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Stephen Crane: Man adrift

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City University of New York, 1988

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STEPHEN CRANE: MAN ADrift

by

PAUL A. BROER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
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of the requirements for the degree of
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Chapter One: The Problem of Biography

It is the function of the biographer to capture and transmit the facts of a life and, more importantly, to discover the life within these facts, to reconstruct the man. The artist's biographer has the additional obligation to establish the connection between the life of the artist and the life in his work, to comprehend behind the varieties of form and style, subject and tone, a controlling intelligence and a pervasive sensibility, to discover the source of the power of the man's work--his genius. While this chapter adds nothing new to the factual information concerning Crane's life, it draws a portrait that differs significantly from preceeding ones. The change in perspective or change in focus is offered to broaden a too narrow definition of the man and his work, to resolve some persistent distortions and to counterbalance a trend in the study of Crane which has its roots in the distorted public image of him as neither "nice" nor respectable which revealed more about his American Victorian contemporaries than it did about the artist. While any basis for allegations of symptomatic aberrations in his behavior--drunkenness, drug addiction, profligacy--have long since been convincingly repudiated, the effects of

these myths, in the form of lay diagnosis, continue to influence our understanding of the man and his work.

While the first biography of Crane by Thomas Beer is in many ways faulted by lack of documentation and by inaccuracies both accidental and deliberate, in trying to launder Crane's reputation he omitted the unpleasant fact of his extra-legal marriage to the undivorced former madam, Cora Taylor Stewart, the conflict he describes between Crane's character and that of his age is essentially accurate. It is his thesis on the source of Crane's art, however, that reveals in its limitations the influence of the traditional view he sought to dispel. "Let it be stated that the mistress of this boy's mind was fear. His search in aesthetic was governed by terror as that of tamer men is by the desire of women" (296). It is apparent that Beer is working backward from The Red Badge, his best known work, to the author. Without arguing the validity of this method, the thesis is easily repudiated by even a cursory glance at Crane's other works. "The Blue Hotel," "The Monster," and "The Open Boat" all contain life and death situations, but the first deals primarily with the responsibility for a death, the second with society's soft, relentless pressure on an individual and the third surely more with the meaning of life in a godless

universe than with the fact of fear. Beer's thesis, while at the same time implying the absence of a normal "desire of women," personifies fear as his "mistress" and juxtaposes the passion of a presumably wild Crane with that of "tamer" men for women; the choice of the word "governed" is also an infelicitous one with its emphasis on compulsion. Beer's thesis is, quite simply, too narrow to be of much use in understanding Crane's life and "his search in aesthetic."

This approach to understanding Crane did not originate with Beer and unfortunately neither did it end with him; his first literary benefactor, Hamlin Garland, was also the first to seek an explanation for the power of this marvelous boy in the unconscious rather than the conscious mind.

"We called him a genius, for he had that quality which we can not easily measure or define. His mind was more largely subconscious in its workings than that of any man of my acquaintance. He did not understand his own processes or resources. When he put pen to paper he found marvelous words, images, sentences, pictures already formed in his brain, to be drawn off and fixed on paper. His pen was 'a spout' as he himself says."

(Gullason, Career 107)

In reference to The Red Badge he said, "It was as if the youth in some mysterious way had secured the cooperation of a spirit, the spirit of an officer in the Civil War. How else could one account for the boy's knowledge of war?" (Gullason, Career 102). This explanation reveals more about Garland, who presided over meetings of the American Psychical Society, than it does about the genesis of Crane's works. A less interesting but more accurate account of the boy's knowledge of war would include the time he spent in research, his many revisions, imagination and talent, if not genius.

To an extent Crane himself is responsible for this view of his work. As if his iconoclastic ideas, stylistic idiosyncracies, and deviations from accepted notions of literary form were not enough, he was deliberately deceptive about where and when his works were written, often denying any familiarity with authors he had read. He claimed, although the evidence refutes this, that The Black Riders was written in three days and The Red Badge in nine; according to Edwin Cady there are at least seven different versions of the latter that we know of (Crane 36). He said he never revised, yet his notebook is there to refute him. "The Notebook

contradicts Crane's assertions that revisions are a sign of dishonesty in a writer. Not only does it prove that Crane took notes before working his sketches into final form, but even more significant, the Notebook reveals revisions within the notes themselves, further evidence of Crane's conscientious writing." (Greiner ix). Perhaps Crane was deceptive about the creation of his work because he thought the less effort he revealed, the more remarkable the result would appear; perhaps by discounting the effort expended, he hoped to lessen the embarrassment and disappointment of rejection. Certainly he is not the only author highly sensitive to suggestions of indebtedness to other writers. Regardless of the motivation for his deceptions, the fact remains that his work was the product of a life, however short, of sustained effort and not merely the outpourings of the spout of his subconscious.

Of the three biographies, only John Berryman's makes a serious attempt at solving the mystery of genius; his honesty and daring take us simultaneously closest and furthest away from the center of Crane's art. He finds in Crane "an altitude and tenacity of purpose altogether extraordinary" (3). "If Crane struck many of his contemporaries as a typically irresponsible 'genius' [the phrase is Garland's], his will strikes us

--his patience and generalship and will" (3). Here, I believe that Berryman is right on target, as he is when he locates the center of Crane's values in ". . . an idea of consideration, a practice of consideration, so little common in human beings that one alludes to it with diffidence" (26). Unfortunately, in his search for the source of this powerful will, Berryman accepts Garland's view of Crane's mind as "more largely subconscious in its workings than that of any man of my acquaintance" as well as Beer's judgement that the mistress of his mind was fear. In the chapter entitled "The Color of This Soul" Berryman finds that Crane precisely fits the specific conditions of an unusual variant of the Oedipus complex described in Freud's study, "A Special Choice of Type of Object Made by Men." In this variation of the Oedipal complex, the subject continues to live out the trauma of infancy. The mother is represented by a "sexually discredited" woman or prostitute whom the subject tries repeatedly to rescue from a father represented by an injured third party (298f). This theory suggests itself because of Crane's marriage to a former madam (Cora Taylor Stewart), his rescue of a falsely accused prostitute in New York City, and the subject of his first novel, Maggie.

The chief problem with this thesis is that Berryman isolates Crane's kindness to prostitutes from what he himself identifies as Crane's most consistent, most remarkable trait: he was kind to everyone. In a letter to Nellie Crouse, he explained:

I don't like to make wise remarks on the aspect of life but I will say that it doesn't strike me as particularly worth the trouble. The final wall of the wise man's thought however is Human Kindness of course. If the road of disappointment, grief, pessimism, is followed far enough, it will arrive there. Pessimism itself is only a little, little way and moreover it is ridiculously cheap. The cynical mind is an uneducated thing. Therefore do I strive to be as kind and as just as may be to those about me and in my meagre success at it, I find the solitary pleasure of life. (Stallman and Gilkes 99)

While he did endanger his reputation in his confrontation with the New York City police, as a war correspondent he was fired because he filed the dispatch of wounded Edward Marshall, who was working for a competitor, before his own. He twice rescued others from drowning; he financially rescued a discharged

soldier in Florida, a cowboy in New Jersey, a boy who had hoped to become a cowboy out West, and a diseased young male prostitute in the city. "The Blue Hotel" derives from Crane's attempt to break up a saloon fight in Lincoln, Nebraska. His friends were well aware of this habit of Crane's. One friend, Frank W. Noxon, in a letter to the president of Newark's Stephen Crane Association said: "One of Stephen Crane's characteristics was a haunting solicitude for the comfort and welfare of other people, especially those of narrow means. He thought about it as one thinks about an art or craft, developing a style and inventing original methods" (Stallman and Gilkes 334). In the same letter he had this to say about Crane's relations with women:

No doubt some of our acquaintances in those days as well as critics and readers since had ascribed Crane's interest in unfortunate women to another instinct than sympathy and compassion. Nobody can be sure. But knowing him pretty well and seeing him a good deal in the company of girls, toward whom he showed respect and deference, I have no difficulty in believing that when he wrote about scarlet sisters or vehemently defended one as later he

did in a New York police court, the dominant impulse was a desire to serve the helpless.

(Stallman and Gilkes 335)

In a letter to Thomas Beer, Dr. Frederic Lawrence, whose lodgings Crane had shared, agrees, "... I am amused and yet not a little disgusted at the attitude of some of Crane's old friends. The plain truth is that Crane, in spite of his devotion to realism in literature, was incurably romantic about women, and this extended even to the girl of the streets . . ." (Stallman and Gilkes 333).

There seems little need to debate Berryman's application of Freud in detail, but let us look at its application to Crane's work on one minor but significant point, the role of the Negro in Crane's fiction. For Berryman "... 'darkness' and 'sex' and 'sin' come readily to mind." The Civil War was chosen because "... the Civil War was precisely about the Negro--about the object, that is, of Crane's own (fantasied) horror, envy, fascination and inquiry" (307). "At the moments in Crane's work, first, where stabbing is in question, a Negro is always suggested with less or more directness in the context, and his latest one was openly of war," (308). This analysis is faulty on two counts. In The Red Badge Crane tried, successfully, to universalize the experience of war; Negro slavery has

nothing to do with the novel. Secondly, the Negro is not always suggested where stabbing is the question; in "The Blue Hotel: he's a white gambler, and in "The Five White Mice" and "The Duel That Was Not Fought" the knife wielders are Mexican and Spanish. Finally, darkness, sex and sin do not come readily to mind in the two stories in which Negroes feature prominently, "The Open Boat" and "The Monster."

With the exception of Daniel Hoffman, who has written the only extended study of Crane's poems, Crane scholars have rejected John Berryman's thesis. Joseph Katz simply states, ". . . every biographer, try as he might to be objective, must eventually arrive at a thesis which will be at once his strength and his weakness. Attempting to interpret his subject, he is bound in some ways to distort it. Unfortunately, Berryman's theory of Crane seems to be untenable" (Centennial 229). Edwin Cady criticizes the theory in more detail:

To take just one major point, Berryman's case for identifying Crane with the victims portrayed in Freud's observations . . . is very shaky. He plays fast and loose with the evidence. The sole example, finally, is Cora. It was not true that Helen Trent and Lily

Brandon Munroe were "sexually discredited" any more than that Crane was in love with Dora Clark, Doris Watts, or Amy Leslie, or any more than that Crane fell in love with Cora because he knew of Captain Stewart as a necessary "injured third party." There is no evidence of "an exceptional concern with prostitutes." What has happened is a juggling of evidence to make Crane prove out Freud--the method of the exegete, of the fundamentalist. (171-2)

Although this Freudian approach depends on Crane's relations with women, it is centered on speculations about the effect on Crane's art of his relationship with his parents; Hoffman's analysis of the poems rests on this theory:

Of his mother, Mr. Berryman has little to say, although she looms as a stern and forceful figure in the fantasies which, according to the psychoanalytic interpretation this critic proposes, lie at the source of Crane's creativity. With respect to the poetry, Berryman makes this valuable suggestion: "God is the brutal villain of The Black Riders, and some pieces that set this Old Testament swaggerer against an interior pitying God

(xxix, li, liii) went unnoticed. His mother's had been warring with his father's God." (65)

While there is little evidence on Crane's attitude towards his parents, what we do have contradicts this interpretation. Oddly enough, with the exception of his handling of the love poetry, Edwin Cady praises Hoffman's work while attacking the theory of Berryman on which he stands. "Much of the amateur-Freudian speculation that this or that literary invention of Crane represents revolt against his father must face the simple fact that Stephen never knew his father well. With what images of father he grew up, we shall never know exactly" (21). This interpretation of Crane's attitude toward his father is also challenged by R. W. Stallman:

Not the slightest evidence exists for the notion of hatred of the father, a kindly man without quile whom the son revered and who died when Stephen was eight years old. Busy with Methodist journalism, his parents let Stephen's sister, Agnes, run the household and attend to the boy. (Crane ix-x)

A lack of evidence need not be a deterrent; in the following passage Hoffman admits there is no justification of this theory in the biographical

information, yet he continues to assert it solely on the basis of his ability to perceive what went on in the mind of Stephen Crane:

. . . it is well to emphasize that if "his mother's had been warring with his father's God" (Berryman, 114) in Crane's thought, it was a war which neither parent nor maternal grandfather nor great-uncle recognized or fought themselves. . . . Nor is there any evidence that Dr. Crane and his wife had any serious fallings-out on theological grounds--or any other. The conflict became a conflict only in the mind of their son. (70-1)

We have seen this approach to Crane's art develop from Hamlin Garland, through Beer and Berryman to Hoffman; it is a major trend in Crane criticism which emphasizes the effect of the unconscious to the neglect of Crane as conscious artist. Thomas Gullason, who has made valuable contributions to Crane studies and yet is another critic who has succumbed to this influence, shows the extent to which this approach has been carried:

If one applied Freudian psychology to his life and art, it could be demonstrated that, like Henry Fleming, young Crane had gotten rid of

the "red sickness of battle." For the battles of the early novels were partly autobiographical. The ever recurring themes of the early novels--ended (save in The Red Badge) in mocking irony and were aimed at the destructive self; yet they purged away Crane's psychic illness, and what was left was health.

(Fiction, 82)

Besides the simplification of assuming character and author are identical, this statement, is inaccurate on both life and work. On a biographical basis there seems little reason to suppose any transition to mental health occurring at the time The Red Badge was written. In fact, even to posit Henry Fleming's cure is to simplify the definition of cowardice the novel provides.

If any additional evidence for the pervasiveness of this trend is necessary, we need only look at the third and most recent biography, where R. W. Stallman accepts without question Hamlin Garland's notion that Crane's poems were produced subconsciously and drawn off by a "spout." After describing his ride in a hansom cab with Helen Trent and quoting from his letter to her ("You have the most beautiful arms I ever saw. If I could keep your arms nothing else would count. It would not matter if there was no more world. In dreams, don't

you ever fall and fall but not be afraid of anything because somebody safe is with you?"), he concludes with this sweeping generalization, "Dreams were for Crane, throughout his life, the wellsprings of what he called his 'poetic spout' . . ." (Crane 36). Here the circumstances of the creation of the poem "Should the wide world roll away" are given along with a conclusion which ignores them. The poem did not come from a dream or in a dream. The young man takes a ride with a woman he loves, a real woman; as not much bare flesh was seen in those days, he is struck by the sight of her arms. When he returns home he composes a love letter; he does not dream the letter, he writes it. It seems safe to assume that conscious thought went into the letter writing and that even more thought went into transforming the letter into a poem.

Stallman's conclusion on creative methods brings us full circle back to Hamlin Garland, but the poems do not represent a special case; they are no more the spontaneous outpourings of the subconscious than his other literary work, which often went through several revisions and, as works in progress, were read by friends and relatives whose suggestions were occasionally accepted by the author. In order to understand Crane's character and his development as an

artist, it is necessary to recognize that indications of his ability were present in his childhood, that at a very early age he acquired emotional and intellectual self-confidence--even independence--and that not long after he decided to devote himself to a life of a professional writer.

His Early Years

Stephen, named for an ancestor who had served in the first Continental Congress and in New Jersey's own colonial assembly, was born in the Methodist parsonage at 14 Mulberry Street in Newark on November 1, 1871. Other relatives had founded Montclair, N. J. (Cranetown) and served with distinction in the Revolutionary War. It was a heritage he later spoke of with pride. He was the fourteenth child of the Reverend Jonathan Townley Crane, fifty-two, and Mary Helen Peck, forty-five; the four previous children had all died within one year of their births. Both parents devoted themselves to religious work; in addition to their pastoral duties, they both wrote on religion--he theological books, she for religious periodicals. The management of the home and the care of the youngest child was left to their daughter Agnes, fifteen at the time of Stephen's birth.

He was a sickly child, constantly afflicted with colds. Perhaps consideration for his health was one of the reasons for the family's move to the healthier climate of Port Jervis, New York. Stephen did not begin school until his eighth birthday, but he was promoted through two grades in six weeks, a sign of both his natural ability and of tutoring by Agnes at home.

Two years after the move to Port Jervis, on February 16, 1880, Reverend Crane died. Understandably, this affected the eight year old Stephen; twenty years later he remembered with anger the pain which the religious explanations of the adults had heightened rather than salved: "We tell kids that heaven is just across the gaping grave and all of that bosh and then scare them to glue with flowers and white sheets and hymns. We ought to be crucified for it! I have forgotten nothing about this, not a damned iota, not a shred" (Stallman and Gilkes, 8). The vividness of his memory, the pain undiminished by the years, and the vehemence of the lingering rage in "crucified" all focus not on the loss of his father but on the failure of a religion which produced only fear in a grieving child. Although he did not often mention his parents, he had this to say about his father: "My father was a Methodist minister, author of numerous works of

theology, and an editor of various periodicals of the church. He was a graduate of Princeton and he was a great, fine simple mind" (Stallman and Gilkes 94). "He was so simple and good that I often think he didn't know much of anything of humanity. He liked all kinds of animals and never drove a horse faster than two yards an hour even if some Christian was dying elsewhere. But it is a big job to be a presiding elder in a Methodist conference. He worked himself to death, my people thought" (Stallman and Gilkes 243). Later, much the same thing would be said about Crane who had adapted his parents' selfless devotion to religion to his own chosen profession.

. . . My mother was a very religious woman but I didn't think that she was as narrow as most of her friends or her family. . . . My brothers tell me that she got herself into trouble before I was old enough to follow the proceedings by taking care of a girl who had an accidental baby. Inopportune babies are not part of the Methodist ritual but mother was always more of a Christian than a Methodist. . . . (Stallman and Gilkes 242-3)

His mother's act of charity, brave in its defiance of social convention, is a precedent for Crane's defense

of an alleged prostitute. Instead of the Freudian interpretation that this incident revealed a compulsion to rescue a discredited mother-figure, a more obvious explanation would be that he sought to duplicate an act performed by his mother which he here deemed important enough to retell. Both refused to turn their backs when convention required that they should. In his first novel, Maggie, all turn away from the young woman guilty of sexual transgression. Crane remarked on the kindness of both parents, a trait in his own personality later noted by many. That both parents, and later his brother Townley, wrote professionally must have contributed toward his own choice of career. His distant military heritage, which helped to offset the dominance of religion in his home, no doubt influenced his choice of schools (Claverack) and was to some extent responsible for the interest in warfare shown in his writing.

By 1883 the family had settled in Asbury Park, New Jersey, where Stephen continued his schooling and engaged in his favorite activity, playing baseball:

. . . he was brilliant; the sensitive brain absorbed and recorded swiftly; he seemed to learn without effort and his memory for words was prodigious. A boy of fourteen who can use 'irascible', 'pyrotechnic', 'impartial', and

'memorial' correctly in an impromptu essay for a prize of a quarter between two hot games of baseball is not as other American boys of fourteen. He had a passion for outlandish words and even invented one, a verb 'higgle'. It appears that to higgle is to behave in the manner of a school teacher." (Beer 50)

Much is foretold in this new word. It shows not only precocity but confidence in his daring to take liberties with language; it also is an early indication of his attitude toward educators and formal education. At fourteen he also wrote his first story for which we have a manuscript. "Uncle Jake and the Bell-Handle" is significant in that it is based on a mistake in perception by an innocent, an old farmer who inadvertently rouses a whole town by ringing the fire alarm.

At this time his brother Townley was writing for the Newark Advertiser and operating a summer news agency for the New York Tribune. His mother was also active in journalism, writing articles for the Methodist papers and reporting their events at the Jersey shore for the Tribune and for the Philadelphia Press. During these years Crane went through what seems a natural adolescent development. He smoked cigarettes surreptitiously,

discovered what beer tasted like, and watched a prize fight in a barn with his friend George Wheeler while their mothers were attending a temperance lecture by Frances E. Willard. Of course, all such activities were anathema to his parents' Methodist creed, which frowned on these and other illicit activities such as dancing, card playing, baseball and the reading of novels. Marston La France, who defines Crane as a born ironist, says of his development, "It is impossible to say just when this emotional coming-of-age occurred. It apparently had occurred by 1884. . . . He accepted the inevitable and psychologically and emotionally turned to no one. The ironist was his own man by about his fourteenth year" (8).

The young Stephen did not openly revolt against these parental doctrines; considerate of his mother's feelings, he quietly moved away from her beliefs, drawn by his curiosity about life. None of the Crane children seems to have adopted the strictness of their parents' religion. Agnes gave him adventure novels to read, and his brother Will felt compelled to take him aside to counteract the preaching of an uncle. Crane later described his religious upbringing in a letter:

. . . I used to like church and prayer meetings when I was a kid but that cooled off

and when I was thirteen or about that, my brother Will told me not to believe in Hell after my uncle had been boring me about the lake of fire and the rest of the sideshows. . . . Once when I was fourteen an organ grinder on the beach at Asbury Park gave me a nice long drink out of a nice red bottle for picking up his hat for him. I felt ecstatic walking home and then I was an Emperor and some Rajahs and Baron de Blowitz all at the same time. I had been sulky all morning and now I was perfectly willing to go to a prayer meeting. . . . (Stallman and Gilkes 242)

The coincidence of the dates here is notable. Soon after his sister's death, when he was thirteen and fourteen, the time when most adolescents begin to assert themselves, Stepehen started to move away from his parents' religion and, at the same time, wrote his first two juvenile works. Although he never associated himself with any religion in later life and challenged religious fundamentalism in his poetry, he showed no animosity toward his partents, always referring to them with affection and respect even while acknowledging the distance between his beliefs and theirs. When he

praises his mother because "She was always more of a Christian than a Methodist," he also defines his own stance on religion. I concur in this with Marston La France: "The Methodism in which the area, and particularly Crane's parents, fairly marinated had seen its finest hour in a frontier environment during the first half of the century; and it was far too narrow, too anachronistic, to provide nourishment for a precocious boy growing up in the 1880's in urban Asbury Park" (4).

After spending two years and a fall semester at nearby Pennington Seminary, Crane became a student at Claverack College and Hudson River Institute in January, 1888, at the age of sixteen. Crane always spoke of his two and one half years at Claverack as one of the best times in of his life. He did better on the drill field than in the classroom and on the baseball diamond than the drill field; acquired a bad reputation for smoking and card playing; fell in love three times; and got into a fistfight, losing part of a tooth, for calling Tennyson's poetry "swill." It is not unusual for young boys to get into fights, but not many lose a tooth over Tennyson's reputation.

Almost every part of Crane's life has been widely, even wildly, romanticised, and his school years

are no exception. Edwin Cady, who wrote ably in his Stephen Crane, particularly of Crane as a Christian gentlemen, succumbs to the romantic view of Crane, accepting Garland's idea that he "sprang into life fully armed" and entitling his first chapter "The Ghost of Chatterton." He says of Crane's days at Claverack: "Orphaned, impoverished, disinherited, clear superiority denied or disregarded, he often knew drear November in his soul" (19). In fact, Crane was not an orphan at this time; his mother still lived, and there were several brothers to whom he often turned for aid and advice. While never wealthy and often later poor, he was now attending a private school, hardly impoverished. He was never disinherited, and his superiority, later recognized more widely than most men's in their lifetimes, could hardly be called "denied or disregarded" when it had yet to manifest itself. There are two letters of Crane's which shed some light on the climate of his soul during this period; the first was written to his friend Odell Hathaway on June 15, 1890:

My dear "Tough" / I thought I would enjoy writing to you today, as I am home with lots of friends, yet, longing for some of my old companions at Old Claverack. I am smoking a cigar after a 10:00 AM breakfast of roast

pigeons and gooseberries yet I wish to God I was puffing on a cigarette butt after a 7:00 AM breakfast of dried-beef and oat meal at H.R.I. (Stallman and Gilkes 6)

In 1896 Viola Allen, a classmate at Claverack, wrote to the newly-acclaimed writer; this is his response:

. . . My years at Claverack are very vivid to me. They were I believe the happiest period of my life although I was not then aware of it. Of course, you were joking when you inferred that I might not remember you, And Anna Roberts! And Eva Lacy! And Jennie Pierce! Alas, Jennie Pierce. You must remember that I was in love with her, madly, in the headlong way of seventeen. Jennie was clever. With only half an effort she made my life so very miserable.

Men usually refuse to recognize their school-boy dreams. They blush. I dont (sic). The emotion itself was probably higher, finer, than anything of my after-life, and so, often I like to think of it. I was such an ass, such a pure complete ass-it does me good to recollect it. (Stallman and Gilkes 119)

The tone of these two letters should indicate Crane's

life at this time was neither an approximation of a ghost of Chatterton nor a shadow of Young Werther.

In September, 1890, he entered Lafayette College as a mining engineering student and flunked out by the end of the first semester; he immediately enrolled at Syracuse University as a belles lettres special student but again failed out in one semester. There is no record of any conflict with his family over these failures, nor of any feelings of inadequacy or remorse on Stephen's part. It seems he felt no compulsion at all to do what was expected of him. Instead, he seems to have already realized which direction his future held, was able to make up his own mind on what was and what was not of value to him, and accept responsibility for those decisions. La France supports this evaluation: "Unless one accepts the fact that Crane was his own master by 1888 when he enrolled at Claverack, the strange tale of his flirtation with higher education will not make much sense" (8). In a letter to John Northern Hilliard written in 1896, Crane revealed his discontent with higher education:

. . . As far as myself and my own meagre success are concerned, I began the battle of life with no talent, no equipment, but with an ardent admiration and desire. I did little

work at school, but confined my abilities, such as they were, to the diamond. Not that I disliked books, but the cut-and-dried curriculum of the college did not appeal to me. Humanity was a much more interesting study. When I ought to have been at recitations I was studying faces on the street, and when I ought to have been studying my next day's lessons I was watching the trains roll in and out of the Central station. (Stallman and Gilkes 109)

While at Lafayette Crane played pool with Porter Cheney, a young civil engineer recuperating from typhoid at the home of a relative. Cheney was impressed enough by Stephen to mention him in several letters to his sister. During their games of pool, Crane expounded on literature, declaring Count Tolstoy the world's foremost writer. These conversations also reveal that Crane had read Flaubert, thinking Salamambo too long; R. L. Stevenson, whose writing he heartily disliked; and Henry James' The Reverberator. which bored him (Beer, 54-56). It is safe to assume that during his college years, and both earlier and later in his life, Crane read widely. Classmates testified to his late night reading habits, describing his appetite for print as omniverous

(Stallman, Crane 30). In spite of his anti-intellectual pose and his sensitivity to any question of literary influence on his work, Crane often pronounced opinions on other writers, revealing his familiarity with classical writers as well as European and American contemporaries. With his early commitment to a life of a literary artist, such reading could only be expected. He read early Kipling and admitted his influence on his own early tales when he repudiated that style of writing. The first of these tales set in Sullivan County was entitled "The Last of the Mohicans," revealing his familiarity with the work of J. F. Cooper. As for Mark Twain, he admired Life on the Mississippi, thought A Connecticut Yankee as "inappropriate as a drunken bride." He often praised Tolstoy as the world's greatest writer, having read War and Peace, Sebastopol and Anna Karenina. He was familiar, too, with the work of Ambrose Bierce and praised "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" highly; the works of Flaubert, Turgenev, and Zola were also known to him. Through his reading, and later because of his writing, he came to know W. D. Howells, Hamlin Garland, Harold Federic, H. G. Wells, Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

This is only a partial list; that his reading was even more extensive can easily be confirmed by examining

the list of books in his library made at the time of his death. Further evidence can be found in the many essays on the sources for Crane's stories and poems; for example, Homeric influence has been found in the structure of The Red Badge and in the opening scene of Maggie. And in Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism, Eric Solomon contends that Crane began all of his works as parodies, presupposing a wide reading knowledge that Crane has not often been credited with. In addition, Crane was interested in the theatre, writing several short plays and an article, "Some Hints for Playmakers," in which he lampooned the cliches of the contemporary stage. For a short time he even hoped to be appointed as drama critic of a Philadelphia newspaper. Consequently, a statement such as Donald Gibson's ". . . it is quite certain that he read very few books of any kind" (25), reflects only the persistence of that romantic myth of Crane as untutored, unconscious boy genius begun by Hamlin Garland.

While attending Syracuse Crane not only walked the streets and haunted the Central railroad station; his duties as a correspondent for the New York Tribune and, according to Crane, the Detroit Free Press took him to the city police courts. A Syracuse classmate describes Crane's activities at this time: "He gloried in talking

with shambling figures who lurked in the dark doorways on deserted slum streets and his love for adventure constantly kept his feet on the ill-lighted thoroughfares honeycombing the city" (Stallman, Crane 29).

Other notable incidents occurring at Syracuse were his refusal to meet the noted Christian reformer Frances Willard because he thought her "a fool" and his disagreement with a psychology professor: "'Tut tut, what does Saint Paul say, Mr. Crane?' 'I know what Saint Paul says, but I disagree with Saint Paul.'" (Berryman 21). During his single semester at Syracuse, Stephen played baseball on the varsity team, published his first story, "The King's Favor," in the University Herald, and managed an "A" in English literature. Another accomplishment of this period was the perpetration of a successful hoax, a story of great swarms of bugs so large that the grease from their crushed bodies brought a train to a halt; "Great Bugs of Onondaga" appeared on the front page of the Tribune and the Syracuse Daily Standard. (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches xiv - xvi). There remains one more accomplishment: when Stephen Crane left Syracuse, ending his academic career in failure at age nineteen, he carried the first draft of Maggie with him.

During the following summer Stephen again helped his brother in reporting the shore news of arrivals, excursions, religious meetings and lectures for the Tribune. His report of Hamlin Garland's lecture, "Howells Discussed at Avon-by-the-Sea" (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 267), impressed Garland so much that he asked to meet the author. They did meet, several times, to talk and play catch on the beach. This was a crucial meeting; Garland later helped Crane in many ways, including writing the first review of Maggie and introducing both book and author to W. D. Howells. This same summer saw young Steve fall in love with Helen Trent. Unfortunately for Crane, Miss Trent was already engaged, but this one, like Crane's other unsuccessful romances, was fortunate for readers curious about Crane's ideas. Throughout his life he often revealed his thoughts about life and art and about himself only to the women he courted. Incapable of small talk when there were so many things that needed to be said, he hoped each time to find someone with whom he could share the things of his heart. Inevitably he made himself unwelcome, he shocked, he was not "nice." When asked by Miss Trent about the appearance of Hamlin Garland, Steve replied that he looked like a "nice Jesus Christ." He said that American religion was mildewed but that

Buddhism was interesting; he thought that a Negro could be handsome. One evening when he arrived with a black eye, the result of a thrown beer bottle in a Bowery saloon where he had been sitting, she forbade him to go near the Bowery again.

She spoke until Crane's lean body reared in his chair and he exploded with, "Hully gee!" The Bowery was the only interesting place in New York. Nobody had written anything "sincere" about its people. He was going to write a book some time soon about the Bowery and it was going to be a sincere book and he must see how these people lived and what they thought. Miss Trent broke in with protests. She was, for the hour, the composite portrait of all well-bred young women who have tried to explain proper art and letters to American artists. Why must he write any such book? Who wanted to read about such people? . . . So they wrangled unhappily and Crane walked out of the house, at last, leaving the word "hypocrite" in the air. (Beer 61-62)

A Writer's Campaign

In the fall of 1891 Crane began his campaign as a professional writer in earnest. He began by living at his brother Ed's house in Lakewood, later part of Paterson, New Jersey, and made forays into the city trying to get a job with the Park Row publishers while studying the life of the Bowery and rewriting Maggie in the attic at night at Ed's house. Little is known about his activities during the crucial period from the fall of '91 to the summer of '92. He often stayed in New York City for days, presumably put up by friends; he must have been writing a great deal, judging by the amount of articles published beginning in February, but until that time he had nothing at all published. He was unable to get a job with the newspapers and had no money coming in from freelance work until then.

On December 7, after a long illness, his mother died in a Paterson hospital of a "malignant carbuncle." On March 23, Crane suffered another blow; the previous day, with a note of introduction from his brother Townley, he had brought the manuscript of Maggie to Richard Watson Gilder, editor of The Century magazine. Gilder rejected the story because he thought it "cruel" and ". . . sat pointing out excessive adjectives and slaughtered infinitives to the shy boy who finally cut

him short with an untactful question: 'You mean that the story's too honest?' Being a gentleman as well as an editor, Gilder gave his courteous little nod and 'Maggie' was carried away from him in the pocket of the grey ulster" (Beer 85-6). When it later made the rounds of the other publishers' offices, Maggie met with the same response. So Crane temporarily put it aside and concentrated on what have been termed the Sullivan County Sketches.

These stories began to appear in the Tribune on February 21; between that date and July 31, fourteen of these stories were published in the Tribune. While they have been considered as a homogeneous group, perhaps because of their single locale, they are of three different types. The largest group is made up of hunting stories in the tradition of the American tall tale, told with some degree of irony and a decided prejudice in favor of the hunted; the titles clearly indicate their subject: "Hunting Wild Hogs", "The Last Panther", "Sullivan County Bears", "The Way in Sullivan County", "Bear and Panther", and others. The second group are grotesque-comic stories taking place in the same setting but focusing on exaggerated emotions based on misapprehensions which are comically deflated at the story's end; again, the titles reflect the stories'

tenor: "Four Men in a Cave", "The Octopush", "A Ghoul's Accountant." The third group of only three stories ("The Last of the Mohicans", "Not Much of a Hero", "A Reminiscence of Indian War") are historical in setting where the others are contemporary. Each of these three debunks its subject, all are anti-heroic.

These fourteen pieces appeared with increasing frequency into the summer of '92; they then began to be supplemented by many reports from the Jersey shore and a single New York City sketch, "The Broken-Down Van." He began to have two pieces in the Tribune on the same day (May 1, July 3, July 10), and twice the Tribune published three of his pieces on the same day (July 17 and 24).

This flurry of publication--and, one imagines, meagre prosperity--lasted only to the end of the summer. It seems Crane simultaneously began to tire of the hypocrisy of Asbury Park and the empty trickery of the Sullivan County Sketches which manipulated the readers' emotions to no particular purpose other than the demonstration of the writer's skill; his news items from the shore now became increasingly, noticably, more ironic. He began on July 2, by gently mocking the religious professionalism of the ministers convening at nearby Ocean Grove. ". . . arriving in solemn

procession, with black valises in their hands and rebukes to frivolity in their eyes" (Bowers, 8:508). He soon moved on to focus his irony more sharply on both the customers and the proprietor of the resort:

The average summer guest here is a rather portly man, with a good watch-chain and a business suit of clothes, a wife and about three children. He stands in his two shoes with an American self-reliance and, playing casually with his watch-chain, looks at the world with a clear eye. He submits to the arrogant prices of some of the hotel proprietors with a calm indifference; he will pay fancy prices for things with a great unconcern. In the evening he puts on his best and takes his wife and the "girls" down to the boardwalk. He enjoys himself in a very mild way and dribbles out a lot of money under the impression that he is proceeding cheaply.

(Bowers, 8:516-17)

In the same "On The Boardwalk" Crane also singled out James A. Bradley, the founder of Asbury Park: "'Founder' Bradley has lots of sport with his ocean front and boardwalk. It amuses him and he likes it. It warms his heart to see the thousands of people tramping

over his boards, helterskeltering in his sand and diving into that ocean of the Lord's which is adjacent to the beach of James A. Bradley." (Bowers 8:518-19) These three excerpts mark the beginning of a transformation; the broad comic irony of the hunting tales has hardened, and the debunking attitude of the recently published historical pieces has now been directed at contemporary society--the professional religious reformer, the middle-class vacationer, and the entrepreneur Bradley.

While Stephen Crane was able to feel at home with the people of Hartwood and Port Jervis, with newspapermen, art and medical students in New York City, among farmers and hoboes, gamblers and prostitutes, soldiers and sea captains, cowboys and coal miners, and later even among the best English novelists of his age, Asbury Park, which he called "distinctly American," represented for him the pernicious aspects of the social order which consistently drew his ironic response. Four years later, in August of 1896, he returned to Asbury Park as a writer of reputation; the report he filed reflected his change in status, "Asbury Park As Seen By Stephen Crane."

Besides the prohibition law, there are numerous other laws to prevent people from doing those things which philosophers and

economists commonly agree work for the harm of society. Moreover, there are a number of restrictions here which are ingeniously silly and are not sanctioned by nature's plan or any of the creeds of men save those which define virtue as a physical inertia and a mental death. (Bowers, 8:653)

If Sullivan County best represents Crane at play, riding, shooting, camping, fishing, sailing, hiking; and New York City, Cuba and England best represent him at work as artist and correspondent--in these he was an active, involved participant--Asbury Park best represents Stephen Crane at odds with his place and time, a withdrawn spectator, isolated, angry, and amused. The above article ends: "The very heart of the town's life then is Asbury Avenue pavilion, and the rustle and roar of the changing throng gives the casual visitor the same feeling of isolation that comes to the heart of the lone sheep herder, who watches a regiment swing over the ridge or an express train line through the mesquite" (Bowers, 8:655).

