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The Sound of Silence: Saint Cecilia and Celestial Music in Hart Crane and Stéphane Mallarmé

Abstract: The article examines Hart Crane's and Stéphane Mallarmé's approaches to music as exemplified by two poems: the former's "Sonnet" and the latter's "Saint." Linked by the figure of Saint Cecilia, the patroness of music, the two works do more than just explore similar motifs. In fact, both are aesthetic statements on the role of music in verse, on the poet's predicament and on a certain concept of poetry rooted in the symbolist-modernist continuum, of which Crane's *œuvre* is an example. My analysis takes into account Boethius's and Kepler's theories of music, Platonism, with which symbolist poetry is inextricably linked, the concept of pure poetry and the notion of the music of the spheres, central to both poems.

Keywords: Hart Crane, Stéphane Mallarmé, American modernism, French symbolism, poetry, music, Platonism, pure poetry

In a 1922 letter to Gorham Munson, Hart Crane referred to his friend Matthew Josephson, who had left America for France the year before. The future author of *The Bridge* expressed his skepticism about Josephson's fascination with French avant-garde movements and poets, namely Dadaism and Guillaume Apollinaire:

> The precious rages of dear Matty somehow don't seem to swerve me from this position. He is, it strikes me, altogether unsteady. Of course, since Mallarme [sic] and Huysmans were elegant weepers it is up to the following generation to haw-haw gloriously! Even dear old Bhudda-face de Gourmont is passé. Well, I suppose it is up to one in Paris to do as the Romans do, but it all looks too easy to me from Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, God's Country. (267)

As Langdon Hammer, a Crane scholar and editor of *Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, notes, "Crane embraced the Elizabethan and metaphysical poets that Josephson encouraged him to read in 1920, but he took issue with his friend's later enthusiasm for Dada and Apollinaire" ("Biographical Notes," 764). This was followed by "[t]ensions between Josephson and Munson [which] led to an acrimonious split in

1923; because Crane took Munson's side, his friendship with Josephson ended" (764). The "position" from which Matthew Josephson was unlikely "to swerve" Crane was that of an "abashed posture of reverence before the statues of Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, Chaucer" (267). In light of the data available, it is also possible to state that Crane's literary allegiance extended to a school of poetry to which Remy de Gourmont devoted his critical attention and of which the "elegant weeper" Mallarmé is a key representative. Reading between the lines, one senses Crane's loyalty to Baudelaire and his followers in the passage *loco citato*. The mention of de Gourmont, whose critical output "disseminated the Symbolist aesthetic doctrines" and who is remembered as "one of the most penetrating contemporary critics of the French Symbolist movement" ("Remy de Gourmont"), seems far from coincidental. In the year from which the letter quoted above dates, Munson had an opportunity to notice certain tendencies in his friend's behavior and attitude to poetry which were associable with the context of French symbolism. As one of Crane's biographers puts it, "in the lives of the great Symbolists he found models of bohemian excess which accommodated his increasing thirst for alcohol, his romantic conception of the poet as pariah and his rejection of Clarence Crane's [the poet's father's] sober virtues" (Fisher 151). Drawing on Munson's observations, Fisher notes that "the lives of Verlaine, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Corbière, Mallarmé and Rimbaud above all, with their chronicles of poverty, riot, sexual unorthodoxy and self-destruction" were particularly "significant" (151). Crane's indebtedness to the French symbolist poets, in particular Arthur Rimbaud, whose American heir he is believed to be, is universally acknowledged, though not necessarily critically explored. The parallels between symbolist poetics and Crane's *œuvre* which a thorough critical reading reveals is substantiated by biographical and epistolary data (Piechucka, *Dream* 99–101).

