. It was a great comfort knowing that he had money in the bank to get started when he returned. God, you’re wonderful!

Thad found himself sitting at his desk with the letter in his hand. This was the moment he lived for while he was away. Reading Teresa’s letters was like devouring a delicious meal after a long day. He opened the letter slowly and carefully, savoring the experience in full. He unfolded the letter and read its short message:

“Dear Thad, I am so sorry to have to tell you this. You mean a great deal to me and I don’t like hurting you. I’m sorry but I have fallen in love with another man. I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry. Please understand. Please forgive me. Teresa.”

Thad could not believe the words he had just read. Sitting back in his chair he stared blankly at the single page in front of him. A half hour went by before Thad realized fully what had just happened to him. A feeling of sickness and despair swept through him. His frustration soon turned to anger. He got up from his chair and slammed his way outside. And then he ran. He ran till he could run no more and then he flung himself down on the grass. He gave the sky a defiant look and shouted “I-hate-you-God!”

THE LOCUST — (Continued from page 1)

to no one in particular, “Besides, them little bugs don’t work at night so’s I won’t have ‘em hoppin’ all over my clothes and shoes if I leave now.” With that in mind, Heather creaked to her feet, eased herself to the door and looked out.

With the moon not yet up and clouds obscuring the stars, the night was coal black but warm. There was no wind, Heather was pleased to note, but she did not really care for the wuifet stilliness either. Extinguishing the oil lamp she had carried to the door, she carefully placed it on the floor, picked up her suitcase and stepped out, closing the door behind her.

Picking her way in the dark as best she could, Heather was panting and shaking by the time she reached the edge of the gravel road bordering her property. The starrin of carrying such a heavy burden and the trickiness of finding her way in the black, foreign night made Heather’s heart to pound furiously inside her chest, but it was strong and she began to feel better after resting a few minutes. She had come this far in hopes of snagging a ride from her neighbor Arthur Pood, who often passed by her place in his truck on his way to the city or another farm. After standing there for several minutes, it occurred to Heath that her chances of flagging down his truck would be better if she stood on the opposite side of the road, so oncoming traffic would face her where she waited.

Still tired from her hike to the road and plagued by the darkness and her own weak eyesight, Heather stumbled when halfway across and could not catch her balance. She continued her way in the black, foreign night forced Heather’s heart to pound furiously inside her chest, but it was strong and she began to feel better after resting a few minutes. She stood this far in hopes of flagging down a ride from her neighbor Arthur Pood, who often passed by her place in his truck on his way to the city or another farm. After standing there for several minutes, it occurred to Heather that her chances of flagging down his truck would be better if she stood on the opposite side of the road, so oncoming traffic would face her where she waited.

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Poet

I saw a poet flying higher and higher
and highest inside an eastern dawn
possessing four blood red walls of the yawn
closing him in the confines of a dying sun--a sun all too ready to die.
Against the choking walls lay the broken bonds
of fellowships forgotten and long-gone.
The poet was all too ready to die.

Mark Okkema

Problems

Problems --
I had all kinds of them
I would bury myself within myself
and ponder and wonder
and try to figure them out.
But I needed to know those of importance--
and otherwise.
I found myself with chaff and grain in hand
not disearning which was which;

Until I realized that there was one
who wanted to help--
He knew the difference between the
chaff and grain better than I

Joyce Moore

Prophet

a guru in his blue jeans
waded through the water
out across the river
and all the people followed
laughing at reality
jumping up and down
splashing all the water
on each other’s faces
they reached out for his wisdom
which he gave to them with love
and they swam off down the river
out into the ocean
yelling to their saviour
that they were one forever
while the sun shone brightly
on all the drowning followers.

Tina LaBrenz

Ballad of Poochie, No. 12

When Robert walked onto the court,
The crowd roared, “Poochie, ooOH--
Six foot six and black as coal,
Just watch that nigger go!”

He rode the bench his freshman year
Until about game four.
He’d block a shot and we’d count five
Before he hit the floor.

His sophomore year he learned to shoot
From ten feet out or less.
His coach pulled “D” ’s from Poochie’s profs,
No trouble, fuss or mess.

Outscored them white boys three to one--
Some thirty points a game--
His senior year, all-state, all-south;
Sportswriters knew his name.

We did a graduation thing
That Poochie didn’t do.
He’d done his four years’ time for us.
And flunked. So he was through.

Pat De Young

Untitled

I met a boy in St. Paul
he was lonely
We talked by the rocky beach
his tanned face shadowed by the fire
Did anyone love him
he had a girl Marianne
she seemed to care about him
even if she was only sixteen
She loved him enough to give herself
and was supposed to have his
Mari didn’t want it
she was fixed up
He wanted the baby to love--his own
and she took it
letting him go
His ma and pa never found out
until the law helped her mama accuse
The preacher tried to help
answering less questions and giving the wrong answers
The folks handed him a Bible
it was all in there
But somehow he was still lonely
I talked to him five hours
listening to hate for me, Ma, and Pa
I tried to answer his questions
to prove there is a God, life, and love
but I couldn’t
I could only answer what I had learned
what we’d both been taught
only, he looked for his own different answers
to his own different questions
I left him with my thoughts
Six months later I saw him again
happy to see me
but he didn’t remember my name
He was the same
and I never saw him again.

Becky Maatman

Poem

My mother has books on her library shelves
Books she has kept over the years
Their dog-eared pages opened her life
To Napoleon, Marx and the Cherokee.
Between me and the others the pages flipped shut
From history to stichery her living has shifted
Ginghams tweed plaids now clutter her room
Trimmed by dusty volumes.

Jeanie Zinkand