By the end of the summer of '92 either Crane's antipathy for Asbury Park had built up to an ungovernable degree, or the incongruity of an organization of laborers coming to a middle-class resort

to march on behalf of capital overcame his former restraint; the report which he wrote caused both him and his brother to be fired. Contrary to the public reaction which followed, he did not attack the marchers; he called them "dignified" and "men who possess principles" and criticized them only for a lack of smartness in their marching. It was the Asbury Park community which drew his blunt irony. The qualities of this crowd which he found offensive were dramatically heightened in contrast with the parade of working men; the distinction between the upper middle-class and the lower had never seemed so clear, nor the distance from white collar to blue so great.

Asbury Park creates nothing. It does not make; it merely amuses. There is a factory where nightshirts are manufactured, but it is some miles from town. This is a resort of wealth and leisure, of women and considerable wine. The throng along the line of march was composed of summer gowns, lace parasols, tennis trousers, straw hats and indifferent smiles. The procession was composed of men, bronzed, slope-shouldered, uncouth and begrimed with dust. Such an assemblage of the spraddle-legged men of the

middle class, whose hands were bent and shoulders stooped from delving and constructing, had never appeared to an Asbury Park summer crowd, and the latter was vaguely amused.

The bona fide Asbury Parker is a man to whom a dollar, when held close to his eye, often shuts out any impression he may have had that other people possess rights. He is apt to consider that men and women, especially city men and women, were created to be mulcted by him. (Bowers 8:521-22)

Crane's sympathies are clear in the pair of sentences that refer to the marchers as men but identify the bystanders only as items of apparel with indifferent smiles, and his awareness of social inequality rooted in economic injustice is pronounced in the image of the Asbury Parker with his vision eclipsed by a dollar and in his choice of the crunching "mulcted." While the loss of the job hardly represented a personal crisis for him, it did cost him his primary outlet of publication. More importantly, the writing of the article represents a breakthrough, a significant change in subject and style that is also reflected in the termination of the Sullivan County sketches. This change involves a

movement toward artistic freedom, honesty of vision, a willingness to accept responsibility for that vision, and the reassurance--in the violent reaction to the article--of the power of his words.

It is also possible that Crane's desire to create a name for himself was part of his motivation in writing the parade article. Clearly this was behind "The Great Bugs of Onondaga," but the change in subject and style would indicate that something more than publicity-seeking was at work here.

Much of the publicity connected with his career was unsought or accidental, and his personal and artistic convictions always took precedence over the possible effects on his public image or the sales of his works. Often the personal cost to him far outweighed the benefits. Though some of the papers praised his actions as heroic, his reputation suffered, even among publishers and literary friends who should have known better, when he defended a chorus girl who had, this time, been unjustly accused of soliciting. From his account of the affair, it seems Crane would have done anything to get out of this but could not bring himself to turn his back on an injustice he had witnessed. After this incident the New York City police waged a campaign of persecution against Crane whenever he

returned to the city. While this incident may possibly have begun as a publicity stunt, there were sufficient opportunities for him to back out when it turned sour, but he did not do so. The second incident which brought Stephen to national headlines was "The Open Boat" episode, when the filibustering ship he was on sunk and he was for a time lost at sea and presumed dead. These two incidents did most, aside from his works, to make Stephen Crane a public figure in his time, but the first was primarily responsible for the distorted image of the man that long outlived him, and the second, with the help of his second trip to Cuba, helped to hasten his early death. Ironically, in both cases Crane was attempting to verify the impressions he had already successfully rendered in Maggie and in The Red Badge.

It is in writing of the works themselves, however, that we will uncover the relationship between his personal principle and artistic vision and the demands of publicity and commercialism. The Black Riders, the first of his books to be professionally published, gives a clear demonstration of Crane's unwillingness to compromise what he conceived as the aims of his art. This book of poetry received much attention in the reviewing press of the day; most of the criticism was negative, much of it attacking the author personally.

The amount of attention The Black Riders received is understandable; the book was clearly a provocative statement, from its flowing orchid cover and its all-capital, untitled, unpunctuated format to its unconventional style and its barbaric and blasphemous subjects. While he did approve of at least some of the physical elements of the work, Crane took little interest in this aspect of the publication; the ideas for its appearance did not originate with him. "The type, the page, the classic form of the sample suits me. It is however paragraphed wrong. There should be none. As to punctuation, any uniform method will suit me" (Stallman and Gilkes 42). The orchid cover design, with its overtones of decadence, was selected by the artist; Crane had nothing to do with it. (Stallman and Gilkes 59n). The green ink of the second edition also originated with the publisher. Although there was no question of anyone wishing to alter Crane's style before publication, Copeland and Day did ask Crane to delete some of the poems only to meet with his curt refusal:

In the first place, I should absolutely refuse to have my poems printed without many of those which you just as absolutely mark "no." It seems to me that you cut all of the ethical sense out of the book. All of the anarchy,

perhaps. It is the anarchy that I particularly insist upon. From the poems which you keep you could produce what might be termed a "nice little volume of verse by Stephen Crane," but for me there would be no satisfaction. The ones which refer to God, I believe you condemn altogether. I am obliged to have them in when my book is printed.

(Stallman and Gilkes 39-40)

The assurance and self-confidence Crane shows here is amazing when one considers that The Black Riders will be his first professionally published book. The drastically abbreviated version of The Red Badge won't appear in the newspapers for another month and the full version for over a year, and Maggie, which Crane had printed at his own expense in March 1893, had still not found a legitimate publisher.

Maggie is perhaps the best example of Crane's calculating but uncompromising campaign to establish himself as an author. Despite the fact that no publisher would touch Maggie, Crane stood by this work and, rather than abandon or modify it, personally financed its private printing in an attempt to open the doors of the publishing world that had been closed to him. While Maggie's plot fell within the conventional

moral standards--a young woman succumbs to the temptations of sex without matrimony, is abandoned by her lover, cast out by her family, sinks into prostitution and escapes through suicide--the lack of sentiment, the gritty realism, and the occasional profanity put the novel out of bounds for any reputable publisher. In fact, the name of the medical-religious printer who swindled Crane is to this day unknown. Crane used the pseudonym Johnston Smith, the stupidest name he could think of, because "They said I might be arrested" (Linson 21). Although arrest was a real possibility in those days and he might have been concerned about protecting his family from scandal and his career from jeopardy, he later revealed another reason for the deception. "You see, I was going to wait until the world was pyrotechnic about Johnston Smith's Maggie and then I was going to flop down like a trapeze performer from a wire, and coming forward with all the modest grace of a consumptive nun, say, I am he, friends" (Stallman, Crane 67).

The world's response was hardly pyrotechnic. The publishers had been right: Maggie was a financial disaster. Only one store, Brentano's would carry it and they sold only two copies. But in spite of paying for the printing of eleven hundred copies, it was not the

sales of the book on which Crane had gambled his future. He carried on a mail campaign, sending copies to editors, critics, and crusading ministers. His friend C. K. Linson, whose studio Crane shared, remembers him saying:

I sent some copies to some preachers who were maniacs for reform--not a word from one of them.

I wrote across the cover so they couldn't miss it, that if they read it, they would see its sense. I knew they'd jump at first, but I hoped they were intelligent. You'd think the book came straight from hell and they smelled the smoke. Not one of them gave me a word!

Icebergs, CK, flints!" (21-2)

He sent a copy to Hamlin Garland without revealing his identity, but Garland recognized the style and wrote to him; Garland then advised him to send a copy to W. D. Howells. Impatient and perhaps despondent at the lack of results, Crane sent this letter to W. D. Howells: "My dear Mr. Howells: I sent you a small book some weeks ago. Mr. Garland had, I believe, spoken to you of it. Having recieved (sic) no reply I must decide then that you think it a wretched thing?" (Stallman and Gilkes 16). Howells replied that he had not yet found

time to read the book, but by April 18, they had already met (Stallman and Gilkes 18). These two men would supply Crane with the leverage he needed to open the doors of the publishers. With Garland Crane developed a warm relationship. Garland wrote letters strongly recommending Crane to publishers, gave him tickets to plays, loaned him money, and fed him on occasion. In June of '93 he favorably reviewed Maggie in the Arena, giving Crane his first recognition as an author. Crane's relation with Howells was not so cordial. In his letter to Howells he asked for a job recommendation with the proper degree of humility: "However, I have humiliating misgivings that you never do such things. If so, please forget that I have asked you" (Stallman and Gilkes 17). Instead of reassuring the young writer, Howells responded by telling Crane to show the editor in question his previous letter on Maggie, adding: "Personally I know nothing of you except what you told me in our pleasant interview. But I suppose you can readily establish your respectability to Mr. Godkin" (Stallman and Gilkes 18). Although Howells' favorable reviews did much to help get Crane's career underway, that word "respectability" seems to indicate some distance between the older and the younger writer. In an interview in the Philadelphia Press on August 15,

1894, Howells praised Maggie, and on June 8, 1895, in Harper's Weekly he again praised the book; this time the praise came from the left hand. He found the novel ". . . grim . . . grimy . . . largely profane . . . All of its conscience, all of its art could not save it" (40). Howells wrote on Crane several more times, but, although he praised George's Mother, Maggie was always, for him, Crane's best work; The Red Badge, The Black Riders, and all the others were inferior works.

The effect on Crane of the success of the Maggie campaign is revealed in his letter to Lily Brandon Munroe, his most recent love, whom he had met at Asbury Park the previous summer and who had watched the mechanics' parade with him.

Well, at last, I've done something. I wrote a book. Up to the present time, I think I can say I am glad I did it. Hamlin Garland was the first to over-whelm me with all manner of extraordinary language. The book has made me a powerful friend in W. D. Howells. B. O. Flower of the "Arena" has practically offered me the benefits of his publishing company for all that I may in future write. Albert Shaw of the "Review of Reviews" wrote me congratulations this morning and to-morrow I

dine with the editor of the "Forum." (J. D. Barry)

They tell me I did a horrible thing, but they say, "its great."

"And its style," said Garland to Howells, "Egad, it has no style! Absolutely transparent! Wonderful--wonderful."

And I? I have merely thought of you and wondered if you cared that they said these things. Or wether (sic) you have forgotten?
(Stallman and Gilkes 20-21)

Crane's joy at this recognition and acceptance by such men repaid his investment in Maggie, but for the next two years, and periodically throughout his later life, he lived in extreme poverty. He lived in cheap rooming houses or in the rooms of friends; he lined his worn-out shoes with playing cards and often went without food. At times he subsisted on delicatessen potato salad. A copy of Maggie bears the author's inscription: "Miss Wortzman. This story will not edify or improve you and may not even interest you but I owe your papa \$1.30 for tobacco" (Stallman and Gilkes 15). In the fall of '93 he returned to the city from Port Jervis wearing only rubber rain boots on his feet. He borrowed money from his friends and relatives for food, but the

embarrassment of being unable to support himself at his chosen profession often kept him away from available aid. As late as November, 1895, when Elbert Hubbard organized a testimonial dinner for him at Buffalo under the auspices of his magazine, The Philistine, Crane had to borrow the suit of clothes offered by his friend Willis Brooks Hawkins. The pain of his poverty is apparent in his reply to Hawkins' kind offer: "My chest, bad luck to it, measures 35 inches--scant--and my leg is a 33--worse luck. And my foot--rot it--is seven. There! It is over. I feel as if I have told you that I am a damned horse thief" (Stallman and Gilkes 74).

An Artist's Aims

Despite the continuing financial hardship, Crane was satisfied that his campaign, his battle, was a success. The recognition of these men supplied whatever reassurance he needed in his faith in his own ability and reaffirmed the validity of his decision to change from "the clever school in literature" when he stopped writing the Sullivan County sketches and burned his Asbury Park bridges behind him at the end of the summer of '92. He described the success of this transition in

a letter to Lily Brandon Munroe in 1894:

. . . . To speak, to tell you of my success, dear, is rather more difficult. My career has been more of a battle than a journey. You know, when I left you [August, '92], I renounced the clever school in literature. It seemed to me that there must be something more in life than to sit and cudgel one's brains for clever and witty expedients. So I developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one. Later I discovered that my creed was identical with the one of Howells and Garland

If I had kept to my clever Rudyard Kipling style, the road might have been shorter but, ah, it wouldn't be the true road. The two years of fighting have been well spent. And now I am almost at the end of it. The winter fixes me firmly. We have proved too formidable for them, confound them. They used to call me "that terrible, young radical," but now they are beginning to hem and haw and smile--those very old coons who used to adopt a condescending air toward me. (Stallman and Gilkes (31-32))

The choice between two paths Crane describes as having made in the summer of '92 is basically accurate; it is, however, an oversimplified account. Crane continued throughout his career to write light works which he thought would sell. According to Willa Cather: "He gave me to understand that he led a double literary life; writing in the first place the matter that pleased himself, and doing it very slowly; in the second place any sort of stuff that would sell" (Bassan, 15). "Any sort of stuff" includes some short pieces, but it is mostly made up of the longer fiction, The Third Violet, Active Service, and The O'Ruddy. Also conflicting with his statement to Lily Brandon Munroe is the fact that his first serious work, most notably Maggie, predates the transition point he gives. In spite of these qualifications, it's clear from the change in his Asbury Park reporting, from his loyalty to Maggie, and from his insistence on the "anarchy" of The Black Riders that Crane has made a choice to define himself as an artist committed to the examination and criticism of social and moral values. He had accepted the role of artist as antagonist and critic of a society which, according to him, defined "virtue as a physical inertia and a mental death." There ought to be no misunderstanding on what Crane saw as the function of the artist and how he

understood the artist in relation to society. "Art, in the splendor of her processional toward the everlasting altars does not disclose those of her train who hobble in tatters, their mouths filled with goblin-laughter, their hands making ironical gestures toward the fat and complacent public" (Bassan, 1). The tradition of artist as nay-sayer in which Crane places himself is a strong one in American literature; one of the few direct references that we have for the sources for his ideas is a quotation that Crane copied into his notebook, the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson that he found on the wall at The Art Students' League building: "Congratulate yourselves if you have done something strange and extravagant and have broken the monotony of a decorous age." In reference to Hawthorne and Melville, Leslie Fiedler defined this attitude as "tragic Humanism":

. . . it follows that the writer's duty is to say "nay!", to deny the easy affirmations by which most men live, and to expose the blackness of life most men try deliberately to ignore. For tragic Humanists, it is the function of art not to console or sustain, much less to entertain, but to "disturb" by telling a truth which is always unwelcome.

(432)

This attitude is present throughout the entire range of Crane's serious work and can easily be seen by merely observing their various subjects. He wrote on prostitution in Maggie, and in Flowers of Asphalt, a novel which he destroyed on the advice of friends, he dealt with the subject of the homosexual prostitution of young boys. In George's Mother he focused on the twin opiates of alcohol and religion; opium, itself, was the subject of several short pieces. While The Red Badge is the least controversial of his works, he was criticized for showing cowardice in union soldiers. Three of the four works just mentioned deal with the effects of poverty, and many of his shorter pieces deal specifically with economic conditions and their consequences. Crane studied the relation between poverty and wealth and analyzed the effect in "Men In The Storm," a breadline story. In "An Experiment in Misery" he describes what it is like to live the life of a bum for a day and spend the night in a Bowery flophouse. The same point of view is found in the companion piece "An Experiment in Luxury." His anger is only thinly veiled in his article for McClure's. "In the Depths of a Coal Mine," where he confesses a "sinful glee" at hearing of coalbrokers being trapped below the surface while on a tour of their holdings. He makes the

following recommendation: "If all men who stand uselessly and for their own extraordinary profit between the miner and the consumer were annually doomed to a certain period of danger and darkness in the mines, they might at last comprehend the misery and bitterness of men who toil for existence at these hopelessly grim tasks" (Bowers, 8:607). According to C. K. Linson, Steve's friend who had been commissioned to do sketches to accompany this article, this and other parts of the original article did not appear in print:

But this never saw print. Instead it was made tamely innocuous. When Stephen read his article in type, he grunted and tossed it aside. "The birds didn't want the truth after all. Why did they send me up there then?" (69-70)

By the summer of '93 he had written the "Tommy" stories: "An Ominous Baby," "A Great Mistake," and "A Dark Brown Dog." In the first two, the underprivileged infant steals; in the last his pet is brutally killed by his drunken father. Crane's awareness of the social intent of these stories is revealed in a letter to C. K. Linson solely for the purpose of retrieving the story: "Have you finished the 'Ominous Baby' story yet: At the present time--during these labor troubles--is the best

possible time to dispose of it" (Stallman and Gilkes 23). Crane's notion of the impact of the story was shared by its publisher. When the story did appear in the Arena, this puff appeared with it:

I wish each reader of The Arena to peruse with care the vivid sketch by Stephen Crane in this issue. It is an admirable bit of work, even if viewed merely as a fine character study. But after you have perused the sketch from this point of view read it carefully as a social study. The little chap who had acquired the engine and who refused the gamin in pleasure of even playing with it for a few moments, places the toy behind him the moment there is danger. The "divine" right of property, as practically held by modern plutocracy, finds a striking expression in the involuntary action of the little aristocrat, who risks a thrashing by placing himself between the toy and danger. . . . The conscience of the nation is waking, and conscience when aroused, is more powerful than avarice. (Bowers 8:783-4)

Crane's awareness of class prejudice and economic opportunism is apparent even in his was correspondence.

When the rest of the correspondents were concentrating on the exploits of the blue-bloods in the theatrical Rough Riders, Crane wrote "Regulars Get No Glory." In "Captured Mausers For Volunteers" he accused the army of criminal negligence for sending men equipped with old-fashioned black powder to fight an enemy equipped with smokeless powder: "In war anything is justified save killing your own men through laziness or gross stupidity" (Stallman & Hagemann, War 187). The army administration is again attacked in "Memoirs of A Private," while the shameless profiteering of Havana's merchants is the subject of "The Grocer Blockade." I don't mean to suggest that Crane limited his artistic aspirations to social and economic problems; the best of his work hasn't been included in this list because its subtlety prevents such easy categorization; nevertheless, these works and the wide range of subjects included in the poetry complement rather than contradict the humanist commitment expressed in his major works.

In a letter to Willis Brooks Hawkins, Crane condemns Eastern society and clearly implies a definition of the role of the artist in his definition of culture:

. . . . I have always believed the western people to be much truer than the eastern

people. We in the east are overcome a good deal by a detestable superficial culture which I think is the real barbarism. Culture in its truest sense, I take it, is a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder. It has nothing to do with an adoration for effete jugs and old kettles. This latter is merely an amusement and we live for amusement in the east.
(Stallman and Gilkes 70-71)

In this distinction many things are revealed. It explains to some degree his dissatisfaction with contemporary higher education and with organized religion. It shows the thinking behind his abandonment of "the clever school in literature," and perhaps reveals why he preferred to call his verse "pills" rather than "poems." In another letter, this one to Nellie Crouse, he again emphasizes his humanist commitment as an artist:

Most people consider me successful. At least they seem to think so. But upon my soul I have lost all appetite for victory, as victory is defined by the mob. I will be glad if I can feel on my death-bed that my life has been just and kind according to my ability and that every particle of my ridiculous stock of

eloquence has been applied for the benefit of my kind. (Stallman and Gilkes 105)

From even a glance at his works or at his explanation to Willa Cather of the two kinds of writing he produced, it is clear he exaggerates in claiming that "every particle" of his skill is being used for the benefit of his kind; nevertheless, it should be equally clear that the works that most pleased him, whether in fiction, poetry or journalism, sought neither to entertain nor console but to disturb, to tell a truth that was unwelcome. While his criticism of society nowhere aspires to the coherence or consistency of an ideology, his beliefs were firm throughout his career and exerted a strong influence in the shaping of his work. The didacticism and presumption of certainty which accompany ideology were unacceptable to Crane; they would have violated his sense of the nature of truth and the impossibility of moral certainty. His explanation of his career as a socialist is similar to situations in several of his poems, both secular and religious. "'I was,' he told somebody later, 'a Socialist for two weeks but when a couple of Socialists assured me that I had no right to think any differently from any other socialist and then quarreled with each other about what Socialism meant, I ran away'"

(Berryman 141). Combined with his reaction to an overly sentimental age, this distaste for dogma is partially responsible for the difficulty in fixing Crane's position in his work. In a letter to John Northern Hilliard, he ruled out preaching in art:

. . . . I endeavored to express myself in the simplest and most concise way. If I failed, the fault is not mine. I have been very careful not to let any theories or pet ideas of my own creep into my work. Preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give to readers a slice out of life; and if there is any moral lesson in it, I do not try to point it out. I let the reader find it for himself. The result is more satisfactory to both the reader and myself. As Emerson said, "There should be a long logic beneath the story, but it should be kept carefully out of sight."

(Stallman and Gilkes 158-159)

Given Crane's commitment to the moral, humanist, end of art and his belief that preaching in art is fatal, it seems that his consistent use of irony, for both the edge and the distance it provides, was the only suitable style available to him. Notice, too that this is Crane's second reference to Emerson; the extent of his

influence on Crane has generally been underestimated. Crane's pattern of non-conformism is indebted to Emerson as indicated in the passage cited earlier from his notebook on breaking the monotony of a decorous age. The idea of the artist at war with society is also traceable to Emerson: "... let us enter into the state of war and wake Thor and Woden, courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts. This is to be done in our smooth times by speaking the truth. Check this lying hospitality and lying affectation" (Bradley, Beatty and Long, American 1141-42). The courage and constancy of which Emerson speaks are among the most prominent characteristics of Crane's career. In the same essay, Emerson continues to define his position, this time in the first person; if not for its pretentious tone, the speaker might easily be Crane as well as Emerson:

I will stand here for humanity and though I would make it kind, I would make it true. Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office the fact that is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever

a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of all things. He measures you and all men and all events. (Bradley, Beatty and Long, American 1136)

This centering of values not in the community nor in the inherited tradition but in the individual man, the insistence on honesty, and the contempt for smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment are all part of Crane's inheritance of Emerson. While Crane espoused no religion, his ideas on the nature of God and the nature of truth were closer to Emerson's Transcendentalism than they were to the Methodist fundamentalism of his parents. To say, as R. W. Stallman does, that "He nowhere denied that man is a fallen sinner. . . ." (Crane 5) is equivalent to observing that he nowhere denied the earth is flat. The application of both frames of reference is anachronistic.

If we compare the excerpt above from "Self Reliance" with the following passage from Crane's letter to John Northern Hilliard, the similarity of their positions is apparent:

When I was the mark for every humorist in the country I went ahead, and now, when I am the mark for only 50 per cent of the humorists of

the country, I go ahead, for I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition. . . . This aim in life struck me as being the only thing worth while. A man is sure to fail at it but there is something in the failure.

(Stallman and Gilkes 109-10)

Man is first required to depend only on "his own pair of eyes," on his individual assessment. He must be "the centre of all things." Next, he is responsible for "the quality of his personal honesty," for adhering to his vision "in the face of custom and trade and office." When Crane writes that "a man is not at all responsible for his vision," I take him to mean, rather than irresponsibility, allegiance to his vision despite "every humorist in the country."

From only what we have seen so far of Crane's ideas on the relation of culture to the individual man and on the relation of the artist to society, it should be apparent that there is reason to question an evaluation such as this one by Daniel Hoffman: "... Crane was unprepared either by native gifts or training

to deal effectively with abstract ideas, as his disinclination to speculate on the theoretical principles on which his literary practice is based suggests" (222). This kind of assessment fails to recognize Crane's intelligence, his intellectual experience, and his lifelong commitment to writing. This is a man to whom Joseph Conrad and Henry James gave their manuscripts for criticism. Hoffman echoes again Garland's idea of a mind "more largely subconscious." There is no appreciable difference between this evaluation of Crane's abilities and Garland's. "He did not understand his own processes or resources." The longevity of this evaluation is indeed miraculous. There seems no legitimate reason to posit such lack of self-awareness in a man who wrote much of his poetry on the theme of introspection, or to say that he was unaware of the workings of his own mind when at the age of twenty-two he had somehow produced the most detailed, most accurate picture of the workings of the human mind as it faced death in combat.

Success and Poverty

If it has seemed that there was no period of transition from struggling obscurity to resounding

success, the impression is not altogether incorrect. 1893 was a slow year for Crane, but the building momentum after the printing of Maggie carried him to the first stages of his success. In January of 1894 he began a sustained output of poetry, and by spring the short stories and sketches on social themes already mentioned appeared regularly in The Arena and the New York Press. Early that winter it looked as if McClure would buy The Red Badge, but he delayed until November when Crane lost patience and sold a much-shortened version to the Bachelier-Johnson Syndicate for ninety dollars. After the newspaper serial version appeared, D. Appleton & Company bought the full-length novel in December. Crane was now succeeding on three fronts; in addition to the regular publication of the short works and the sale of the novel, his poetry began to attract attention. On April 14, 1894, a selection of his poems was read at a meeting of The Uncut Leaves Society, and by August, Copeland and Day had agreed to bring out his first book of poetry, The Black Riders. His second city novel, George's Mother, was also finished by November of this year.

In 1895 Crane began to enjoy the fruits of the harvest sown in previous years and reaped in 1894. The beginning of the year saw him wading through the details

of getting his first two works through publication. From January through May he toured the Southwest, the West and Mexico as a correspondent for the Bachelier-Johnson Syndicate. On this trip he met Willa Cather and confided among other things that he hoped to find a cure for his cough in the healthier climate of the West. This journey provided him with the material for his western tales; "The Blue Hotel," "The Bride Comes To Yellow Sky," "Horses--One Dash," and "The Five White Mice" are among these. He returned to New York about the time of the publication of The Black Riders on May 11. The year ended well for Crane; Appleton brought out The Red Badge on October 5, and Heineman published it in England in November. That month Crane journeyed to Buffalo in his borrowed clothes for a raucous testimonial dinner sponsored by Elbert Hubbard and his Philistine, which had a poem of Crane's in nearly every issue that year.

The new year brought fame to an unprepared Stephen Crane; by the end of January he was so rattled by the new-found attention that he had to retreat to Hartwood. He had come to expect and had learned to accept mockery and abuse, so this joy at recognition was balanced by his fear that acclaim would blunt his purpose and cause him to lose sight of the truth. He wrote his sponsor,

W. D. Howells, about his doubts:

Dear Mr. Howells: I had just become habituated to abuse when this bit of a flurry about the red badge (sic) came upon me. I am slightly rattled and think it best to cling to Hartwood where if I choose to shout triumphant shouts none can hear me. However I have not yet elected to shout any shouts. I am mostly, afraid. Afraid that some small degree of talk will turn me ever so slightly from what I believe to be the pursuit of truth, and that my block-head will lose something of the resolution which carried me comfortably through the ridicule. (Stallman and Gilkes 106)

His fear is understandable, considering the overnight transition from ridicule to international recognition. Even in this moment of fear and elation, his sense of artistic purpose is his primary concern; he is afraid that acceptance will take the edge off his criticism. In a letter to Nellie Crouse, his most recent love, he admits to another fear, a fear of his inability to go on now that the battle with the world was over and the battle with himself had begun.

When I speak of a battle I do not mean want,

and those similar spectres. I mean myself and the inherent indolence and cowardice which is the lot of all men. I mean, also applause. Last summer I was getting very ably laughed at for a certain book called The Black Riders. When I was at my publishers yesterday I read long exerpts from English newspapers. I got an armful of letters from people who declared that The Black Riders [obviously, a mistake for The Red Badge] was--etc, etc,--and then for the first time in my life I began to be afraid, afraid that I would grow content with myself, afraid that willy-nilly I would be satisfied with the little, little things I have done. For the first time I saw the majestic forces which are arrayed against man's true success--not the world--the world is silly , changeable, any of its decisions can be reversed, but man's own colossal impulses more strong than chains, and I perceived that the fight was not going to be with the world but with myself. (Stallman and Gilkes 105)

The combination of being laughed at one minute and applauded the next gave him a maturity of perspective

that neither could have provided by itself. He later tested this recent critical acclamation by having C. K. Linson's brother submit one of his stories under his own name. It was rejected. When Crane submitted the story under his name, it was accepted, verifying for him the relative value of his name and his work. It touched his sense of irony and amused him greatly (Linson 90).

But on both counts Crane had no reason to fear. He kept on with his work; in May George's Mother and A Souvenir and A Medley were published, and Maggie was revised once more before its publication in June. He was also wrong in thinking that his battle with the world was over; the respectable world merely opened up a second front. Thomas Beer appropriately entitled his chapter on this period of Crane's life "Fame and Prejudice." His standing up for Dora Clark, confronting the corrupt New York City Police Department this year over a false accusation, put Crane on the front pages and on the harrassment list of the police who once tried to frame him for opium and later tried to arrest him for no reason as he was leaving a theatre. While it would be foolish to suppose any conspiracy existed outside of the city police, slander and gossip followed Crane wherever he now went. People who hadn't seen him would report him as having been drunk to others who had spent

the entire night with a sober Crane (Beer 357). Richard Harding Davis thrashed a loudmouth who diagnosed Crane's malaria as advanced syphilis (Beer 361). Even in England he paid the price of non-conformity; after a Christmas party at which even husbands and wives slept in separate dormitory areas, there were rumors of an orgy at his home (Cady, Crane 67). Similar incidents are recorded in his letters. In a letter to Robert Barr in May 1898, Crane sent a bitter apology to Harold Frederic:

. . . Now I owe Harold an apology for laughing when he said they would tear me in pieces the minute my back was turned. Hi, Harold! I apologize! Did you know me for a morphine eater? A man who has known me for ten years tells me that all my books are written while I am drenched with morphine. The joke is on me.
(Stallman and Gilkes 180)

Another comic yet painful incident is related in a letter he wrote from Cuba to Mrs. Bolton Chaffee:

. . . You must be careful about feeding runaway dogs. Mr. Bemis informs me that you and I are sinners and that we have flown to San Francisco. They have promoted you to the rank of Mrs. Brigadier General Chaffee.

Perhaps it is not known to you--and it has not long been known to me--that my name in New York is synonymous with mud. Give my regards to your husband and tell him the cigars made many correspondents happier. My friends will pile a mountain of lies on me but they will smoke my cigars as freely as I smoke theirs.

That is cynicism. (Stallman and Gilkes 183-4)

Despite such difficulties progress continued. The Third Violet, his long novel based on the bohemian life he shared with art students, appeared serially in McClure's syndicate from October 15 to November 15, and The Little Regiment, the first collection of his short stories, was also published in November. 1896 ended with Crane in Florida as a correspondent for the Bachelier syndicate, waiting for the opportunity to observe the insurgents who were running weapons to Cuba illegally. While he was waiting he met Cora Taylor Stewart, his only success at love. She would later follow him to Greece and live as his wife in England.

In some ways, perhaps Crane's fear about the effect of success on his work was not altogether unfounded. Most of '95 and '96 was spent on seeing earlier works through publication. The Little Regiment hardly had the effect of The Red Badge, and The Third Violet, while

commercially successful, was an artistic failure. A stiff and loveless love story which was based on Crane's life of work among art students in New York City and his life of leisure in Sullivan County, it is a subject of which his talent failed him and also an example of the wavering of purpose he had feared. There was no heart or heat in it; it was a mere piece of fluff, a relapse to "the clever school in literature."

1897 opened with the disasterous sinking of the Commodore which irreparably damaged Crane's always frail health, and further damage was done in the two months he spent reporting the war between Greece and Turkey, but the year fared better for Crane the artist than it did for Crane the man. During this year, while his health began to deteriorate, he began to re-assert himself as a writer, refining his style and striking out in new directions in a period of sustained creativity that resulted in his great short works. When the war in Greece ended in May, Crane returned not to America but to England. Aside from his brief return to cover the Spanish-American War, England was to be his home for the few short years which were left to him. Most students of Crane's life, Stallman for one, make little sense of Crane's last years in England. They lament the distractions of hospitality and wasteful expenditures

that caused him to write at a feverish pace, often solely for the money, money which never came to the amount he needed to pay already pressing debts.

To some extent Crane's choice is explained by the persecution he had been experiencing in New York; he said so much himself in a letter:

I am going to stay in England for some time. It seems that in New York, outside of the immediate circle of men who know me well, I am some kind of Simon Legree who goes around knocking women in the gutter and then walking on them. If I was a grocery boy or a hired man or a bank clerk no one would give a cuss what I did. But I am a writer so all bets are doubled. (Stallman, Omni 685)

Crane's preference, however, was probably influenced more by England's attractions than by troubles at home. He found a welcome, an acceptance, and a recognition in England that America had failed to provide. "Over here, happily, they don't treat you as if you were a dog, but give everyone as honest measure of praise or blame. There are no disgusting personalities" (Stallman and Gilkes 159). For the first and only time in his life, this young man, who had slept under the roofs of friends and relatives, had his own home, and for the first time

he could offer to others what he had earlier so often received. Who could doubt the pleasure he took in this? In England with Harold Frederic, Ford Maddox Ford, H. G. Wells, Henry James and especially with Joseph Conrad, he found a circle of friends and acquaintances who valued his abilities and shared his interests as no others had. Who could be surprised that a man would not wish to leave a circle such as this? His English country life combined the outdoor pleasures of Sullivan County with the intellectual promise that New York City had never quite fulfilled. He found there a climate of artistic, moral, and intellectual freedom that was as yet unavailable in the States. His old friend C. K. Linson said just this in a letter to Thomas Beer:

As to his going to England, I do know that he went there because the "atmosphere" suited him, the publishers friendly or better, which all meant that his work was valued at its worth, and this fellowship and appreciation was meat and drink to him. . . . He wasn't happy in New York and he was happy in England--voila tout. Why not? With Conrad and Robert Barr and all the rest, and his horse and house. . . . (Stallman and Gilkes 327)

Although the writing of "The Open Boat," which Crane had finished by February before he left for England in March, indicates a rebirth of the artist in Crane, it wasn't until the fall of 1897 that he showed a sustained revival of confidence and creativity. In a period of approximately six months, he turned out his most well-known short works. By September he had finished "The Monster;" "The Bride Comes To Yellow Sky" was written during September or October, and "Death and the Child" was done by December of that year. By February of 1898 "The Blue Hotel" was also finished. The pleasure he took in this new work and in the praise he was receiving for "The Open Boat" resulted in a new sense of confidence. These pleasures, a new maturity, and a sense of security about himself and his work are shared with his brother in a letter written October 29, 1897:

. . . . All my friends come here say it ["The Bride"] is my very best thing. I am so delighted when I am told by competent people that I have made an advance. You know they said over here in England that The Open Boat was my best thing. . . . Now I want you to promise to never pay any attention to it [abuse in the newspapers], even in your

thought. It is too immaterial and foolish. Your little brother's neither braggart or a silent egotist but he knows that he is going on steadily to make his simple little place and he cant be stopped, he cant even be retarded. He is coming.

Sometimes I think you and old Ted worry about me and you may well worry! I have managed my success like a fool and a child but then it is difficult to succeed gracefully at 23. However I am learning every day. I am slowly becoming a man. (Stallman and Gilkes 146-7)

I have read this letter many times and I am always impressed by the blend of candor, confidence and humility it reveals.

Another reason for Crane's happiness was his new-found friendship with Joseph Conrad; they met for the first time that month. They felt an immediate spiritual kinship, as if each offered the other the perfect reader for whom he had always been searching. Conrad recounts their meeting in the introduction he wrote for Beer's biography:

. . . sincethe title of the work [The Red Badge] had been pronounced for the first time,

feeling I must do something to show I had read it, I said shyly: "I like your General." He knew at once what I was alluding to but said not a word. Nothing could have been more tramp-like than our silent pacing, till, after we had left Hyde Park Corner behind us, Crane uttered with his quiet earnestness, the words: "I like your young man--I can just see him." Nothing could have been more characteristic of the depth of our three-hour old intimacy that that each of us should have selected for praise the merest by-the-way vignette of a minor character. (Beer 11-12)

These two helped each other in many ways. They visited each other often, sometimes working in the same room. Conrad, himself struggling, several times secured money for Crane, giving his own future work as security for the loans. Crane tried to boost Conrad by recommending his work to literary friends and publishers. The last letter Crane wrote before his death asked Sanford Bennet as a "last favor" to pull wires to help secure a place for Conrad on the Civil List (Stallman and Gilkes 283-4). They also read each other's work; in the following letter Conrad reveals the esteem in which he held Crane's friendship and his critical appreciation. The

letter responds to Crane's praise after reading the proofsheets of The Nigger of "The Narcissus" in November.

