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| Harold Hart Crane (1899-1932) |
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| Generally considered one of a half-dozen major American modernist poets, Hart Crane produced during his short, nomadic life some of the twentieth century’s most impossibly obscure verse alongside its most intensely visionary.  Born June 24, 1899, Hart Crane grew up in a bourgeois household in Garrettsville, Ohio. His mother and father fought often, divorced, and reconciled, a relationship which often cast the Crane’s only child on an opposing side. June Hart, a noted beauty, was controlling and hypochondriac, often calling her son home from his travels to lavish attention on his nervous, ailing mother. Crane’s attempts to win his father’s love were tempered usually with a desire for acceptance and financial support. Amid a chaotic upbringing, Crane on occasion spent time with his grandmother, the first in the young poet’s life to acknowledge his poetic gift.  Although not published until 1926 by Horace Liveright, Crane’s first book of poems, *White Buildings*, exhibits in 1920-22 a penchant for densely symbolic verse. *White Buildings* concludes with a sequence of six erotic poems, penned 1921-26 and inspired by Crane’s love affair with sailor Emil Oppfer; critics disagree, however, on the extent to which a queer approach grasps the opus. Most confer the best of this early work is “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” a poem which immerses classical figures into a milieu of contemporary urban imagery and declares, “The imagination spans beyond despair,/Outpacing bargain, vocable, and prayer.” Here, amid war-torn images of “blown blood” and “bleeding hands,” Crane’s perhaps naive vision of nineteenth century sentiment—the influence of Whitman and Emerson—becomes an antidote for the pessimism of his contemporaries Pound and Eliot. |
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| Further reading:  (Bloom)  (Crane and Hammer)  (Crane, Hammer and Weber, O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane)  (Mariani) |