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Possessed by Poe: Hart Crane's Tribute to *il Miglior Fabbro* in a Symbolist-Modernist Context

Abstract: The article explores the ways in which Hart Crane, Stéphane Mallarmé and Mina Loy pay homage to Edgar Allan Poe in their respective poems. A comparative exegesis of the tributes in question reveals the connections as well as the differences between the ways the two American modernist poets and the French symbolist approach the legacy of their eminent American predecessor. A critical juxtaposition of Crane's, Mallarmé's and Loy's poetic texts seems particularly worthwhile in view of the fact that Poe is regarded as one of the fathers of both French symbolism and American modernist poetry, which, in turn, are strongly interconnected. Consequently, the analysis undertaken in the present article results in broader conclusions concerning what, in the context of American and French literature, may be referred to as the symbolist-modernist continuum.

Keywords: Hart Crane, Edgar Allan Poe, Stéphane Mallarmé, Mina Loy, American modernism, French symbolism, poetry

In his biography of Hart Crane, Clive Fisher recounts Allen Tate and Malcolm Cowley's visit to the New York room of the future poet of *The Bridge*. What followed was "a discussion of poetry" (Fisher 227), during which Edgar Allan Poe's name was mentioned: "As Cowley noticed, 'Hart gestured, as always, with a dead five-cent cigar while he declaimed against the vulgarity of Edgar Poe.' His friends demurred, and chancing upon a volume of Poe Cowley read aloud 'The City in the Sea': 'While from a proud tower in the town / Death looks gigantically down'" (227). Fisher is also careful to note that Poe's legacy was crucial to the formation of American modernist literature:

Thus the excavations began—to continue throughout Crane's literary career—among the forgotten monuments of nineteenth-century American fiction and poetry. The idols of Gentility—Longfellow, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving and others too Anglophile for their own good—were cast out and a new pantheon constructed: the achievements of Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau and Emily Dickinson were reassessed and over a quarter-century interval American literature acquired an altogether darker lineage.... [T]his re-creation of the past was a significant literary enterprise, and one which had profound implications for Crane's later career[.] (42)

An examination of Crane's correspondence seems to prove the point made by Fisher *loco citato*, and to suggest that the "five-cent cigar" incident was an isolated one rather than a pattern, and that what Crane did was in fact probably done in jest. In a letter to Gorham Munson, written three years before the above-mentioned encounter took place, Crane states that he is in the process of translating Remy de Gourmont's essay "Marginalia sur Edgar Poe et sur Baudelaire." The same year, writing to William Wright, he lists his literary *bêtes-noires*, but is also quick to admit: "I do run joyfully towards Messrs. Poe, Whitman, Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, John Donne!!!, John Webster!!!, Marlowe, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Dante, Cavalcanti, Li Po, and a host of others" (254-255). In his 1926 letter to Cowley, Crane expresses his enthusiasm for Isidor Schneider's *Doctor Transit*, saying that "[it] intrigued [him] more than any such tour de force since Poe" (430). Several months on, this time writing to Yvor Winters, the poet of *White Buildings* points out that "[o]ne goes back to Poe, and to Whitman—and always [his] beloved Melville—with renewed appreciation of what America really is, or could be" (491). Whatever Crane may have said about Poe's "vulgarity"—provided it was said seriously—in 1924, in 1927, having mentioned Marianne Moore, he shares with Allen Tate his thoughts on "old virgins (male and female)... Always in a flutter for fear bowels will be mentioned, forever carrying on a tradition that both Poe and Whitman spent half their lives railing against" (527). A year later, Crane's correspondence confirms his stance, as he draws Yvor Winters's attention to a text devoted to Poe and authored by Malcolm Cowley.

This article aims to look at the literary connection between Hart Crane and Edgar Allan Poe by placing the former's poetic tribute to the latter in the larger context of French symbolism and American modernism. In order to do so, I shall draw on a comparative analysis of poems by Crane, Stéphane Mallarmé and Mina Loy: "The Tunnel" section of *The Bridge*, "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe," whose title is faithfully translated into English as "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe," and "Poe" respectively. The affiliation between Crane and the author of "The Raven" is indisputable; so is the one between Crane and the French symbolists, especially Rimbaud but also Mallarmé, as I have already demonstrated in earlier publications (Piechucka, "Dream" 99-114; Piechucka, "Images and Ideas" 5-16; Piechucka, "The Past" 25-40; Piechucka, "The Sound" 23-36). Less obvious, but no means less intriguing are the analogies between the American poet's *œuvre* and the work of his fellow modernist Mina Loy (Piechucka, "The Religion" 25-43). Among the common points between Crane, Mallarmé and Loy is the fact that all three wrote poems which, one way or another, paid homage to Poe. Such tributes—even if in Loy's case the word *tribute* is rather problematic—from a leading exponent of French symbolism and two Anglo-American modernists are more than fitting. It is so because it may be argued that the Father of the Detective Story was also one of the fathers of the French symbolist school and, as has already been signaled at the beginning of the present article, of what was to happen in American literature in the first decades of the twentieth century. Warner Berthoff, for instance, goes so far as to