My dear Crane, / I must write to you before I write a single word for a living to-day. I was anxious to know what you would think of the end. If I've hit you with the death of Jimmy I don't care if I don't hit another man. . . . When I feel depressed about it I say to myself "Crane likes the damned thing"-- and am greatly consoled. What your appreciation is to me I renounce to explain. The world looks different to me now, since our long powwow. It was good. The memory of it is good There's no doubt about breaking a stone. But there's doubt, fear--a black horror, in every page one writes. You at any rate will understand and therefore I write to you as though we had been born together before the beginning of things. (Stallman and Gilkes 151)

But problems soon began to cast shadows on such pleasures. By the end of this month Cora was writing to Henry Sanford Bennet asking him not to make a proposed visit because Stephen had been unable to work due to the demands of hospitality. She was unsuccessful because

within the week Stephen had to flee to a London hotel to finish "Death and the Child." He was desperate to get the work out because of persistent difficulties in getting money from his American publishers. A lawsuit blocked his royalties from The Red Badge, and because he owed McClure money, they had first claim on his work; they were quick to claim but slow to use. He explained these difficulties in the letter to his brother quoted above: "In the three working months I have earned close to 2000 dollars but the sum actually paid in to me has been only L20, 17s 3d--about 120 dollars. In consequence I have had to borrow and feel very miserable indeed" (Stallman and Gilkes 146). It is worth noting that these financial complaints appear in the same letter as his unmitigated self-assurance. At this time, although he feels the pressures of his debts, he is confident that he can meet the challenge. His correspondence with his agent, Paul Revere Reynolds, charts his increasing vacillations between confidence and despair over his monetary burdens. In October he is a confident general arranging his forces for the battle, issuing Reynolds his orders of the day (Stallman and Gilkes 144-46), but by December he writes to Reynolds, "For heaven's sake raise me all the money you can and cable it, cable it between Xmas and New Year's"

(Stallman and Gilkes 157). The nature of his problem is clear; freelance writing, even when the writer has a reputation and is hard at work turning out an abundance of quality work, is slow to pay. In the first of these letters, written in October, McClure already has "The Monster," but Crane is unable to get him to release the story until January; still, he has seen no money. He reveals his anger and frustration in the letter of January 14:

In all the months I have been in England I have never received a cent from America which has not been borrowed. Just read that over twice! . . . My English expenses have chased me to the wall. Even now I am waiting for you to cable me my share of the Monster money and if there is a fluke I am lost. (Stallman and Gilkes 168)

Nearly a month later, on February 7, he again writes Reynolds; the problem of money remains, but he seems to have recovered his composure.

. . . . And if it hadn't been for your handsome management of the Harpers I would have been stumped absolutely. As you can see, I am buckling down and turning out stuff like a man. If you hold your fine gait it will

only be a short time before we are throwing out our chests.

However, now that I am in it, I must beat it and I feel that with your help the affair will not be too serious. I will bombard you with stuff. Then, if you sell Harper's "The Blue Hotel," cable the money instantly. I have big matters to attend to this month. Get me through this and I am prepared to smile.

(Stallman and Gilkes 172)

But Reynolds was unable to sell "The Blue Hotel" until April; by that time Crane had already decided to leave England to cover the Spanish-American War. There is no way of knowing the reasons behind this decision. He might have thought that he could cut his living expenses by leaving home and stripping himself of constant houseguests and, at the same time, secure a more steady income working as a war correspondent. He might have been merely running away from his debts, or perhaps his curiosity about warfare was still unsatisfied. His abrupt departure for the Cuban war is entirely within Crane's pattern of sudden leave-takings, but his attempt at volunteering for service in the U.S. Navy, when he had already been hired by the World, is more difficult to explain. It is not likely he was acting from a

sudden burst of patriotism, although this remains a possibility. Another explanation, in light of subsequent events, is his awareness of the tuberculosis that was already killing him.

It is impossible to tell when he learned of his illness, but when he did report for enlistment he was rejected as physically unfit. As the military has never been known to be particularly choosy about the condition of its recruits during wartime, it is safe to assume that his condition was quite serious, with the disease sufficiently advanced to be noticed in a cursory pre-induction physical. We do not know whether this came as a surprise to Crane, merely confirmed his suspicions, or if he had already seen a doctor in England and came to join up hoping to substitute a quick death in battle for a slow death in bed. In two separate incidents in Cuba, he deliberately exposed himself to heavy enemy fire for no apparent reason. Was he an abnormal young man living out a suicidal compulsion? Was it that because he knew of his illness, he no longer felt any worry about his safety? Was he making a conscious choice of a quick death over a slow but certain one? There is simply no way to resolve this question with any certainty, but we do know that he went out of his way that summer to visit a famous lung specialist, Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau,

at Lake Saranac, New York, because we have the Doctor's response to a letter of inquiry sent by Cora.

Dear Madam / Your husband had a slight evidence of activity in the trouble in his lungs when he came back here this summer but it was not serious and he has improved steadily I understand since he came. I have only examined him once but he looked very well and told me he was much better last time I saw him. (Stallman and Gilkes 184)

His reply tells us several things. Not only was Crane concerned about his health at this time, but Cora was already aware of his condition and somehow knew enough to write to Dr. Trudeau. Although critics have accepted this letter as an accurate statement of Crane's condition, there are several reasons for questioning its meaning. Its phrasing is vague, if not mysterious. The doctor says Crane "has improved steadily since he came," but says he has examined Crane only once, so on what does he base this steady improvement? He also says that Crane told him that he was better, an odd method of diagnosis. Subsequent events make the doctor's prognosis somewhat suspect. Does the letter indicate an error on the part of the specialist, or does it reflect an agreement between patient and physician that the

patient's family, that everyone, be kept in the dark on the extent of his illness? Does the letter, in fact, verify the reality it denies? The facts seem to support this interpretation. How could a specialist fail to recognize a disease that a Navy doctor found serious enough to deny enlistment? Richard Harding Davis told Thomas Beer that when Crane returned to New York from Cuba he was coughing badly and spitting blood. That he tried to keep his illness hidden from Cora is substantiated by a letter quoted by John Berryman; when he was back in England, a tactless friend mentioned his health in Cora's presence and Crane sent this note to the offender:

Please have the kindness to keep your mouth shut about my health in front of Mrs. Crane hereafter. She can do nothing for me and I am too old to be nursed. It is all up with me but I will not have her scared. For some funny woman's reason, she likes me. Mind this. (Beer 248)

It seems there was a mutual, perhaps unspoken, agreement between them to ignore his illness.

It is not clear what Crane's intention was, but it is possible that his illness was responsible for his mysterious disappearance in Cuba in September and

November. He kept in touch with his agent, but he did not collect letters from Cora and his family, although he did wire his brother William for money. This incident is difficult to explain; his treatment of his wife seems heartless. Not only was she frantic about his welfare, she was left alone in England to fend off creditors who wanted to cut off her credit for food and repossess the furniture from under her. This behavior is remarkable in a man who displayed such consistent kindness and consideration throughout his life. Perhaps he expected to die in Cuba, sparing her the agony of standing by helplessly at his slow and painful death? Perhaps he hoped to nurse himself back to health in sunny Havana? Perhaps he hoped that, with no interruptions or distractions, he could feverishly write them out of debt? We have no way of telling. We do know that he was writing. He turned out stories, articles, and poems at a rapid pace. He wrote a series of love poems, "Intrigue" and finished Active Service, his second long novel and another failure. "The Price of Harness" also dates from this period.

In November he came out of hiding and returned to New York; in January, 1899 he returned to England, Cora, and debt. Just before the end of the year he collapsed from massive hemorrhaging in his lungs; he lingered for

months and died on June 5, 1900, at the age of twenty-eight. During 1899 Active Service and his second book of verse, War Is Kind, were published. In his last year he was working in four areas: Whilomville stories, war tales, tales of the West, and a historical romance, The O'Ruddy. Most of this work was inferior to his earlier efforts, but this is not surprising when one considers the conditions under which he labored; he was hounded by creditors, suffered recurring bouts of Cuban fever, and was probably stoically masking the pain of the disease which riddled his body.

Critics who speculate that his failure to take precautions about his health brought on an early death fail to recognize the extent of his illness. Although tuberculosis was successfully arrested by rest cures at sanatoriums situated in healthy climates, the cellular disruption from which Crane suffered--perhaps cancer and not tuberculosis--was not limited to his lungs and was simultaneously eating away his digestive system in a way that no known treatment could arrest or cure. These two, with the addition of the recurring fever he had acquired in Cuba, drained away his strength as they drained away his life. While rest helped slow the tuberculosis in his lungs, it did nothing to arrest the disease in his intestines. In a letter to James A.

Pinker, Crane's new agent, Cora mentions these difficulties, "Mr. Crane was moved downstairs yesterday. And will be carried out in the sunshine today. The Abscess keeps him back a little as it is so painful but the danger from hemorrhage is quite over" (Stallman and Gilkes 277). The next day, April 25, 1900, she wrote to his friend H. G. Wells, showing more frankness with a friend than with the agent, whom she wished to convince of Crane's health in order to keep him at work, for their lives depended on him.

. . . . The lung trouble seems over! The doctor today, after an examination, said that the right lung was entirely unaffected. The trouble is that this dreadful abscess which seems to open from time to time in the bowels--or rectum, makes him suffer the most awful agony. And it takes away his strength in an alarming fashion. The abscess seems to have upset the bowels too. So he is very weak. Then the fever comes for an hour or two each day. (Stallman and Gilkes 278)

The false optimism displayed by Cora and the doctor was not shared by Crane. Numerous, expensive specialists were brought in, but none, as far as we know, was able to even diagnose the seriousness of the disease, much

less do anything to arrest its course.

It is futile to speculate what further literary accomplishments Crane might have achieved had he not died at such an early age, but considering the growth he had shown from Maggie to "The Monster," the stylistic development from The Red Badge to "The Open Boat," or even the development from the early poems to a late masterpiece like "War is kind" or "A man adrift on a slim spar," there seems to be no reason to conclude, as R. W. Stallman does, that: . . . his death at twenty-eight resulted in no loss to literature. He had exhausted his genius" (Stallman, Omni xxiii). Although he argues with Garland, Stallman's assessment is practically identical to Garland's illogical hindsight, "He was too brilliant, too fickle, too erratic to last" (Gullason, Career 106). Stallman also says, "He produced too much, he kept repeating himself, and he never developed" (Omni xxiv), I am not sure by what standard Crane can be judged as having produced too much. I take "he never developed" as a redundancy for "he kept repeating himself" and respond to both by asking the reader to recall the variety in subject and style found in both Crane's fiction and poetry.

To explain Crane's death, Stallman relies on the Poe myth of Crane held by Garland, as have other

contemporaries of Crane and many critics since, despite the vast difference in their characters and the character of their works. According to this approach, Crane did not suffer from a killing disease but from terminal romanticism: "What killed Crane . . . was his own will to burn himself out, his own Byronic cravings to make his body a testing ground for all the sensations of life" (Stallman, Omni xxiii). Considering Crane's efforts to separate his poetic work from the romantic tradition, calling them "pills" or "lines" instead of "poems," one can imagine a wry smile crossing his face if he were to hear of this equation to Byron. Amy Lowell's explanation depends on another romantic misconception of Crane, the Chatterton myth, the boy who died of a broken heart and self-administered poison. In her words the twenty-eight year old man who died died of tuberculosis and perhaps cancer was, "A boy, sprituallly killed by neglect" (Follett 6: xxiv). Nauseated by these romantic excesses, A. J. Liebling somewhat overreacted in his article, "The Dollars Damned Him," when he decided that Crane was killed by financial worries. "He died, unwillingly, of the cause most common among American middle-class males--anxiety about money" (Bassan, 18). But this is hardly an improvement; it merely substitutes a twentieth century

romanticism for one of an earlier vintage.

The evaluations of Crane's ability and the circumstances of his death cited in the two preceding paragraphs all share a certain amount of romanticization and condescension. Byronic urges, spiritual neglect, and financial anxieties all provide a certain satisfactory sensation which tuberculosis and/or cancer cannot provide. There is an element of condescension often present in evaluations of Crane. Sometimes it is tender and solicitous; occasionally it carries tones of disappointment in judging both man and career. There is, as I hope to have shown, a continuing myth of Crane for which I find neither a reflection in his work nor a justification among the events of his life, a myth at odds with Crane the artist and Crane the man. In the chapters which follow we will see how the critical evaluations of Crane's work have been affected by this myth, a myth which simultaneously elevates Crane to the pantheon of Romantic martyrs and allows the reader/critic to assume a position of moral and intellectual superiority.

This myth began with Garland's reminiscence of Crane as a mind "more largely subconscious in its workings than that of any man of my acquaintance." To some extent the myth continues in each of the biographies.

It is heard in Beer's ". . . the mistress of this boy's mind is fear." In Berryman it is contained primarily in the Freudian analysis of "The Color of This Soul." In Stallman the myth appears more frequently; his assessments of Crane's life given above are typical.

The portrait of Crane drawn in this chapter is not intended to be complete but merely a counterpoint to a trend prominent in Crane studies. In rebuttal to ". . . it is quite certain that he read very few books" and ". . . did not know a single poet when he wrote The Black Riders," I recall a youth who called Tennyson's poetry "swill" and remember a young man who failed out of Syracuse University with an "A" in English literature. Instead of a sort of child prodigy, unlettered, unread and unaware, I propose a man who was raised in a family of readers and professional writers, who chose his career early and devoted the strength of his life to developing his craft. I find Crane to be a man of independent thought and strong ethical conviction, willing to pay the price exacted for non-conformity by the Victorian America of his time. Daniel Hoffman writes: "Although Crane lived only five more years after The Black Riders appeared, those years were crammed with dissolute, libidinous, even criminal incidents . . ." (28). But I see a man of notable

kindness whose only connection with the law was testifying in New York on behalf of a falsely-accused prostitute and being admonished by a Nebraska judge for disrupting a fistfight. Instead of a child of Methodism driven by guilt in his pursuit of sin, my emphasis is on a humanist who places man at the center and holds him responsible for his own life and that of others.

Chapter Two: The Poetry

In his evaluation of Stephen Crane, H. G. Wells wrote, "In style, in method, and in all that is distinctly not found in his books, he is sharply defined, the expression in literary art of certain enormous repudiations" (Gullason, Career 136). Of all Crane's repudiations, those that are most strikingly enormous involve the form of poetry. He not only rejects the traditional structures of poetry and the ornamental use of poetic diction but abandons rhyme and meter altogether. Crane possessed a strong distaste for the conventions of poetry; for him, the very word had sunk into disrepute. In one letter to Nellie Crouse he wrote, "I am sorry that you did not find the 'two poems'--mind you, I never call them poems myself. . . ." (Stallman and Gilkes 96). In another letter to her he revealed, "I was very properly enraged at the word 'poet' [being applied to himself] which continually reminds me of long hair and seems to be a most detestable form of insult . . ." (Stallman and Gilkes 85).

Considering his attitude, two questions come to mind. What are the causes for this vehement reaction to poetry? Why did he proceed to write and publish two

books of poetry? While Crane provides no specific answer to the first question, there are several assumptions we can make on why he found "poet" to be "a most detestable form of insult." His mention of "long hair" is the first clue, revealing a form of reverse snobbery with connotations of effeteness and affectation. To his mind, apparently, these "poets" were not likely to be found on a baseball diamond, in a coal mine, in a Bowery saloon or on a battlefield. Crane would agree with Shelly that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world but, I suspect, would accuse them of abandoning their responsibilities. By permitting the "witty expedients" of form and style to take precedence over the pursuit of truth, a vehicle for deepening our understanding of life had become a form of light entertainment, a distraction from life. Although there is no record of his opinion of contemporary poets, Crane expressed his disgust at the quality of contemporary popular drama in Maggie and in his article "Some Hints For Play-makers" (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 25). In general, I believe he associated the conventions of poetry with the social and religious conventions of his age, condemning both for separating men while claiming to bring them together and for ignoring the unpleasant problems of the real world.

Some insight might be gained if we can read Crane's opinions on social form as a metaphor for poetic form. In a letter to Nellie Crouse he describes a reading of his poems ("things") at Sherry's:

On two or three occasions I had some things read at Sherry's and later by chance met people who had been there. I distinctly remember some compliments paid me very graciously and confidently by a woman. Nothing so completely and serenely stupid have I ever witnessed. And the absolutely false tongue of her prattled away for ten minutes in more lies than are usually heard at one time. Of course it was nothing to me if she liked my stuff and it was nothing to her. She was merely Being (sic) because she indifferently thought it to be correct at that moment, but how those old cats can stand up and lie until there is no breath left in them. Now, they think that is form, mind you, but, good heavens, it isn't. They think that a mere show of complacent idiocy is all that is necessary to a queen of society. Form really is truth, simplicity; when people surround it with falsity, interpret it as meaning: "lies.

. . ." (Stallman and Gilkes 115-16)

Although Crane refers to social form, his statement "Form really is truth, simplicity . . ." seems to apply equally to his reactions to the conventions of verse form. Unfortunately, we have no clear statement to explain Crane's animosity toward poetry, but he is more helpful in trying to find an answer as to why he wrote poetry at all:

I suppose I ought to be thankful to "The Red Badge" but I am much fonder of my little book of poems, "The Black Riders." The reason, perhaps, is that it was a more ambitious effort. My aim was to comprehend in it the thoughts I have had about life in general, while "The Red Badge" is a mere episode in life, an amplification. (Stallman and Gilkes 79)

This chapter will focus on Crane's poems primarily as a means of understanding Crane's thoughts "about life in general." Consequently, questions of literary influences upon Crane and influence of Crane's work on subsequent poets will be omitted. Poetic style and technique will receive only secondary consideration, and while Crane's best poems are featured, many of his inferior poems are included as well for the contribution

they bring to our understanding of Crane's thought. Although there is some understandable overlapping, I have divided the consideration of Crane's poetry into four sections following these introductory remarks: "Introspection and The Search for Truth;" "God and Religion;" "A Humanist Ethic;" "Crane's Worldview, 'a place of blackness.'"

The significance of the poetry in understanding Crane's work has been repeated and reemphasized by the critics who have seriously considered it. Daniel Hoffman writes:

The poems, therefore, are particularly useful to the critic who wishes to understand Crane's sensibility. In his verse Crane defines or implies his essential convictions about man's relations to God, to nature, to women, and to his fellow-man. These convictions are the assumptions on which his fictions are based.

(20)

But Hoffman believes the source of all Crane's poetry is his obsession with sin. ". . . we will trace in Crane's verse the themes of sensual life, ("the wave of hair") and of war. As in the poems discussed in the present chapter, these too are concerned primarily--obsessively--with Sin" (82). It is his contention that

Crane inherited this obsession from his parents, both active Methodists, and from his great-uncle, the Reverend Jesse Peck. Crane was given a book. What Must I Do To Be Saved?, written by this uncle, and Hoffman uses this book as his source for Crane's ideas. "It is almost as though Crane had taken What Must I Do To Be Saved? as his text, and proceeded to write commentaries on what seemed to him the monstrosity and inhumanity of the creed of his mother's family" (65). I find, however, that his work cannot be contained in a frame of reference this narrow; he looks toward the future not the past and is more of a modernist than a Methodist. One cannot but be sceptical of a theory which limits an artist's vision to a book that he might have read when he was ten years old. Hoffman's The Poetry of Stephen Crane, the only extended work on Crane's poetry, presents the author of the poems in terms that seem to have little or nothing in common with the author of the prose works. His interpretation of Crane--". . . his verse reflects more closely than do his stories the religious and sexual conflicts which are intrinsic to the power of his major work"--is not reconcilable with the bulk of Crane's work (ix). The essential difference between his analysis and mine is that Hoffman believes that all of Crane's poetry derives from his rebellion

against the religion of his family and I believe his poems on god and religion can best be understood as a manifestation of his attitudes toward society and the individual and his understanding of human psychology and the nature of truth. Hoffman finds his key to Crane's art in an obsession with sin and salvation, and I find mine in his commitment to the improvement of the human condition. The former defines an artist whose sources are private, whose goals are idiosyncratic; the latter defines as artist whose sources are public, whose goals are social. It is the second who chose to attack those conventional attitudes and institutions which he considered detrimental to the welfare of his fellow-man. It is this Stephen Crane who wrote: "I will be glad if I can feel on my deathbed that . . . every particle of my ability has been applied for the benefit of my kind." In his excellent book on Crane, Marston La France begins his chapter on the poetry, "The Ironist's Moral Norm," by dismissing Hoffman: "Hence, if one approaches the poems without a commitment to any of these three critical assumptions [that Crane was "after all" a Christian, that Berryman's application of Freud is valid, that Crane was a naturalist], one's reading will not agree with Hoffman's" (130). Although La France disputes Hoffman's interpretations of the poems, he

concur on the poems' importance to an understanding of Crane's work:

The poems present the moral norm which controls this ironic pattern in his fiction. It should follow, therefore, that any critique of Crane's fiction which ignores the poetry is likely to be inadequate; any conclusions about his fiction which run contrary to the values set forth in the poems are likely to be wrong.

(131)

The poems do, indeed, present the ironist's moral norm and, for the most part, his analysis of Crane's convictions are accurate. But there is a significant difference in our respective points of departure and in the interpretation of the basis and scope of Crane's ideas. La France follows Hoffman's organization, reversing only the priority of god and nature: "Crane's convictions about man's relations to God, to women, and to his fellow man arise more or less as corollaries to his view of man's relation to nature" (139). I believe that to derive full value from the poems, to fully comprehend Crane's work as a whole--his aesthetic as well as his moral norm--the necessary starting point must be his view of man's capacity for knowledge and the nature of truth itself. Both his aesthetic and moral

convictions spring from an epistemology that is clearly relativistic.

Let us examine one of Crane's simpler poems as a point of reference for these three views:

To the maiden
The sea was blue meadow
Alive with little froth-people
Singing.

To the sailor, wrecked,
The sea was dead grey walls
Superlative in vacancy
Upon which nevertheless at fateful time
Was written

The grim hatred of nature. (Katz, Poems 84)¹

For La France this poem is "A more subtle illustration of the same human failing . . . when two illusory views of a morally neutral externality are contrasted. . . ." (133). "The sailor's illusion match the maiden's" (134). It seems, however, that the narrator's voice in this poem contains no sense of criticism or condemnation, no sense of "illusion" or of "failing."

¹

All subsequent citations of Crane's poems will be from this edition.

The two points of view are not illusions; they are projections. The subjective nature of the viewer determines the nature of the object viewed. This is indicated in the structure of the poem by the separation of it into two stanzas, each beginning "To the. . . ." The placement and punctuation of "wrecked" further qualify the sailor's point of view; presumably, based on his profession, he has previously held another view of the sea. La France observes, "The wrecked sailor, like Melville's Pip, is unhappily alone in an immensity superlative in vacancy, but in this superlative vacancy there can be no grim hatred towards him" (134). The sailor is a sailor and not a mad-boy: Crane, as La France otherwise recognizes, is not Melville. Nature for Crane is merely a backdrop, the scenery where man enacts his life's struggle. It is neither agent, principal, nor pasteboard mask. The key word in the poem is "written." If the "grim hatred of nature" is written on the waves, it is not written by the narrator of these two viewpoints, nor is it written, as it would be for Melville, by the hand of an inscrutable deity; it is written by the sailor. The hatred is not in nature but in the sailor and is no illusion. This reading is reinforced by the phrasing of the last line. "The grim hatred of nature" contains the possibility which

"nature's grim hatred" would deny. To the argument that there is a progression from the first to second stanza, that the sailor's vision is superior, I would respond that each sees only a reflection of self. The sailor sees his own death in the "vacancy," so the beauty and grace of the sea are dead to him. In other circumstances his experience would provide knowledge and understanding superior to the maiden's, but his desperate situation has narrowed his perspective. When placing Crane in the humanist tradition, La France mentions Wallace Stevens, but more pertinent, specific parallels come to mind on the subjectivity of perception: "The Snow Man's" mind of winter or from "The Idea of Order at Key West:"

. . . . And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker.

(Poems 54)

For Crane there are as many ways to look at the sea as there are ways to look at a blackbird, each revealing little about the nature of oceans or of birds.

Hoffman, failing to distinguish between Crane and Melville, includes "To a Maiden" in ". . . a group of poems in which the Blustering God wears as his mask the visible forms of Nature" (90). His interpretation shows

the extent to which Crane's work has been forced to fit a "religious and sexual conflicts" thesis; however, Crane's title for the poem further supports the interpretation I have proposed:

The poem quoted about is titled "The Sea-- Point of View" in a holograph list of magazine acceptances of his verse. The first point of view, that of Nature as beautiful and implicitly beneficent, Crane attributes to a sensibility not only feminine but virginal: to one inexperienced in what, as the next chapter will show us was for him the exquisite sin and supreme source of terror in life. Only those innocent of the mysterious terror of sin can be so innocent as not to know the terror of being abhorred by the elements in which we live. (Hoffman 91)

In the previous chapter I placed Crane in the category coined by Leslie Fiedler to define Hawthorne and Melville, tragic humanist; however, there are significant differences when we compare Crane's philosophical presuppositions with those of Melville and Hawthorne. Fiedler writes:

Among the assumptions of Melville and Hawthorne are the following: that the world

of appearance is at once real and a mask through we can dimly perceive more ultimate forces at work; that Nature is inscrutable, perhaps basically hostile to man, but certainly in some sense alien; that in man and Nature alike, there is a "diabolical" element, a "mystery of iniquity"; that it is impossible to know fully either God or ourselves, and that our only protection from destructive self-deceit is the pressure and presence of others; that to be alone is, therefore, to be lost; that evil is real, and that the thinking man breaks his heart trying to solve its compatability with the existence of a good God. . . . (432)

For Crane there are no "more ultimate forces at work." Man is on earth alone: "God lay dead in heaven" (Katz, Poems 71). Only the interior god of the individual conscience is alive and real, the institutionalized god of organized religion exists only as a force in society. For Crane the world of appearance is real, but it is no longer a mask; it is a mirror. Nature is certainly alien to man. but not inscrutable because there is now nothing to be read in her countenance; she reveals nothing but what man's imagination projects upon her, as

in "To a maiden." Man's understanding of reality is relative and conditional. It is doubly dependent--on the imagination of the perceiver and on the given situation which both reflects and influences that imagination. The Swede in "The Blue Hotel" begins with dime-novel notions of the West which are then magnified by his fears and intensified by his isolation (essentially the same pattern is used in The Red Badge of Courage). It is his imagination which determines his reality, which, as self-fulfilling prophecy, leads him to his death. In an often quoted passage from the same story, the reverse is the case; the situation clearly influences, perhaps determines, the point of view, a statement of the human condition.

We picture the world as thick with conquering and elate humanity, but here , with the bugles of the tempest pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smitten, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The conceit of man was explained by the storm to be the very engine of life. (Katz, The Blue Hotel 25)

This view of man's existence, while consistent with Crane's idea of life as war and world as wasteland, must be seen in context; it is "explained by the storm." The author's emphasis on the qualifying, conditional, even determining, "here" and "then" is as essential an element in this description as the "To" is in "To a maiden."

Crane recognizes the diabolical element, "the mystery of iniquity," but his own god, the inner voice of conscience, is knowable and, consequently, so is man. However, knowledge for him is always momentary and elusive; as man constantly changes, there is no room for "ultimate." Crane would agree that our only protection from destructive self-deceit is the pressure and presence of others. Brotherhood is as important a value in Crane's work as it is in Melville's. But for Crane the negative value of communal pressure was equally, if not more, apparent. The group may sustain the individual, but it can just as easily crush or smother him. Destructive self-deceit, vanity, rampant egotism are the primary sins in Crane's credo, but the thoughtless opinions of the mass of men, the received social and moral conventions of the community, are themselves the strongest and most pervasive form of self-deceit. If the individual is lost without society

(The Red Badge, "The Blue Hotel"), he is as lost within it (Maggie, George's Mother, The Monster). Evil was certainly real for Crane, but he looks no further than man for his explanation for any possibility of change. The moral conventions of organized religion and the deity they represent hold only a negative value for him. Inflexible, institutionalized values only thwart the development of individual conscience and responsibility. True social, humanist commitment can only be attained by the man who dares to stand alone, who has the courage to see with his own pair of eyes. For Crane, the individual man is always at the center.

Introspection and The Search for Truth

Many of Crane's poems involve the search for truth. Some of these take the form of the interior search of introspection and follow the traditional quest:

The wayfarer
 Perceiving the pathway to truth
 Was struck with astonishment.
 It was thickly grown with weeds.
 "Ha," he said,

(NO STANZA BREAK)

"I see that none has passed here

In a long time."

Later he saw that each weed

Was a singular knife.

"Well," he mumbled at last,

"Doubtless there are other roads." (94)

As a result of his quest, the wayfarer learns something about himself and something of the nature of truth when his expectations are disappointed. When he sees that "none has passed here in a long time," that the path has become weed-choked with disuse, he feels his own self-worth begin to swell. With the recognition of the knives comes the realization that he is not unique in his search and that he, like others before him, lacks the courage to face the knives of truth. Ironically, his failure due to cowardice in the search for truth is, itself, a painful truth. His decision to seek another road is doubly ironic in its rationalization. He rationalizes away the new knowledge of his cowardice and also rationalizes away the easily available awareness of his brotherhood with previous seekers. He cannot face the pain he would suffer in the deflation of his ego still swollen with the condescending "Ha." This poem shares with the others a pattern of a solitary seeker of truth who reaches his goal only to find his expectations

thwarted; truth is painful, dangerous, even lethal. The following poem reaffirms the solitary nature of the search and the courage required of the seeker:

There were many who went in huddled
procession,

They knew not whither;

But, at any rate, success or calamity
Would attend all in equality.

There was one who sought a new road.

He went into direful thickets,

And ultimately he died thus, alone;

But they said he had courage. (19)

The placement and punctuation of "alone" again stress this requirement in the search for truth. This rejection of community, convention and tradition in the search for knowledge is omnipresent in the poems. While the new roads and direful thickets reproduce less effectively the image of the previous poem, the "huddled procession" is sufficiently vague to include both religious and intellectual orthodoxy--both equally suspect to Crane's mind.

These two poems are typical of the narrative fable form most often used by Crane and serve into indicate the strengths and weaknesses of this form. Although they are of approximately the same length and, for the

most part, employ the same diction, "The Wayfarer" is clearly superior. The second poem is mere flat statement of the author's opinion, more prose than poem, but "The Wayfarer" is richer in its ironic reverberations on the rationalization and egotism of this seeker of truth. The second poem offers only the voice of the narrator and proceeds predictably to the narrative's conclusion without offering any insight into the seeker's thought. The narrator states the point of view the reader is expected to accept. "The Wayfarer" alternates the narrative voice with the comments of the wayfarer. It gives the last word to the wayfarer and requires an intellectual and emotional response from the reader not demanded by the other poem. In "There were many who went in huddled procession" the flat diction is unrelieved; in "The Wayfarer" the predominately flat diction serves to accentuate the sharp turn built upon the phrase "singular knife."

In the following poem, society's representative in this search, the prophet, the lean ascetic of ancient times, has now become fat and complacent:

When the prophet, a complacent fat man,
 Arrived at the mountain-top
 He cried: "Woe to my knowledge!

(NO STANZA BREAK)

I intended to see good white lands
And bad black lands-
But the scene is grey." (103)

Again knowledge is the destination of an arduous journey, and the seeker's expectations are realized only negatively. Doubt replaces the expected reaffirmation of moral certainty. The cry "Woe to my knowledge!" and the statement "I intended to see." distinguish the false seeker of truth and place the prophet in this category along with the wayfarer.

In both poems a change in physical point of view brings about a change in intellectual or moral point of view. What were weeds at a distance become knives on closer inspection, and, as a result, solitary bravery becomes communal cowardice. What were from a close perspective good white lands and bad black lands become, from a distant vantage point, a morally indeterminate grey.

Three of the four poems we have considered thus far involve the idea of perspective and point of view, both as structure and, at least in part, as subject of the poem. The narrator assumes a physical point of view which is distant from and/or elevated above the events described. The progression in these narrative fables is from far to near. The seeker gets closer to the object

of his inquiry as the narrator gets closer to his subject. As either or both of these movements take place, the emotional distance between reader and subject decreases. The wayfarer is a stick figure until he first gloats, then rationalizes as he moves closer to the pathway. Consider the dynamics of this simple but effective poem:

I stood upon a high place,
And saw, below, many devils
Running, leaping,
And carousing in sin.
One looked up, grinning,
And said: "Comrade! Brother!" (11)

The point of view of the first person narrator is given double emphasis: "stood upon a high place" and "saw, below." The superior physical position corresponds to the superior moral position of "devils." When the devil looks up, not just smiling but grinning, his words leap up from the pit to confront the narrator. At the same time, the reader is abruptly shaken from the morally superior point of view Crane has set for him into the recognition of his kinship with the narrator-devil. In this sense the poem is almost a miniature analogue of the structure of "The Blue Hotel."

To dispute the evaluation of Crane as an artist

who could not sustain a coherent world-view, Max Westbrook offers his theory of two voices in Crane's work:

. . . the conclusion has been that Crane's world is arbitrary, unrealized. Crane's readers, however, have failed to distinguish two quite different voices in the poems. The voice of perspective, with reasonable consistency, is affirmed; the voice of arrogance, without exception, is mocked.

(Gullason, Career 296-7)

This limited approach, while useful, is open to criticism on two grounds. There is a coherent standard of values in Crane's work, and without a doubt there is an opposition of the voice of arrogance to the voice of perspective in many of the poems. However, "arrogance" defines the attitude consistently attacked by Crane more accurately than "perspective" does its alternative; perhaps "relativity" would be better because these two voices are part of the more inclusive theme of relative perspective. The other problem is that in a poem like "To a maiden" there are two voices, but neither can be characterized as arrogance or perspective; affirmation and denial are also absent in this poem.

"A man saw a ball of gold in the sky" reveals additional

difficulties with the two voices. In this poem the movement of the seeker and the resulting alteration of his understanding parallel that of the prophet above, but here two aspects have been changed: the moral dimension has been removed, and one more stage of development has been added--"the strange part." To further emphasize the relativity of perception, the seeker is brought back down from the heights; the parable becomes paradoxical.

A man saw a ball of gold in the sky;
He climbed for it,
And eventually he achieved it--
It was clay.

Now this is the strange part:

When the man went to the earth
And looked again,

Lo, there was the ball of gold.

Now this is the strange part:

It was a ball of gold.

Ay, by the heavens, it was a ball of gold.

(37)

Westbrook applies his theory of voices in this way:

The poem has been said [he refers to Hoffman,
pp. 201-2] to mean that man's belief in
ultimate values is a mockery, an

interpretation which requires that the last line be taken ironically,. The tone of the poem, however, is objective, calm. It is characterized by that perspective Crane associates with an awareness of the elusive nature of truth. Thus a more satisfactory paraphrase is suggested: the value of the ball of gold exists, but it must be seen in perspective--obliquely, from a distance--or else be distorted. It cannot be climbed for in the sky any more than it can be chased to the horizon; man cannot get his hands on a truth which is symbolic. (Gullason, Career 299-300)

Both Westbrook and Hoffman read this poem symbolically. For Hoffman gold symbolizes ultimate value and clay, mockery; for Westbrook, gold is "a truth which is symbolic" clay the distortion of that truth. While the poem is about both value and truth, these symbolic readings distort the poem in the same way that R. W. Stallman distorts The Red Badge of Courage by reading the 'red sun pasted like a wafer' as a symbol of Jesus Christ.

The value of the gold is not "distorted" by perspective; it becomes, it is, something else. Like

the sea, the weeds, and the moral landscape of the previous poems, this ball is equally gold and clay; that is the strange part. When we see one thing from two different points of view, we see two different things, both equally real. Consequently, the poem affirms the idea that truth is elusive and conditional but does not state that truth is symbolic. Gold has the value assigned to it by the society of man; for practical purposes it is inferior in value to clay. Perhaps because this seeker's goal is external and socially-defined, he fails to discover a sense of accomplishment with his achievement. In a letter to Nellie Crouse, Crane distinguished between "man's true success" and false success--victory "as defined by the mob" (Stallman and Gilkes 105).

The pattern in the above poems contains a solitary seeker after truth; he experiences danger, difficulty, and disappointment; nevertheless, this experience provides him with some new awareness. This poem follows that pattern, it is Crane's clearest epistemological statement:

"Truth," said a traveller,
 "Is a rock, a mighty fortress;
 Often have I been to it,

(NO STANZA BREAK)

Even to its highest tower,
From whence the world looks black."

"Truth," said a traveller,
Is a breath, a wind,
A shadow, a phantom;
Long have I pursued it,
But never have I touched
The hem of its garment."

And I believed the second traveller;
For truth was to me
A breath, a wind,
A shadow, a phantom,
And never had I touched
The hem of its garment (30)

The aggressive certainty of the first stanza, the "mighty fortress" with its "highest tower," describes a goal that is consistently condemned and attacked in Crane's work. It is this coercive and reductive tendency that set him at odds with organized religion, and with the traditions of the community. This is the voice of arrogance Westbrook speaks of. Unlike "To the maiden" where two conflicting views of reality are presented without the intrusion of the narrator's point

of view, here, the narrator intercedes in the third stanza and, based on his own experience, settles the argument. The concept of truth put forth in the second and third stanzas, however, allows for the two views of reality given in "To the maiden" which the first stanza would deny.