In the present article, I would like to examine some of these parallels by looking at two poems dealing with the same theme: "Sonnet" by Hart Crane and "Saint," a lyric by one of Crane's "elegant weepers," Stéphane Mallarmé. The analysis which I am about to undertake is founded on the conviction that Crane's fascination with the French symbolists goes beyond the unquestionable interest which their destinies, lifestyles and attitudes must have held for him. It is also based on the conviction that, while Rimbaud may have been Crane's principal symbolist idol, the latter's work also bears the traces of Mallarmé's influence. Importantly, it must also be noted that the term *influence* is to be understood very broadly, both in the present article and, I would argue, in the realm of comparative literary studies at large. Influence, as I understand it, should not be limited to what a particular poet or prose writer directly borrowed from his or her predecessors. It should not even be understood as indirect inspiration. The broad understanding of inspiration includes the idea of a certain spiritual, emotional and artistic kinship. Since Crane's "Sonnet" is an early work, it is debatable whether the American poet was fully aware of the intricacies of Mallarmé's poetry when he wrote it.

Nevertheless, what transpires in it is a similarity in purpose and preoccupation linking the French symbolist and his modernist heir.

What marked Mallarmé's work and was to mark Crane's was not just music, though, as this article will show, it was important to both of them. Even more important, however, was an aim which, in the context of Crane's poetry, is defined by Brian M. Reed, one of the poet's monographers, as "transcendental aspirations" (100). Preoccupied with the idea and the ideal, both Mallarmé and Crane produced verse whose nature is often challenging, ambiguous or downright hermetic. Both opted for idiosyncratic lexis, grammatical structures and syntax. Both set themselves unrealistic, larger-than-life poetic goals: the "Book" to end all books in Mallarmé's case, the *über*-epic poem in Crane's case. Both paid a high price for chasing often impossible poetic ideals, for the painful pursuit of the Absolute. Gordon A. Tapper places Crane's desire for linguistic purification in the context of Mallarmé's analogical yearnings (21). In a similar vein, in *Hart Crane and Allen Tate*, Hammer notes the Mallarméan dimension of Crane's concept of the "new *word*" (158). Both claims are relevant to my discussion of the two poems on which the present article focuses, as well as to the notions of music versus silence, self- and non-referentiality, and pure poetry.

Central to both Crane's "Sonnet" and Mallarmé's "Saint" is the figure of Saint Cecilia, "the patron saint of musicians, singers, and poets" (Singer-Towns and all 143). The interrelationship between the art of music and the art of poetry is, of course, axiomatic, as is the musical dimension of Mallarmé's work and French symbolist poetry in general. Elizabeth McCombie reminds us that "Verlaine's calculated rhythmic irregularity was intended to invest poetry with 'musicality', as he proclaims in his 'Art poétique': 'Music above everything else! | And to write it favour the *Impair* | It is more vague and soluble in air" (xv). As McCombie notes, "Mallarmé greatly admired this brand of musical poetry'" (xv) and his fascination was very much in tune with the spirit of the times:

> The move to 'liberate' verse and search for new rhythms of meaning was in large part guided by poets who looked to music to provide a model. Mallarmé's observations about music inform his poetics at the most fundamental level. He lived at a time of heightened mutual awareness between music and literature, and his work represents a particularly fertile moment of crossover in the histories of the two arts. (xv)

McCombie also points out the role Richard Wagner played in this "mutual awareness" and the ensuing competition between composers and poets (xv). In a similar vein, Reed asserts the importance of the German composer not just to Mallarmé, but also to Otto Kahn, the financier and cultural philanthropist who supported the American poet's main creative venture: "Crane's patron—like Baudelaire, Beardsley, D'Annunzio, Huysmans, Kandinsky, Mallarmé, Renoir, Shaw, Wilde, and a host of other influential devotees of

Wagnerism—would have considered the composer's operas an invaluable touchstone for subsequent artistic achievement" (136). Noticing, in his reflections on *The Bridge*, its author's "turn to Wagnerian rhetoric" in his *opus magnum* after "the interview at Kahn's Fifth Avenue home that won him a grant of two thousand dollars" (137), the Crane scholar also observes that "[t]he French symbolist poets found that Wagner's two-tier temporality tallied with their own intuition" (145). Baudelaire, Mallarmé and their followers, who, on the other side of the Atlantic, included Crane, believed "that the phenomenal world is, in Baudelaire's words, 'des forets [sic] de symbols,' merely forests of symbols that, read aright, prove to be 'echos [sic] qui de loin se confondent / Dans une tenebreuse [sic] et profonde unité,' echoes that from afar meld into a dark and profound unity" (145).