chronologically place Poe “in the apprehensive dawn of literary modernism” (83).

Since we know from Crane's correspondence that he was profoundly familiar with Remy de Gourmont's “Marginalia sur Edgar Poe et sur Baudelaire,” it seems particularly worthwhile in the context of the present article to provide a brief overview of some of the main points made about Poe by a French critic inextricably linked with symbolism (1-36). Gourmont begins his 1904 essay, which, as its title indicates, is essentially a collection of loose observations, by claiming that it is largely Poe's premature death that is to blame for his long-lasting marginalization on the western side of the Atlantic. He also debunks—or at least questions—another myth that has grown up around the American writer: that of a “sickly dreamer” (2; trans. A. P.) doomed to a dramatic and miserable if picturesque existence. That does not, however, prevent Poe from displaying an acute “sense of fatality, of tragic necessity” (11; trans. A. P.) in his *œuvre*, which the author of “Marginalia” views as largely “the expression of his [Poe's] pains and dreams” (4; trans. A. P.). Gourmont also claims that his parents' early deaths were, paradoxically, beneficial to Poe because the lack of parental role models made him unconventional and unique. Moreover, the French critic depicts the author of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a woman's man and almost a feminist *avant l'heure* in both life and literature. The Poe of “Marginalia” is also someone who is supportive of members of his craft: he “is willing to defend poets” (8; trans. A. P.). Benign to his fellow craftsmen, he is authoritarian *vis-à-vis* his audience, reduced to submission by “the sovereign tone rendered in affirmative and absolute idiom” and “domination against which no defense can be found” (10; trans. A. P.). In addition, Gourmont argues that “[e]ven at its most passionate and desperate, Edgar Poe's poetry retains an ironic coldness” (14; trans. A. P.). Nevertheless, “Poe is the most subjective of all subjective poets. He does feel and suffer the terrors he claims to create coldly. Fear, the pain that fear breeds are the almost exclusive theme of his poems as well as of his most beautiful tales” (16; trans. A. P.). To Gourmont, “the true Edgar Poe” is by no means “the man of magnetism, of phantasmagoria, of perversity, of mystification” (17; trans. A.P.); he is also more truly himself as a poet than as a prose writer (16) but is, above all, a master of criticism and critical thinking. “Poe's pessimism is the most bitter and the haughtiest,” the French critic states, before adding that the author of “The Raven” “caresses death” and reflecting on the poet's own passing away in “circumstances... which have never been very clear” (29-31; trans. A. P.). As he recounts the details of Poe's “horrible electoral adventure,” Gourmont deplores the “debasement” and “degradation” which marked the American poet's end but also suspects that it was Poe's alcoholism that had sealed his fate. Gourmont reminds the reader that Poe “could only work in the hallucination of drunkenness” (31; trans. A. P.) and was a prime example of self-destruction. Towards the end of his essay, Gourmont also points out that the author of “William Wilson” “[went] further in morbid psychology than any other writer of his time” (31; trans. A. P.) and that “Poe is an American far more representative of America than Emerson or Walt Whitman” (35; trans. A. P.), because, in his work, there are “traces of the Americans' particular taste for

advertising, for the poster, for barbarous publicity, for extravagant journalism” (36; trans. A. P.). As we shall see, many of Gourmont’s notions about Poe recur not only in Crane’s portrayal of the latter but also in the poems by Mallarmé and Loy with which the present article is concerned.