In this letter to John Northern Hilliard Crane gives a most explicit statement of his artistic credo:

When I was the mark for every humorist in the country I went ahead, and now, when I am the mark for only 50 per cent of the humorists of the country, I go ahead, for I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition. There is a sublime egotism in talking of honesty. I, however, do not say that I am honest. I merely say that I am as nearly honest as a weak mental machinery will allow. This aim in life struck me as being the only thing worth while. A man is sure to fail at it, but there is something in the failure. (Stallman and Gilkes 109-10)

In ". . . I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes . . ." Crane reveals that his aesthetic, his understanding of artistic vision, is consistent with his concept of truth. The relativism of perception expressed here is identical with that expressed in the poems above. Even the sentiment in the last lines of this passage parallels the feeling at the end of "There were many who went in huddled procession." That man is "born into the world with," and is "not at all responsible for," his vision constitutes Crane's given. It is his only determinism, what might be called a "perceptual determinism" as opposed to the philosophical determinism of naturalism. Questions of perception are central to Crane's work, and recognition of the individuality of this vision is, therefore, crucial in understanding his work. A man fails in his humanity when he fails to use and to trust "his own pair of eyes" and, instead, through indolence, force of habit, cowardice in the face of social pressure or fear of the unknown relies on the eyes of others, on the traditional, conventional point of view. This is the definition of courage found in "There were many who went in huddled procession." It is the definition of social pressure and individual responsibility found in "Think as I think."

"Think as I think," said a man,
"Or you are abominably wicked,
You are a toad."

And after I had thought of it,
I said: "I will, then, be a toad." (50)

This poem is almost a paraphrase of Emerson's dictum: "Who so would be a man, must be a non-conformist." Crane's transformation of "man" into "toad" reveals his awareness of both the coercive force behind conformity and the price required of the non-conformist. Like the narrator here, Crane consistently chose to accept the price demanded for his unconventional ideas. This is what is meant when Crane speaks of man's responsibility to keep close to this personal honesty as a "supreme ambition." Having located Crane's central value here, the logic is apparent behind his two cardinal sins: the outer-motivated personal dishonesty of the hypocrite, the false seeker in "When the prophet," and the inner-motivated personal dishonesty of the rationalizer, as in "The wayfarer." But the greatest threat and the strongest temptation lie elsewhere. Because he centers his values in the individual man, in his vision and in his conscience, because of his rejection of community and tradition, the persistent danger is in the inflated

value of the individual--in selfishness, in vanity and, most importantly for Crane, in egotism. It is in dynamics of egotism that the center of Crane's work can be found. His balance of this "sublime egotism" against "a weak mental machinery" defines the tension or dramatic conflict in his work. The Red Badge is a prime example, from the ironic jab at hypocrisy in the title to his use of imagination and rationalization as the central action. Henry Fleming's fight is not with the Confederate army but with himself. Crane defined life as a battle, but this battle is not the external battle with nature and the forces of environment of the naturalists; it is another sort of battle:

When I speak of battle I do not mean want and those similar spectres. I mean myself and the inherent indolence and cowardice which is the lot of all men. . . . For the first time I saw the majestic forces which are arrayed against man's true success-not the world-the world is silly, changeable, any of it's (sic) decisions can be reversed-but man's own colossal impulses more strong than chains, and I perceived that the fight was not going to be with the world but with myself. (Stallman and Gilkes 105)

The day after he wrote this letter to Nellie Crouse, Crane wrote a letter of thanks to Dr. A. L. Mitchell for his appreciation of Crane's work. "I did not bend under the three hills of ridicule which were once upon my shoulders but I don't know that I am strong enough to withstand the kind things that are now sometimes said to me. I have a strong desire to sit down and look at myself." (Katz, Poems frontispiece) In his poems as in his life, the search for truth often took the form of introspection; the knowledge sought by the narrator is self-knowledge. We can begin with poem forty-four of The Black Riders:

I was in the darkness
 I could not see my words
 Nor the wishes of my heart.
 Then suddenly there was a great light--

"Let me into the darkness again." (47)

Our narrator, like the complacent prophet, is not exactly delighted with his new-found knowledge. Perhaps his desire for certainty is also disappointed by an ambiguous blend of good and evil. Here Crane uses "dark" and "light" to signify ignorance and knowledge, rather than the meanings of sin and grace of the religious context. "I could not see my words" makes it

clear where Crane's interest lies.

In the following poem, Crane again deals with the mixed blessings of introspection:

Mystic shadow, bending near me,
 Who art thou?
 Whence come ye?
 And--tell me--is it fair
 Or is the truth bitter as eaten fire?
 Tell me!
 Fear not that I should quaver,
 For I dare--I dare.
 Then, tell me! (9)

This time the cries of the presumptuous seeker go unheeded. Truth is described here as "bitter as eaten fire." To know oneself is not an easy task; it is a desperate ordeal. The frenzied speech of the narrator bears a striking similarity to the plea of the Earth Spirit in Goethe's Faust. Crane's most anthologised poem is perhaps the best example of his attitude toward introspection:

In the desert
 I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
 Who, squatting upon the ground
 Held his heart in his hands,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

And ate of it.
 I said; "Is it good, friend?"
 "It is bitter--bitter," he answered:
 "But I like it
 Because it is bitter,
 And because it is my heart." (5)

This poem is powerful and unnerving; it is typical of Crane's better work. There seems to be something in the poem which points a finger at the reader. Joseph Conrad described this effect in Crane's work in a letter to Edward Garnett:

He is the master of his reader to the very last line--then--apparently for no reason at all--he seems to let go his hold. It is as if he had gripped you with greased fingers. His grip is strong but while you feel the pressure on your flesh you slip out from his hand--much to your own surprise. (Stallman and Gilkes 156)

There is an obvious connection between the bitter heart in this poem and the line from the previous poem, "or is the truth bitter as eaten fire?" Crane has answered the question and intensified his image by changing the bitter fire into the bitter flesh of the heart. The creature is described as performing an act of self-

cannibalism, a perfect image for introspection. This poem shocks the reader in several stages. The first is that this naked beast has hands and talks; it is a man, like the reader. The second and third shocks are the eating of the heart and the surprising pleasure in the eating, but the most unnerving aspect of all is the unruffled attitude of the narrator who shows no surprise or distaste at this spectacle and calmly discourses with the munching beast. He asks for no explanations but only inquires if the heart is good; the act itself is accepted without question. There is no criticism of the act implied, and no surprise or argument or even commentary on the revelation of the heart's bitter taste or in the pleasure found in its eating. After all, eating out one's heart is not so original a metaphor, and turning inward for sustenance is not an unusual act for this writer.

Let us now look briefly at Daniel Hoffman's analysis of this poem:

This poem gathers into itself several of Crane's most important themes: rebellion against the wicked God, the kinship of the fallen man in his sin, and the insistence upon a human fate--though it be damnation--rather than transcendent beatitudes that follow

superhuman renunciation. (61)

Although many of Crane's poems are on religious subjects and there is some cause for confusion over his religious convictions, there appears to be nothing in this poem which calls for the application of a religious frame of reference. There is no hint here of sin, man's fall, rebellion, God or damnation, much less of "transcendent beatitudes" or "superhuman renunciation." In those poems specifically religious in subject, such ideas are categorically rejected.

God and Religion

The confusion over Crane's religious and moral convictions is not surprising. He is a writer who can begin a poem with the line "God lay dead in Heaven" or give us an undeniably strong and clear anti-religious poem such as:

You tell me this is God?

I tell you this is a printed list,

A burning candle and an ass. (91)

And yet in another poem in which blades of grass stand before God in judgment, all full of self-praise except for one who confesses ignorance of any good deeds, he

writes:

Then God in all His splendor

Arose from His throne.

"Oh, best little blade of grass!" He said.

(20)

To reconcile the apparent contradiction here, it is necessary to recognize that there are three ways in which religion is used in the poetry. First, Crane uses Christian terms, images, and situations as any writer uses cultural tradition and literary convention. Gods, devils, angels, spirits, prophets, sages, and sins appear in his poems as a shorthand of moral values. To teach a lesson of humility, as in the poem above, he relies on such conventional figures, but he no more believed in a god of thrones and splendor than he believed blades of grass had the power of speech. The second use of religion is in poems like "You tell me this is God?" which confront the beliefs of orthodox Christians by argument or attack. This use of religion is often combined with the third use, those poems which gave Crane's own convictions. These last two in combination clearly show that Crane is in no sense of the word an orthodox Christian believer. In all three varieties of expression, it is apparent that Crane's interest in religion is not theological but social,

moral and philosophical; his argument is with the social evils resulting from contemporary moral conventions.

Crane had some difficulty over these religious poems with the publishers of his first book of verse, The Black Riders and Other Lines:

It seems to me that you cut all of the ethical sense out of the book. All of the anarchy, perhaps. It is the anarchy which I particularly insist upon. From the poems which you keep you could produce "a nice little volume of verse by Stephen Crane," but for me there would be no satisfaction. The ones which refer to God I believe you condemn altogether. I am obliged to have them in when my book is printed. (Stallman and Gilkes 40)

In this letter Crane makes this connection between his "ethical sense" and his poems on God. Together they form an essential part of his poetry and of his thought. In his use of the word "anarchy" we must understand Crane in the role of polemicist. He is not acting on behalf of a social theory but re-acting to the American Victorian mentality and the Genteel Tradition -- "a nice little volume of verse." He is not so much opposed to order as to the imposition of an inflexible and unforgiving order. He is not interested in God as an

object of worship but as an idea that influences and controls the lives of men. His concern with religion is contained within a larger sphere of interest, perhaps best defined by the "abominably wicked" in the poem "Think as I think."

Crane's first poem in which God is mentioned is number six in The Black Riders, a parable about the creation of the world:

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully
 With infinite skills of an all-master
 Made He the hull and the sails.
 Held He the rudder
 Ready for adjustment.
 Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
 Then--at fateful time--a wrong called,
 And God turned, heeding.
 Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped
 slyly,
 Making cunning, noiseless travel down the
 ways.
 So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the
 seas
 Going ridiculous voyages,
 Making quaint progress,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Turning as with serious purpose

Before stupid winds.

There were many in the sky

Who laughed at this thing. (8)

The poem begins with the conventions of world-as-ship and god as the all-master, but these seem to function primarily to set up a definition of human existence as free from divine control and "forever rudderless." The purpose of the conventional images in the first five lines is indicated in the way Crane neglects the explanation of the crucial transition from divine control to anarchy, giving it a mere three lines and providing only the ambiguous "a wrong called" by way of explanation. Although god is given as a fallible, easily-distracted deity with no power over his creation, Crane is more interested in judging the current state of man; it is a judgment of the world as ridiculous and quaint. The error of the world is that it does not recognize its true condition. There is no guiding hand; it is "turning as with serious purpose before stupid winds." The world erroneously believes it has a purpose, and it acts in accordance with its belief in that illusion. This is Crane's broadest criticism of religion: it is an illusion which prevents men from acting accurately with respect to reality. He expressed

a similar idea in the short story "Death and the Child."

. . . moving the world through the strength of their arms and getting their heads knocked together, in the name of God, the king, or the stock exchange--immortal, dreaming, hopeless asses who surrender their reason to the care of some shining puppet, and persuade some toy to carry their lives in his purse. (Gullason, Short Stories 401)

Here Crane explicitly equates his attitude toward God with his attitude toward the king and the stock exchange. All three are social institutions, "shining puppets," to which men surrender their reason. This failure to accept responsibility for one's own life and death is Crane's primary objection to religion. For him, as in the passage above, it is a form of existential cowardice. On the same basis he rejects moral conventions because they set limits for acceptable behavior and take over the function of the individual's conscience--"his own pair of eyes." In addition, the purported goal of religious and social conventions is to promote good and suppress evil, but Crane saw that these conventions, when applied to real life, had just the opposite effect. Goodness was cultivated by abstaining

from any contact with morally contaminated persons, thereby denying aid to those who needed it most. It was simply a denial of common humanity.

The idea of god as a "shining puppet" appears in the second poem on god in The Black Riders, number twelve:

"And the sins of the fathers shall be visited
upon the
heads of the children, even unto the third and
fourth
generation of them that hate me."

Well, then, I hate Thee, unrighteous picture;
Wicked image, I hate Thee;
So, strike with Thy vengeance
The heads of those little men
Who come blindly.

It will be a brave thing. (14)

In the previous poem Crane mimicked the diction of the Old Testament, here he quotes directly and gives his response in a separate stanza. God is described twice in this poem: "unrighteous picture" and "wicked image." Crane's argument is not with the kind of man god created but with the kind of god man has created. The object of his hatred is not the divine person of Judeo-Christian

theology but the motivating concept that defines and determines the actions of men toward other men. His target is a society where clear-cut distinctions and moral certitudes permit sinless, perfect men to judge and damn forever their brothers and their brothers' children. Crane saw his artistic purpose as the improvement of the human condition; although he wrote about the Bowery, coal mines and government negligence in war, his province, in all his work, was the workings of the human mind. He worked as a gadfly to the American Victorian mind, attacking the intellectual conditions that caused men pain instead of the physical conditions.

Crane gives us an example of how deeply he hated those who would legislate the morals and aesthetics (his sister-in-law's hat) of the community in one of his letters:

There is a feminine mule up here who has roused all of the blood thirst in me and I don't know where it will end. She has no more brain than a pig and all she does is to sit in the kitchen and grunt. But even when she grunts something dies howling. It may be a girl's reputation or a political party or the Baptist Church but it stops in its tracks and

dies. Sunday I took a 13 year old child out driving in a buggy. Monday this mule addresses me in front of the barber's shop and says, "You was drivin' Frances out yesterday" and grunted. At once all present knew that Frances and I should be hanged on twin gallows for red sins. No man is strong enough to attack this mummy because she is a nice woman. She looks like a dried bean and she has no sense, but she is a nice woman. Right now she is aiming all her artillery at Cornelia's new hat. I have been deprived by heaven of any knowledge of hats but it seems to be a very kindly hat with some blue flowers on one side and a ribbon on the other. But we rustle in terror because this maggot goes to and fro grunting about it. If this woman lived on Hester Street some son or brother of a hat would go bulging up to her and say "Ah, wot deh hell!" and she would have no teeth anymore, right there. . . . But she is a nice woman and all her views of all things belong on the tables of Moses. No man has the power to contradict her. We are all cowards anyhow. (Stallman and Gilkes 42-3)

His three repetitions of "She is a nice woman." show his rancor at this Victorian concept of moral quality and help illuminate his use of the phrase "a nice little volume of verse" in his letter to his publisher. In the final lines the letter confirms the ideas on hypocrisy, moral cowardice, and courage given in the poems. It also contains an explanation of Crane's fascination with the Bowery and with characters outside of the "nice" world; they, too, rejected the concept of the rule of "nice."

Crane continues to develop the idea of God as a product of human projection. The worship of god again appears as the idolatry of a man-made object, another shining puppet:

I stood upon a highway,
 And, behold, there came
 Many strange peddlers.
 To me each one made gestures,
 Holding forth little images, saying:
 "This is my pattern of God.
 Now this is the God I prefer."

But I said: "Hence!"
 Leave me with mine own

[NO STANZA BREAK]

And take yours away;

I can't buy of your patterns of God.

The little gods you may rightly prefer." (36)

Here the argument is not with God but with Crane's fellowmen who wish to impress their images of God upon the narrator. Crane is objecting to the use of religion as a means of inducing conformity. It is the complaint of a man of sincere moral convictions against pressure to conform to the rigid moral conventions of the Nineteenth century. The reaction to the "strange peddlers" is part of a pattern of an individual struggling against another individual, a group of men, or a god who seeks to impose a definition of reality upon him. The poem "'Think as I think,' said a man." contains the same situation as this poem, but, although it is not explicitly religious, the non-conformist is labelled "abominably wicked."

The next three poems taken together give Crane's own concept of the deity. All three are based on a comparison of two gods: a public god of repression and brutality and an individual, interior god of understanding and compassion. They reveal the influence of Emerson and provide the best case for Max Westbrook's theory of two voices in Crane's poetry. The first presents these two gods through their voices:

The livid lightnings flashed in the clouds;
The leaden thunders crashed.
A worshipper raised his arm.
"Hearken! Hearken! The voice of God!

"Not so," said a man,
"The voice of God whispers in the heart
So softly
That the soul pauses,
Making no noise,
And strives for these melodies,
Distant, sighing, like the faintest breath
And all the being is still to hear." (41)

Here, again, Crane uses the two-stanza structure to present the argument. The first stanza carries over the idea of primitive idolatry from the other poems, describing an exterior god whose voice takes the form of violent demonstrations which can be perceived easily and unequivocally by many men. The interior god of the second stanza is not so easily discerned; only by effort and attention can his voice be heard. Notice, too, that the protagonist of the first is called a worshipper, while the second contains a man. This technique appeared earlier, in his Asbury Park parade report, when

he referred to the marchers as men and the vacationers as items of apparel. In the next poem these two voices present themselves:

A man went before a strange god--
 The god of many men, sadly wise.
 And the deity thundered loudly,
 Fat with rage, and puffing
 "Kneel, mortal, and cringe and grovel and do
 homage
 To my particularly sublime majesty."

The man fled.

Then the man went to another god,--
 The god of his inner thoughts.
 And this one looked at him
 With soft eyes
 Lit with infinite comprehension,
 And said: "My poor child!" (55)

Here the contrast between the two figures is most clear: the god of many men and the god of his inner thoughts. The former demands obedience through fear and the latter gives compassion and understanding. Crane juxtaposes the external god of religious convention and institutionalized morality with an interior god of individual moral conscience. In the following poem the

image of two gods is used again; this time the narrator replies to the exterior god and makes his choice.

I

Blustering god,
Stamping across the sky,
With loud swagger,
I fear you not.
No, though from your highest heaven
you plunge your spear at my heart,
I fear you not.
No, not if the blow
Is as the lightning blasting a tree,
I fear you not, puffing braggart.

II

If thou can see into my heart
That I fear thee not,
Thou wilt see why I fear thee not,
And why it is right.
So threaten not, thou, with thy bloody spears,
Else thy sublime ears shall hear curses.

III

Withal, there is one whom I fear;

[NO STANZA BREAK]

I fear to see grief upon that face.
 Perchance, friend, he is not your god;
 If so, spit upon him.
 By it you will do no profanity.
 But I--
 Ah, sooner would I die

Than see tears in those eyes of my soul. (57)

Again we have the two gods; this time in a slightly more prosaic rendition. The exterior god blusters, stamps, and swaggers but fails to secure worship through fear. The interior god succeeds where the other deity fails; mere tears in his eyes produce more fear in the narrator than all the thunder and lightning. The concept of divinity put forth here, especially in the last two lines, is further evidence of the relativism at the center of Crane's work. The definition of divinity as "those eyes of my soul" is remarkably close to Crane's definition of his artistic vision: "I understand that a man is born into this world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for the quality of his personal honesty."

Like the other poems already considered on god and religion, this one does not represent Crane at his best.

The two or three stanzas that form these poems are mere succeeding parts of the demonstration of the poet's argument. In his better poems, Crane can produce marvelous effects with the simplest of phrases, for example, "God is cold" or "War is kind." But, here, the archaic diction of "thou" and "thy," "perchance" and "withal" produces a stiff and unnatural effect. The reader is left unmoved by either the spear and lightning or the "tears in those eyes of my soul." Instead of combining the familiar words of informal diction into surprising and provocative phrases as he does in his better poems, here Crane uses a more formal diction in combinations that are all too familiar. The style is too prosaic for good poetry and too archly poetic for good prose. There is neither grace nor richness in these lines.

Crane's dispute with organized religion, aside from the fact that it was organized, and that it held to a totally different morality, springs from these two points: that it denied the primacy of the individual's own pair of eyes and that, most often, it was personally dishonest. The first caused him to write poems like "You tell me this is God?" which ridiculed the institutionalization of faith and worship:

Two or three angels
 came near to the earth.
 They saw a fat church.
 Little streams of people
 Came and went in continually
 And the angels were puzzled
 To know why the people went thus,
 And why they stayed so long within. (34)

"Two or three angels" recalls "There were many who went in huddled procession," but here the reference is explicitly religious. The distinction is made between spirit and form, the laws of ritual which are incomprehensible to the angel. The second led him to attack the clergy for hypocrisy and for failure to recognize the common humanity of sinners. In the following poem an upstanding member of the community, a preacher, perhaps, is unable to help a little child because he is afraid he will jeopardize his position and draw the censure of the community:

With eye and gesture
 You say you are holy.
 I say you lie;
 For I did see you
 Draw away your coats

[NO STANZA BREAK]

From the sin upon the hands
Of a little child.

Liar! (61)

Crane did not limit this theme to his poetry. We find the same incident related in prose in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets:

Suddenly she came upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of buttons reached from his chin to his knees. The girl had heard of the grace of god and she decided to approach this man.

His beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kind-heartedness. His eyes shone good will.

But as the girl timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side-step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving? (Gullason, Novels 147)

This stout, chubby-faced gentlemen in his silk hat recalls two other instances (the fat church, the fat prophet) in which signs of material prosperity were linked to a concern for respectability and appearances at the expense of truth and honest spirituality.

Buttoned up from chin to knees, his literal restraint is an apt metaphor for his conduct. Besides describing an involuntary, reflex action--bad enough given the circumstances--"convulsive" adds the connotation of sickness. The description of this gentleman and the last few lines about saving her soul are Crane's dramatization of the note he most often inscribed in gift copies of the 1893 edition of Maggie; more correctly, the inscription is an abstraction of this incident, which is of little importance to the novel's plot but altogether representative of the "environment" it depicts:

It is inevitable that you will be greatly shocked by this book but continue please with all possible courage to the end. For it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people. (Stallman and Gilkes 14,49)

Because of the notions of propriety and respectability rooted in the moral certitudes of religion regarding saint and sinner, saved and dammed, the primacy of the

individual conscience is abrogated; compassion--the human kindness Crane referred to as "the solitary pleasure of life"--is denied, and, most importantly, any sense of common humanity is destroyed.

A Humanist Ethic

Despite his reliance on the familiar vocabulary and traditional imagery of religion, Crane's adherence to the Western humanist tradition and his own belief in a relativist epistemology preclude his acceptance of the Christian theology and social practice of his time. When we apply his definition of culture, "a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder," to the traditional moral frame of reference portrayed in his poems, Crane's objection to the effects of religion on man's behavior becomes clear. "The sage lectured brilliantly" uses the same technique of ironic reversal in the last line as "I stood upon a high place." The cunning students take the narrator's place, and the grinning devil is now the sage:

The sage lectured brilliantly.

Before him, two images:

"Now this one is a devil,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

And this one is me."
He turned away.
Then a cunning pupil
Changed the positions.
Turned the sage again;
"Now this one is a devil,
And this one is me."
The pupils sat, all grinning,
And rejoiced in the game.
But the sage was a sage. (62)

After the student's prank the sage acts as the jokers expect and now identifies himself with the devil. I take the last line to mean that the wise man knows that while the images have been switched, in reality, they are the same. This interpretation is supported externally by the previous poem and, internally, by the use of the word "cunning" for the student and "brilliant" in connection with the sage. Additional support for this interpretation can be found in the force and the placement of the word "but" in the last line. If this were phrased "The sage was but a sage," the irony would be directed at the sage and not at the students, who are unable to recognize the brotherhood of common humanity. In Heart of Darkness Joseph Conrad develops just this point by contrasting European traders

and tribal Africans:

They howled and leaped, and spun and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you--you so remote from the night of first ages--could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything--because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future." (36-7)

Like Conrad, for Crane the possibility for good or evil action is always present in all of us. If sage and devil can be instantly transposed, men's acts may be judged, but certitude in judging the character of another is not possible. Crane's attitude toward good and evil, based on the primacy of the situation and the individual's conscience, is quite similar to the one voiced by Emerson in "Self-Reliance": "Good and bad are but names readily transferable to that or this; the only

right is what is after my own constitution; the only wrong what is against it" (1132). Here Emerson is considering moral certitude as it affects social conformity and individual freedom. Because the stance in both is polemical, I don't believe that Emerson is as much a relativist as this passage would indicate or that Crane is as much a moral relativist as this poem would indicate:

"It was wrong to do this," said the angel.

"You should live like a flower,
Holding malice like a puppy,
Waging war like a lambkin."

"Not so," quoth the man
Who had no fear of spirits;
"It is only wrong for angels
Who can live like the flowers,
Holding malice like the puppies,
Waging war like the lambkins." (58)

Crane attacks the preaching of right behavior, criticizes the simple-minded idealism of the genteel romantic, and reiterates his view that right and wrong, good and evil, are largely a matter of perspective. What is wrong is for one person to presume he can tell another how his life ought to be lived. Here, Crane

effectively uses the repetition with inversion by having the man's rebuttal to the angel adapt the same phrases for his reply.

Violence, as both subject and metaphor, appears with great frequency in Crane's poetry and both fiction and non-fictional prose. He continually returns to the study of the nature and causes of violence, violence often taking the form of war. Although strong irony is his characteristic mode, apparent in the poem above and in the titles of his works concerned specifically with war: The Red Badge of Courage and War is Kind, his irony sometimes takes a milder form:

There was a crimson clash of war,
Lands turned black and bare;
Women wept;
Babes ran, wondering.
There came one who understood not these
things.
He said: "Why is this?"
Whereupon a million strove to answer him.
There was such an intricate clamor of tongues,
That still the reason was not. (16)

For Crane war was not only an arena for testing a man's mettle and a metaphor for the condition of human existence, it was also the threshold of the limits of

reason. Millions have answers to the question, but their replies add up to only a chaotic babble. What could possibly be a sufficient reason for the murder and carnage men wreak upon each other? If war is an obvious and undeniable horror, why do men and nations still go to war? Crane spent much of his energy grappling with these questions. In this poem chaos reigns, but in the following poem, it is clear that order brings no peace:

Once there came a man
Who said:
"Range me all men of the world in rows."
And instantly
There was a terrific clamor among the people
Against being ranged in rows.
There was a loud quarrel, world-wide.
It endured for ages;
And blood was shed
By those who would not stand in rows,
And by those who pined to stand in rows.
Eventually, the man went to death, weeping.
And those who stayed in bloody scuffle
Knew not the great simplicity. (7)

This poem is deliberately, and effectively, vague in its referents. Name, place, and time are eliminated. The cause of the commotion is simply "a man." His goal

of order, given simply as "Range me all men of the world in rows," includes all possibilities: political, religious, social, economic, philosophical. The goal itself receives no evaluation nor even a connotation of good or evil, true or false. Neither side of this conflict is condemned, and the man with the simple idea is treated sympathetically. It is the great simplicity, any great simplicity, that is judged to be contrary to human nature.

The attitude towards the evils of enforced conformity in this parable-like poem is identical to the attitude in the poems on religion considered previously; the microcosm of "Think as I think" is here expanded to the macrocosm of society as a whole. The cause of violence is the idea that all men can be arranged to fit a single idea of order; the men choose sides, kill and die for another man's idea. While none of the other war poems are on the same level of abstraction as this one, the unifying element, despite the various forms it may take, is the causal connection between idea and act of violence. Crane shares with a contemporary like Mark Twain ("The Campaign That Failed"), and with most writers on warfare since, a bitter anger at the discrepancy between the romantic renditions of violence that were his cultural heritage and the horror of the

lived experience. Crane most often used irony to satirize man's inflated ideas by juxtaposing the ideal with the lived experience. In the following poem he compares the ideals of romance and chivalry with the realities of the experience and shows how good and evil, elegance and ugliness, are combined in the consequences of a single act. Note that the difference in perspective is not so different from the first poem discussed, "To a maiden":

Fast rode the knight
 With spurs, hot and reeking
 Ever waving an eager sword.

"To save my lady!"

Fast rode the knight
 And leaped from saddle to war.
 Men of steel flickered and gleamed
 Like riot of silver lights
 And the gold of the knight's good banner
 Still waved on a castle wall.

A horse
 Blowing, staggering, bloody thing
 Forgotten at foot of castle wall.

A horse
 Dead at foot of castle wall. (89)

Here the juxtaposition is most effective. The lavish, dramatic spectacle of the first stanza, alive in every sense, could not find a more sharp or stark contrast than the second stanza's simple reduction to a single element of the pageant.

Of this poem Daniel Hoffman writes, "The apparent lack of connection between the narrative first section and the imagistic second is baffling; one does not forget this poem" (143). Hoffman analyzes:

It is possible that in "Fast rode the knight," despite the conscious rescue motif [he refers to the Oedipal conflict Berryman found in Crane], this knight, too, is a black rider, and his leap, "from saddle to war," is again the ride of sin. In fact, his ride may be sinful exactly because his errand is a rescue of the kind we have seen it to be Crane's fate to imagine and perform. As was true in the poems examined earlier in the chapter, we may expect that his rescue, performed as an act of love, produces feelings of guilt and fears of punishment. (144)

Although rescue is the intention, I find no sense of sin, feelings of guilt or fears of punishment here. The second part is baffling only if one is unaware of

Crane's irony: without this second part, it would not be a Stephen Crane poem. R. W. Stallman proposes that the poem is a contrast of "illusion versus reality" and does not pursue his analysis any further, but if the first part were illusion the horse would not be dead in the second part. There is no difficulty in understanding this poem, given our knowledge of Crane's ideas and his use of irony. One need only juxtapose the line, "To save my lady!" and the last stanza. The most obvious ironic aspect is the good and evil consequences of the glorious act. One might also wonder what condition the knight might be in after riding his mount to death; would he not also be a "blowing, staggering, bloody thing"? The irony runs deeper when one realizes that the foundation of chivalry is based on the horse, and it is the cause of his death. We can also connect this poem with "A youth in apparel that glittered," and observe that in both cases Crane's target is the romanticization of violence:

A youth in apparel that glittered
 Went to walk in a grim forest.
 There he met an assassin
 Attired all in garb of old days;
 He, scowling through the thickets,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

And dagger poised quivering,
 Rushed upon the youth.
 "Sir," said this latter,
 "I am enchanted, believe me,
 To die, thus,
 In this medieval fashion,
 According to the best legends;
 Ah, what joy!"
 Then took he the wound, smiling,
 And died, content.

Stallman considers this poem ". . . a miniature copy of The Red Badge of Courage" and says, "The conflict in the poem about the indomitable youth is between illusion and reality [his emphasis]. But here it is reality, the assassin of dreams, that finds itself compromised." (Omnibus 569) I agree with Stallman's anylysis except for the last sentence; reality is not compromised when it destroys the dreamer. Daniel Hoffman disagrees with Stallman on other grounds: "There is surely a difference between the panic and courage of the novel and the satisfied nihilism of the poem" (253). There is, of course, a vast difference between the novel and the poem; in fact, no character in any of Crane's fiction dies a violent death smiling and content, but to call the attitude expressed by the youth "satisfied

nihilism" is to miss the point entirely. Max Westbrook also disagrees: "Hoffman reads the poem as a statement of 'satisfied nihilism' and indeed the youth is humble before a being who slays him without purpose. The youth, however, has chosen 'legends' not the voice 'that whispers in the heart' and has chosen them because they are 'the best' not because they are in accord with experience" (33). The analyses of Stallman and Westbrook are helpful but incomplete. The poem is a miniature of many of Crane's stories because it contains the conflict between illusion and reality that is the basic approach Crane used in his writing since his first, juvenile effort, "Uncle Jake and the Bell-Handle." The illusion can be a product of the protagonist's own overactive imagination or some element of the social-cultural heritage which the protagonist has accepted without question; with the exception of the early Sullivan County Sketches, most often the illusion is a combination of both. A much better parallel to this poem exists in Crane's fiction in "The Blue Hotel." In this story an Easterner, the Swede, causes his own death because of the preconceptions he brings with him based on dime-novel notions of the nature of life in the West. The knight ("in apparel that glittered") is frequently used by Crane as a figure to represent the

illusions of romance and chivalry. Henry Fleming's difficulties include the fact that he thinks he is a knight and that the Civil War will be a grand tournament where he will be able to display his personal strength, courage and heroism. In addition to the social conventions of right conduct, the source of Maggie's downfall is her inability to distinguish Pete the bartender from Prince Charming of the legends: "He was her knight." Maggie forces her experience to fit her illusions. The attitude of the youth in the poem is not "satisfied nihilism"; he accepts a violent death with unquestioned joy because of the ideals that have been instilled in him "according to the best of legends." The murderer kills without hesitation; he needs no other motivation beyond his accordance with tradition. Both youth and assassin are only playing out the roles assigned to them by a tradition they have accepted. Their acceptance of the ideas of others has determined their lives (and deaths). Crane explains this process explicitly in The Red Badge of Courage:

. . . to seduce her victims, nature had to formulate a beautiful excuse. She made glory. This made the men willing, anxious, in haste, to come and be killed. And, with heavy humor, he thought of how nature must smile when she

saw the men come running. They regarded warfare and courage as holy things and did not see that nature had placed them in hearts because virtuous indignation would not last through a black struggle. Men would grow tired of it. They would go home. They must be inspired by some sentiment that they could call sacred and enshrine in their heart, something that would cause them to regard slaughter as fine and go at it cheerfully; something that could destroy all the binding of loves and places that tie men's hearts. She made glory. (Stallman, Omni 291)

In this passage, glory and honor are illusions that serve as justifications of warfare in the same way that religion has been made to serve as a justification for the moral conventions forced upon men by other men. It is the same analysis of violence that we found in "Once there came a man: and in "Fast rode the knight." It is interesting to note the many references to religion in the passage above and in the rest of Crane's writing on war, and it seems difficult to reconcile the religious interpretations of this novel (Jim Conklin as Jesus Christ and the red wafer sun as eucharist symbol) with Crane's negative attitude towards God and religion. A

non-believer would not likely choose a redemptive allegorical framework for a war novel that is non-romantic, non-redemptive, and ironical in nature. His remarks on the glory of warfare are of the same kind as his criticism of religion in that both shape the way in which men define their lives and the lives of their fellowmen. In "Death and the Child" he gives these as the views of a war correspondent:

Peza was proud and ashamed that he was not of them--these stupid peasants who, throughout the world, hold potentates on their thrones, make statesmen illustrious, provide generals with lasting victories, all with ignorance, indifference, or half-witted hatred, moving the world with the strength of their arms, and getting their heads knocked together, in the name of God, the king, or the stock exchange--immortal, dreaming, hopeless asses who surrender their reason to the care of some shinning puppet, and persuade some toy to carry their lives in his purse. Peza mentally abased himself before them, and wished to stir them with furious kicks. (Stallman and Hagemann, War 96)

While it might be possible to dismiss the selection

quoted from The Red Badge above as the rationalization of the cowardly Henry Fleming, here the war correspondent is clearly Crane's persona. "Proud and ashamed," as well as the last line of this passage, define precisely Crane's ambivalent attitude toward the common soldier. Although he defines the force that moves these men as god, the king, and the stock exchange, he clearly places blame on the men themselves. This triumvirate is clearly man-made; they are each a "toy" or "shining puppet." The King uses the illusions of glory, honor, patriotism as beautiful excuses for men to surrender their reason and their lives. The illusions of sin and salvation, guilt and innocence are used by religion for the same purpose. The shining puppet here is the same kind of figure Crane used in the religious poems, appearing as "unrighteous picture" and "wicked image." In both areas it is the surrendering of reason that Crane objects to so strongly, the effect of accepting traditional or socially prevalent ideas without the verification of personal experience. He is most explicit in "The godly vice of patriotism makes us slaves."

There exists the eternal fact of conflict

And--next--a mere sense of locality.

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Afterward we derive sustenance from the winds.
Afterward we grip upon this sense of locality.
Afterward we become patriots.
The godly vice of patriotism makes us slaves,
And--let us surrender to this falsity
Let us be patriots

Then welcome us the practical men
Thrumming on a thousand drums
The practical men, God help us.

They cry aloud to be led to war

Ah--

They have been poltroons on a thousand
fields

And the sacked sad city of New York is
their record

Furious to face the Spaniard, these
people, and

crawling worms before their task

They name serfs and send charity in bulk
to better men

They play at being free, these people of
New York

Who are too well-dressed to protest
against infamy. (140)

The first two lines constitute a given, universal in Crane's work, a point of view intrinsic to his artistic vision: human existence and conflict are inseparable. Patriotism is reduced to a mere sense of locality, capable of providing no more sustenance than the wind; notice how the sequence of events is emphasized by the use of dashes around the word "next." The three repetitions of "afterward" serve to reinforce the idea that patriotism is a retroactive justification of warfare. It is further identified as a "vice" and a "falsity." While repeating with slight variation the pattern of the second line, the seventh line's "and--" forces a pause and, by the interruption, begins the change in tone to one of despair and resignation found in "surrender" and in the "God help us" in line three of the second stanza. If line six clearly states that patriotism makes us slaves, then to become a patriot is to become a slave. Again, for Crane, to give up one's intellect, one's own eyes, is surrender of the saddest kind. It is to "play at being free."