The connection between Crane's *œuvre* and Wagner's music may be unarguable, but so is the one between his work and music *tout court*. The fourth chapter of Reed's monograph centers on one of the two factors which were crucial to the American author's creative process: inebriation and his Victrola gramophone. Examining the implications of what he terms "Hart Crane's phonograph fetish" (99), the scholar comes to the conclusion that the poet's "singing machine, the Victrola, left a profound mark on all aspects of his poetry, from the microtexture of his verse to its transcendental aspirations" (99–100). In answer to the question, "What does Hart Crane himself have to say on the subject of music and poetry?," Reed identifies the poet's "desire to model his poetry on the most advanced music of his day" as well as his tendency towards "describing his verse in musical terms" (103). The monographer also retraces the history of Crane's musical tastes and his experience as a classical music, jazz and experimental music listener:

> It is even known where and when he first involved himself seriously in study of the art form. While living in Cleveland after his first stint in New York (1920–23), Crane's chief connection to the international avant-garde was via the Cleveland Orchestra, then under the direction of the world-famous conductor Ernest Bloch. From Bloch, Crane learned to relish the latest in European music. He became an ardent admirer of such composers as Vincent d'Indy, Erik Satie, Aleksandr Scriabin, and Igor Stravinsky. Later in life, wherever he traveled, Crane continued to seek out innovative music of whatever kind, whether it be Times Square jazz or the microtonal, percussive compositions of Edgar Varèse. From his Cleveland days onward—that is, during his poetic maturity, the years in which he wrote the bulk of the poetry for which he is remembered—modern music remained a constant touchstone for Crane's achievements in his own medium, verse. (104)

"Given this background," Reed observes, "one can conclude that Crane had definitive reasons for insisting upon writing with a Victrola's accompaniment" (104). However, Crane's awareness of the importance of music to both his life and poetic craft does

not begin in the 1920s. "Sonnet", the poem I am concerned with in this article, dates from 1915 or 1916, when its author was not more than seventeen years old. Like all juvenilia, it thus runs the risk of being dismissed as immature and undeveloped. I, however, propose to look at it in terms of how it anticipates Crane's later poetic preoccupations, constituting his artistic credo or at least its embryonic form. I also propose to explore it by setting it against Mallarmé's poem because of the theme they share, but also because of Crane's evident predilection for the school of poetry to which the author of "Saint" belongs as well as the preoccupation with music the two poets have in common and their belief in the inextricable link between *ars musica* and *ars poetica*.

"Saint" predates "Sonnet" by half a century. The original title of the Mallarmé poem in question, "Sainte Cécile jouant sur l'aile d'un chérubin," could be translated as "Saint Cecilia Playing a Cherubine's Wing." As Lagarde and Michard point out, the more "explicit" title was changed to "Sainte"—of which "Saint" is the most accurate English equivalent imaginable—because "Mallarmé wished to make the evocation of the figure in a stained glass window and of the music he heard resonating inside of himself even more immaterial while he contemplated it in his imagination" (538, trans. A. P.). The French scholars' critical comment makes it clear that we have to do with a text which gravitates towards the ethereal and the aleatory, which is unsurprising in view of its author's reputation as an obscure and hermetic poet. Poetry is not only what is, according to Robert Frost's oft-quoted formula, "lost in translation," it is also usually lost in paraphrase, and hardly any poet illustrates this better than Mallarmé. In an attempt to paraphrase the seemingly unparaphraseable, Walter A. Koch offers a matter-of-fact summary of the poem's content: "The poem is supposed to be a description of a stained-glass window portraying Saint Cecilia, the patroness of music. The sonnet appears to be written for an Avignon lady named Cécile with whom Mallarmé had been acquainted" (258). Koch also states that "[w]e obviously have to imagine a Saint playing on [sic] a harp formed by an angel's wing" (258) before capitulating altogether: "This is about all we can make out as to informational structure, since every other reference to the 'universe' is being refuted as soon as it is mentioned" (258). To this, the two French critics quoted above add a few clarifications. First of all, although we have to do with a description of a stained glass window, "the Saint appears as if she were *in a window*" (Lagarde and Michard 538; trans. A. P.). Secondly, "sandalwood" is the material of which Cecilia's "viol" is made (538; trans. A. P.). Thirdly, the poem's closing phrase, "musician of silence," is an "expression applicable to Mallarmé's poetry itself" (538). All three exegetes also agree that the phrases "monstrance glass" and "evening flight" refer to the sun or sunlight and a "wing," respectively (Lagarde and Michard 538; trans. A. P. , Koch 258).