As is common knowledge among American literature scholars, Poe was orphaned by his parents, widowed by his young wife at the age of thirty-eight and dead before his time; additionally, the last ten days of his life were veiled in mystery. It is therefore no wonder that death is crucial to his biography and, more importantly, to his *œuvre*, of which it is arguably the principal motif. It is also crucial to the three poems discussed in this article. The word *death* appears in all of them, and is something of a keyword in each of them. Poe’s decease and death *tout court* are evoked by Mallarmé, Crane and Loy. In “Marginalia sur Edgar Poe et sur Baudelaire,” Remy de Gourmont mentions that he is in possession of a photo of Poe’s Baltimore memorial. It is the same memorial which is evoked in Mallarmé’s “The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe,” the earliest of the three poems in question and one whose title is the most explicit. While it is always risky to summarize a work by Mallarmé, Lagarde and Michard take up the challenge. They note that the French symbolist was inspired by Poe’s memorial, though they fail to actually specify that the memorial is also his grave. They go on to point out that “in the beginning, Mallarmé seems to *imagine the bas-relief* which could have decorated this monument,” the statement referring clearly to the poem’s first stanza, in which “the Poet becomes an *archangel*” (Lagarde and Michard 537; trans. A. P.):

Changed to Himself at last by eternity,
with a bare sword the Poet has bestirred
his age terrified that it failed to see
how death was glorying in that strange word. (Mallarmé, *Collected Poems* 71)

In the quatrain which follows, the author “meditates upon the *incomprehension* to which Edgar Poe fell victim” (Lagarde and Michard 537; trans. A. P.):

The spell was drunk, so they proclaimed aloud
(as vile freaks writhe when seraphim bestow
purer sense on the phrases of the crowd),
in some black brew’s dishonourable flow. (Mallarmé, *Collected Poems* 71)

The poem’s closing tercets are described as “a powerful *widening*, [in which] he [Mallarmé] shows the *symbolic* value of the simple block of stone devoid of sculptures” (Lagarde Michard 537; trans. A. P.):

If our idea can carve no bas-relief
from hostile clod and cloud, O struggling grief,
for the adornment of Poe’s dazzling tomb,

at least this block dropped by an occult doom,

this calm granite, may limit all the glum
Blasphemy-flights dispersed in days to come. (Mallarmé, *Collected Poems* 71)

It is not until the penultimate stanza that the French symbolist mentions his distinguished predecessor's surname. In the homage Mallarmé pays to him, Poe is first referred to as "the Poet," which justifies Lagarde and Michard's remark that it deals with "Poe and more generally the Poet" (537; trans. A. P.). Similarly universalistic terms are employed to evoke Poe's *œuvre*, "that strange voice," which is that of a "seraphim bestow[ing] / purer sense on the phrases of the crowd." Both the word *tribu*, used in the French original, and the word *crowd* for which the English translators opted, are collective nouns whose presence in the poem opposes Poe to his ungrateful public, consisting of masses which are vulgar and as such they vulgarize and debase Poe's work: "The spell [which] was [supposedly] drunk... in some black brew's dishonourable flow" may be read as a reference to the simplistic conclusion that "Edgar Poe was said to draw inspiration from alcohol" (Lagarde and Michard 537; trans. A. P.). Consequently, it may be inferred that the purity for which Poe's *œuvre* stands is opposed to the filth which characterizes the masses.

In another pair of opposites, the past is set against the present in "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe" as "the last" of the first stanza and the "jadis"—French for *formerly*—of the second stanza, omitted in the English translation, indicate. Vilified in his lifetime, the poet of "Annabel Lee" finally—and posthumously—becomes who he has always been, after being misunderstood and underestimated for decades. As the way Poe is perceived alters, he is "[c]hanged to Himself at last by eternity," the agents of the change being death and timelessness. It is in temporal terms that Mallarmé refers to Poe's public of the first half of the nineteenth century: "his age terrified" is a *siècle*—French for *century*—in the original and the term is used to designate "his contemporaries" (Lagarde and Michard 537; trans. A. P.). The past is now "terrified" for being forced to admit its own mistakes. Aside from being an allusion to the fact that "*death* haunted Edgar Poe's imagination" (537; trans. A. P.), the statement "death was glorying in that strange word" announces the American author's postmortal triumph, the victory being made even more resounding in the phrase's French version, where the verb *triumph* is actually used. While death is paramount in Poe's works, it is also instrumental in changing the poet's status. Typically associated with immobility, death is dynamic in Mallarmé's poem.