The first stanza presents a universal statement about warfare; the second applies this generalization to a particular conflict. The second stanza refers to the Spanish-American War, one of the most romanticized and least justifiable conflicts in our nation's history, and

focuses on the war hysteria and hypocrisy of New York in particular. The "practical men" crying aloud to be led to war are the archetypical loud-mouthed cowards often present in Crane's work. They are generalized, after the narrator's understanding "Ah--," into "poltroons on a thousand fields." As in his early newspaper piece on the Asbury Park marchers, economic class is a significant factor. The practical men may cry for war but are wise enough to send others, the serfs, to fight. The Cuban peasants, recipients of their charity, are explicitly the "better men." The last line emphasizes the conjunction of class and morality; the well-to-do, the well-dressed, are too respectable to protest. Only with these last two lines do we see the irony and contempt behind the term "practical men." The description of clothing serves as a shorthand for the idea of decorum he found so offensive and with which he always associated falsity. Ending the poem with "infamy" serves to echo "the godly vice of patriotism" of the first stanza.

In "War is kind," a quintessential Crane poem, we find the ideals of patriotism and glory set against the consequences of war. In this poem Crane parodies the condolences offered to a dead soldier's kin, perhaps the kind heard at a public, patriotic funeral ceremony. The

first, third and fifth stanzas are addressed to the surviving family members of the soldier: his sweetheart, his child, his mother. The second and fourth stanzas provide a counterpoint of blaring martial music to the soft weeping of the other stanzas.

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.

Because your lover threw wild hands toward the
sky

And the affrighted steed ran on alone,

Do not weep.

War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,

Little souls who thirst for fight,

These men were born to drill and die.

The unexplained glory flies above them,

Great is the Battle-God, great, and his

Kingdom--

A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.

Because your father tumbled in the yellow
trenches,

Raged at his breast, gulped and died,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Do not weep.

War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
Make plain to them the excellence of
killing
And a field where a thousand corpses
lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.

War is kind. (81)

The only solace the bereaved are offered is the blunt directive "Do not weep" which is followed each time by the absurd "War is kind." By phrasing the most outrageous lie possible in the fewest words and in the simplest diction, Crane is able to produce the most shocking effect. By its stark economy it both summarizes and criticizes the sanctimonious, self-congratulatory oratory characteristic of such occasions. The soldiers' deaths are related in the most simple

terms. In the first stanza all we see are "wild hands" thrown against the sky and a riderless horse. This technique of condensation, the most frequently used by Crane, dramatizes the moment, heightens the impact and, by avoiding the conventional glorification and sentimentality, requires from the reader a fresh response. In the third stanza the soldier merely tumbles (a word as far removed from the heroic as possible), rages at the wound in his breast, gulps and dies.

These particular lines and the poem as a whole bring to mind Wilfred Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est" where soldiers fumble and stumble in not yellow but gas-green trenches. In the final stanza Crane's gift for creating the perfect image and his skillful use of alliteration in the "h's" of the first line and "s's" of the second line convey both sympathy for the mother and contempt for the gaudy death display. The domestic simplicity of the heart-as-button image maintains the effect begun with "tumbled" and "gulped." The "bright splendid shroud" recalls the traditional displays at military ceremonies, the drums, flags, and eagles of stanzas two and four, and unites in this stanza the two distinctly separate parts of the poem.

Stanzas two and four, which are not directed to

loved ones as one, three and five are, contain several elements. First, they render the standard ingredients of a full-dress military funeral in sound and color. Second, they contain, in their identical third lines, and in the second line of the second stanza, the kind of anger at the soldiers' willingness to die seen in the two previous citations from Crane's work. Third, both of these stanzas attack the hollow rhetoric so often accompanying these ceremonies. In the second stanza the flag is simply "the unexplained glory." The greatness of god and the size of his kingdom are measured by the number of corpses. The fourth stanza includes a direct, angry and bitter challenge to the speaker at this ceremony: "Point for them the virtue of slaughter, / Make plain to them the excellence of killing." It is understandable that Crane chose this as the title poem for his second book of poetry.

In The Poetry of Stephen Crane Daniel Hoffman spends ten pages analyzing "When a people reach the top of a hill." It is for Hoffman "His most significant poem" because he believes that it contains a unification of the various themes in Crane's work. Following another logic, I judge the poem to be of minor importance because the themes it contains are expressed more eloquently and more poetically in other poems. We

will, therefore, look first at the poem and then compare Hoffman's analysis of the poem with some lines from it and with our understanding of Crane up to this point.

When a people reach the top of a hill
 Then does God lean toward them,
 Shortens tongues, lengthens arms.
 A vision of their dead comes to the weak.

The moon shall not be too old
 Before the new battalions rise

--Blue battalions--

The moon shall not be too old
 When the children of change shall fall
 Before the new battalions

--The blue battalions--

Mistakes and virtues will be trampled deep
 A church and a thief shall fall together
 A sword will come at the bidding of the
 eyeless,

Swinging a creed like a censer
 At the head of the new battalions

--Blue battalions--

March the tools of nature's impulse
 Men born of wrong, men born of right

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Men of the new battalions

--The blue battalions--

The clang of swords is Thy wisdom

The wounded make gestures like Thy Son's

--Aye, another is the hand of a mother on the
brow of a son.

Then swift as they charge through a
shadow,

The men of the new battalions

--Blue battalions--

God lead them high, God lead them far

Lead them far, lead them high

These new battalions

--The blue battalions-- (76-7)

Hoffman believes that this poem is a confident ethical statement:

Nowhere else in his writing does Crane so strikingly envisage the triumph of man over the fated misery of life. This militant vision of the New Jerusalem manifests the ethical coherence of Crane's ultimate belief; here he has overcome his fears of the vengeful God, and he identifies his inner God of pity

with the heroism and sufferings of Jesus. The debt of his ethical sensibility to his father is great, yet his apocalyptic fervor most likely derives equally from the evangelism of his mother's family. (165)

"The Blue Battalions" is certainly not one of Crane's best. The use of repetition which worked so effectively in "War is Kind" falls flat here; the images are obscure and are hardly comparable to those in "War is kind." While this is undoubtedly a prophetic poem, I have difficulty in finding either optimism or confidence in it. Is it optimistic that "the children of change shall fall"? Are these children evil? Is change bad? Are falling and trampling optimistic? Is it optimistic that the narrator should see a sword coming at the bidding of the eyeless? This image, in particular, I find impossible to accept as either affirmative or optimistic, especially given Crane's emphasis on the importance of using one's own pair of eyes. It is equally impossible for me to interpret "God-led" as an admirable situation; it is contradictory to everything Crane wrote about either God or war. "Swinging a creed like a censer" accurately describes Crane's understanding of the function of creeds. The words "tools of nature's impulse" express the same sentiment

as "Nature's dupes" surrendering their reason to some shiny puppet. An understanding of Crane's concept of an inner god ought to include the knowledge that this interior god of pity does not lead crowds to war. As in "War is kind," Crane connects god to the carnage of the battlefield: "Great is the Battle-God, great, and his Kingdom-- /A field where a thousand corpses lie-." Of the line "The clang of swords is Thy wisdom" Hoffman says, "... it is the Divine Will war and suffering be man's portion" (172). The fact that violence could be dismissed with such ease is exactly what so infuriated Crane. The line in question is not a description of reality that Crane accepts "... with a humility and resignation he had hitherto attributed only to the pebbles" (172).

It is hard to understand how Hoffman could ignore the irony in this line aimed directly at the intelligence of god; what kind of wisdom is the clanging of swords? When these battalions rise in line six, I believe they rise from their graves, that they are ghost battalions.

There is another poem of apocalyptic vision, quite similar to "The Blue Battalions," in which battalions of the dead march in attack on god. This poem begins by addressing the deity as "All-feeling God," but, at that

very moment, the narrator is trying to direct god's attention:

Bend and see a people, O, God,
 A people rebuked, accursed,
 By him of the many lungs
 And by him of the bruised weary war-drums
 (The chanting disintegrate and the two-
 faced eagle) (142)

Crane's reaction to demagoguery is clear. In the same way in which he struck at established religion and ministers for the suffering caused to society by dictated forms of thought and behavior, notions of the saved and the damned, he also strikes out at patriotism and demagogues for the suffering caused to the many by the few through pointless wars. If one were seeking an apocalyptic vision of warfare in Crane's poetry or a synthesis of his attitudes on god and war, one must consider the last lines of this poem, where the responsibility for the carnage is laid directly to god, where he is threatened with attack and death:

For, the sea shall not bar us;
 The capped mountains shall not hold us back
 We shall sweep and swarm through jungle and
 pool,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Then let the savage one bend his high chin
 To see on his breast, the sullen glow of the
 death medals

For we know and we say our gift.

His prize is death, deep doom.

(He shall be white amid the smoking cane)

(143)

Here, I believe, there can be no question of acceptance, humility, or resignation. The medals are neither of honor nor for valor; they are "death medals," signifying both responsibility and punishment. This is a far cry from the religious-patriotic mentality characterized by the familiar God-is-on-our-side rhetoric. Although I prefer this poem to "The Blue Battalions," this one, too, suffers from an imbalance that favors emotional release at the expense of poetic effect, producing a prosaic manifesto instead of an effective, evocative poem like "War is Kind."

It is difficult to speak with certainty when explaining the fascination with the subject of violence in Crane's work. He sought and found it in the slums, in the West, in the Civil War of The Red Badge, in Cuba and in Greece. Perhaps it was because they were all places to which he could escape from the respectable life? Of course, war and violence provided him with a

convenient dramatic condensation as they have done for so many other artists. The moment of deadly violence, despite the crowds of cities or armies of hundreds of thousands, is a moment in which a man faces his mortality alone, an existential moment of doubt and decision. But, most important, is the suitability of these situations for an artist who perceives life essentially as struggle, a war with oneself, a war with the world. This struggle of life does not carry with it the optimism of any theological, social or economic theory, nor does it contain even the reassurance of a natural selection by the survival of the fittest. Crane finds no such order to the world and no such purpose to life. There is no evidence of a coming, brighter day or a new and better man, no hint of a plan--divine or otherwise.

Crane's Worldview: "a place of blackness"

The world of Crane's vision was most often a wasteland. The chaos and isolation of slum, war, and open sea in his fiction and non-fiction prose become more clearly a spiritual wasteland, "a place of blackness" (25), in the poetry. "I stood musing in a black world, / Not knowing where to direct my feet."

(52) gives both a vision of life and its effect on the poet. Crane has no faith in a world-to-come (70), and the world he sees around him is often a cause for despair. There is also an element of life-sickness and disgust in the poet's response, which is one element that Crane shared with other fin de siecle poets:

Behold from the land of farther suns

I returned.

And I was in a reptile-swarmling place,

Peopled, otherwise, with grimaces,

Shrouded above in black impenetrableness.

I shrank, loathing,

Sick with it.

And I said to him:

"What is this?"

He made to answer slowly:

"Spirit, this is a world;

This was your home." (31)

In this poem Crane again uses the two person structure to set up the shocking revelation in the last two lines, the technique used in "The sage" and "I stood upon a high place" and other poems. Notice, also, the consistent use of change of perspective here, similar to these two poems and to "The wayfarer" and "When the

prophet . . ." as well.

Crane's sense of the world as wasteland reflects both the absence of order, as in "God fashioned the ship of the world carefully," and his sensitivity to the change in the pace of life. This poem, much more modern in subject and style, gives another reason for the poet's nausea; the unceasing turmoil of movement is characterized as dizzying:

Rumbling, buzzing, turning, whirling Wheels,

Dizzy Wheels!

Wheels! (78)

This sense of the pace of modern life is abundant in Crane; the poem parallels his first published (July 10, 1892) New York City sketch, "The Broken-Down Van." Another sketch, "In a Park Row Restaurant," gives Crane's version of a leisurely lunch in Manhattan:

. . . . As the spring doors clashed to and fro, one heard the interminable thunder of the street, and through the window . . . could be seen the great avenue, a picture of grey tones, save where a bit of green park gleamed, the foreground occupied by this great typical turmoil of cab and car, truck and mail van, wedging their way through an opposing army of the same kind and surrounded on all sides by

the mobs of hurrying people.

"A man might come in here with a very creditable stomach and lose his head and get indigestion," resumed the stranger, thoughtfully. "It is astonishing how fast a man can eat when he tries. This air is surcharged with appetites. I have seen very orderly, slow-moving men become possessed with the spirit of this rush, lose control of themselves and all at once begin to dine like madmen. It is impossible not to feel the effect of this impetuous atmosphere."

(Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 84-85)

Amazingly, not a word of this description seems dated nearly a century after its publication.

The following poem stresses the effect on the ear instead; it contains the previous poem's wheels as well as a hint of the memorable opening of "The Open Boat" in its "forgotten sky."

A slant of sun on dust brown walls
 A forgotten sky of bashful blue.
 Toward God a mighty hymn
 A song of collisions and cries
 Rubbling wheels, hoof-beats, bells,

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Welcomes, farewells, love-calls, final moans,
 Voices of joy, idiocy, warning, despair,
 The unknown appeals of brutes,
 The chanting of flowers
 The screams of cut trees,
 The senseless babble of hens and wise men--
 A cluttered incoherency that says at the
 stars:

"Oh, God, save us." (95)

Here, despair results from the reductive, leveling
 effect of the constant uproar of the modern world which
 blends the babble of hens and wise men, the voices of
 joy and despair into a cluttered incoherency that says
 not "to" but "at" the stars"--for there is nothing there
 to listen--"Oh, God, save us."

Crane lived in the heyday of American journalism
 and earned his living from it before and after his
 success as a novelist and poet, but he found this sense
 of "cluttered incoherency" in the press and in the
 constant barrage of information that is so much a part
 of the modern experience:

A newspaper is a collection of half-injustices
 Which, bawled by boys from mile to mile,
 Spreads its curious opinion

[NO STANZA BREAK]

To a million merciful and sneering men,
 While families cuddle the joys of the fireside
 When spurred by a tale of dire lone agony.

A newspaper is a court
 Where every one is kindly and unfairly tried
 By a squalor of honest men.

A newspaper is a market
 Where wisdom sells its freedom
 And melons are crowned by the crowd.

A newspaper is a game
 Where his error scores the player victory
 While another's skill wins death.

A newspaper is a symbol;
 It is fetless life's chronicle,
 A collection of loud tales
 Concentrating eternal stupidities,
 That in remoter ages lived unaltered

Roaming through a fenceless world. (93)

This list of indictments of both medium and reading public moves rapidly through the set of charges condensed into brief, sharp juxtapositions, another of Crane's favorite techniques. His anger and bitterness from his own experiences at the hands of the press come through in "merciful and sneering men," "kindly and unfairly tried," and a "squalor of honest men." This

juxtaposition of condensed and concentrated images is most effective in the fourth and fifth lines where families cuddle the joys of the fireside, joys which include, and which are heightened by, "a tale of dire lone agony." Mercy, compassion, justice, wisdom, democracy, and fair play--the qualities Crane's fellowmen most pride themselves for--topple one after another like dominoes, culminating in the generalization in the last six lines which echo the "cluttered incoherency" of the previous poem. It is not so much that men have changed but that newspapers have changed the way that they see themselves. Crane's apprehension at the power of this mass medium to shape public opinion is another aspect of his concern with the pressures of society on the individual conscience. Another poem uses the ironic parable style on the subject of the contemporary press; the narrator congratulates himself when he assists a sage who is baffled over a newspaper by telling him, "Old, old man, it is the wisdom of the age." (13)

Crane was sensitive to the connection between the human spiritual poverty, the machine-pace of modern life, and the rise of capitalism as the pervasive modern ethic. In one poem he wrote: "Your cross? / The real cross / Is made of pounds, / Dollars or Francs." Just

as the newspaper has become the ironic emblem of the intellect, the dollar sign has replaced the cross as the spiritual emblem of the age. Another poem, worthy of closer attention not as an example of Crane's skill but as a more detailed statement on the cost of prosperity, uses this simple comparison:

The impact of a dollar upon the heart
Smiles warm red light
Sweeping from the hearth rosily upon the white
table,
With the hanging cool velvet shadows
Moving softly upon the door.

The impact of a million dollars
Is a crash of flunkeys
And yawning emblems of Persia
Cheeked against oak, France and a sabre,
The outcry of old beauty
Whored by pimping merchants
To submission before wine and chatter.
Silly rich peasants stamp the carpets of men,
Dead men who dreamed fragrance and light
Into their woof, their lives;
The rug of an honest bear

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Under the foot of a cryptic slave
 Who speaks always of baubles,
 Forgetting place, multitude, work and state,
 Champing and mouthing of hats
 Making ratful squeak of hats,
 Hats. (101)

As in the poems already considered, the idea of relativity is central to both the structure and the idea of the poem. A single dollar smiles; a million dollars crash. Wealth is today linked to the imperialism of France and ancient Persia, and the rise in wealth is connected to a decrease in craft and imagination: "Old beauty is whored by pimping merchants." The dead craftsmen "who dreamed fragrance and light into their woof, their lives" have been replaced by silly rich peasants. Crane's "wine and chatter" parallel T. S. Eliot's coffee cups and the talking women who come and go. Both poets share this sense of wasteland and of bitter lament. The ". . . hats / . . . hats / hats" of the last three lines duplicate in a specifically commercial image the pattern and effect of the earlier "Wheels." The rise in the importance given to materialism, of people "who speak always of baubles," is further evidence in the presence of a consistent social awareness in Crane's work from the early report on the

Mechanics' parade to the late story "The Monster."
 In another poem Crane writes of "the successful man" as
 "Slimed with victories over the lesser, / A figure
 thankful on the shore of money." (92)

In "Bottles and bottles and bottles" Crane
 utilizes the comparative technique of "The impact of a
 dollar" much more effectively, this time using physical
 location as the basis of comparison and adding a third
 stanza which comments on the first two. The first
 stanza is set in a saloon; the contrasting second stanza
 is set in a basement, perhaps under the saloon. The
 sharp contrast works as effectively here as it does in
 "Fast rode the knight" where the romantic pageantry of
 the first stanza is set against the horse's bloody
 corpse in the second:

Bottles and bottles and bottles
 In a merry den
 And the wan smiles of women
 Untruthing license and joy
 Countless lights
 Making oblique and confusing multiplication
 In mirrors
 And the light returns again to the faces.

* * * * *

A cellar, and a death-pale child.

A woman

Ministering commonly, degradedly,

Without manners.

A murmur and a silence

Or silence and a murmur

And then a finished silence.

The moon beams practically upon the cheap bed.

An hour, with its million trinkets of joy or
pain,

Matters little in cellar or merry den

Since all is death. (145)

The first line of the first stanza is another version of "hats" and "Wheels." There is no wealth to this abundance, only repetition and sameness. The wan smiles of the professional hostesses destroy any illusion of freedom and gaiety; the den's merriness is a lie. This idea of falseness is amplified by the gaudy show of the countless mirrors and lights. "Oblique and confusing multiplication" reenforces this idea while adding the note of disorientation seen earlier as "cluttered incoherency" in "A slant of sun on dull brown walls." The "again" in the last line of this stanza carries with it a vague sense of purposelessness and sterility.

The second stanza switches to the basement tableau of mother and child. The transition is from false wealth to real poverty. The false love of the professional saloon women is changed to maternal love in the second stanza, but poverty and disease have taken their toll on this love. The woman's ministrations are performed "commonly, degradedly, without manners." While the first stanza relied on visual imagery, the second uses auditory to achieve the same effect. The "or" in "A murmur and a silence / Or a silence and a murmur" produces the same effect as "again" in the last line of the first stanza by indicating either absence of order or the pointlessness, the essential superficiality of order, in this setting of mortality. I take the "finished silence" to be the death of the pale child, a death which further serves to give the lie to the merry den upstairs. The irony becomes even stronger when one considers the implication that the woman is employed upstairs and that the child itself, hidden in the basement, might be the result of her profession. The poem reminds one of Blake's "London" especially of the final stanza:

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.
 (Portable, 112)

The last line of the second stanza echoes the last line of the first. The senselessness of the surprising phrase "the moon beams practically" begins by playing on the traditionallly romantic associations of moonbeams with love and grace and the power of the imagination, but by coupling the moonbeams with the harsh, ironic "practically upon the cheap bed" Crane cuts the ground out from under the sentimentality begun with the mother and child tableau in the first lines of this stanza. The final stanza makes clear that the child's death below is as pointless as the merriment above. The downstairs tragedy of a "million trinkets of . . . pain" is no more significant than "it's [sic] million trinkets of joy" of the upstairs comedy. In the face of death, under the aspect of eternity, both are mere "trinkets."

The last line of this poem may help us to understand the logic behind the judgments voiced by the man described in the following poem. "Since all is death" is simplified into "There is nothing,-- / No life," and the "million trinkets of joy or pain" are condensed into "No joy, / No pain,--"

Once there was a man,--
Oh, so wise!
In all drink
He detected the bitter,
And in all touch
He found the sting.
At last he cried thus:
"There is nothing,--
No life,
No joy,
No pain,--
There is nothing save opinion,
And opinion be damned." (51)

In addition, the bitter drink of the third and fourth line parallel the saloon, and the stinging touch of lines five and six approximates the negatively described caresses of the woman in the basement. The last two lines are in a sense a reversal of Crane's artistic and ethical credo: ". . . I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty." The irony of the poem's end is anticipated, I believe, by the self-directed sarcasm of "Oh, so wise!" In one letter he wrote: "There is nothing to respect in art,

save one's opinion of it" (Stallman and Gilkes 52). Another letter derides the kind of pessimism described in the poem: "Pessimism itself is only a little, little way, and moreover it is ridiculously cheap. The cynical mind is an uneducated thing" (Stallman and Gilkes 99).

Having begun this chapter with a poem on the sea ("To the maiden"), it seems right to conclude with another, "A man adrift on a slim spar," which is an expansion of the second stanza of the earlier poem. "To the maiden" is limited to the concept of the relativity of perception, but "A man adrift" examines the larger question of man's place in the universe. Significantly, "the sailor, wrecked," has been replaced by "a man adrift." While relativity of perception is present in this poem, for example, in "A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle," it is present as technique, not as subject. In the analysis of "To the maiden" given earlier, the point was made that the two perceptions of the sea it related were presented as equally valid; both are determined by the circumstances of the perceiver and that, for Crane, nature was neither agent nor a mask for the deity. The equation "God is cold" might seem to contradict this, but a closer examination of the poem will show that there is no inconsistency here. The "grim hatred of nature" in the earlier poem is replaced by

what might be called "indifference," except for the fact that this word also includes a presupposition of the existence of an external other who is capable of feeling. As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, there is no external "other" in Crane's worldview; his only deity is the one he found within each man, "the god of his inner thoughts" who "whispers in the heart." A man adrift turns to an external god for relief and finds he is alone:

A man adrift on a slim spar
 A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle
 Tented waves rearing lashed dark points
 The near whine of froth in circles.

God is cold.

The incessant raise and swing of the sea
 And growl after growl of crest
 The sinkings, green, seething, endless
 The upheaval half-completed.

God is cold.

The seas are in the hollow of The Hand;
 Oceans may be turned to a spray
 Raining down through the stars

[NO STANZA BREAK]

Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.
 Oceans may become grey ashes,
 Die with a long moan and a roar
 Amid the tumult of the fishes
 And the cries of the ships,
 Because The Hand beckons the mice.

A horizon smaller than a doomed assassin's cap.
 Inky, surging tumults
 A reeling, drunken sky and no sky
 A pale hand sliding from a polished spar.
 God is cold.

The puff of a coat imprisoning air:
 A face kissing the water-death
 A weary slow sway of a lost hand
 And the sea, the moving sea, the sea.

God is cold. (125)

Perhaps in this poem alone is Crane able to successfully combine idea, a theological argument, with feeling, the sense of compassion, grief, and helplessness for a drowning man. One man's isolation and death dramatize the existential situation of all men. The first two stanzas give the man's predicament; the third stanza contains an aside in the form of an

examination of the theological problem of an all-powerful and all-merciful God, and the fourth and fifth stanzas show the man's death with remarkable force through precise and economical selection of detail. The refrain "God is cold" is, in a sense, the conclusion of the syllogism (the sea is part of god; the sea is cold; therefore god is cold.) contained in the theological argument of the third stanza, which struggles with the contradictions contained in the idea of a personal god who is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-merciful. That god may note the fall of the tiniest sparrow is a principle incapable of being argued with a man adrift and about to die. "Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe. / Oceans may become grey ashes," but there is no pity and the water is cold. The comforting self-importance of the egotism that is revealed in the concept of a deity who watches over and cares for each living thing is simply unavailable to Crane. This element of cosmic indifference is an intrinsic part of Crane's vision, appearing throughout his work. It is often combined with an ironic version of man's egotism. One of Crane's best known poems puts it succinctly:

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

[NO STANZA BREAK]

"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation." (102)

In its assumptions, in the boldness of its condensation, in its scope the first line is a marvel of nerve. Using only two points of reference given in a very polite, funny, two-sentence dialogue, Crane surveys the boundaries of the relationship of man and the universe.

While there are many other possible selections from his prose fiction, this passage from "The Open Boat" is most appropriate. In this prose equivalent of "A man adrift on a slim spar," the correspondent defines their situation in a similar way:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot, he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands

suppliant, saying, "Yes, but I love myself."

(Gullason, Stories 353)

The phrase "to confront a personification" repeats the idea of human projection seen earlier as "wicked image" and "unrighteous picture." It is the same process as the one defined in "To a maiden." "A man adrift on a slim spar" is an appropriate image for Crane's understanding of man's place in the world. He is alone in a desperate struggle which he cannot win. The environment in which he is immersed cannot support him; it is neither hostile nor inimical, it is merely there. The drowning man is nameless and featureless; in his isolation, in the precariousness of his situation, in the fragility of his life, in the narrowness of his perspective he is all men, lost and alone in the vastness of time and space.

In this examination of Crane's poetry, many things have been ignored. I have not tried to argue for a reevaluation of his reputation as a poet or for his influence on later poets and have considered his craftsmanship as a poet only in passing. In addition, one entire area, his love poems, has been completely omitted. These have not been included; first, because of an absence of women in his major works, they cannot contribute to our understanding of these works, and,

second, because his love poems are one area in which Crane could not escape from the limitations of the literary conventions of his age. They are defined by the romantic and, especially, the decadent influences of his time. "Intrigue," his longest poem, is for the most part a rather stilted catalog; each stanza begins: "Thou art my love." She is "a weary violet," "the ashes of other men's love" and "a priestess / And in thy hand is a bloody dagger." (110-12) These poems would serve as a appropriate starting place for critics who wish to analyze and interpret this author's psycho-sexual conflicts, but as they offer little or no assistance in the interpretation of his major works, they have been omitted from this chapter.

What I have sought to accomplish in this examination of Crane's poetry is to chart a map of the prominent features of his intellect, to produce a topography of the landscape of his imagination. I hope to have shown him to be a man more consciously seeking than unconsciously driven, a man more of social commitment than of private devils, a writer better defined by the concerns of the twentieth century than those of the Old Testament. Beginning from Crane's own preference for the poems for reason of their wider scope, "the thoughts I have had about life in

general," certain prominent features have been noted. Life is a struggle, a struggle with one's self and one's world. Part of that struggle is a search for truth about both world and self. Knowledge is relative to time, place, and circumstances of the individual; the search for truth is arduous, dangerous, and painful. Questioning is the fundamental mode of human existence, and not certainty but doubt is the result of this search. Egotism, rationalization, and intellectual cowardice are the obstacles to self-knowledge. Tradition, social convention, the pressure to conform, and the fear of that pressure are the obstacles to knowledge of the world. One man's experience is equal in weight to all tradition is a concept which is a rejection of the world as arbiter of taste, morals, ideas, and values. This places the burden for the justification of his existence on each individual. Because each man must be his own arbiter, he must rely on himself alone. This, in conjunction with a loss of religious faith, accounts for each man's isolation. It also produces a need for introspection, an emphasis on the need for brotherhood, the fear of the crowd, and the fear of egotism.

In addition, because of this intellectual relativism, the individual's assessment of his situation

is always suspect. These doubts to some extent must produce, in combination with isolation, feelings of insecurity and fear. Courage, endurance, honesty and, above all, kindness are the human values given most importance. Greed, hypocrisy, cowardice, and self-deception are the prominent vices. He felt the danger to individual freedom in the unbridled rise of capitalism and felt the danger to the individual conscience in the compulsion to conform to the conventions of society. He found no solace in religion, no moral order to the universe, and little purpose to life. In a letter to Nellie Crouse, he wrote:

I will be glad if I can feel on my death-bed that my life has been just and kind according to my ability and that every particle of my ridiculous stock of eloquence and wisdom has been applied for the benefit of my kind. From this moment to that deathbed may be a short time or a long one but at any rate it means a life of labor and sorrow. I do not confront it blithely. I confront it with desperate resolution. There is not even much hope in my attitude. I do not even expect to do good. But I expect to make a sincere, lonely battle to remain true to my conception of my life and

the way it should be lived. (Stallman and Gilkes 105)

Despite the negativism of his vision of life, Crane did not surrender in despair to the chaos, isolation, and suffocating commercialism of the modern world. Instead, he responded with sympathy toward the plight of man and in his work attacked those moral, intellectual and social conventions he considered destructive of man's well-being; they defined for him the goal of his life's work and shaped his artistic choices in subject and style.

Chapter Three: Problems in Prose

For this discussion of Crane's fiction I have selected his two earliest substantial works, Maggie and The Red Badge, and two shorter works from late in his career, "The Blue Hotel" and "The Monster." Together, these four represent distinct subject areas for Crane: the slum, war, the West and the small town. They also represent the range of Crane's style - intense and flamboyant in the earlier work, most often subdued and understated in the later. Despite the variety of subjects and the distinctly different styles, these works exhibit the singularity of purpose and consistency of vision which I have sought to establish in the previous chapters.

Following a brief consideration of general problems in interpreting Crane's fiction, the discussion will focus on these individual works. "The Blue Hotel" and The Red Badge will be analyzed with the intention of resolving the critical disagreement over the endings of these works; also, the interpretation of these two as examples of American naturalism will be challenged. The third section of this chapter will continue the re-evaluation of Crane's assignment to the naturalist school by considering Maggie in order to clarify the

nature of Crane's interest in, and understanding of, the underworld of the city slum. The discussion of Maggie will be supplemented by references to related short stories; a brief examination of "The Monster" will also be included here because, despite the enormous differences in subject and style, there is an essential unity of purpose within these two works. By way of conclusion, "The Open Boat" will be considered as the clearest statement of those ideas unifying all of Crane's best work.

The first chapter sought to clarify our understanding of Stephen Crane, the man, by tracing a line of misconceptions in his biographies and showing how these have influenced the criticism of his works and his overall estimate as an artist. By examining his letters and the events of his life, I hoped to reveal something of his own self-awareness, his understanding of the role of an artist, and the aims and limitations of his craft. The second chapter focused on Crane's poetry as the clearest statement of his ideas, seeking a map of the prominent features of his intellect, a topography of the landscape of his imagination. Simply put, I hope to have produced some readjustments as to who Crane was, what he chose to write about and why. For example, if it has been understood that Crane is not

a Christian, interpretations of his works as symbolic presentations of Christian sacrifice and redemption become untenable. Perhaps more important, if one has recognized Crane's view of the artist's obligation to society and the ethical concerns so prominent in his poetry, there is less reason to suppose his prose works are defined by the philosophy of determinism. In fact, the idea of individual human responsibility is the most prominent unifying thread which binds the variety of Crane's serious work into one fabric.

What further unifies Crane's work is the causal relationship between the two elements just mentioned. Because there is no divine person to provide order to life and purpose to human existence, the sustaining value of community is enhanced, and the importance of the individual in terms of accurate perception and right act is emphasized. While fear has been identified as a prominent feature of Crane's imagination, dating back to Beer's ". . . the mistress of this boy's mind was fear," it is the question of death in a godless universe which most often makes its presence felt in Crane's writing. A poem (which is said to have been inspired by a prostitute trying to protect her pimp from a beating) begins with "God lay dead in Heaven" and ends with these lines:

But of all sadness this was sad,--

A woman's arms tried to shield

the head of a sleeping man

From the jaws of the final beast. (71)

Before considering individual works, let us first examine some general reasons for the problems which have occurred in reading Crane's fiction. His style is to some extent responsible for the misreading of Crane's work. His habit of condensation and strict economy encourage the isolation of various elements from the overall context of the story. The episodic nature of his plot structure and his evocative use of image and metaphor further complicate the problem by giving additional temptation to symbolic readings. But, by far, his ironic approach to his material has been the greatest stylistic reason for confusion about his work. As Swift had long ago learned, a writer who chooses the ironic mode to examine morals invites trouble upon himself. The oblique approach of the ironist depends on the writer's assumption that his audience will discern the position from which the attack is being made and recognize the writer's moral presuppositions. The ironist invites misunderstanding, therefore, because even if the target of the irony might be quite clear, a positive alternative is not, since by its nature irony

is limited to a negative mode of definition.

In its most general form, the problem in Crane studies is a tendency to put him in his proper place at the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but to have him facing the wrong direction. In his essay on The Red Badge John Berryman removes Crane from the company of Howells, Garland, Norris and Drieser and places him with Joyce, Hemingway, Kafka, Eliot and Pound, saying, ". . . my uncertain feeling is that Crane is best thought of as a twentieth century author."

One must approach Crane with the understanding that isolation and wasteland are the given, that a personal god exists only within each individual as a moral voice, quite similar to the inner voice described by Socrates. There is no creed, secular or religious, which can explain man's behavior or justify his existence. Each individual is responsible for perceiving the reality of his situation and for the actions based upon these perceptions. This concept of individual responsibility is similar to that of such contemporaries as Conrad, James and Hardy. There is no afterlife to redeem this one and no purpose, divine or otherwise. Consequently, the nothingness of death is central in his work; fear and anxiety are the principal emotions, and there is a desperate need for the

brotherhood of community, for kindness, sympathy and a recognition of common humanity. Forces which reduce, inhibit or destroy man's ability to achieve this fragile bastion of community provoke anger and attack whether they derive from the individual or the group.

The question of naturalism soon arises in any discussion of Crane's fiction. His inclusion in the naturalist school is, I believe, the most pervasive misconception about the author and his work. Circumstantial similarities between his work and that of the naturalists have been allowed to mask the fundamental differences between them, both in belief and in literary practice. The first reason for this error is the chronological accident of Crane's writing during the period of the naturalists' ascendancy. Another reason can be found in the willingness of critics to apply to Crane a definition of naturalism remarkable for its degree of flexibility. Let us look for a moment at how this definition is applied to two of Crane's works. Lars Ahnebrink says of The Red Badge: "The book is a sample of naturalism because of its candor, its treatment of men as dominated by instincts, its pictures of masses, and its pessimistic outlook" (Bradley, Beatty and Long, The Red Badge, 150). I hardly think it is necessary to search through the history of literature

to find examples of writers who were both candid and pessimistic without being naturalists. Similarly, a war novel is hard to imagine without "pictures of masses." As to the question of being dominated by instincts, the immediate possibility of death must surely call up the instinct for self-preservation, but all those men who stood and fought in the face of death have escaped its domination.