Mallarmé's poetic evocation of Saint Cecilia may serve as an illustration of McCombie's view that in the French poet's *œuvre* "[l]anguage assumes some of the non-ref-

erential quality of music" and "words share music's signifying patterns" because they are "[r]emoved from the world of objects associated with ordinary reference" (xvii):

> In the window concealing
> The old sandalwood losing its gilt
> On the viol sparkling
> Of yore with flute or mandolin,
> Is the pale saint, displaying
> The old book which unfolds
> Of the Magnificat streaming
> Of yore according to vesper and compline:
> On this monstrance glass
> That is brushed by a harp by the Angel
> Formed with his evening flight
> For the delicate joint
> Of the finger, which, without the old sandalwood
> Nor running along the old book, she balances
> On the instrumental plumage,
> Lady—musician of silence. (qtd. in Koch 257)

Koch, one of the poem's many exegetes, sees it primarily as the work of a "flamboyant representative of a more mature type of symbolism, of *poésie pure*" (257), a poetry which is *par excellence* musical and gravitates towards non-referentiality and abstraction (Cuddon 759). Central to it are vagueness, indeterminacy, invisibility and absence: "The informational focus is temporarily forced to linger on the unfolding of quasi-informational segments that turn out to be referentially null and void" (Koch 258). Inconclusiveness and open-endedness also characterize the poem's syntax, style and soundscape (259). Generally, it is "[t]he strange 'music' arising from the overall suggestiveness of rarely-heard words" as well as "from the repetition of words devoid of reference" that "seems to enjoy a privileged structural position" (259). The conclusions Koch draws from his reading of "Saint" are in keeping with the ones McCombie draws about Mallarmé's *œuvre* in its totality:

> Like music, the 'rhythms between the relations' in poems create reflections, connections, silences, and hermeneutic gaps, revealed and concealed but never totally unveiled, according to language's own logic. As patterns of meaning appear and disappear in the reading of a Mallarmé poem, they create their own structure or rhythm. The form of meaning is as prominent a part of the poetry as the phonetic and metrical form. Language freed from conventional modes of denotation assumes material existence independent of what it might signify; yet at the same time the word experienced as word creates an immediate consciousness of the absence of identity between word and sign. The word points at once to a thrilling Nothingness, a refer-

> ential failure, at the heart of language, and to the pure generative power of language itself. This musical poetics inevitably draws close attention to its own practice and to the ultimately arbitrary relationship of language to reality. (xvii)

