

ON THE WAY TO THE BROKEN BRIDGE

New in town? I'm Hart Crane. Haven't seen you at any of Sam's soirees before. He mentioned you write poetry too. Are you blessed or cursed? Is booze a boon or bondage? Is sex driving, draining or definitive? Do you wish I'd shut up and go annoy someone else? Why, thank you. Glad you liked "White Buildings." No, I've never been to Africa but I don't shy away from images of other cultures-- twisted horizons, a carcass quick with flies, another man's stinking shoes. Poetry transports you anywhere, anywhen, anywhy.

At present, I owe my life and my best work to Sam. Priceless Samuel Loveman, New York bookstore owner who reads his wares and understands what he hawks. One Manhattan night like this--good company, wine, music, laughter-- I suddenly deflated like a punctured tire, wobbled to the edge of the roof garden-- intending to jump. And there was Sam-- a fast firm grip on my arm from behind. Relentlessly, silently pulling me back. And I hated him for it. The next day I couldn't thank him enough for saving me. It was an epiphany. And my stanzas, my verses translated into more than rhetoric.

Oh, the reprieve won't last forever. And I'll never be the mythos master I want to be. But for now my words are alive again-- singing, drumming with illumination of all the colors in white. Words are all I have-- the same weary words everyone has, but I strip off their linty clothes, pry up layers of plating, pierce their rusty armor, expose their nakedness shot with pumping blue veins or even the multiple faces of flashing amethyst-- like a just-split geode I'm the first human to see.

You say you know what it's like to hit bottom? Most poets do. Seems to be part of the package. Don't blame your parents. Mine couldn't bear each other beyond eye-blink attraction and the first belch of fact. Caramel-coated curare for a mother, hide-bound ledger book for a father. They can't help who they are. You can't help who you are, poet.

(cont.)