In an otherwise excellent essay on Maggie, Donald Pizer stretches his definition of naturalism to include Crane:

His fiction is historically important because his expression of this theme ["The difference between moral appearance and reality"] within the conventions of naturalist fiction reveals the relationship between critical realism and naturalism. But his fiction is perhaps even more significant historically because he revealed the possibility of a uniquely personal style and vision within naturalistic conventions. Our writers have responded to the critical spirit and the fictional sensationalism and freedom of naturalism without a sense of being burdened by doctrinaire precepts and forms. (Gullason, Career 342)

This passage is perhaps the best example of an overly flexible definition of naturalism being applied to Crane. Pizer says that Crane writes "within the conventions of naturalistic fiction" yet recognizes his "uniquely personal style and vision," admitting that Crane is not "burdened by doctrinaire precepts and forms." My problem with this is that I can't understand how a writer can be considered part of a school when he does not share either its precepts or its forms. If neither of these is present in his work, then his relationship can, consequently, be based only on minor similarities, hardly a sufficient basis for identifying an artist with a school. Crane may share the naturalists' lack of sentimentality and the sensational subjects of war and slum, but his imagistic style is as different from the accumulative approach of the naturalists as his ironic presence from their scientific detachment. Most important of all, while both Crane and the naturalists see the universe as amoral, Crane is a humanist, and a recognition of the existence of free will is essential to the understanding of his work. When the possibility of, and need for, right knowledge, right choices, and right act are eliminated from Crane's fiction, the result is not a slight difference in

interpretation but a complete turning of Crane on his head, a grotesque distortion. Take Harry Hartwick writing on The Red Badge: "Of pity, reason, self-control, and human sympathy, the naturalist is very skeptical. Such abstractions hold no meaning for him." or "Like Frank Norris and Jack London, Crane admired the man of action, the brawler, the trail-maker, and 'men with the bark on.' Hence these are the types he chose for his heroes" (Bradley, Beatty and Long, The Red Badge of Courage 222). Crane admired men of action but only men of right action. Brawlers there may be, but George, Pete, Jimmy, Johnny and the Swede are never presented with admiration. Certainly Maggie, Henry Fleming, and Dr. Trescott do not fit this description. Even before considering The Red Badge, or any of Crane's fiction, in detail, it should be clear from the preceding examinations of Crane's life and poetry that if the naturalist considers pity, reason, self-control and, especially, human sympathy as meaningless abstractions, then Crane cannot be considered a naturalist. The absence of human sympathy is certainly a central concern in Maggie, The Red Badge, "The Monster" and "The Blue Hotel."

"The Blue Hotel":

"A tragedy greater than the tragedy of action"

Because Crane's fiction has always been a subject of controversy and a source of critical disagreement, one could begin almost anywhere, but "The Blue Hotel" seems like a good choice because it is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of the short story form, yet it continues to provoke disagreement among readers and critics, readings of the story which are not slight variations or complements to each other but which are diametrically opposed and mutually contradictory. The disagreement over "The Blue Hotel" centers around the story's ending. R. W. Stallman, a pioneer in Crane studies, solves the problem of the ending by combining three elements: an assumption that Crane shared the philosophical basis of the naturalists, a belief that Crane wrote as a symbolist, and a fair amount of condescension toward the writer:

.. . . But consider the story critically, and you see at once that Crane has here violated his own artistic canon. He intrudes to preach a deliberate moral. The story ends with the grotesque image of the murdered Swede whose eyes stare "upon a dreadful legend that

dwelt atop of the cash-machine; 'This registers the amount of your purchase.'" This point marks the legitimate end of the story. Crane spoiled the whole thing by tacking on a moralizing appendix. The off-key tone is at odds with the tone of the preceding part, and the theme that his beginning prepared for stands at odds with the trumped-up theme announced in the totally irrelevant and non-ironic conclusion. (Omnibus 482-83)

If Stallman is correct in his belief that Crane accepts the concept of determinism and is a symbolist in technique, then his complaint about the ending has merit. On the other hand, it would seem preferable to assume that Crane is a more gifted artist and not a less-talented naturalist. Part of the critics' displeasure at Crane's choice of ending is due to a disappointment at the writer not living up to their preconceptions by failing to supply the naturalism expected, but I suspect that some of the negative reaction is attributable to the fact that as readers they have been taken in by Crane.

The double ending of this story has been constructed in such a way that we share in the guilt distributed by Mr. Blanc at the story's end. Who of us

saw the Swede as anything more than an annoyance, a crazed mumblor to be avoided and, after the whiskey, as an obnoxious loud-mouth? How many of us rooted for the Swede during his fight with Johnnie? And when the Swede dies in the saloon, who among us did not in some degree agree with the cash register and say to ourselves, "He got what he was asking for?" If this description of the reading experience is accurate, then there is already some justification for Crane's choice of ending. Without the revelation of the Easterner, the reader's understanding of the events in the story would be incomplete, and he would be able to dismiss the Swede as easily as the characters in the story did. If, however, the reader had shared the Easterner's point of view all along, the dramatic effect of the reversal of moral perspective, as well as the reader's involvement and complicity, would have been lost. It is the same technique we have seen in the poems, for example, in "I stood upon a high place." In both poem and story Crane leads the reader to assume a point of view which will be ironically upset at the end. Both poem and story depend on this ironic reversal of expectation; Crane constructed the form to fit the idea it was meant to reveal. The Easterner's revelation that "We're all in it." is the equivalent of the poem's final lines in

which the grinning devil looks up from the pit and addresses the narrator as "comrade" and "brother." Rather than being "tacked on," the ending makes the story.

The rejection of the point of view which is presented in the last section of the story has been a common critical response to the story. Charles Walcutt rejects the ending not on the basis of structural reasons but out of a belief that Crane's worldview is that of a naturalist:

Crane's naturalism is descriptive: he does not pretend to set forth a proof, like a chemical demonstration, that what happened must have happened, inevitably. . . . Crane simply shows how a sequence of events takes place quite independently of the wills and judgements of the people involved. The reader is convinced that it happened that way, and he sees that the ordinary moral sentiments do not adequately judge or account for these happenings. The writer does not have to argue that he has proved anything about causation or determinism: he has absolutely shown that men's wills do not control their destinies.

(74-75)

The claim that events take place "quite independently of the wills and judgements of the people involved" is clearly in conflict with the Easterner's analysis: "We're all in it." To say that man is not in control is not at all the same as saying that man is controlled by exterior forces. This is a crucial distinction, for naturalism has been most generally defined as ". . . a manner and method of composition by which the author portrays life as it is in accordance with the philosophic theory of determinism" (Bradley, Beatty and Long, The Red Badge 148). Men's wills may not control their destinies, but will is one of the factors that affect a man's destiny. There may be many factors beyond his control which affect his life, but there are many which he can, and ought to, control. A man left alone in the open sea or raging blizzard has little control, but a man in a room or in a community with other men has some responsibilities upon which he may be required to act. Johnnie's will to win by cheating others is nearly as strong as the Swede's will to die by provoking others. Scully's and the gambler's pride, the cowboy's gruff stupidity, the reticence of Mr. Blanc and others to become involved are surely significant factors in the story's outcome.

James T. Cox quotes the lines in which the

Easterner provides his definition of accountability and, sharing Stallman's position, dismisses them:

. . . when he says: "'We are all in it! . . . Every sin is the result of collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede.'" And our answer must be no, not really. . . . none of the characters of the story, rather than all, may be said to be responsible. Consequently, the real strength, the ruthless honesty this story possesses is not to be found in the literal surface but in the symbolic substructure, where by means of a fictional technique still denied to Crane--recently by Philip Rahv-- the author of "The Blue Hotel" has unmistakably contrived a complex but consistently related statement of a severly naturalistic Weltanschauung. (158)

The technique described here by Cox of rejecting the literal surface of the work in favor of the "symbolic substructure" is unfortunately a common one in Crane criticism; both naturalist and symbolic readings depend upon this approach. But to reject Blanc's summation is to approach the attitude of the cowboy, who is characterized in the story as a "fool" and a jackass." When he cries out "blindly into this fog of mysterious

theory," it is neither the validity of the theory nor his own intelligence that is being criticized; it is, rather, his lack of personal honesty that is being targeted. He is described as "injured and rebellious." If the Easterner's words did not truly make sense, if his definition of complicity was not verified by some recognition within the cowboy of his part in the Swede's death, why would he feel injured and rebellious? Additional justification for accepting Blanc's point of view can be found in the fact that this final section of the story begins "months later," and it is not until the combination of the news of the gambler's sentence and the cowboy's aggressive ignorance provoke him that he reveals the guilty knowledge that he has kept hidden.

The rejection or acceptance of the Easterner's point of view is pivotal to the interpretation of the story. In the reading of the story offered by Stallman, Walcutt, Cox and others, the Easterner's definition of moral responsibility is rejected because it cannot co-exist with the determinism required of a naturalist writer. However, leaving aside for a moment the thought that this definition of moral certainty is not consistent with Crane's other work, there are many aspects of the story which support the Easterner's explanation of moral responsibility. In fact, there is

considerable evidence that the ending has been anticipated and is frequently foreshadowed. The concluding view is anticipated earlier when the men return to the hotel from the fight in the snow. The responsibility for Johnnie's beating is assigned by the women first to Scully--as a father he ought to keep his son out of fights, not arrange them--and, secondly, to the two men with whom the story concludes, the cowboy and the Easterner. They are described as "trembling accomplices" (Gullason, Stories 23).¹

Mr. Blanc has a special role in the story. It is to him that the others turn for explanation throughout the story, so his explanation which ends the story has several times been foreshadowed. When Scully returns to the main room to find the Swede raving about murder, he turns to Mr. Blanc for the final word:

The father spoke suddenly to the Easterner.

"Mr. Blanc," he asked, "What has these boys been doin'?"

The Easterner reflected again. "I didn't see anything wrong at all," he said at last slowly. (11)

¹

All subsequent citations will be from this edition.

Blanc's response is one of the many variations in the story of its closing line; "don't know," "don't see," "don't understand," "didn't do" together form a refrain of denial in the story. Even this early in the story, after the first card game, there are grounds for doubting not the veracity of his words but the character of the Easterner. If the Swede is simply behaving irrationally without the slightest justification (as the reader is led to assume), why must Blanc reflect and give his response "at last slowly?" Later, while the Swede is upstairs with Scully, Johnnie and the cowboy turn to Blanc for an explanation of the Swede's behavior. His reply is that the Swede is a man whose fears have been nourished by dime novels of the Wild West. When Scully returns he confirms this evaluation.

More importantly, it is to Mr. Blanc that the Swede turns when the others have failed to understand his fear:

"They say they don't know what I mean," he remarked mockingly to the Easterner.

The latter answered after prolonged and cautious reflection. "I don't understand you," he said, impassively. (9)

Given the words of his response, "I don't understand you," there seems little reason for his "prolonged and

cautious reflection" unless, as he later reveals, he does understand the Swede but does not have the courage to align himself with the Swede and admit he had once been afraid and had once held misconceptions about the ferocity of the West. He might have been afraid of being drawn into any further involvement with the Swede because he had already ascertained the state of his mental health. He might also have been wary of associating himself with the Swede in the eyes of the others.

Blanc's two denials to Scully and the Swede are as important as anything that happens in the story later. In his essay on "The Blue Hotel" Stanley Greenfield evaluates the summation by Blanc in this way:

Here he [Crane] shows man's fallability in interpreting his own experience, for the Easterner's speech is swelling with self-importance and half-truth. The card game was for fun. What could the Easterner have done by standing up for the Swede that the Swede had not done for himself by whipping Johnnie?

(567)

What Blanc could have done needed to be done earlier, at the moment when the Swede turned to him for help. At that point he might have been able to bring the Swede's

isolation to an end merely by responding with sympathy and reassurance, saying, "I understand how you feel and what you're thinking, but you're mistaken. . . ." But these are not his words. He denies his brotherhood with the Swede because of his own fears and the habit of reticence. Crane adds the adverb to his response ("I don't understand you," he said, impassively.") and gives it additional emphasis by the placement of the comma, casting further doubt upon his claim of ignorance and revealing his decision to remove himself from the situation. The Swede's response to Blanc's words indicate the importance he places on them: "The Swede made a movement then which announced that he had encountered treachery from the only quarter where he had expected sympathy if not help" (9). The choice of the name "Blanc" for the Easterner works well for several reasons. White seems an appropriate designation for a character who seems to stand for the always pale, tubercular Crane. Surely, the other characters would not give the name its correct French pronunciation; they would call him "Mr. Blank," a name entirely appropriate given his moral failure. In addition, the color white has traditionally been a mark of cowardice and surrender.

While I am aware of the dangers of associating an

author with his character, Mr. Blanc seems to be based as much on Crane as the correspondent in "The Open Boat." He is described as a "silent little man." He is even wearing a new leather coat, which Crane had probably purchased with the recent modest prosperity of his assignment as a correspondent for the Bachellor-Johnson news syndicate. During his Western trip Crane did stop in Nebraska and, according to Beer, witnessed and tried to stop a barroom fight. "But thus I offended local custom. These men fought each other every night. Their friends expected it and I was a darned nuisance with my Eastern scruples . . ." (293). If the artist's life is to be used in understanding his work, then Crane's action in this incident confirms the judgment given by Blanc at the end of the story, regardless of whether Blanc stands for the author. There is a moral obligation to act on behalf of others: the disclaimer of the cowboy, "Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?", is clearly unacceptable to Crane.

Combining his artistic credo that preaching is fatal to art with his view that men have only other men to turn to for aid, Crane used his talent to shape a story which dramatizes this simple idea in a way that could hardly be called simple. His choices in the creation of the characters and settings are brilliant.

Among the unappealing others, the Easterner's moral failure is as well concealed as Johnnie's cheating. The cast of characters represents various forces at work against the communion of men. For Scully, and later for the bartender as well, the Swede is not a man; he is merely a customer. Johnnie, like his father, lets pride and ego stand in the way of human connection. People--the farmer, the Swede--are there to be beaten for his self-gratification, his idea of fun. The Easterner and the Westerner display codes of behavior characteristic of their backgrounds. Mr. Blanc minds his own business and as a city man is wise enough not to get involved. He fails the Swede almost out of habit. The cowboy is filled with bravado and prone to aggressive display. His experience and his code of behavior do not provide him with any means of understanding the Swede's fears or Johnnie's cheating in a "fun" game. He is the typical small-town mind, trusting Johnnie because he seems familiar enough but responding to the Swede's strangeness with suspicion and aggression. His preference for physical demonstration over verbal communication is of the type later characterized in Hollywood dialogue as "Yep" and "Nope." His inexperience and inarticulateness are the Western equivalent of the experience and reticence of the

Easterner, a man of "prolonged and cautious reflection." If Blanc fails by his unwillingness to act, the cowboy fails by his unwillingness to think. The Easterner learns from his experience; the cowboy does not.

The problem of irony comes up with Crane's depiction of Scully. Although some critics accept his ministrations as genuine, referring to his "good nature" and "his role of benevolent god," (Gleckner 273) from the beginning he is the target of Crane's irony. He never acts as a human being; he is exclusively a hotel proprietor. "It was notable that throughout this series of small ceremonies the three travelers were made to feel that Scully was very benevolent. He was conferring great favors upon them. He handed the towel from one to the other with an air of philanthropic impulse" (6). Of course, Scully has all the sincerity of a salesman; the water he provides is ice cold, and there is one towel for three guests! Losing a customer would be a personal defeat for him, a matter more of pride than greed. He never takes a cent from the Swede, but his efforts at calming the Swede are not humane; they are professional. His aggressive, intimidating manner only serves to terrify the Swede further. His offering of whiskey brings not reassurance but deepened terror. Common sense should have told him to let the unhappy, unstable

Swede go elsewhere, but his pride would not permit it. For Scully, the Swede remains a customer, and, after the whiskey, the customer is always right. One of the story's humorous moments occurs when Scully intimidates his guests into agreeing that none of his guests should be intimidated:

. . . What do I keep? What do I keep? What do I keep?" he demanded in a voice of thunder. He slapped his knee impressively, to indicate that he himself was going to make reply, and that all should heed. "I keep a hotel," he shouted. "A hotel, do you mind? A guest under my roof has sacred privileges. He is to be intimidated by none. Not one word shall he hear that would prejudice him in favor of goin' away. I'll not have it. There's no place in this here town where they can say they iver took in a guest of mine because he was afraid to stay here." He wheeled suddenly upon the cowboy and the Easterner. "Am I right?"

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the cowboy, "I think you're right."

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the Easterner, "I think you're right." (15)

Johnnie is a smaller, younger version of his father. From their two arguments, we can assume he cheats the farmer earlier in the story as he later cheats in the central card game. The card games are, ostensibly, a matter of fun, yet Johnnie has a kind of ego-greed; he must be the winner. His pride in winning is comparable to Scully's towards his guests. No money is involved, yet the loss of a game or a guest is an intolerable loss of face.

It is the Swede alone in the story who is both stranger and foreigner. Despite his ten years in New York, he is defined, for the convenience of all, as "the Swede." It is the given of the story that the Swede is unbalanced. As he repeatedly says: "Yes, of course, I am crazy--yes. But. . . ." No explanation is given for the cause of his mental condition, but obviously his fears have fed on dime novel notions of the Wild West. His illusions of desperadoes and shootouts prevent him from ever realizing that he is in a small farming town in rural Nebraska. Before the whiskey he is paralyzed by his fears and is in no way dangerous or even aggressive. He is merely an inconvenience, an anomaly. He is simply a man desperately in need of help, a man in vital need of genuine warmth, sympathy and reassurance. I think it is another example of Crane's skill that he

chose to make the most unsympathetic character the one most in need of sympathy. The other characters in the story are guilty of a failure to act, to make the stranger welcome, to calm the fearful, to protect the weak, to protect even the mentally weak. The arrangement of characters here is quite similar to those in Maggie. Like the Swede, Maggie is partly responsible for her fate because of a failure in perception; she ought to be able to recognize Pete for what he is. But Pete, her brother, her mother, the preacher she meets on the street, are all equally responsible. The same kind of moral failure is also found in "The Monster."

The whiskey brings about a total transformation in the Swede. False confidence replaces false fear. He becomes bullying, angry, arrogant, domineering, disdainful, wolfish, menacing. It is he who orders the last card game. His new personality begins to adopt the mannerisms of those around him, first Scully's back-slapping, then the cowboy's board-whacking. His death comes when he follows Scully's model and orders a man to drink.

There is in the fight in the storm an absurd combination of man's animal and civilized behavior. It would be lamentable but not absurd that two men could fight over a game of cards, but it is patently

ridiculous, after the moment has passed, to arrange a boxing match in a blizzard to settle the affair honorably. This is one of Crane's many variations on the standard Western melodrama. Instead of instant gunsmoke and death at the moment of the accusation, or even a shootout on the main street, the group adjourns outdoors for some fisticuffs in the snow; the comedy is of distinctly human proportions. Scully is described as "the master of ceremonies." The talk is of "preliminaries" and "arrangements." The narrator describes them as contestants and seems suprised that they have not changed into suitable costume: "The contestants had not stripped off any clothing. Each was in his ordinary attire." They wait like gentlemen for referee Scully's signal to begin pounding each other. Two changes take place at this moment: the Easterner's voice begins to dominate the narrative, and the generalizations he makes during and after the fight cause the dimensions of the frame of reference of the story to be altered:

The entire prelude had in it a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action, and this aspect was accentuated by the long mellow cry of the blizzard as it sped the tumbling and wailing flakes into the black abyss of the south. (20)

This passage takes the reader beyond the moment of the fight to the eternal human condition. The raging storm makes it clear that life is a terrible struggle and accentuates the pathetic egotism of a fistfight in a blizzard. "The black abyss" juxtaposes the element of death's finality and omnipresence with the men's infantile scuffling in the snow. Given the fragility of man's existence on a "whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb" and the fact that in the vast emptiness of space and time, in the face of the certainty of death, he has only his brother to turn to for aid and comfort, it is indeed a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action that he turns to his brother with a clenched fist or a cry of "Kill him!"

Even before the Swede's death confirms his fears and before Blanc reveals the truth about the card game, there is something about this story that makes the reader uneasy. The Swede was wrong when he thought he was living in the Wild West but right that death was all around him in Nebraska. It is everywhere--in sea, storm, city and town, hotel and barroom. Isn't he also basically right about the group at the hotel? Johnnie does cheat; Scully's warmth is fake and the cowboy cries, "Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill

him!" Given the right provocation, all cheer his temporary downfall and become the men the mad Swede feared:

. . . his [Johnnie's] fist sent the over-balanced Swede sprawling.

The cowboy, Scully, and the Easterner burst into a cheer. . . ." (21)

Later, after the Swede leaves the hotel, the Easterner does not join Scully and the cowboy in their orgy of fantasy violence.

The old man burst into sudden brogue. "I'd loike to take that Swade," he wailed, "and hould 'im down on a shtone flure and bate 'im to jelly wid a shtick!"

The cowboy groaned in sympathy. "I'd like to git him by the neck and ha-ammer him"--he brought his hand down on a chair with a noise like a pistol shot--"hammer that there Dutchman until he couldn't tell himself from a dead coyote!"

"I'd bate 'im until he--"

"I'd show him some things--"

And then together they raised a yearning fanatic cry. "Oh-o-oh! if we only could--"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"and then I'd--"

"O-o-oh!" (24)

The arguments used earlier by Scully (portraits of children, electric streetcars, four churches, and a brick schoolhouse) are meaningless to the Swede, a man certain of death who was "keeping a keen watch on the gloom to his rear." The advanced state of Scully's and Fort Romper's level of civilization is of no help in calming the Swede because he's not interested in buying real estate; "he thinks he's right in the middle of hell," and electric street-cars neither bridge nor illuminate the "black abyss." In his explanation of the Swede, the Easterner generalized the Swede's specific fear. Specifically, in that he is in the West, the Swede is in error. Specifically, in that the West is a particularly dangerous place, he is again in error. "The traveled Easterner laughed, 'It isn't different there even--not in these days'" (14). But, generally, the Swede is correct about the potential for violence which the others fail to recognize within themselves and behind the thin veneer of civilized Nebraska. This idea of the omnipresence of death stands behind the considerable detail devoted to the description of the gambler and the social niceties of Fort Romper. The

scene in the bar duplicates the circumstances at the hotel, showing that the behavior displayed there is not unique but representative of men in general. The town more than tolerates this professional gambler; they seem to take pride in him. He gives them the opportunity to feel superior, superior to both the gambler and to those he takes advantage of.

. .. the important men of Romper invariably laughed in contempt of the victim, and if they thought of the wolf at all, it was with a kind of pride at the knowledge that he would never dare think of attacking their wisdom and courage. (26)

This attitude toward the victimized farmers and travelers reflects the same lack of moral awareness and sympathy that we found at the hotel. Their simplistic rationalization of the dangerous aspect of the professional gambler echoes Scully's attempt at calming the Swede:

Besides, it was popular that this gambler had a real wife, and two real children in a neat cottage in a suburb, where he led an exemplary home life. . . . (26)

This belief that homey civilization can somehow ward off violent death clearly draws Crane's irony here. The

inhabitants of the saloon ignore the drunken, loud-mouthed stranger bragging of his conquest. Like Scully, the bartender, "making the pretension of blindness," adopts the professional attitude, "a distinction of his class." Like the Easterner, the four card players "in some subtle way encased themselves in reserve." When trouble begins, again like the Easterner, the two prominent business men and the district attorney "said nothing." When the Swede falls, these three--without a moment's hesitation to help the Swede or apprehend the murderer--"tumbled out of the place backward." The gambler himself reiterates the story's refrain; his "My friend, I don't know you." (27) is a variation on the Easterner's "I don't understand you." Both statements are false. As we have seen, Blanc reveals that he does understand, and the professional gambler who spends his life in saloons certainly must be able to recognize an aggressive drunk. He may not know the Swede individually, but the Swede can hardly be unknown to him professionally.

The description of the Swede's death again generalizes the idea of life's fragility given earlier during the fight in the storm.

It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced

as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

(28)

Crane's irony is heavy here in the juxtaposition of "citadel" and "melon." Humanity has the potential for virtue, wisdom and power, but in Romper we find egotism, ignorance and weakness. There are a good many more melons than citadels in Fort Romper.

The Red Badge:

"Tell brave deeds of War"

There are several problems in interpretation concerning The Red Badge. As with "The Blue Hotel," the most persistent difficulty with this novel concerns the interpretation of its ending. Has Henry Fleming developed in the course of the action and achieved a higher knowledge of himself and his place in the world, or does he remain under the influence of the illusions which have been with him from the opening of the novel? While there is internal evidence to support a resolution of this question, if one is willing to grant Crane a consistency of thought and interest and can apply an understanding of his ideas on the nature of truth and the limitations of human understanding, the apparent

contradiction can be resolved.

Another way in which a reading of the poetry should clarify our understanding of The Red Badge is that, after an examination of his poems, it is clear that Crane did not consider himself a Christian and, therefore, there is little reason to suppose that the novel is a work of Christian redemption. Thirdly, the reading of the novel as a work of naturalism is also contrary to the thoughts revealed in the poetry, Crane expressed no more confidence in this "scientific" explanation of order in the world than in any theological version. In more specific terms, the determinism inherent in naturalism is directly contrary to the drama of individual human responsibility which is at the heart of all Crane's serious work and forms its most prominent unifying element. There is one other adjustment to our interpretation of this novel which will be considered, a shift in emphasis away from the question of bravery and cowardice as the central issue of the novel to the larger question of life and death.

This little book is a landmark in the history of war narrative, a short novel of the American Civil War that is not at all about the Civil War. It is a single battle whose name we never learn; it is placed neither historically nor geographically. We have no famous

generals, no names and numbers of regiments, no grand strategies, no greater or lesser politics. At its end we remain ignorant of which side has won. Instead, what we are given is the narrative of a young man who comes to modern war with only a reading of Homer to supplement his ignorance. Instead of a stalwart leader of men, Natty or Ahab, Daniel and Davy, we get Henry, a raw recruit, a frightened but thoughtful farm boy. And yet the choice is a mark of genius, revealing both the experience of the author, himself a rather young man, and his philosophy which placed the individual man always at the center and which did not permit the posturings of larger-than-life heroes.

For Crane, the battle raging within Henry is more important than the battle raging around Henry; the latter is important only as it affects the former. In one of his early poems Crane wrote:

"Tell brave deeds of war"

Then they recounted tales:

"There were stern stands

And bitter runs for glory."

Ah, I think there were braver deeds. (17)

The novel is formed by repeated cycles of action and

reflection for both Henry and his comrades. While he is involved in activity, energy is devoted to action, but a moment's pause, the lull between fights, even when catching one's breath at the top of a hill, gives opportunity for reflection and allows doubts and incapacitating fears to come in. The action of war provides a centripetal force pulling men together; ironically enough, the action of war produces the effect of community, of brotherhood, of selflessness. The act of reflection provides a counter-balancing centrifugal force which generates isolation, alienation, and a supreme egotism--an understandable reaction to the immediate self-annihilation resulting from the action of war. The energy in the novel is generated by the conflict between the expansion of self and of self-importance (even a cat swells up in fear in the face of danger) and the attraction of the security and the sustenance of group solidarity which requires a willingness to submerge or surrender the ego's needs to the collective needs of the community.

The most obvious aspect of the interplay between action and reflection must still be emphasized. While the primary action of the novel is reflection, the significance of the war setting cannot be undervalued. The question of bravery or cowardice is not primary to

war; it is secondary. The primary action of war is death. It is the reality of his own imminent annihilation, the mortality of his humanity, the insignificance of his existence--the fact of death--which Henry cannot face. Given Crane's lack of belief in the redemptive framework of a religious faith and his evaluation of reputation as "a bubble," death, itself, takes on new importance in this war novel. As death comes to each alone, it is the cause of the ultimate isolation, yet as all must die, it is the basis of our common humanity. In Crane's worldview, because nothingness has replaced both the security of a divine plan and the reassurance of a heavenly reward, man's conceit must supply his motivation, and men have only each other to turn to for comfort and aid. It is his many encounters with death which is Henry's guide in the rite of passage; it is death which shows him his place in the world and in the world of men.

The Red Badge of Courage is essentially a work neither of naturalism nor symbolism but of impressionism and realism in technique and of humanism and irony in outlook. The interpretations of this novel based on symbolism I reject on the grounds that, as I have tried to indicate in the previous chapters on his life and poetry, Crane was neither a Christian in faith nor a

symbolist in technique. The interpretation of this novel as the best example of American naturalism will require a more detailed analysis, but in general terms, let me say that this novel, and all of Crane's serious work, is inextricably involved with ideas of conscience and morality, with definitions of right choice and right act, which are dramatized by Crane through his characters and for his audience, which cannot exist without the free will denied by the determinism inherent in naturalism. The exterior battles are rendered realistically and impressionistically; the interior battles are a psychologically realistic study of the states of consciousness of a young soldier of a certain personality. Anyone who has read The Red Badge of Courage can never re-read its title without supplying an ironic question mark at its end. There is no red badge; there is only an intentional clubbing of one deserter by another. The outward sign is false; it reveals nothing of its origin or of the inner reality of the man. This red badge is only one of Crane's many negative definitions of courage; it is not chivalry, not bravado, not animal frenzy nor a machine-like state of "battle sleep." Based on what we have already seen of Crane's ideas of human nature and the nature of truth and on the definition realized through Henry Fleming, we

can say that, for Crane, a man is neither a hero nor a coward; he is both, sometimes one, sometimes the other, and barring the variety of self-delusion, moments of confidence must be preceded and followed by moments of doubt. With astonishing economy Crane manages to make us care for a constantly disappointing hero, to make us share in his fears and, especially, in his doubts. These doubts, the persistent questioning of Henry about himself, his place in the regiment, their place in the battle and in the battle of life against death, secure us to Henry and help secure a place for this little book full of questions.

The first two chapters give three versions of the perspective and the code of behavior which Henry must live through in order to understand. The novel opens with the army at rest, a time for washing shirts, arguing over rumors and worrying about oneself. Henry retires to the tent's solitude to try to fit the bits of his war knowledge together with bits of self-knowledge. Too many pieces are missing for him to be able to complete the puzzle. Crane uses the technique of flashback through Henry's musings to reveal how he came to be at war. Led by neither patriotism nor principle, he chances his life because "The newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturings, had roused him to an

uncheckable degree" (Bradley, Beatty and Long The Red Badge ¹ 7). He enlists despite the fact that his romanticism--"He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess."--is tempered with a touch of realism: "It must be some sort of play affair. He had long despaired of witnessing a Greek-like struggle. Such would be no more. Men were better or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions" (7). Yet he struts and swells with pride, and his mother disappoints him ". . . by saying nothing about returning with his shield or on it." She does, however, give first voice to the idea of self and others which is repeated in variations throughout the novel: "Don't go a' thinkin' you can lick the hull rebel army at the start, because yeh can't. Yer just one little feller amongst a hull lot of others. . . . I know how you are, Henry" (8).

This aspect of Henry's growth from the romantic egotism of adolescence to a mature partner in the human brotherhood is often neglected in favor of the lesser problem of courage and cowardice, which can lead to problems, especially in naturalist readings such as this

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All subsequent citations will be from this edition.

one from Mordecai and Erin Marcus:

In any case Henry's assumption of manhood leads from an animal-like cowardice to an animal-like fierceness. Crane's inability to lead Henry to manhood by any means other than a release of contrasting animal-like forces in his soul may account for the charge of failure to convince which has often been made of Henry's assumption of manhood. (Gullason, Career 346)

Animal imagery is often given as proof of Crane's naturalism, as an indication that men are no more than animals. Several key incidents in the story require detailed explanation to resolve the nature of such misreading, but the frequency of animal imagery has, itself, been cited as a proof. The animal-like cowardice cited above refers to "ran like a rabbit" or ". . . he was like a proverbial chicken." The animal-like fierceness refers to "fight like a wildcat." I believe each of these expressions were common to the American idiom (and presumably predate it) long before the birth of naturalism or, for that matter, of Crane. Counterbalancing image patterns which describe the soldiers as infants or "babes" or which describe warfare in homey images of bonnets and carpentry have largely

been ignored.

Henry's reverie is interrupted when Conklin and Wilson enter the tent. Henry asks Conklin questions hoping to get answers about himself. There are three: "How do you think the regiment will do? Think any of the boys will run? Did you ever think you might run yourself, Jim?" (12-13). Conklin's answer to the second question links both of them to the regiment (all are as yet untested, all have been called "fresh fish" by the veterans) and echoes his mother's advice: ". . . it ain't likely they'll lick the hull rebel army all-to-oncet the first time. . . ." His response to the third question echoes the second half of the mother's advice and gives the soldiers' simple creed which includes allegiance to neither god nor country but is merely an acceptance of the community of brother soldiers: ". . . if a whole lot of boys started and run, why, I s'pose I'd start and run. . . . But if everybody was a-standing and a-fighting, why, I'd stand and fight. Be jiminey, I would" (13). Conklin feels no separation or distance from the others and derives some of his assurance from this feeling of oneness.

Conklin's self-assurance allows Henry to fall asleep reassured, but he awakes to the same self-doubt and spends the following day alienated from his fellows,

believing that he is alone in doubt. "He told himself that he was not formed to be a soldier. And he mused seriously upon the radical differences between himself and those men . . ." (18). A wedge of doubt has been driven between him and the balance and sustenance comradeship could yield. The second chapter ends with the same questioning dialogue as the first, but this time it is the swaggering Wilson who answers the three questions, already bitter and sarcastic: "Oh, you're going to do great things, I s'pose? How do you know that you won't run when the time comes? You ain't the bravest man in the world, are you?" (19). While his bravado hardly replaces Conklin's unassuming strength, Wilson also identifies himself with the regiment: "I s'pose I'll do as well as the rest." and, in response to the last question, "I said I was going to do my share of the fighting--that's what I said." Here, the effect on Henry is negative; he now retreats further from the community of soldiers into the isolation of his self-pity. "He felt alone in space when his injured comrade had disappeared. . . . No one seemed to be wrestling with such a terrific personal problem. He was a mental outcast" (19). This chapter, too, ends with Henry falling asleep, but now he is "exhausted and ill from the monotony of his suffering." These two chapters,

then, are the given of the novel: before any action begins, split off from the others by a wedge of self-doubt and self-importance, Henry has already retreated behind the distorting lense of his inflated egotism; he is a "mental outcast."

In trying to discover whether he will run or stand in the coming battle Henry ". . . finally concluded that the only way to prove himself was to go into the blaze, and then figuratively to watch his legs to discover their merits and faults." I have emphasized "figuratively" because it seems that this word has been read as "literally" by the editors of the Norton Critical Edition of The Red Badge as they appended the following note after the word "legs." "Crane's naturalistic inclination suggested images representing soldiers' acts as mechanical responses not controlled by moral judgement or choice" (n14). The process Henry describes seems reasonable enough; he concludes that he cannot predict what he will do until the moment arrives. This is not at all the same as his legs literally making the decision for him, not the same as a surrender of responsibility. And it is not naturalism. A similar misreading occurs a few pages later when the editors follow the sentence "Whole brigades grinned in unison and regiments laughed." with this note, "A

characteristic example of Crane's depersonalized image of the individual soldier." This evaluation is quite surprising, considering the context; Crane immediately follows this generalization with several paragraphs of detailed dramatization whose effect is just the opposite of depersonalization:

A rather fat soldier attempted to pilfer a horse from a dooryard. He planned to load his knapsack upon it. He was escaping with his prize when a young girl rushed from the house and grabbed the animal's mane. There followed a wrangle. The young girl, with pink cheeks and shining eyes, stood like a dauntless statue.

The observant regiment, standing at rest in the roadway, whooped at once, and entered whole-souled upon the side of the maiden. The men became so engrossed in this affair that they entirely ceased to remember their own large war. They jeered the piratical private, and called attention to various defects in his personal appearance; and they were wildly enthusiastic in support of the young girl.

To her, from some distance, came bold advice. "Hit him with a stick."

There were crows and catcalls showered upon him when he retreated without the horse. (17)

In his naturalist reading of this novel, Charles Walcott gives this generalization on Henry's mental processes: "Increasingly, in short, Crane makes us see Henry Fleming as an emotional puppet controlled by whatever sight he sees at the moment" (79). While it would be an oversimplification to say that Henry is unaffected by his surroundings, it is also an oversimplification to say that he is a puppet controlled by them. As I have shown in the discussion of Crane's poetry, this process works both ways; sensory input does shape attitude, but for Crane the mental outlook, attitude and preconceptions are a powerful influence on the perceptions. A man's view of nature reflects his mental state while nature remains neutral and has no awareness of him at all. Henry is being mocked when he sees kindness in nature, "The stillness of the night enveloping him made him feel a vast pity for himself. There was a caress in the soft winds; and the whole mood of the darkness, he thought, was one of sympathy for himself in his distress" (17). The fallacy of this view, and the process by which it has been derived, is suggested by the passage which immediately follows it where Henry recalls the milk cows of home whom he cursed

and threw milk stools at: "But, from his present point of view, there was a halo of happiness about each of their heads, and he would have sacrificed all of the brass buttons on the continent to have been able to return to them. He told himself that he was not formed to be a soldier" (18). A few pages later and a few steps closer to the battle, Henry again looks at nature; understandably, his perspective has changed: "Absurd ideas took hold of him. He thought he did not relish the landscape. It threatened him. A house standing placidly in distant fields had an ominous look. the shadows of the woods were formidable" (23). While neither of these passages is crucial to understanding the novel, they reveal the operation of Henry's mind, its effect on his perceptions, and the distortion produced by his fears. The naturalist interpretations of more significant passages are the result of either ignoring the distortion and rationalization produced by his fear or taking passages out of context, or both.