Crucial to "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe" is the notion of verticality; in fact, as we shall see, the concepts of both horizontality and verticality prove useful in the analysis of all the poems with which the present article is concerned. In his discussion of the symbolism of the cross, William Stewart deals with the associations that each of the two elements of this sign evokes: "The horizontal arm was associated with the terrestrial, worldly, feminine, temporal, destructive, negative, passive, and death while the vertical arm connoted the celestial, spiritual, masculine, eternal, creative, positive, active, and life" (114). In short, the horizontal is tantamount to "the inferior" and the vertical to "the superior" (114).

In the Mallarmé poem in question, images of the high and the low play a significant role. The “vile freaks [that] writhe” correspond to “un vil sursaut d’hydre” (*Œuvres Complètes* 70) of the original. The figure of the hydra, derived from ancient Greek mythology, but interpreted in the context of the poem as “the crowd [which] becomes a monster with a thousand heads” (537; trans. A.P.), is absent from the English translation. The French word *sursaut* means *jump*, which, in this particular case, is likely to denote a vertical and upward movement. While “they proclaimed aloud” in the English translation, the members of the public “[p]roclamèrent très haut” (*Œuvres Complètes* 70) in the poem’s original version: Mallarmé may thus be playing with the double meaning of the French adverb *haut*, which means *aloud* but also *high*. This past reaction of the public can be seen as an attempt to, so to speak, usurp the positive connotations of verticality. In truth, this response to the poet’s life and work was clearly “vile” as the dark colors evoked in the poem demonstrate. The “brew” suggestive of Poe’s alcoholism is “black” and Poe’s monument is supposed to “limit all the glum / Blasphemy-flights dispersed in days to come.” In other words, it is to serve as a reminder warning future generations not to debase literary giants, the vertical “Blasphemy-flights” being another example of a usurpatory attempt made—or likely to be made—by the forces of evil. In fact, the history of Poe’s reception follows a vertical pattern. In his lifetime, the poet was mistreated by the “hostile clod and cloud,” by what is up and what is down: “Mallarmé deplores the wrongs of men (the *sol*) and of destiny (the *nue*) towards Edgar Poe” (537; trans. A.P.). In a final instance of a vertical movement, the poem’s closing stanza likens both Poe’s tomb and his *œuvre* to a falling star: “Considered to be an *aerolite*, the block of stone symbolically represents another *meteorite*: Edgar Poe’s poetry” (537; trans. A. P.).

In “The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe,” the American author’s suffering is merely suggested. A true symbolist—and thus a Platonist—Mallarmé focuses on the “idea” of a “bas-relief”; analogically, he also gives the reader merely an idea of Poe’s pain and his demise in both senses of the word. The poem is a romantic tribute (Lagarde and Michard 537) in which the artist figure is elevated and sanctified, presented in angelic and thus ethereal terms. As such, it can be both compared and contrasted with Hart Crane’s portrayal of Poe in “The Tunnel,” Part VII of *The Bridge*, his *magum opus*:

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
In interborough fissures of the mind...?

The above stanza is followed by another, longer one:

And why do I often meet your visage here,

Your eyes like agate lanterns—on and on
 Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?
 —And did their riding eyes right through your side,
 And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?
 And Death, aloft,—gigantically down
 Probing through you—toward me, O evermore!
 And when they dragged your retching flesh,
 Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore—
 That last night on the ballot rounds, did you,
 Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe? (69)

The way Poe is evoked in Crane's poem strikes the reader as *par excellence* explicit and almost literal. While "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe" focuses largely on the lack of understanding and rejection America's *poète maudit* had to face, "The Tunnel" presents Poe's death and the ordeal which accompanied it in a naturalistic way. Nevertheless, some of the points made by Crane are not that distant from the ones made by Mallarmé.

Physicality underlies both the stanzas which constitute the tribute, and the figure of the poet is presented in corporeal terms. The "Poean" passage in "The Tunnel" is structured metonymically: the mentions of its protagonist's "head" and "body" are followed by those of his "visage," "eyes," "side," "retching flesh" and "trembling eyes." By piling up synecdoches, Crane emphasizes the notion of dismemberment central to the first stanza and continued into stanza two, similarly based on the *pars pro toto* principle. The list of body parts which constitutes the backbone of the poetic fragment comes complete with references to "the brain" and "the mind." The references in question may be said to have a double meaning as they convey not only the physical but also the cerebral and the emotional: first of all, they denote the speaker's mind, which recreates a great poet and his work; secondly, they may perhaps be read as allusions to Poe's intellect and talent, the sources of his art as well as—on a deeper level—to the significant psychological aspect of his *œuvre*. Moreover, "Crane exploits a part of that beautifully and complexly rendered metaphor—namely, the tormented mind as a subway system—in the hallucinatory vision he now entertains of Edgar Allan Poe" (Lewis 359). Despite the metaphorical dimension, however, Crane is precise enough to specify the anatomical details when he speaks of "the chasms of the brain" and the "fissures of the mind." Additionally, the "eyes" which recur in the second stanza are not only those belonging to Poe but also the eyes of the passengers, and—by extension—of other people, his enemies and his tormentors: the poet finds himself exposed to their gaze and their merciless judgment.