At first glance, the expression "musician of silence," used in Mallarmé's poem, strikes the reader as oxymoronic, since it combines the person who, by definition, produces sound with soundlessness. The seemingly contradictory combination of *ars musica* and silence is in fact deeply ingrained in philosophical thought concerning music. As early as the sixth century BC, Confucius asserted that "great music is in harmony with the universe, restoring order to the physical world through that harmony" ("Music"). A century later, Plato, whose views on music resembled the ancient Chinese philosopher's in several respects, claimed that "[m]usic echoes divine harmony; rhythm and melody imitate the movements of heavenly bodies, thus delineating the music of the spheres and reflecting the moral order of the universe" ("Music"). The music of the spheres, also known as the harmony of the spheres or *musica universalis*, is customarily defined as "an ethereal harmony thought by the Pythagoreans to be produced by the vibration of the celestial spheres" ("Music of the spheres," *Merriam Webster*) or as "[t]he natural harmonic tones supposedly produced by the movement of the celestial spheres or the bodies fixed in them" ("Music of the spheres," *Oxford Dictionary*). By contrast, Plato believed "[e]arthly music" to be "suspect" and its "emotional power" to be unreliable or even dangerous ("Music"). The Greek philosopher's conception of music inscribed itself in his idealist philosophy: "in treating earthly music as a shadow of the ideal, [he] saw a symbolic significance in the art" ("Music"). By associating Cecilia with the time-honored philosophical concept of universal music, which is inaudible to the human ear, the poet of "Saint" therefore elevates her above the earthly and places her in the realm of the ethereal. As William C. Carter observes, "Mallarmé paid homage to Saint Cecilia in a poem entitled *Sainte*. She is a cosmic creature whose music, like that of the spheres, may seem to be silent: 'Musicienne du silence'" (271).

It is also with soundlessness that Crane associates Saint Cecilia in "Sonnet," a seemingly traditional poem whose form is suggested by the title but whose meaning, as is often the case with Crane's verse, eludes clear-cut elucidation and defies simplistic paraphrase, much like Mallarmé's *œuvre*:

> Ere elfish Night shall sift another day
> Hope-broken 'neath her ebon scepter's keep,
> Or the fainting soul's last flames all trembling creep
> White-taper-like, and paler, pulse away,
> Then shalt thou come, O Saint, in magic sway
> Of midnight's purple organ-breath, and sweep
> Brave echoes from the spooming coast to steep,

Blue heights were cone-wood calls near summits spray
Frost-fringes through thine octaves.… And from shades
Of moon-fled valleys, there shall rise a rift,
The supplication of all earth, mute serenades,
Whispering, 'Cecilia, Saint, leave us thy gift.'
And sleep shalt thou bestow, the final song,
And Time shall set the morning stars adrift. (111)

The patroness of music is the addressee of Crane's sonnet as lines five, twelve and thirteen explicitly point out. She is also the addressee of what the poet refers to as "mute serenades." A serenade being a song, the oxymoronic phrase seems to echo Mallarmé's "musician of silence." In fact, Crane goes as far as to construct an oxymoron within an oxymoron: the "serenades" may be "mute," which is itself a contradiction in terms, but muteness does not prevent them from either "Whispering" or being whispered, or at least being a prelude to a whisper. While it is clear who is being serenaded, the identity of the serenader leaves room for doubt. It appears that the earth is the one serenading Saint Cecilia: the mention of "a rift" is suggestive of a tectonic movement and the lines which precede it may imply that all of nature unites in a song of praise and a courtship song addressed to the Saint. However, if we assume that the speaker of the lyric is a poet, which, despite Crane's admiration for T. S. Eliot, the leading modernist exponent of poetic depersonalization, we may, I believe, safely do, the conclusion may also be that the serenader is an artist who joins in nature's song. Addressing—albeit indirectly—Saint Cecilia, the poet thus invokes a muse. In popular consciousness, artists' muses are often also their mistresses. In "Sonnet," Crane may be said to be singing one of the many serenades dedicated to Cecilia, as if he were a lover wooing a woman. The statement, "Cecilia, Saint, leave us thy gift" may thus be read as a loving plea for inspiration. In Crane's poem, Cecilia, the "cosmic creature" of Mallarmé's sonnet, is the poet's beloved and nature's queen, as the regal color "purple" which majestically surrounds her indicates.