Walcutt, for example, contends Crane "has absolutely shown that men's wills do not control their destinies" (75). He says, "Approaching the first engagement the youth perceives that he is 'in a moving box' of soldiers from which it would be impossible to escape." and ". . . it had occurred to him that he had

never wished to come to war. . . . He had been dragged by the merciless government." Lars Ahnebrink in his naturalist reading of the novel is even more explicit in his acceptance of Henry's evaluation of this moment: "In The Red Badge of Courage Crane made it clear that the soldiers had little free will, and were pawns in the hands of forces they could not control. Henry Fleming was aware of the fact that his enlistment, for example, was no action determined by his own will" (160). This naturalist interpretation of the "moving box" is unacceptable on several grounds. First, Henry did enlist and he gave his reasons; they did not include being dragged by the merciless government. Second, while he now perceives that he cannot escape, in fact, that is exactly what he later does. Moreover, the nature of circumstances must be taken into account. In joining any army the surrendering of individual freedom to forces they cannot control is required of all soldiers. More importantly, a crucial distinction has not been recognized. While it may be true that "men's wills do not control their destinies." this is not the same as saying that men's destinies are in fact controlled. Similarly, there are forces beyond the control of men, but that does not mean that men are under the control of those forces. But the primary factor here is the effect

of Henry's own mind. The battle and the others are soon eclipsed as the needs of the ego expand in the face of the void. Rationalization, distortion, and self-deception have come to the defense.

Two other incidents in the third chapter contribute to Henry's continued retreat into himself: the foreshadowing of death when Wilson gives him a packet of his last letters and his first meeting with a dead man:

Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one the dead foot projected piteously. And it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he had perhaps concealed from his friends.

The ranks opened covertly to avoid the corpse. The invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself. The youth looked keenly at the ashen face. The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it. He vaguely desired to walk around and

around the body and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question. (22)

This is the first of several rather active corpses Henry will encounter. The placement and capitalization of the word "Question," as well as the obvious fact that this man is dead, ought to indicate that the unasked question is not about bravery or cowardice but about life and death, the meaning of existence.

While much has been made of animal imagery as evidence of naturalism in this novel, what seems more surprising, and less appropriate to the battle scene, is the frequent appearance of images that can be categorized as domestic or homey. These images serve to deflate the romantic preconceptions of the glory of war, often add an absurd dimension to the life and death struggles, and, to some extent, remove some of the exoticism of death in war by domesticating it. A lieutenant is the first to be wounded. His anger is "conventional" and the men laugh in relief:

The lieutenant of the youth's company was shot in the hand. He began to swear so wonderously that a nervous laugh went along the regimental line. The officer's profanity sounded conventional. It relieved the

tightened senses of the new men. It was as if he had hit his fingers with a tack hammer at home.

He held the wounded member carefully away from his side so that the blood would not drip upon his trousers. (28)

When the first attack comes, Crane uses a rather surprising simile to describe their preparations: "They displayed a feverish desire to have every possible cartridge ready to their hands. The boxes were pulled around into various positions, and adjusted with great care. It was as if seven hundred new bonnets were being tried on" (29). When he describes Henry hard at work at the killing, all romantic allusions vanish; he is a workman immersed in the routine of his task:

He was at a task. He was like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box, only there was furious haste in his movements. He, in his thought, was careering off in other places, even as the carpenter who as he works whistles and thinks of his friend or his enemy, his home or a saloon. And these jolted dreams were never perfect to him afterward, but remained a mass of blurred shapes. (31)

As Henry's emotions are transformed by the heat of battle, he is not described as a bull, wolf or lion; he is "a well-meaning cow worried by dogs" (31). In a later skirmish he is described as a kitten chased by boys (79). Instead of the glorious knight which he later described himself to be, "He fought frantically for respite for his senses, for air, as a babe being smothered attacks the deadly blankets" (31). A colonel scolds "like a wet parrot" and a captain "coaxed in schoolmistress fashion." His description of the dead and wounded that result from this skirmish, while not as powerfully grotesque and shockingly absurd as those seen later, clearly continue the anti-romantic, domestic tone in lines such as: "The men dropped here and there like bundles." The dead men are described as "dark bits of debris" and:

Underfoot there were a few ghastly forms motionless. They lay twisted in fantastic contortions. Arms were bent and heads were turned in incredible ways. It seemed that the dead men must have fallen from some incredible height to get into such positions. They looked to be dumped out upon the ground from the sky. (33)

Henry's doubt and isolation are interrupted

temporarily during the first skirmish as he is reunited with the regiment in the work of war. "There was a consciousness always of the presence of his comrades about him. He felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death" (31). This concept of fraternity and brotherhood, the ability to simply stand in the face of death and work at the task with one's comrades, is the one aspect of warfare that Crane admires. Notice, too, that this brotherhood is specifically described as being born of the danger of death. Chapter V, like Chapters IX, XVII, and XXIV, ends with a glance at the sky. Here it reveals that Henry still has much to learn because, egotistically, he still expects to find some reflection of his state of affairs on the face of the universe. This description also provides a premonition of the resurgence of Henry's ego in the next chapter where "The youth awakened slowly."

As he gazed around him the youth felt a flash of astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleamings on the trees and fields. It was surprising that Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment. (34)

Crane uses this state of "battle sleep" (12) to postpone Henry's achievement of maturity, his understanding of his place in war and in life. When he awakens his old egotism prevents him from understanding that he has been sustained as a small part through his participation in the action of the whole group. He forgets his mother's definition of his place as "one little feller amongst a hull lot of others" and thinks he has fought the entire war on his own. His egotism is boundless, self-deception complete. "He went into an ecstasy of self-gratification. . . . He perceived that the man who had fought thus was magnificent" (34). Not only does he misunderstand the part he has played, he misjudges the whole drama of both life and war. "So it was over at last! The supreme trial had been passed. The red formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished." Unfortunately, there is no supreme trial in Crane's vision of life and war, for one trial merely precedes another; the struggle of life goes on, and difficulties are only temporarily vanquished.

Ironically, while he was able to stand and fight with his fears and his fellows, his new-blown self-image cannot survive the second charge, and, in fact, it might be the reason why he now runs. Initially he runs because he sees others run. He convinces himself that the whole

regiment is in flight as he dodges the lieutenant who tries to stop him. Initially, though he mistakes the situation, he acts in accordance with the soldiers' code, but the fear of death soon consumes him, and he begins to retreat behind the distorting lense of his egotism. He alone is right; the entire brigade are "fools" and "idiots." His ego puts him at a great distance from the group:

Thoughts of his comrades came to him. The brittle blue line had withstood the blows and won. He grew bitter over it. It seemed that the blind ignorance and stupidity of those little pieces had betrayed him. He had been overturned and crushed by their lack of sense in holding the position, when intelligent deliberation would have convinced them that it was impossible. He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark, had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge. He felt a great anger against his comrades. He knew it could be proved that they had been fools. (40)

Henry shortly runs to the forest to escape, but he cannot, despite his extravagant rationalizations, escape his conscience nor can he dodge the death that has been

pursuing him.

This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy.

He threw a pine cone at a jovial squirrel, and he ran with chattering fear. High in a treetop he stopped, and poking his head cautiously from behind a branch, looked down with an air of trepidation.

The youth felt triumphant at this exhibition. There was the law, he said. Nature had given him a sign. The squirrel, immediately upon recognizing the danger, had taken to his legs without ado. He did not stand stolidly baring his furry belly to the missile, and die with an upward glance at the sympathetic heavens. On the contrary, he had fled as fast as his legs could carry him; and he was but an ordinary squirrel, too--doubtless no philosopher of his race. The youth wended, feeling that Nature was of his mind. She reenforced his argument with proofs that lived where the sun shone.

Once he found himself almost into a swamp. He was obliged to walk upon bog tufts and watch his feet to keep from the oily mire. Pausing at one time to look about him he saw, out at some black water, a small animal pounce in and emerge directly with a gleaming fish.

(41)

The last line of this passage makes the opening portrait of nature absurd, and the irony in "doubtless no philosopher of his race" is unmistakable.

Further reasons for doubting the interpretation of this incident as a naturalistic justification of desertion can be found in the magnitude of his rationalization and, especially, in the quite eloquent corpse who gives Henry a true picture of his relationship with nature.

He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that had once been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the

face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of bundle along the upper lip.

The youth gave a shriek as he confronted the thing. He was for moments turned to stone before it. He remained staring into the liquid-looking eyes. The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look. Then the youth cautiously put one hand behind him and brought it against a tree. Leaning upon this he retreated, step by step, with his face still toward the thing. He feared that if he turned his back the body might spring up and stealthily pursue him.

The branches, pushing against him, threatened to throw him over upon it. His unguided feet, too, caught aggravatingly in brambles; and with it all he received a subtle suggestion to touch the corpse. As he thought of his hand upon it he shuddered profoundly.

At last he burst the bonds which had fastened him to the spot and fled, unheeding the underbrush. He was pursued by a sight of the black ants swarming greedily upon the gray face and venturing horribly near to the eyes.

I say "eloquent corpse" not only because his message turns Henry around, sending him back to the regiment but because of the way it is described: "He was being looked at by a dead man. . . ." The eyes were "staring at the youth." The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look." The word "bundle," used earlier to describe the bodies of the dead, here takes on horrifying proportions. In this meeting Henry has confronted his own mortality in the physical reality of the corpse and has learned that there is no sanctuary against death. Much later, in Chapter XIV, when he awakens in the encampment of the regiment, he perceives the sleeping soldiers as corpses:

His disordered mind interpreted the hall of the forest as a charnel place. He believed for an instant that he was in the house of the dead. . . . He saw that this sombre picture was not a fact of the present, but a mere prophecy. (63)

His vision is prophetic not because all of these men will die on the fields of war but because all will die. Beginning with "a subtle suggestion to touch the corpse." in the woods, Henry now feels an attraction, a fascination, toward death and the battlefield. "He saw that it was an ironical thing for him to be running thus

toward that which he had been at such pains to avoid." This irony is a noticeable change in attitude. "Reflecting, he saw a sort of humor in the point of view of himself and his fellows during the last encounter. They had taken themselves and the enemy very seriously and had imagined that they were deciding the war" (43). In addition, his attitude toward nature has undergone some revision; when trees impede his return to the battlefield, he observes "with a fine bitterness: that Nature could be not quite ready to kill him" (44). He moves toward the battlefield with the express desire to "see it produce corpses."

Presently he proceeded again on his forward way. The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. Its complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go close and see it produce corpses. (44)

Henry gets his wish and encounters a procession of the wounded. Crane's description here is remarkable, with similarities to Dante and Kafka. There is a chilling black humor here characteristic of a modern view of a modern war. There is no salvation, there is no glory; it is a comedy of horrors as men march into the void in "an unholy mixture of merriment and agony."

One of the wounded men had a shoeful of blood. He hopped like a schoolboy in a game. He was laughing hysterically.

One was swearing that he had been shot in the arm through the commanding general's mismanagement of the army. One was marching with an air imitative of some sublime drum major. Upon his features was an unholy mixture of merriment and agony. As he marched he sang a bit of doggerel in a high and quavering voice:

"Sing a song 'a vic'try
A pocketful 'a bullets,
Five an' twenty dead men
Baked in a - pie."

Parts of the procession limped and staggered to this tune.

Another had the gray seal of death already on his face. He stalked like the specter of a soldier, his eyes burning with the power of a stare into the unknown. (44-5)

Although Henry does not recognize him until later, the spectral soldier, more dead than alive, "burning with the power of a stare into the unknown," is his childhood friend, Jim Conklin. Crane's powerful treatment of the dead and the dying, their role in turning Henry around

and sending him back to his comrades, serves to indicate that more than bravery and cowardice is involved in Henry's education. Conklin is four times described as staring into "the unknown" (45,7,8). His slow death, "this spectacle of gradual strangulation," is unbearable, and his final moment of dancing a "hideous hornpipe" with "implike enthusiasm" is ghastly. The crowning touch to the prolonged description of Conklin's death is found in Crane's description of the expression on his face; death, apparently, brings no peaceful rest: "The mouth was open and the teeth showed in a laugh" (51).

More than enough, I think, has been said about the red wafer sun, but I think it is worth noting that Henry's immediate reaction (The youth turned, with a sudden, livid rage, toward the battlefield. He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a phillipic.), given its emphasis on the word "seemed" and the fact that his phillipic is limited to only one word, "Hell," anticipates in a less well developed form the expression of the more mature correspondent in "The Open Boat."

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at

the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelted with his jeers. (Gullason, Short Stories 353)

Suprisingly, or perhaps not, Henry and the tattered man linger over and consider interrogating the corpse. "They both turned toward the body as if to ask it a question. 'Well,' at length spoke the tattered man, 'There ain't no use in our stayin' here an' tryin' t' ask him anything'" (52). The last words Crane gives to Jim Conklin are "It remained laughing there in the grass" (52).

While Henry has shown the proper care for Jim Conklin, he abandons the tattered man for the second time when he begins to ask questions about the location of his wound. It is this desertion, and not his previous escape from the battle, that Henry will be unable to forgive himself for, because he now acts only to preserve his self-image from scorn, a far cry from self-preservation. The fear of death has to a great extent been exorcised by the corpse in the woods and by his participation in Conklin's death, but fear of the laughter and contempt of his comrades has taken its place. His imagination had provided the centrifugal

force which led to his isolation, and now his encounters with death, beginning with the corpse in the forest, provide the centripetal force to send him seeking the solace of the community of his comrades. The mental outcast who became a deserter, a physical outcast, now worries about becoming a social outcast, "a slang phrase." But Henry continues to see himself at impossible distances from other men. He cannot join the others without fear of ridicule because, egotistically, he still considers himself the center of everyone's attention. He wishes for a general rout of the army to bring the others to him. Simultaneously, another solution presents itself; if brotherhood with the living is not possible, brotherhood with the dead might also be desirable. Anything is preferable to his current isolation:

Again he thought that he wished he was dead.
He believed that he envied a corpse. Thinking
of the slain, he achieved a great contempt for
some of them, as if they were guilty for thus
becoming lifeless. (58)

The desire to end his isolation is present; all Henry needs is an opportunity to return without the public humiliation which would prevent the comradeship he so desires. He gets his wish when fleeing soldiers sweep

past him, and as he has already faced death, he now looks in the face of cowardice in another dialogue of unanswered questions:

From the mouths of the fleeing men came a thousand wild questions, but no one made answers.

The youth, after rushing about and throwing interrogations at the heedless band of retreating infantry, finally clutched a man by the arm. They swung around face to face.

"Why--why--" stammered the youth struggling with his balking tongue.

The man screamed: "Let go me! Let go me! His face was livid and his eyes were rolling uncontrolled.

Let go me! Let go me!"

"Why--why--" stuttered the youth. (60)

There is still no answer to the question, but Henry can now return to the regiment with his forged red credentials. He is welcomed back into the regiment by the recently transformed Wilson, who gives up his own blanket for his friend. "He gave a long sigh, snuggled down in his blanket and in a moment was like his comrades" (68).

Just as the self-effacing behavior of the tattered

man and the cheery man have shown Henry how to behave toward his fellow man, just as Conklin must die to show him how a man can die, Wilson must live to show how a man can grow. While there has understandably been much debate over how much Henry has changed by the novel's end, and even over whether he has changed at all, Wilson presents a clear, irrefutable proof that Crane holds that learning and growth are possible. In the stark economy of this novel, Wilson serves as a clear statement of this possibility. His certain transformation both establishes the possibility of change and is a contrast to Henry's uncertain growth.

The youth took note of a remarkable change in his comrade since those days of camp life upon the river bank. He seemed no more to be continually regarding the proportions of his personal prowess. He was not furious at small words that pricked his conceits. He was no more a loud young soldier. There was about him now a fine reliance. He showed a quiet belief in his purposes and his abilities. And this inward confidence evidently enabled him to be indifferent to little words of other men aimed at him. (70)

In addition, Henry describes the process of Wilson's

change in a paraphrase of Crane's parable-style poems. "Apparently, the other had now climbed a peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing." Notice both the geographical change for a change of point of view and, more importantly, the change in perspective is a change in self-perception. A few lines later this sense of proportion is further emphasized when Henry jealously gives Wilson a backhanded compliment, paraphrasing his mother's advice while claiming to be repeating Wilson's words. "The youth considered for a moment. 'Day--'b--fore--yesterday,' he finally replied, with boldness, 'you would 'a' bet you'd lick the hull kit--an'--boodle all by yourself.'" While Wilson is now able to recognize his past faults, "I believe I was a pretty big fool in those days.," Henry sticks to his illusions, refusing to accept the reality of his actions and unable to see himself in others:

He remembered how some of the men had run from the battle. As he recalled their terror-stricken faces he felt scorn for them. They had surely been more fleet and more wild than was absolutely necessary. They were weak mortals. As for himself, he had fled with discretion and dignity. (74)

His self-pride was now completely restored. In the shade of its flourishing growth he stood with braced and self-confident legs. . . . He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man. (73)

This chapter (XV) is devoted exclusively to the dissection of Henry's rationalizations. He remembers he still carries Wilson's letters and "rejoiced in the possession of a small weapon with which he could prostrate his comrade at the first sign of a cross-examination." Crane adroitly takes us through the mental chain from guilt to fear and from jealousy to superiority: "The latter [Henry] felt immensely superior to his friend, but he inclined to condescension. He adopted toward him an air of patronizing good humor" (73). He must tear down the new Wilson in order to build himself up. Henry gives further indication of his own lack of growth when he reacts to the news that his side has suffered a defeat in the recent battle. Wilson sighed and remarked sadly, "Oh, well, I s'pose we got licked." But Henry "began a long and intricate denunciation of the commander of the forces" (76). He provokes the familiar question, another variation of his mother's advice, "Maybe yeh think yeh fit th' hull battle yestirday, Fleming."

Henry is terrified this sarcastic man has information on his recent cowardice and "he became suddenly a modest person." But in Crane's view of things, such transformations of personality are neither sudden nor permanent. In fact, Henry is slowly learning to recognize his place in the regiment and in the universe, but his lessons are incomplete at this point; for every two steps forward, he takes one step back.

In the first engagement of the next battle, Henry stands and fights, but again he operates in a kind of battle sleep or trance. He keeps firing after the enemy have left the field and must be told to stop shooting. He continues to magnify his own importance and, just like his reaction after the first skirmish on the preceding day, fails to understand the difference between the duty expected of every soldier and the qualifications of a hero:

He had been a tremendous figure, no doubt. By this struggle he had overcome obstacles which he had admitted to be mountains. They had fallen like paper peaks, and he was now what he called a hero. And he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight. (82)

Crane's irony here is obvious in the placement and

punctuation of "no doubt" in "He had been a tremendous figure, no doubt." It is also present in the qualifying phrase in "... he was now what he called a hero." (emphasis added) and in "what he had admitted to be mountains." Even without the magical process of sleeping and awakening, the word "knight" is always ironic in Crane's hands.

There remains only one lesson for Henry, an almost insignificant incident which seems to crystalize all of the experiences he has recently undergone without being able to assimilate, which leads to his one unheralded, quiet moment of heroism. After the first skirmish of the second day, Henry and Wilson go to fill their canteens and eavesdrop on a general. Astonished, they find that their regiment is being sent on a charge from which few are expected to return. His perspective undergoes a drastic readjustment when he learns that the entire regiment is considered a mere broom:

These happenings had occupied an incredibly short time, yet the youth felt that in them he had been made aged. New eyes had been given to him. And the most startling thing was to learn suddenly that he was very insignificant. The officer spoke of the regiment as if he referred to a broom. Some part of the woods

needed sweeping, perhaps, and he merely indicated a broom in a tone properly indifferent to its fate. It was war, no doubt, but it appeared strange. (85)

After this point there is a noticeable change in Henry and in Crane's attitude toward him. There is irony in the final pages, but it deals with war in general and not Henry in particular. At the moment this passage describes, the youth is suddenly aged, is given "new eyes" and finally comprehends something about his own place in the scheme of things, coming to this awareness backwards by first recognizing the relative significance of the whole regiment. After overhearing the general's plan, neither Henry nor Wilson thinks of his own safety; they abandon the search for water and return to the regiment without hesitation, now committed to the death struggle. Apparently a change has taken place:

The youth, turning, shot a quick, inquiring glance at his friend. The latter returned to him the same manner of look. They were the only ones who possessed an inner knowledge. "Mule drivers--hell t' pay--don't believe many will get back." It was an ironical secret. Still, they saw no hesitation in each other's faces, and they nodded a mute and unprotesting

assent when a shaggy man near them said in a meek voice: "we'll git swallowed." (86)

It is significant that throughout the following battle, in fact, since they eavesdropped on the general, Henry is shown to be one in thought and act with Wilson, the transformed soldier.

While earlier he had either fought blindly or run blindly, fought in a trance or run like a rabbit, Henry now sees with a heightened awareness and a new understanding:

It seemed to the youth that he saw everything. Each blade of the green grass was bold and clear. He thought that he was aware of every change in the thin, transparent vapor that floated idly in sheets. The brown or gray trunks of the trees showed each roughness of their surfaces. And the men of the regiment, with their starting eyes and sweating faces, running madly, or falling, as if thrown headlong, to queer, heaped-up corpses--all were comprehended. His mind took a mechanical but firm impression, so that afterward everything was pictured and explained to him, save why he himself was there.

. . . . There was the delirium that encounters despair and death, and is heedless and blind to the odds. It is a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness. And because it was of this order, perhaps, why the youth wondered, afterward, what reasons he could have had for being there. (87)

The most remarkable aspect of this passage is that he is actually part of the furious rush which he describes. He is now able to maintain his identity while participating in the action of the group. Here, the repeated question is why is he there. The only reason Crane gives, with an undercutting "perhaps," is that, because egotism is the normal order of things, this temporary but sublime absence of selfishness cannot be understood outside of the circumstances which give birth to it. In later years, after he had been to two wars, Crane still found this kind of behavior baffling. In a letter to an unknown recipient, which Stallman dates as "Summer, 1899," Crane wrote:

. . . . I don't know why. I shall never know why. But there is an excellence of human conduct independent of Cervantes and Velasquez. The Spaniards who lay dead in El Caney knew something of it. Our men knew

something of it. Mob-courage?--mob-courage. The mob has no courage. This is the chatter of clubs and writers. Pray go stand with your back to deadly fire from a painted drop from a pantomime and wave signals for an hour without wincing and then talk of mob-courage. Imperialism? All right. The White Man's Burden? What in hell did Private Jones and Seaman Smith know of it? Stop being sarcastic. A year hasn't diminished by one my respect for the men. I shall never see another war. I don't care if Buller drives all the Boers up Egypt's fattest pyramid. The men were all right. (Stallman and Gilkes 223)

The other central questions of the novel on the mystery of death and "Will I run?" also receive no final answer. The question of why men go to war is another for which Crane never found a satisfactory answer.

There are, however, some ideas of human nature, codes of conduct, and values which are clearly realized in the novel. Henry is held, by himself and by Crane, responsible for his actions; there is a debt one owes to one's comrades, the dying and those who stand to fight in the face of death. Comradeship, brotherhood and community are real and preferable to isolation and

egotism. Intellectual growth and change in behavior are expected, even required, for a self-respecting man.

Crane titled one of his Civil War short stories "A Mystery of Heroism." In this story a young soldier, Fred Collins, decides that he will traverse a meadow alive with enemy rifle and cannon fire to get water from a well. Crane undercuts the value of his action, first, by revealing that the need for water is not commensurate with such a desperate endeavor; the motivation is boasting and boredom, so the act is absurd. Second, although Collins returns unhurt, whatever water remains in the bucket is spilled by two playful lieutenants; the errand has been pointless. The only aspect of this adventure which could be seen as heroism free of irony is when a wounded officer on the field begs for a drink of water. Collins first refuses and runs by him but he soon turns around and stops to help. As with The Red Badge, the presentation of heroism, while clearly anti-romantic, remains ambivalent. Crane never praised a man, soldier or not, for the excellence of his killing. Even in war it is often acts of kindness which are dubbed heroism. Collins is a hero, regardless of his own and the regiment's perceptions, only for endangering himself to ease the pain of a wounded man. In The Red Badge it is his failure to help the tattered man, and

not his flight from battle, which will haunt Henry Fleming. On May 1, 1892, a short piece by Crane titled "Not Much of a Hero" was published in the New York Tribune in which Crane retells the exploits of a legendary Indian fighter, Tom Quick. He concludes:

He was merely an Indian killer. There are three views to be taken of 'Tom' Quick. The deeds which are credited to him may be fiction ones and he may have been one of those sturdy and bronzed woodsmen who cleared the path of civilization. Or the accounts may be true and he a monomaniac upon the subject of Indians. . . . Or the accounts may be true and he a man whose hands were stained with unoffending blood, purely and simply a murderer. (15)

The critical debate over the novel centers around its final pages. Has Henry learned from his experiences, has he grown as a human being, or has he remained mired in his delusions about himself? In the first place it is necessary to recall that Crane saw life as continual change, a constant battle. In describing his own mixed reaction to favorable response to his work, he wrote this in a letter to Nellie Crouse:

. . . . For the first time I saw the majestic forces which are arrayed against man's true

success--not the world--the world is silly, changeable, any of its decisions can be reversed--but man's own colossal impulses more strong than chains, and I perceived that the fight was not going to be with the world but with myself. I had fought the world and had not bended or moved an inch but this other battle--it is to last on up through the years to my grave and only on that day am I to know if the word Victory will look well upon lips of mine. (Stallmen and Gilkes 105)

In this light there seems little reason to consider the last pages of the novel as a final statement on Henry's character. Looking at the last pages when Henry takes stock of himself, we can, however, discover several things. Crane does not appear to be ironic about a change in Henry. The diction here is vastly different from his earlier awakenings. Modesty has replaced bombast; exaggeration gives way to qualification. "For a time the youth was obliged to reflect in a puzzled and uncertain way. His mind was undergoing a subtle change" (107-8). Naturally, his first thoughts are given to rejoicings that he has escaped from death. "Later he began to study his deeds, his failures and achievements." That he can even admit that he has had

failures is a significant change from his earlier wild rationalizations. In reviewing his recent behavior, the description of the change in point of view is given in the most modest and qualified terms. He now can "criticize them [his acts] with some correctness." (Emphasis added). He has "defeated certain sympathies." Henry makes a careful distinction between those public deeds "which had been witnessed by his fellows" and those of which he alone is aware. He relishes "with a thrill of joy the respectful comments of his fellows upon his conduct." But these positive reflections are more than offset by his memories of the tattered soldier which are given four or five times as much space:

A specter of reproach came to him. There loomed the dogging memory of the tattered soldier--he who, gored by bullets and faint for blood, had fretted concerning an imagined wound in another; he who had loaned his last of strength and intellect for the tall soldier; he who, blind with weariness and pain, had been deserted in the field. (108)

Looking at the last pages of the novel, we can say that at least here Henry is neither an animal nor a machine but a man. He is not a hero; he is, perhaps,

not even a particularly good man, but he is a man, a young man whose life we have shared for only a few days, a man who is faulted, fragmented, and fragile--like us all.

Maggie and "The Monster":

"a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder"

The Red Badge ends with Henry Fleming evaluating his behavior as he marches away from battle. Remembering the tattered soldier, he feels "a specter of remorse" and sees his failure to act as a "vision of cruelty." He knows that "whichever way his thoughts turned they were followed by the somber phantom of the desertion in the fields." Like The Red Badge, "The Blue Hotel" ends with a strong emphasis on social responsibility, the debt each man owes to the other in need. At the story's end, like Henry Fleming, Mr. Blanc is haunted by his own failure to act. ". . . I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone."

In Maggie and in "The Monster," the two communities, just as Henry Fleming and the groups at the hotel and in the saloon do, turn their backs on an innocent individual most in need. In this aspect the

raucous slum novel and the tale of easy small town life are essentially the same story; both central characters survive physical obstacles but succumb to the pressure and rejection of their communities. Aside from a difference in locale and a change of style, the two stories are similar in that each focuses on a specific aspect of the general cultural shortcomings--Maggie on the inequalities and prejudices of gender, "The Monster" on the inequalities and prejudices of race. No one comes to Maggie's aid because she has been conveniently categorized as a fallen woman; she can no more recover her appearance of innocence that Henry Johnson can recover his appearance. Out of all four of these novels and stories, it is Dr. Trescott alone who chooses to stand up and be a man, refusing to let Henry Johnson fight it out alone when his community decides that a dead Negro hero is preferable to a live disfigured one.

In both Maggie and "The Monster" Crane evaluates his culture by holding up the mirror to the intellectual and ethical environment in which his characters, and his audience, exist. He writes to bring change to this human environment because it fails to measure up to his definition: "Culture in its truest sense, I take it, is a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder."

Crane's interest in the impoverished areas of

American cities apparently began when he was nineteen years old during his one semester at Syracuse University in the spring of 1891. It was at this time that he began the first version of Maggie. According to one of his classmates, Crane ". . . gloried in talking with shambling figures who lurked in the dark doorways on deserted slum streets and his love for adventure constantly kept his feet on the ill-lighted thoroughfares honeycombing the city" (Stallman, Crane 29). Crane explained this behavior five years later in a letter to John Northern Hilliard:

. . . the cut-and-dried curriculum did not appeal to me. Humanity was a much more interesting study. When I ought to have been at my recitations I was studying faces on the street, and when I ought to have been studying my next day's lessons I was watching the trains roll in and out of the Central Station.

(Stallman and Gilkes 109)

There are many reasons why Crane would find the urban underworld so interesting. For both spectator and author this setting contains the built-in dramatic possibilities of raw life not to be found elsewhere in a decorous age. The sensationalism inherent in this setting would certainly have an appeal to a young author

struggling for recognition. It provided a more legitimate means of attention-getting than his journalistic hoax "The Great Bugs of Onondaga." The life of the people in the slums was a topic of current popular interest which, in addition, would also provide Crane with an opportunity to put into practice the dictum of Emerson which he had copied into his Notebook. "Congratulate yourselves if you have done something strange and extravagant and have broken the monotony of a decorous age." The slum setting was also appropriate in light of Crane's convictions on the social function of literature: "Culture in its truest sense, I take it, is a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder. It has nothing to do with an adoration of effete jugs and old kettles." (Stallman and Gilkes 70)

Personally, Crane felt alienated from the forms and values prevalent in respectable society. Of the social restrictions of Asbury Park, a city which he described as "distinctly American," he said that they ". . . define virtue as a physical inertia and mental death" (Bowers 8:653). Crane ended this article on Asbury Park with a description of the distance he felt between himself and the place and its people:

The very heart of the town's life then is
Asbury Avenue pavilion, and the rustle and

roar of the changing throng gives the casual visitor the same feeling of isolation that comes to the heart of the lone sheep herder, who watches a regiment swing over the ridge or an express train line through the mesquite.

(Bowers, 8:655)

To some extent, perhaps, he hoped to find some relief from the claustrophobic social conventions of middle class respectability among the outcasts in the urban underworld. Although he found them to be as incapable of honesty and as dependent on the approval of others as the middle class, their outspokenness was certainly a refreshing alternative to the rule of nice:

. . . There is a feminine mule up here [Port Jervis] who has roused all the bloodthirst in me and I don't know where it will end. She has no more brain than a pig and all she does is to sit in her kitchen and grunt. But when she grunts something dies howling. It may be a girl's reputation or a political party or the Baptist Church but it stops in its tracks and dies. Sunday I took a 13 yr. old child out driving in a buggy. Monday this mule addresses me in front of the barber's and says, "You was drivin' Frances out yesterday"

and grunted. At once all present knew that Frances and I should be hanged on twin gallows for red sins. No man is strong enough to attack this mummy because she is a nice woman. Right now she is aiming all her artillery at Cornelia's new hat. I have been deprived by heaven of all knowledge of hats but it seems to be a very kindly hat with some blue flowers on one side and a ribbon on the other. But we rustle in terror because this maggot goes to and fro grunting about it. If this woman lived in Hester Street some son or bother of a hat would go bulging up to her and say, "Ah, wot deh hell!" and she would have no teeth any more, right there. (Stallman and Gilkes 42-3)

One way in which Crane's major subject areas of city slum, battlefield, and American West are unified is that, to some extent, the genesis of his interest springs from his dissatisfaction with the literary and social conventions by which these areas had been defined. Just as the exaggerated notions of the Wild West are central to "The Blue Hotel" and "The Bride comes to Yellow Sky," just as his inherited romanticism about the glory of combat provide the counterpoint to Henry's experiences of real war, the cliches and

conventions about the poor are consistently ridiculed in his writings on this subject. In the short story "Virtue in War" Crane included this generalization: "Actually, there was not anything which turned out to be as books described it" (Gullason, Stories 619). In a sketch on the Tenderloin printed by the New York Journal on October 25, 1896, Crane wrote: "Let a thing become a tradition, and it becomes half a lie" (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 163). This interplay of literary convention and lived experience is found throughout Crane's fiction; it appears several times in the tender and brutal love story "In The Tenderloin / A Duel Between An Alarm Clock And A Suicidal Purpose." Swift Doyer quarrels with his girlfriend because he believes he has caught her in a lie. His attitude toward her mirrors society's prejudices. Her woe "seemed almost as real as the woe of good people." "But Swift knew as well as the rest of mankind that these girls have no hearts to be broken . . ." (Stallman and Hagemen, Sketches 160). After he bangs her on the head with an alarm clock, she takes a lethal dose of morphine, and Swift spends the night trying to keep her from slipping into a coma.

. . . Swift was aware that this scene was

defying his preconceptions. His instruction had been that people when dying behaved in a certain manner. Why did this girl occupy herself with an accursed fly? Why in the name of the gods of the drama did she not refer to her past? Why, by the shelves of the saints of literature did she not clutch her brow and say: "Ah, once I was an innocent girl?" What was wrong with this death scene? At one time he thought that his sense of propriety was so scandalized that he was upon the point of interrupting the girl's babble.

But here a new thought struck him. The girl was not going to die. How could she under these circumstances? The form was not correct. (Stallman and Hagemenn, Sketches

161)

This story ends with the following complaint about the limitations placed upon the writer by the sensibilities of the age:

When broad day came they were both asleep, and the girl's fingers had gone across the table until they had found the locks on the man's forehead. They were asleep, and this after

all is a human action, which may safely be done by characters in the fiction of our time.

(Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 162)

"An Experiment in Luxury" begins with a dialogue between the youth [Crane] and an old friend who says:

. . . . I have been told all my life that millionaires have no fun, and I know that the poor are always assured that the millionaire is a very unhappy person.

. . . . But it is impossible for me to believe that these things equalize themselves; that there are burrs under all rich cloaks and benefits in all ragged jackets, and the preaching of it seems wicked to me. (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 43-4)

At the end of this article the youth paraphrases his friend after his visit to the millionaire's home, shifting the blame for the lie from the culture-in-general to religion in particular:

Theologians had for a long time told the poor man that riches did not bring happiness, and they had solemnly repeated this phrase until it had come to mean that misery was commensurate with dollars, that each wealthy

man was inwardly a miserable wretch. And when a wail of despair of rage had come from the night of the slums they had stuffed this epigram down the throat of he who cried out and told him that he was a lucky fellow. They did this because they feared. (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 50-1)

These fictions, the myth of the unhappy rich and Swift Doyer's ideas about "these girls," are harmful because they stand in the way of individuals recognizing their common humanity, but what is more harmful are the fictions which popular entertainments promote among the poor. Crane lampooned the formulas of the contemporary popular theatre in his "Some Hints For Play-Makers," and in Maggie he takes the time to demonstrate the dishonesty of a drama and the damage it produces in the minds of the audience, fostering simultaneously a sense of self-pity, a childish reductivism of moral questions, and a false pride in the righteousness of poverty.

In the hero's erratic march from poverty in the first act to wealth and triumph in the final one, in which he forgives all the enemies that he has left, he was assisted by the gallery, which applauded his generous and

noble sentiments. . . . (Gullison, Novels,
125).¹

. . . . To Maggie and the rest of the audience, this was transcendental realism. Joy always within, and they, like the actor, inevitably without. Viewing it they hugged themselves in ecstatic pity of their imagined or real condition. (124)

. . . . When anybody died in the pale-green snowstorms, the gallery mourned. They sought out the painted misery and hugged it as akin. (125)

Crane's anger and irony are obvious in his assessment of the drama's effect on Maggie: "Maggie always departed with raised spirits from these melodramas. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually overcame the wealthy and wicked. The theatre made her think" (125).

To begin a discussion of the problems involved in the evaluation and interpretation of Maggie, one might well start by taking a close look at some of the inscriptions Crane wrote in presentation copies. In several, including the one which he gave to Hamlin

¹

All subsequent citations will be from this edition.

Garland, he wrote this inscription:

It is inevitable that you will be greatly shocked by this book but continue please with all possible courage to the end. For it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people.