The mind and the setting, the underground by which the speaker travels and where he encounters Poe—or rather his spirit—for, as Warner Berthoff notes, in "The Tunnel," the speaker "summons up yet one more ghostly forebear from past history, the death-haunted visage of Poe" (Berthoff 107)—blend as lines four, five and six of the first stanza—and particularly the attributive noun *interborough*—

indicate. So do the past and the present: Poe's death is reenacted before the reader's very eyes, so that it almost seems to be happening in the present. The protagonist's decease acquires an immediacy, which is reinforced by the use of present tenses in the first stanza: his "head is swinging" and his "body smokes" and "[p]uffs." By contrast, in the second stanza Crane switches to the past simple tense. The first half of the nineteenth century, which encompassed Poe's life and literary career, and the interwar period of the twentieth century, which saw Crane's adulthood and his development as a poet, appear to merge.

The very setting of Part VII of *The Bridge*—a tunnel through which the underground train goes—is by definition inextricably linked with darkness and yet equipped with a lighting system. Light and darkness are analogically interspersed in the fragment of "The Tunnel" devoted to Poe. The passage contains explicit references to "that night through Baltimore" and "That last night on the ballot rounds" but also evokes the nineteenth-century poet's "eyes like agate lanterns," seen by Lewis as symbolic of "Poe's visionary genius," which "is contrasted with the blind, hate-filled destructiveness of his contemporaries" (360). Similarly juxtaposed are horizontality and verticality. The former appears to be given prominence: to begin with, the tunnel itself and the movement of the train through it are by definition horizontal. In consequence, the eyes of the passengers—standing for all those who opposed Poe—are "riding eyes" which "like unwashed platters ride." The position of Poe's body is not upright either: it "smokes along the bitten rails" and on the "last night" the half-dead poet is "dragged" "through Baltimore." Death, on the other hand, is presented—in words taken directly from Poe's work (360), which also happens to be the work around which the anecdote cited in the opening paragraph of this article revolves—in vertical terms as well as in oxymoronic ones; it is both "aloft" and "gigantically down." In addition, Poe's "visage" and "eyes" are positioned "[b]elow the toothpaste and the dandruff ads." This allusion to verticality may be read as an allusion to Poe's debasement, to his being "below," but also, paradoxically, to his timeless greatness: his "presence" among the modern-day advertisements may suggest his relevance to the present, which does not make him seem outdated. On a very literal level, it is also in accordance with Remy de Gourmont's aforementioned statement that Poe had a "taste for advertising, for the poster, for barbarous publicity," which the French critic sees as *par excellence* American, but which is also very modern.

It is an altogether different view of the author of "The Raven" and his literary heritage that Mina Loy takes. Her "Poe" is a minimalist poem, unrhymed, devoid of punctuation marks and including only one instance of capitalization. Its unconventional layout favors enjambment:

a lyric elixir of death

embalms

the spindle spirits of your hour glass loves
on moon spun nights

sets

icicled canopy
 for corpses of poesy
 with roses and northern lights

Where frozen nightingales in ilix aisles
 sing burial rites (76)

The “hour glass loves” may have “*spindle* spirits” (italics mine), the “nights” may be “moon *spun*” (italics mine) and the “elixir of death” may “embalm[]” and “set[],” the “nightingales” may be busy with their song, but the poem still strikes the reader as rather static. The notions of stillness and coldness are given prominence by Loy. The “canopy” evoked by the speaker is “icicled,” the “lights” are “northern,” the “nightingales” are “frozen,” and even the evergreen “ilix” brings to mind winter rather than any warmer season. Predictably, death is central to the poem: Poe’s poetry, “a lyric elixir of death,” is able to “embalm[] / the spindle spirits of [his] hour glass loves.” Horizontality dominates in Loy’s lyric, connoting both motionlessness and lifelessness. The phrase “corpses of poesy” conjures up the image of a dead body; so does the mention of “hour glass loves” whose “spirits” are “embalm[ed].” Even the “ilix aisles” are horizontal and suggestive of a church, in this case the site of a funeral mass rather than a wedding or a christening. The “ilix,” an evergreen plant, is evocative of eternity but also of death. The motif of an hourglass may be read as symbolic of the passage of time. The setting of the poem is, so to speak, enveloped in darkness, which parallels that of the tomb: the voices of the “frozen nightingales” are heard “on moon spun nights” lit by “northern lights.”