Serenades are customarily sung outdoors and by night or at least in the evening. This is also when Saint Cecilia makes her appearance in Crane's poem, which opens "Ere elfish Night shall sift another day." The fainting of the soul simultaneously evoked in the sonnet thus parallels the "death" of the day. "Hope" is "broken" precisely because the day is over. Music is Saint Cecilia's main attribute: she is seemingly carried by it, since she arrives "in magic sway / Of midnight's purple organ-breath." Omnipotent, she seems to be able to gather the music of the earth, as if extracting it from the landscape: Cecilia "sweep[s] / Brave *echoes* from the spooming coast to steep, / Blue heights were cone-wood calls near summits spray / Frost-fringes through thine *octaves*" (italics mine). Music is thus played by nature in Crane's poem, but it is the Saint herself who comes to, so to speak, collect it at the end of the day. The earth implores Cecilia to

let it keep the "gift" of music. In response, the patroness of *ars musica* "bestow[s], the final song," which is "sleep." In art, literature and culture, sleep is, of course, closely associated not only with the night, but also with death, both of which appear earlier in "Sonnet." All three—sleep, night and death—also connote silence, an important theme in both Crane's and Mallarmé's evocation of Saint Cecilia. Like his French symbolist predecessor, the American poet oscillates between sound and stillness. "[T]he final song" and Cecilia's final gift to the earth at the end of the day is silence, which is the culmination of all sounds, the ultimate music. "The supplication of all earth" may be that of all human beings as well, including poets and the poet who is the speaker of Crane's lyric. Heavenly music is inaudible to mortal ears, unlike earthly music, which is more accessible, but is not the ultimate musical form. Mere mortals, however, wish to retain the little they have access to. The poem closes with the mention of "morning stars," celestial bodies, suggestive, perhaps, of the harmony of the spheres, celestial, ethereal, superior to earthly music.

Appropriate as it is in the context of Crane's poem, the term *earthly music*, used in the preceding paragraph and mentioned earlier in this text in relation to Plato, is somewhat imprecise. In order to elaborate on it—as well as on the close reading, analysis and interpretation of "Sonnet" undertaken in the present article—it may be useful to refer to two theoreticians of music, both of them Neoplatonists: the Roman philosopher Boethius and the German astronomer Johannes Kepler. Though eleven centuries apart, the two share certain affinities in their approach to music, which they both understand very broadly. They categorize music, and a survey of the classifications they introduce helps to illuminate the intricacies and obscurities of Crane's poem. In both cases, we have to do with three major categories, which, as musicologists observe, overlap, but also diverge in some respects. Together, they also shed new light on Crane's "Sonnet," enabling its exegete to form a more complete and coherent picture.

Elizabeth Eva Leach thus summarizes Boethius's theory:

> As is well known, Boethius divides music into three species: *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*. *Musica mundana*, cosmic or heavenly music, is made by the rapid motions of heavenly bodies, giving the proportions of the seasons and other subdivisions of time. *Musica humana*, human music, is the uniting of the various parts of the soul and incorporeal reason with the body so that they work harmoniously as one. Only *musica instrumentalis* is something that we would classify as music at all, being the music of instruments[.] (12)

In a somewhat similar vein, the Renaissance astronomer distinguishes "the harmonic ratios in the motions of the heavens" as well as "of nature" and "of the human voice" (Dickreiter 183). "This classification of existing harmonies in the world reveals clear parallels with the ancient-medieval one of *musica mundana*, *humana*, *instrumentalis*,