It is probable that the reader of this small thing may consider the Author to be a bad man, but, obviously, this is a matter of small consequence to

The Author

(Stallman and Gilkes 14)

Ignoring for a moment the self-advertising element of the first sentence, we can begin by asking what there is about this novel that Crane believed would cause inevitable great shock on his reader. Similarly, why does he anticipate the reader's evaluation of the author as a bad man? It seems unlikely that Maggie's seduction could be the problem; this is hardly the first

appearance of this phenomenon in print. The violence and drunkenness which abound in the novel and dominate the first three chapters would certainly be expected by a reader given the novel's setting. Drunkenness and brutality are integral parts of the conventional slum setting. Maggie's loss of innocence and her brief career as a prostitute take place either discreetly off-stage or are described in a sufficiently oblique way. By comparison, Richardson's Clarissa is positively salacious. What then is so shocking and bad about this novel? One thing that differentiates this novel from its predecessors is its complete lack of sentimentality; it has been replaced by a pervasive irony, which establishes an emotional distance between the author and his characters. Another element which a contemporary reader might have found disturbing is the fact that innocence fails; it does not transform the seducer and is the woman's undoing, not her salvation. Perhaps, too, the author might have been considered "bad" simply because of his familiarity with the subject matter of the novel.

The next two lines of the inscription can help to resolve this question. The word "environment" has been seized as a banner by those who wish to enlist Crane in the ranks of the naturalists. But this reading is

undercut by Crane's ending of this sentence with the word "regardless." If one has spent much time reading Crane, one can almost hear the emphatic, undercutting comma he most often would place in front of a word located in this fashion. It provokes the question "Regardless of what?" Freedom? Will? His use of "Heaven" in the next sentence gives reason to suspect that Crane is also using "environment" not in its most obvious sense but obliquely and ironically. If, as I have tried to show in the previous chapters, Crane is not a Christian, then the use of "Heaven" must be ironic. Even if he were a Christian, the word must still be ironic, for, according to Christian theology, suicides are damned eternally and none shall see heaven.

As Donald Pizer has said, "The novel is not so much about the slums as a physical reality as about what people believe in the slums and how their beliefs are both false to their experience and yet function as operative forces in their lives" (Gullason, Career, 336). The material of the novel supports this interpretation of "environment." With the exception of the saloons, dance halls and theatres--all of which contribute to the moral environment, the physical environment, in terms of the Johnson's street, building, rooms (for example: their lighting, ventilation, smell,

shape, color), the places of employment of Maggie, Jimmy and their father is each given only a few lines, or none at all. On the other hand, Crane gives four chapters (IV, X,XI,XII) to describing Jimmy's worldview and the quandary of seduced women. To the courtship of Pete and Maggie, her illusions and her disillusionment, Crane gives five chapters (V,VI,VII,VIII,XIV). Marston La France is also suspicious about this inscription:

But all this sentimental pulpit rhetoric about making room in Heaven for "street girls" coming from the ironist . . . sounds a bit too pat; set against the extremely tough Bowery writings, it rings like a lead coin dropped carefully in the hope that it will pass scrutiny. In short, I suggest that this inscription may be an ironic equivocation . . . that Crane's use of "environment" meant one thing to the innocent reader interested in the appalling conditions of slum life and something entirely different to Crane himself." (41)

Although Crane has tangled the syntax of the third sentence, writing "not confidently expected" for "confidently not expected," in "many excellent people" the irony is unmistakeable, and here, I think we find

the key to the shock for which Crane is preparing the reader. These excellent people are certainly not any of the characters in this novel; they are Crane's contemporaries. What Crane had expected to shock them and cause them to think him a bad man is the fact that he is challenging the accepted sexual, moral values of the community. Ignoring for a moment the devastating effects of the drunkenness and the violence, the values defining human conduct held by this degraded Bowery society--the roles of brothers, daughters, mothers, and lovers--are the same values accepted and practiced by all socially acceptable people in Crane's day. It is these values that seal Maggie's fate. Poverty is not the cause; she had, like so many others, a job in a sweat shop. It is not drunkenness; she is never shown intoxicated. It is not brutality; there is not the slightest hint of Pete being rough with her, and Maggie, herself, is never hardened, never displays the voracious duplicity of Nell, the professional. Crane is not just showing that the piety and the propriety of the slum are phoney, he is showing through the fall of Maggie that there are basic flaws in the system of values held by the majority of the society.

There were two incidents in which this system of values touched Crane's own life. When he wrote of his

mother, he praised her because ". . . she got herself into trouble before I was old enough to follow the proceedings by taking care of a girl who had an accidental baby. Inopportune babies are not part of the Methodist ritual but Mother was always more of a Christian than a Methodist" (Stallman and Gilkes 242-3). In 1896 Crane got himself into trouble when he dared to stand up in court to defend a young woman who had been unjustly accused of soliciting. He explained why most citizens would not have interfered, fearing the loss of job, wife, or sweetheart:

. . . . If I have ever had a conviction in my life, I am convinced that she did not solicit those two men. Now, if these affairs occur from time to time, they must be witnessed occasionally by men of character. Do these reputable citizens interfere? No, they go home and thank God that they can still attend piously to their own affairs. Suppose I was a clerk and I interfered in this sort of a case. When it became known to my employers they would say to me: "We are sorry, but we cannot have men in our employ who stay out until 2:30 in the morning in the company of chorus girls."

"Suppose, for instance, I had a wife and seven children in Harlem. As soon as my wife read the papers she would say: 'Ha! You told me you had a business engagement! Half-past two in the morning with questionable company!'

"Suppose, for instance, I were engaged to the beautiful Countess of Kalamazoo. If she were to hear of it, she could write: 'All is over between us. My future husband cannot rescue prostitutes at 2:30 in the morning.'"

These, then, must be three small illustrations of why men of character say nothing if they happen to witness some possible affair of this sort, and perhaps these illustrations could be multiplied to infinity. (Stallman and Hagemenn, Sketches 229)

What I have been hoping to achieve through this analysis of Crane's inscription in the novel and the recollection of these events in his life is to emphasize the often over-looked point that in this novel Crane has not limited himself to the fairly easy target of the values and actions of slum dwellers but has indirectly challenged the definitions of sexual morality and propriety accepted by all levels of his contemporary

audience. Maggie is a focal point through which the microcosm of the Bowery and the macrocosm of society in general are viewed. Her predicament is the means by which the values of the smaller and the greater societies are judged. If the character of Maggie is understood from this point of view, some of the criticisms leveled at the novel can be mitigated, if not answered. Some critics find fault with the novel because there is so little of Maggie in it (La France, 56). But if one is willing to recognize that this girl's problems are inseparable from the beliefs of those around her, her absence in much of the novel ceases to be a problem of the writer's craft. If one applies the insight of the Easterner in "The Blue Hotel" that "We're all in it," the amount of attention given to the other characters in the novel is justifiable. Like the Swede and like Henry Johnson of "The Monster," Maggie is in need of help from the others, and, as in these other stories, it is society that is found wanting.

Another criticism of the novel is that Maggie is simply too dense to be believable. Joseph X. Brennan has written, ". . . her tastes and mental perceptions are sometimes absurd to the point of exasperation . . . one might well wonder whether any kind of moral light could pierce such density" (Gullason, Career 333).

Marston La France has also commented on "Maggie's density," saying "that the favorable connotations of her innocence also sink dangerously towards mere stupidity" (62). But I think the question, in reference to Pete, is not one of her intelligence or innocence. She certainly must have seen bartenders and assorted sharpies before, and, aside from her brother's two conquests, Sadie MacMallister, the girl next door, "was sent to the devil by dat feller who worked in deh soap factory" (130). The fault with Maggie does not lie in Crane's portrayal, but in her ability to will away reality and make Pete into the man she wants him to be. Like the Swede, she is held responsible for her delusions. The easiest way for her to escape is to create a rescuer. Her self-deception recalls to mind the description of this process of willful self-delusion in E. A. Robinson's "Eros Tyrannos," in which a woman is condemned to a life of total isolation because of her shame over a betrayal by a suitor she had accepted out of a fear of loneliness although in her heart she knew him to be false.

Regardless of what socio-economic class she belonged to, Maggie would still come to tragedy because of her self-deceptions and the romantic illusions upon which she builds her hopes. In order to answer the

objection that if her physical environment were different, her thinking would be too, consider how common this romanitization of male suitors is in novels of Jane Austen and Henry James. In Emma, Pride and Prejudice, and Washington Square women make errors similar to Maggie's despite a vast difference in social, cultural, and economic status. In Austen it is only by the intercession of family and friends that the young women are saved from serious harm. An even better comparison, I think, exists in Madam Bovary. Flaubert's heroine possesses all of the advantages that Maggie lacks, yet her romantic fantasies are a primary factor in her undoing.

Maggie draws our sympathy because she seeks love and dreams of escape through it and because, finally, she refuses to live the life society had defined for her, the ruined woman of 1885, the whore. She errs when she tries to make her dreams come true by attempting to change reality by sheer force of will. She is Cinderella, so Pete is, of necessity, Prince Charming: "he was her knight" (118). Her dream is romantic: "Maggie perceived that here was her ideal man. Her dim thoughts were often searching for faraway lands where the little hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream gardens there had always walked a

lover" (117). The comparison with the reality of Pete is striking: "He could appear to strut even while sitting still, and he showed that he was a lion of lordly characteristics by the air with which he spat" (135). Maggie sees in this swaggering bully, the epitome of culture, the perfect gentlemen: "Swaggering Pete loomed like a golden sun to Maggie" (124). This suspension of perception inevitably leads to further errors in judgement. She sins with Pete, leaves home, moves in with him. Although she is, in this way, partially responsible for the disasters that befall her, it is the characters around her who carry most of the blame and draw the heaviest irony. Pete, Jimmy, and Maggie's mother react to her according to their own culturally generated but self-serving delusions. All have created around themselves auras of superiority and self-righteousness in order to conceal from others, and especially from themselves, their true natures. They cannot bear the sight of the fallen Maggie because she is a constant reminder of how they have failed in their responsibilities toward her. When she asks, "Where can I go?", their reply is "Go to Hell!" (147). Pete abandons Maggie because she no longer holds his interest after he has made his conquest and because any connection with a fallen woman will give him and the

saloon where he works a bad name. "He saw Maggie walking slowly past. He gave a great start fearing for the previously mentioned eminent respectability of the place" (146). After he has sent Maggie to Hell, Pete goes off to get drunk. In his drunkenness he repeats over and over, "I'm good f'ler. Anybody treats me right, I allus trea's zem right! See?" (150). He passes out, and Nell, for whom he has abandoned Maggie, leaves him there.

Like Pete, Jimmie chooses to live a lie. Through him Crane illustrates the blindness required in accepting the double standard for sexual morality. He cannot help Maggie because her problems are too close to his own life. Just before Maggie returns home, he dismisses a girl that he has seduced. "Say, Hattie, don' foller me from one end of deh city teh deh odder. Let up, will yehs! Yehs makes me tired, allus taggin' me. See? Ain't yehs got no sense? Do yehs want people to get on to me?" (143-4). Jimmie is unable to deal with Maggie's situation because it would force a re-evaluation of his own life. If he accepts Maggie as a person deserving of his help, then what of the two women he has abandoned?

Jimmie thought he had a great idea of women's frailty, but he could not understand why any

of his kin should be victims. "Curse her!" he said fervidly. Again he wondered vaguely if some of the women of his acquaintance had brothers. Nevertheless, his mind did not for an instant confuse himself with those brothers nor his sister with theirs. (138)

Crane's description of Jimmie's attitude toward his sister is: "Radiant virtue sat upon his brow, and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination" (145). Jimmie suggests to his mother that they bring Maggie home, but his motivation seems to be exclusively the protection of their reputation. "I on'y says it 'ud be better if we keep dis t'ing dark, see? It queers us! See?" (137). Backing off at his mother's reproach for even bringing the subject up, he says, "Well, I didn't mean none of dis prod'gal bus'ness anyway." The mother's response reaffirms the inequalities of gender with a reference to the Bible: "It wa'nt no prod'gal daughter, yeh fool," said the mother, "It was prod'gal son, anyhow" (138).

It is not surprising that Maggie's mother denounces her after she sins, but it is odd that she twice denounces her before she sins. It is as if she is looking forward to a wonderful orgy of self-pity. As Maggie is leaving with Pete on their first date,

"Maggie's mother, stretched on the floor, blasphemed, and gave her daughter a bad name" (119). Crane repeats this tableau for Maggie's next date. When Maggie returns home from living with Pete, it is her own mother who will not forgive and shelter her. "She kin cry 'er two eyes out on deh stones of deh street before I'll dirty d' place wid her. She abused and ill-treated her own mudder--her own mudder what loved her--an' she'll never get anodder chance" (138). The mother must see the situation in this way. Maggie must have abused and ill-treated her mother; it could not possibly have been the other way around. The sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy of Pete are found to equal degree in this brutish, drunken mother. She is like Jimmie who "publicly damned his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane" (139). In the earlier Sullivan County sketches Crane concentrated on exaggerated emotional responses, especially fear; in Maggie he examines the mind's working over of ethical questions and anticipates the elaborate rationalizations of Henry Fleming in The Red Badge.

Crane wrote Maggie not to call attention to the need for improving the working or living conditions of slum dwellers; he wrote this book hoping to shake the moral certainties of his audience. Maggie is not

destroyed by her physical environment but by the moral codes which have been developed for the specific purpose of protecting her. His quarrel with these codes is that they create barriers between human beings so that those who are in a position to give aid are unable to for fear of contamination. When Maggie is in need, all around her withdraw from her in order to protect their reputations. Like his explanation of his behavior in stepping forward to defend the young woman accused of prostitution when no respectable man would dare to, the characters in the novel base their actions on a moral system based on what others will think. Crane extends the circle of condemnation beyond the Bowery denizens by means of two incidents in the novel. When Maggie has been cast out and is walking the streets friendless and hopeless, she makes one last effort at obtaining help; she approaches a man she takes to be a preacher:

Suddenly she came upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of buttons reached from his chin to his knees. The girl had heard of the grace of God and she decided to approach this man. His beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kindheartedness. His eyes shone good will.

But as the girl timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous sidestep. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving. (147)

Perhaps this is the kind of individual Crane had in mind for the "many excellent people" that he referred to in his inscription. This stout, chubby-faced gentleman in silk hat links appearances of material prosperity with a concern for respectability at the expense of another human being's suffering, yet his reasoning is identical with that of Pete, Jimmie, and Maggie's mother. It reveals the same process of assigning those who have fallen to a separate, non-human category. His inability to perceive a soul in need is a result of the same line of thinking which led Swift Doyer to conclude that he "knew as well as the rest of mankind that these girls have no hearts to be broken." His apparel, a chaste black coat buttoned from chin to knees, is an apt metaphor for the constraint of his conduct. Besides describing an involuntary, reflex action, revealing how ingrained these values are, "convulsive" adds a connotation of sickness in his reaction to Maggie.

Earlier in the novel, in the beginning of Chapter

Four, Crane briefly dramatizes this process by which a sense of common humanity is denied and replaced with self-righteous condemnation. It is "a mission church where a man composed his sermons of 'yous.'" Once a philosopher asked this man why he did not say 'we' instead of 'you.' The man replied, 'What?'" (112). This brief incident not only follows the pattern of Crane's fable-style poems, it echoes the sentiments of "I stood upon a high place," The sage lectured brilliantly," and "When the prophet / a complacent fat man." Each of these poems rejects an easy categorization of individuals into good and evil.

In one of the less effective poems from The Black Riders, Crane focuses particularly on the double standard of sexual morality and the problem of respectability; the situation is clearly analogous to the plot of Maggie:

I

There was a man and a woman
Who sinned.
Then did the man heap the punishment
All upon the head of her,
And went away gayly.

II

There was a man and a woman
Who sinned.
And the man stood with her.
As upon her head, so upon his,
Fell blow and blow,
And all people screaming: "Fool!"
He was a brave heart.

III

He was a brave heart.
Would you speak with him friend?
Well, he is dead,
And there went you opportunity.
Let it be your grief
That he is dead
And your opportunity gone;
For, in that, you were a coward (65).

Crane defines as coward those who are afraid to act when the situation before them and a sense of compassion, or even of human decency, require action, but a fear of social condemnation prevents their involvement. What he objects to most strongly is an individual's willingness to surrender his own ability to think and judge in exchange for the herd-security that comes from the blind

acceptance of social dogma. It is the process satirized in "There were many who went in huddled procession, / They knew not whither." It is reflected also in "'Think as I think,' said a man, / 'Or you are abominably wicked.'"

In a letter dated by Stallman as November 12, 1896, Crane responded to Miss Catherine Harris' questions about Maggie:

Thank you very much for you letter on Maggie. I will try to answer your questions properly and politely. Mrs. Howells was right in telling you that I have spent a great deal of time on the East Side and that I have no opinion of missions. That--to you--may not be a valid answer since perhaps you have been informed that I am not very friendly to Christianity as seen about town. I do not think much can be done with the Bowery as long as the [word blurred] are in their present state of conceit. A person who thinks himself superior to the rest of us because he has no job and no pride and no clean clothes is as badly conceited as Lillian Russell. In a story of mine called "An Experiment in Misery" I tried to make plain that the root of Bowery

life is a sort of cowardice. Perhaps I mean a lack of ambition or to willingly be knocked flat and accept the licking. . . . I had no other purpose in writing "Maggie" than to show people to people as they seem to me. If that be evil, make the most of it. (Stallman and Gilkes 133)

Interestingly, the letter ends on the same note as Crane's inscription, the "bad" author. Here Crane attributes the causes of the Bowery way of life to two mental, not physical, conditions--conceit and cowardice. The idea of conceit is the recognizable result of the sanctification of poverty we have already observed in "The Experiment in Luxury" and in the melodrama viewed by Maggie and Pete.

The cowardice he refers to here is not bravery in the face of physical danger but moral cowardice. In Maggie, Jimmie is the best example of this kind of cowardice. He is quite willing, after a few drinks, to risk a beating defending his sister's honor, but he refuses to allow her suffering to alter his view of life; he is afraid to think. In "An Experiment in Misery" cowardice is shown to be a lack of ambition, but not in any young Ben Franklin or Horatio Alger sense. It is a willingness to distort reality because

this is easier than working. The central character from the Bowery, "the assassin," after spending the night in a flophouse and enjoying a breakfast of a roll and coffee, says to the narrator, "B'gawd, we've been livin' like kings" (Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 42). He has known a better life, but he prefers not to work for anything better than this. Crane's impatience with charity and "Christianity as seen about town" in the letter above are obvious echoes of the two related incidents in Maggie. In "Hunger Has Made Cubans Fatalists" Crane compares the Cuban poor with the slum dwellers back home: "Everybody knows that the kind of sympathetic charity which loves to be thanked is often grievously disappointed and wounded in tenement districts, where people often accept gifts as if their own property had turned up after a short absence" (Stallman and Hagemann, War 163). Crane distances himself equally from the sentimental presuppositions of the charitable and from the equally sentimental delusions of the poor themselves. Crane ends "An Experiment in Misery," during which the narrator's own sentimental preconceptions about the poor have been shaken, in the following way:

And in the background a multitude of
buildings, of pitiless hues and sternly high,

were to him emblematic of a nation forcing its regal head into the clouds, throwing no downward glances; in the sublimity of its aspirations ignoring the wretches who may flounder at its feet. The roar of the city in his ear was to him the confusion of strange tongues, babbling heedlessly; it was the clink of coin, the voice of the city's hopes which were to him no hopes.

He confessed himself an outcast, and his eyes from under the lowered brim of his hat began to glance guiltily, wearing the criminal expression that comes from certain convictions.

"Well," said the friend, "did you discover his point of view?"

"I don't know that I did," replied the young man; "but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration."

(Stallman and Hagemann, Sketches 43)

Although their styles are totally different and despite the fact that one marks the beginning of Crane's serious work and the other comes near the end of his career, there is a great similarity of purpose in Maggie and "The Monster." In a sense, "The Monster" takes up

where Maggie leaves off; it does for small town America what Maggie did for city-slum America. While the settings are different, the process by which an individual is destroyed by the ethical and intellectual climate of the community is the same for both. Just as Maggie is cast out by her society, Henry Johnson and Dr. Trescott are cast out by theirs. It is apparent to most, if not all, readers that the monster of the title is not the disfigured and brain-damaged Henry Johnson who harms no one; rather, it is the populace of an idyllic, turn-of-the-century, American small town. It is rather baffling that the critical consensus has been that Maggie is, in whole or in part, a work of naturalism, yet this term never seems to occur in a discussion of "The Monster." Perhaps the sensational aspects of the slum novel--the violence, the drunkenness, poverty, seduction and prostitution--have eclipsed the fact that the essential concern of Maggie is identical with that of "The Monster." Perhaps the similarities are missed because the environment in "The Monster" is a respectable small town of the heartland of America, a refuge of clean living and wholesome values, with nothing to condemn it but its own superficiality, ignorance, fear, prejudice, hypocrisy, and small-mindedness. In this setting of clean, tree-lined

streets, tranquillity and prosperity, the indictment of the people's shortcomings is all the more striking. In his essay "'The Monster' and the Art of Stephen Crane" James Hafley makes this statement which, I believe, could have been applied with equal justice to Maggie: ". . . Crane is in 'The Monster' convinced that whatever constitutes the goodness of man is not to be found in modern social convention" (Gullason, Career 443).

"The Monster" is composed of twenty-four short chapters. Approximately the first half (I-XI) of this novelette is given to establishing the identities of the central characters, setting the tranquil mood of this heart-of-America, small town, and in describing the terrible fire at the Trescotts' home and the rescue of their young son Jimmy by the family's Negro servant, Henry Johnson. The beginning of the story is all about appearances: the father's careful mowing of the lawn, the broken flower, and Johnson's worry about dirtying Jimmy's clothes. The concern for, and value of, appearances is most clear in the transformation of Henry Johnson when he changes his apparel:

It was not altogether the matter of the lavender trousers, nor yet the straw hat with its bright silk band. The change was somewhere far in the interior of Henry. But

there was no cakewalk hyperbole in it. He was simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necessary achievements out for an evening stroll, and he had never washed a wagon in his life¹ (Gullason, Stories 433).

In his progress through the town Henry is teased about his appearance by street corner loungers. The crowd at the barber shop, obviously also concerned about their appearances, is unable to recognize Henry until one of them reminds the others that those lavender pants were his gift to Johnson. The emphasis on appearances in this part of the story culminates in the elaborate formalities of Henry's social call on Bella Farragut.

In other works ("The Open Boat," The Red Badge, "Minetta Lane"), Crane generally uses the neutral term "Negro," but in "The Monster" the townspeople refer to Johnson as "the coon" (434) or "this coon" (445). Before the fire, boys used to call after Johnson "this odious couplet": "Nigger, Nigger, never die / Black face and shiny eye" (446). Crane says nothing about racial prejudice, but the selection of racial epithets makes its presence clear.

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All subsequent citations will be from this edition.

After the fire when the whole town believes that Henry Johnson has died from his rescue attempt, he is considered a hero and a saint:

The morning paper announced the death of Henry Johnson. It contained a long interview with Edward J. Hannigan, in which the latter described in full the performance of Johnson at the fire. There was also an editorial built from all the best words in the vocabulary of the staff. The town halted in its accustomed road of thought, and turned a reverent attention to the memory of this hostler. In the breasts of many people was the regret that they had not known enough to give him a hand and a lift when he was alive, and they judged themselves stupid and ungenerous for this failure (446).

Henry, however, is soon pronounced a monster by Judge Hagenthorpe in his discussion with Dr. Trescott over the propriety of his saving of Henry. For Trescott, it is a familiar ethical problem with no easy answer, further complicated by the personal debt he owes to Henry. He challenges the judge with the only possible alternative, a choice which the judge alludes to but cannot mention. "Well, what would you do? Would you kill him?" (449).

In the chapters that follow, Crane documents the fear, the small-mindedness, and the superficiality of the ethical values that are present in all levels of this society. The Negro community in town is shown to be equal to their white neighbors in this area at least. Supposing Henry dead, Bella Farragut "announced that she had been engaged to marry Mr. Henry Johnson." Alek Williams, a black who has been hired by Trescott to care for Henry, reacts to him without the least sympathy or compassion. His entire family reacts in ignorant horror. His wife's problem, that "she cain't 'ceive no lady callahs," both duplicates and anticipates the story's final scene; it also leads the greedy Alek to demand more money for Henry's care. Elated with his victory at acquiring an extra dollar a week, Alek fails to notice that he is shunned by a fellow church deacon he meets on the way home. "He had been so inflated that he had not noticed that Paterson had definitely shied into the dry ditch as they came to the point of ordinary contact" (457). Brother Paterson has not yet even seen Johnson; hearsay, rumor, and gossip are enough. As a group, although none has seen him, the black community has decided: "Folks go round sayin' he ain't Henry Johnson at all. They say he's er devil!" (452). Later, when he does get loose, Henry visits the Farragut

residence "bowing" and "Gabbling courteous invitations." His grief-stricken fiancée, along with her whole family, flees in terror.

The white population of the town, as enlightened and as emotionally mature as the black, rush to welcome the hero when he appears on the town streets: "a big crowd chased him, firing rocks." The barber shop appears for a second time (III, XIV); the customers joke cold-heartedly about the problem of being faceless and the damage this might do to the Barber's business if it ever became popular. They repeat gossip about the awfulness of Johnson's face, again, although none has actually seen it.

There are two chapters (XIX, XXII) for the females gossiping in the kitchen, Martha Goodwin, her sister Kate, and Carrie Dungen, a neighbor. In their first appearance, Crane gives most of the chapter to describing the three women. Two are weak, one is strong. Crane focuses his irony on Martha, the strong one. "This unknown woman, hidden in a kitchen as in a well, was sure to have considerable effect of the one kind or the other in the life of the town. Every time it moved a yard, she had personally contributed an inch" (464). She is described as "weak, innocent, pigheaded, the most savage critic in town." In Chapter XIX she has

little to say. Carrie is the chief gossip, introducing her bits of gossip with "they say." Kate, Martha's sister, associates the horror of Henry Johnson with Dr. Trescott, "'Serves him right if he was to lose all his patients,' she said suddenly, in bloodthirsty tones. She snipped her words out as if her lips were scissors."

In the second kitchen scene Martha exerts herself on behalf of Dr. Trescott, which is a little surprising given Crane's earlier unflattering description of her. The others praise Jack Winter for his verbal attack on Dr. Trescott, but, as usual in this story, the rumors are false or incomplete. The fact that Winter waited until Trescott was down the street is left out of the story. "As Trescott imperturbably turned the mare's head down the road, Winter stood on the porch still yelping. He was like a little dog." "They say" of the ladies' last meeting has become "everybody says" and "Everybody's afraid of him." Martha, alone, has the courage to say, "Oh, I don't care what everybody says." The chapter ends with the news that the Trescotts' neighbors, the Hannigans, are going to move. It was Hannigan who had described Johnson's heroics for the local paper.

In addition to these portraits of the groups in the kitchen, the barbershop and of the black community,

there are two more chapters which supplement the evaluation of the town's populace, Chapter XX on the behavior of the children and Chapter XXIII on the town's leading citizens. In Chapter XX Jimmy and his young friends play a game of daring each other to touch the monster. It is a child's version of the mechanics of social pressure, the same kind of force which is building relentlessly in the town against Dr. Trescott. Later, a deputation of the town's leading citizens, including Judge Hagenthorpe and the prosperous wholesale grocer, John Twelve, call on Dr. Trescott to convince him to get Henry Johnson out of town. Twelve does most of the talking. He speaks the language of business with the usual blend of sports metaphors. He speaks to Trescott of ways "to beat the game somehow" and "strike your old gait again." He offers "to take him right off your hands." He speaks to Trescott of his ruining himself, thinking of Trescott's practice, but Trescott's first concern is his personal debt to Henry Johnson; he replies "I am not ruining myself."

The story ends with the dilemma unresolved. Trescott finds his wife crying in the drawing room. It is her usual day to receive callers, but only Mrs. Twelve has shown up presumably with the message that the Trescotts' social isolation is now complete. "As he sat

holding her head on his shoulder, Trescott found himself occasionally trying to count the teacups. There were fifteen of them."

Crane has shown this town to be dominated by the concept of face from the opening scene of Dr. Trescott mowing the lawn "as if it were a priest's chin," Jimmie's loss of face for the breaking of a flower, and Henry's lavender pants, to the concluding scene of the Trescotts' loss of face in the community. It is seen in the interaction of the three women in the kitchen, in the reputations of the fire captains, and in the play of the children. In a society where the dominant operational value is appearances, a faceless man is an affront to the community. At the same time the story dramatizes the emptiness of reputation and the fickleness of public opinion. Johnson, virtually overnight, goes from local hero to local horror. The reality of his sacrifice becomes insignificant compared to the alteration of his appearance. Trescott's own sacrifice, his devotion to Johnson and his heroism in the face of social pressure, is regarded only as a threat to the community. In this story, as in Maggie and "The Blue Hotel," the individual most in need of support from the community is denied, rejected, and cast out. Maggie is cast out by her family, her lover, her

neighbors, her society as a whole because her immorality is an uncomfortable reminder of their own moral failure. The Swede's irrationality frightens the others in Scully's hotel, but, despite his madness, he is essentially correct; death and violence are all around him in this Nebraska farm town, a fact that the others cannot accept.

There is one question that remains about the town's reaction to Henry Johnson: why is it that they cannot bear to look at Henry Johnson's face? There is an element of superstition in the black community's rejection and an element of racism in the white community's rejection, but these factors alone are not enough to explain the extent of the entire town's reaction to Johnson's face. They cannot look at Johnson's face, the horror of his mutilation, because they see before them the horror of their own mortality, concrete and undeniable.

"The Open Boat" is generally regarded as Crane's best work, but it has been the least controversial from the critics' point of view. Although a few critics (Hoffman 172, Cady 154) find the oiler's death to be a Christ-like sacrifice, and some others find in it further confirmation of naturalist philosophy, there has

been more of a critical consensus on this story than on any of Crane's other serious work. This is due in part to its simplicity in both subject and style. The simple story of four men adrift on the ocean in a small boat does not allow for either the choice of action or the elaborate rationalizations available to Henry Fleming. The role of social forces as seen in Maggie and "The Monster" is also absent. The pyrotechnics of Crane's earlier style, in Maggie and The Red Badge, for example, which helped to provoke a wide range of critical interpretations has been tempered to a plain and simple prose similar to that of "The Monster" or "The Bride Comes To Yellow Sky."

In "The Open Boat" I find, most clearly stated, those ideas which, as I have tried to demonstrate, unify all of Crane's best work. A belief in a personal deity can no longer be held. The story mentions "the seven mad gods of the sea" and "that old ninny woman fate," but the existence of a divine principle is not taken seriously. Crane is clearly ironic in this regard with the phrase "the sacred cheese of life" (Gullason, ¹Stories 346). As a result, any sense of plan or order

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All subsequent citations will be from this edition.

is absent. There is no certain reward for effort; there is no reward after death; most likely, there is nothing after death. There is no meaning to a man's life other than the one he gives it. There is no sense of justice, no love for man, even no sense of awareness of his existence in the universe; these things can be found only in the minds and actions of men. As a result of the loss of a divine order, instead of naturalism's survival of the fittest, Crane turns with heightened awareness to the interdependence of men, to the brotherhood of man, as the only refuge available to him and the only solace in the face of his mortality. All of Crane's serious work affirms this need for brotherhood. In Maggie, "The Blue Hotel" and "The Monster" this concept is defined primarily by its absence. In "The Open Boat," like The Red Badge, this supreme value is defined positively.

Although his understanding is only temporary, in The Red Badge Henry Fleming perceived "the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death." In "The Open Boat" the correspondent and his three companions all share this perception, but here there is no enemy but death itself:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. . . . there was this comradeship, that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. (343-4)

There is a refrain in this story. It is the question passed continually back and forth with slight variation between the tired rowers: "Will you spell me?" The answer to this question is always, "Sure." When the correspondent notices the menacing shark circling the boat during the night when he alone is awake, he wishes for some companionship so that he does not have to face this personification of death, "this biding thing," alone:

The presence of this biding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would if he had been a picnicker. He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone.

Nevertheless, it is true that he did not

wish to be alone with the thing. He wished one of his companions to awake by chance and keep him company with it. (352)

His reluctance at facing death alone parallels the confrontation with the corpse in the forest which sent Henry Fleming running back toward the battle. In this context it is well to remember that Henry's one unforgivable act was not his flight during the battle but his abandoning of the badly wounded, tattered soldier.

Later, the correspondent recalls a bit of verse from his childhood that he and his classmates were ordered to memorize:

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers;
There was lack of woman's nursing, there was
dearth of woman's tears;
But a comrade stood beside him, and he took
that comrade's hand,
And he said, "I never more shall see my own,
my native land." (353)

What is most noticeable in the passage quoted from the poem is that this dying soldier's only solace is the hand of the comrade who stands at his side. What is most noteworthy in the correspondent's recollection of this bit of verse is his recognition of the change of

attitude he has undergone. Before, he had been "perfectly indifferent" and felt neither sorrow nor compassion for the soldier. "He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, nor had it appeared to him as a matter for sorrow. It was less to him than the breaking of a pencil's point." But from his present point of view ". . . it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing" (353). He is able to feel solidarity with and sympathy for the unknown man; he is able to extend his sense of brotherhood beyond his three comrades in the boat to all men. Crane is careful to specify that this insight is not thinly-disguised egotism or mere self-pity, rationalized and projected. "The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers" (353-4).

The correspondent's recollection of this poem occurs immediately after he has spent the night alone watching the shark circle the boat, but between these two incidents the narrator makes a general assessment of the plight of the men in the boat and of man in the universe. It is Crane's most explicit statement on the existential condition of man:

. . . . For it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural. Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still--

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot, he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowing to one knee, and with hands suppliant, saying, "Yes, but I love myself."

A high, cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation. (352-53)

The passage begins with the kind of egotism that is a man's natural reaction to his own destruction. After

pondering the injustice of a man drowning after working so hard, the thought of the hundreds of thousands who have met the same fate flickers briefly, but it is quickly shut out by the ego's "but still--."

Despite the individual's recognition of his own insignificance in the universe and the realization that there is "no tangible thing to hoot" and neither temples nor bricks to throw, he desires to "confront a personification" and plead for himself. The unfinished "but still--" of the first paragraph is completed by the bowing suppliant's words, "Yes, but I love myself." The universe offers no response: "A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels. . . ." He understands not only "the pathos of his situation" but the pathos of the human situation as well. He recalls the dying soldier and grieves for him.

"Yes, but I love myself.", immediately brings to mind Crane's well-known poem of which this line is a near paraphrase:

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation."

As this sense of obligation does not reside in the

universe, it must reside in the thoughts and actions of men if they are to survive. It is also the counterbalance to the natural egotism of each individual which is inherent in each man's need to survive. "Yes, but I love myself." also recalls a line from the "space-lost bulb" passage in "The Blue Hotel," "The conceit of man was explained by the storm to be the very engine of life."

The title of the story, "The Open Boat," in several ways serves as a metaphor for the human condition. First, it carries the idea of the fragility of human existence in the desperation of their situation. Even the most competent, most experienced seamen find being adrift in the sea in a tiny open boat to be a nightmare of terrifying proportions. Second, their circumstances contain the element of frustration. They struggle valiantly day and night, approach the shore but must return to the open water because of the danger of the surf. The nearer they get to land, the greater the danger. There is no simplistic equation here of sea and death, land and life. The oiler dies only when he reaches the shore. Third, few men alone, or none, would have any chance of survival in that same boat considering the day and night of constant and often simultaneous rowing, steering, and bailing. Beyond the

sharing of labor and the comfort of companionship, the Captain and the oiler each contribute expertise in a particular area of seamanship. To live, these men must cooperate. The setting reduces their choices to two: to help each other, and perhaps drown anyway, or not to help each other and certainly die. Lastly, at the end, there is no reason why the others live and the oiler dies. None is a better, stronger man than he. He has not sacrificed himself for the others; each man was on his own in the surf. If their chances were not equal, the oiler's were certainly better than those of the old Captain with his broken arm. His death signifies nothing, other than the reality of death and the capriciousness of life.

The danger of the sea is the equivalent of the fury of battle in The Red Badge and the fury of the snow storm in "The Blue Hotel," and it is the physical counterpart of the furor of the hostile, uncaring communities of Maggie and "The Monster." The sense of common humanity and comradeship resulting from the heightened awareness of the presence of death in "The Open Boat" is equal to that of the regiment in The Red Badge; its absence defines the tragedy of "The Blue Hotel," Maggie, and "The Monster." The oiler's death reflects the correspondent's and the reader's own

mortality. Like Maggie, the Swede, Henry Johnson of "The Monster," Jim Conklin and the tattered man of The Red Badge, the oiler is the soldier of the Legion brought home to us, a man entitled to our sympathy and deserving of our aid, a human being whose death is our own.

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