Cristanne Miller cites “Poe” as an example illustrating her point that “[d]uring 1920 and 1921, her [Loy’s] poetry increasingly focused on the ravaging beauties of modernist art” (166). The poem’s metaliterary dimension is, of course, unquestionable as the two phrases selected by Miller to support her claim, “a *lyric* elixir of death” (italics mine) and “corpses of *poesy*” (italics mine), demonstrate. However, if, as Miller argues, Loy celebrates modernist experimentation, she does so at Poe’s expense, her tribute to him being in fact a tribute *à rebours*. The underlying message of “Poe” sets it apart from the works by Mallarmé and Crane I have discussed earlier in this article. Poetry and stillness are combined in Loy’s lyric: it is the “frozen nightingales” that “sing burial rites.” For Loy, Poe is a poet of the past as Rachel Blau DuPlessis shows in her brief but perceptive discussion of the text in question. “Poe” is thus a work “which constructs a logopoeic critique of poetry’s foundational cluster via Edgar Allen [*sic*] Poe’s remarkable statement ‘...the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world’” (40). Blau DuPlessis reminds us that “this conclusion is a triumphant synthesis, with glue being Woman, of some of the emotional and thematic markers of poetry—death, melancholy, and beauty. Best poetry draws (with vampiric precision) on best death” (40). The Poean paraphernalia may be there, but the American scholar sees Loy’s “Poe” as a reaction against a certain concept of poetry as well as femininity, to which words such as “romantic” and “romance” may be applicable (40):

This poem is a parodic examination of the accouterments and props of conventional lyricism. Loy's poem is both imitative of a sentimentalized funeral scene and satiric of it, for the phrase 'corpses of poesy' means female figures traditional to poetry, but both killed and eulogized by it. The archaic 'poesy' is, of course, an especially loaded choice of diction. It is a poetical or literary term for poetry, and in Loy 'poesy' satirizes the inadequacy of the dual conventions of the literary and sexual gender materials that fuel the lyric....

Mocking and rejecting 'corpses of poesy,' Mina Loy opens poetry to analytic and ironic considerations that unmask some gendered institutions on which 'poesy' is built. (40-41)

The three poetic tributes to Poe discussed in the present article are interesting for a number of reasons, which have to do with their individual authors and their poetics but also with American and French literature in the age of modernism as well as with the symbolist school which precedes it and simultaneously paves the way for it. Moreover, the modernist-symbolist continuum which the poems by Crane, Mallarmé and Loy exemplify inevitably takes into account the legacy of romanticism, which both symbolism and modernism opposed but also had to acknowledge, and at which all three poems look, though in different ways and to different degrees. As such, they signal the developments which occurred in the poetry of the Western world in the space of a hundred years.

The Poe-inspired fragment of "The Tunnel," "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe" and "Poe" all revolve around the figure of an American romantic poet, who was in many respects ahead of his time. Crane and Mallarmé clearly look up to him, seeing their predecessor as "*il miglior fabbro*," to use a term borrowed from T.S. Eliot (49), another "elder" Crane admired. As Robert Combs reminds us, "[i]t has been pointed out that Poe represented for Crane the Romantic poet destroyed by an unsympathetic public" (165). The view of the author of "The Raven" as *par excellence* romantic recurs in various readings of "The Tunnel," for instance in that of Lewis, who observes that "Poe always comes forcibly to mind 'here,' that is, when the world expresses itself to the poet as an inferno, because Poe is the major American example of the Romantic poet harried and destroyed by his own loveless society" (359). As has been noted earlier in the present article, such statements could largely be applied to Mallarmé's tribute to the American poet as well. Mallarmé's depiction of Poe is—for want of a better word—de-corporealized and focused on the protagonist's transcendent genius: not only is the French poet's vision of his American predecessor mythographic (Lagarde and Michard 537), but it also draws on religious imagery and gravitates towards the transcendental.