which goes back to the Pythagoreans and was passed over [sic] by Boethius" (183). If we superimpose Boethius's and Kepler's ideas on Crane's poetic tribute to Saint Cecilia, we discover that the superimposition results in certain hermeneutic gaps being filled in. "*Musica mundana*," as Kügle points out, "is the 'harmony of the world' which humans can experience in a limited way and indirectly only, for example by marveling at the ordering and proportions of the celestial bodies that can be observed in the night sky" (1188). This precondition appears to be in tune with the nocturnal setting of Crane's poem. Sunset seems to be a borderline beyond which the power of earthly music ends, giving way to celestial music, of which Saint Cecilia is a guardian. Her taking earthly music away may be symbolic of its imperfection and impermanence, of its being, in Platonic terms, merely "a shadow of the ideal." More tangible and accessible, earthly music is, on the one hand, the music of nature, strongly present in Crane's lyric, and, on the other, that of the human body. The importance of what Tapper terms "Crane's corporeal poetics" (5) surfaces in "Sonnet" as well. Somatic references appear in the poem: the phrase "paler, pulse away" seems to apply to "the fainting soul's last flames," suggesting a link between the spiritual and the bodily. Similarly, the mention of "midnight's purple organ-breath" evokes a musical instrument as well as the human body, indicative, perhaps, of a connection between musicality and physicality. The image may imply that music is something organic—as is the landscape. Along with the aforementioned phrase, it also sends the reader back to the concept of *musica humana*, which is, in the words of Kügle, "the order of and within our bodies and souls (Boethius sees the two as a unit)" (1188). As the scholar explains, "[l]ike *musica mundana*, we constantly experience this *musica humana* indirectly, in the form of various bodily and psychological states, but it is not a sonic phenomenon" (1188). What is indeed "a sonic phenomenon" is *musica instrumentalis*, "real, perceptible music" (Dickreiter 186), the sister of poetry, whose roots are melic. The "purple organ-breath," associable, as I have argued, with *musica humana*, ushers in Saint Cecilia in Crane's poem, thus constituting—as it does in the aforementioned tripartite classifications—a link between heavenly music and what is commonly understood as the art of music proper.

In Crane's poem, the "[t]ime [which] shall set the morning stars adrift" could be read as an evocation of "the harmony of the cosmos… i.e. the most perfect harmony of celestial motions" which "Kepler discusses" (Dickreiter 183). However, what the German astronomer also does is "explicitly write[] about perceived music as an imitation of the 'celestial music'" (184). As Dickreiter further notes, "[a]ccording to Kepler, with their music men imitate the movements of the heavens and experience the same satisfaction God experienced when looking upon his work of Creation" (184). Humans also experience a "very sweet sense of delight elicited from this music which imitates God" (185). This sense of delight is, however, inevitably illusory and temporary: "man, the imitator of his Creator" (185)—or, to be precise, a man who is an artist—can "taste the satisfaction of God the Workmaster with His own works" but only "to some extent"

(185). The fact that, in "Sonnet," the gift of music is impermanent, borrowed rather than obtained for good, and ultimately taken away at dusk by Saint Cecilia has rich symbolic implications. "The supplication of all earth" turns out to be more than just a plea for inspiration. It is expressive of the dissatisfaction, insatiability and sense of incompleteness which are inherent in the artist's condition. The lyric Crane devoted to the patroness of music is permeated by a sense of separation and longing, by a disheartenment which unavoidably marks artists and artistic endeavors. The phrase "[h]ope-broken," employed at the beginning of the poem, may, all things considered, refer to more than just the "death" of the day or even death *tout court*. "Sonnet" may, at its deepest level, be a poem about the drama of suffering and imploration immanent in human creation, which strives, in vain, to outstrip divine Creation.

Earlier in this article, Plato's belief that earthly music is not to be trusted, but is endowed with "symbolic significance" has been mentioned. It is also worth remembering that "we notice a substantial influence of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy on Kepler's concept of *harmonia*" (Dickreiter 182). In his study of Kepler's views on the notion of harmony, Dickreiter reminds us of the distinction between the spiritual and the real:

> The pair of the concepts *intellectualis—sensilis* is introduced into the sphere of harmony and is the basis of the disposition of Kepler's principle [sic] work. *Mundus intellectualis* is the spiritual world which can only be conceived by reason, it corresponds to Plato's world of Ideas. Opposed to it is *mundus sensilis*, the real world of our sensory experience. It is the image of the intelligible world. What is multifarious and divided there, is combined to a unity here. (182)