While Crane's monographers also read religious symbolism into the fragment of "The Tunnel" devoted to Poe, which "relates the martyred poet to the crucified Christ with a spear in his side" (Lewis 360), the author of *The Bridge* presents his eminent forerunner in a way which contrasts with the idealistic "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe" in that it is more life-like and down-to-earth. As Combs points out,

“Crane’s fascination with Poe at this point goes deeper than this [romanticism]. It is first of all the degrading way Poe died that Crane remembers. The psychological and physical violence which is characteristic of human life is exemplified in Crane’s vision of the mutilated [*sic*] Poe” (165). The scholar is right to note the importance of the “question of how he [Poe] faced the death he wrote so much about” and of the fact that “[t]he actual demands of his murderers together with the sickening details of his last hours constituted death for him, not an elegantly rhymed poem,” leading Combs to the conclusion that “in effect, Crane is asking Poe if he realized, as Crane himself realizes this moment on the subway, the ugly truth about death in real life” (165). While Combs’s remarks on the brutal reality of death are valid, the realism of the Poe-inspired passage in “The Tunnel” also brings us back to another important point: the notion of the lack of decorum, which distinguishes much of modernist literature from so much of what preceded it in the nineteenth century; in other words, the condition of no longer being “in a flutter for fear bowels will be mentioned,” to quote Crane’s letter to Tate again. Similarly, the “mutilation” Poe is subjected to may be none other than that which characterizes modernist poetry and modernist literature in its totality: a poetry and a literature marked by cracks or “fissures,” by wounds and breaches, a poetry and a literature of disjointedness, of “fragments I have shored against my ruins,” to use Eliot’s celebrated formula (67).

“What Crane sees is a kind of dramatic elaboration upon Poe’s alleged murder,” Combs states (165). This dramatism generates the dynamism which characterizes Crane’s homage to Poe and which constitutes one of the common points it shares with Mallarmé’s work, dynamic despite the seemingly inescapable “static” connotations that the motif of the grave, central to the poem, has. Additionally, both Crane’s and Mallarmé’s tributes to Poe strike the reader as not only admiring but also moving and—especially in Crane’s case—quite personal. The analogy between Poe’s ordeal and the Crucifixion has a universal dimension. The reason is that “it heightens the suggestion that the American world brutally destroys its only potential redeemer” as well as an individual one. “[T]he poet in ‘The Tunnel’ associates himself profoundly with the ruined figure of Poe... to the point of recognizing in that figure a phase or a dreadful potential of his own being” (Lewis 360-361), which may, however, include the potential to “find the internal resources to *deny* the false destructive values the world would force upon him in his own sometimes shattered condition” (361).

By contrast, Mina Loy is far from holding Poe in great reverence, though the fact that she chooses him as the topic of her poem and decides to engage in polemics with his poetics implies that she cannot ignore him altogether. Nevertheless, her “tribute” to the poet is in fact an anti-tribute, impersonal, distanced, static and “cold” in terms of both form and content. Not only is one of the most interesting female representatives of Anglo-American modernism unsentimental about the author of “Ligeia,” but she is, more importantly, critical of the way his poetry is shaped by what decades later came to be referred to as “the male gaze.” Contrary to Remy de Gourmont’s claim that Poe was pro-feminine, Loy, the author of “Feminist

Manifesto,” who dared to write about childbirth, orgasm and male paternalism from a woman’s point of view, distances herself from Poe’s “roses and northern lights” as a poet, a woman and a feminist. However, counterintuitive as this may seem, “Poe” is not out of place within the Crane-Mallarmé continuum analyzed in this article. In his monograph on the affinity between Crane and Allen Tate, Langdon Hammer writes: “In the preface to *White Buildings*, Tate faults Crane’s “masters”—Whitman, Melville, and Poe—for establishing only a discontinuous tradition of false starts, repeated beginnings” (148). However, “in ‘At Melville’s Tomb,’ Crane claims that discontinuity as a sign of generative power and a principle of historical connection” (148). As Hammer explains elsewhere in his book, “[t]he poetries of genius that Tate mentions... therefore constitute a sort of antitradition. The line they form is a discontinuous one of repeated beginnings, each of which provides—in its ultimate break with the poetry of the past—only an *impasse* to further extensions of the same order of imagination” (70-71). Seen in this light, Mina Loy’s dissent may actually inscribe itself into a concept of tradition dear to Crane’s heart.

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