Importantly, Platonic idealism forms the basis of not only Kepler's musical theories, but also of the theory of the symbol and of symbolist poetics. It is commonly identified as one of the cornerstones of the symbolist school of poetry, which "created the image of the poet as a kind of seer" who "was to create this [ideal] 'other world' by suggestion and symbolism; by transforming reality into a greater and more permanent reality" (Cuddon 941). The symbolist poet was therefore the one "who could see through and beyond the real world to the world of ideal forms and essences" (941). In poetic practice, "[t]he attainment, in transcendental [Platonic] symbolism, of the vision of the essential Idea was to be achieved by a kind of deliberate obfuscation or blurring of reality so that the ideal becomes clearer" (941). At this point, music, the subject of the present article, comes into play: "This, according to symbolist theory, could be best conveyed by the fusion of images and by the musical quality of the verse; by, in short, a form of so-called pure poetry" (941). Among the symbolist poets who believed that "[t]he music of the words provided the requisite element of suggestiveness" are Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarmé (941). "Saint," the Mallarmé poem discussed in this article, is exemplary of the

French poet's torturous striving after this poetic ideal of impossible purity. I have written abundantly about Hart Crane's indebtedness to and connections with French symbolism. On one occasion, I also pointed out that Crane's preoccupation with it is far from solipsistic, because he is careful not to allow the triumph of the symbol over truth, or of the image over the idea (Piechucka, "Images and Ideas" 5–16). A transcendental visionary, the American poet is determined to go beyond "the temporal and approach the timeless" and to play "the role of artists and poets" which is that of "self-sacrificing and unselfish sufferers" (15).

In American letters, Hart Crane is arguably the most perfect incarnation of the tortured poet since Edgar Allan Poe. Torment marks both his life story and the scale of his creative aspirations. As has been noted,

> [t]he French phrase *poète maudit* ('cursed poet') expresses a concept of the poet consumed by his vision and doomed in life because of his total commitment. The tortured life of Hart Crane—his bitter relationships with his parents, uncontrollable drinking, homosexual promiscuity, and suicide at the age of thirty-three—together with his ambition to create the 'Great American Poem' have long been seen as fitting this familiar pattern. (Baym 1647)

Hagiographic accounts make it clear that Saint Cecilia's name connotes not only music and mysticism, but also purity and suffering. "Her association with music comes from a line in her biography, which said that at her wedding, 'Cecilia sung [in her heart] to the Lord, saying: may my heart remain unsullied, so that I be not confounded'" (Singer-Towns 143). "[H]a[ving] taken a vow of virginity," the Saint "refused to consummate her marriage" prior to "d[ying] a martyr… during one of the persecutions of Christians" (143). None of these dramatic circumstances are directly mentioned in either Mallarmé's "Saint" or Crane's "Sonnet." Nevertheless, in both the French symbolist's and the American poet's case, choosing Saint Cecilia as, so to speak, the patroness of their respective poems, may be motivated by more than just the inextricable link between the art of music which she represents and the art of poetry which is rooted in music and which they both devoted their lives to. Saint Cecilia may be the archetype of not only the musician, but also the artist in general because of her martyrdom. The suffering inscribed in her fate is evocative of that inscribed in all artists' condition. Crane may have been aware of that—and of the need to defend oneself, with varying degrees of success, against that—when he wrote to Gorham Munson apropos of the latter's play in 1920, four or five years after "Sonnet" had been written:

> You're too damned serious. You victimize your hero. Your aristocrat is much more vital and admirable than the polyphonic God, chosen to symbolize the artist. And anyway,—it's sentimentality to talk the way he does. The modern artist has got to

> harden himself, and the walls of an ivory tower are too delicate and brittle a coat of mail for substitute. The keen and most sensitive edges will result from this 'hardening' process. If you will pardon a more personal approach, I think that you would do better to think less about aesthetics in the abstract,—in fact, forget all about aesthetics, and apply yourself closely to a conscious observation of the details of existence, plain psychology, etc. If you ARE an artist then, you will create spontaneously. But I pray for both of us,—let us be keen and humorous scientists anyway. And I would rather act my little tradgedy [sic] without tears. Although I would insist upon a tortured countenance and all sleekness pared off the muscles. (224)

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