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The Literary Development of Stephen Crane.

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THE LITERARY DEVELOPMENT OF STEPHEN CRANE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

James B. Colvert
B. A., Henderson State Teachers College, 1947
M. A., East Texas State Teachers College, 1949
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MANUSCRIPT THESSES

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ABSTRACT

Though Stephen Crane has been the subject of two biographies and numerous critical essays, his unique literary career has never been fully explained. Less than two years after he started writing in 1892, he burst upon the literary scene with *The Red Badge of Courage*, a novel which reflected a revolutionary departure from literary tradition in the treatment of its subject and literary technique. In terms of the literary traditions of his time Crane cannot be explained at all, and historians and critics have consequently attempted to account for him, without much success, by relating him to various European writers, notably Tolstoy and Zola, despite the fact that there is strong evidence that Crane knew little of their work. His sudden appearance in full literary armor gave rise, also, to the notion that he was an inexplicable genius who intuited an approach to literature and developed through sheer instinct a brilliant and revolutionary writing style.

The purpose of this study is to determine insofar as possible the origins and nature of Crane's art and to show in terms of literary materials, method, and style his development from the beginnings in 1892 to his death in 1900. It begins with a consideration of Crane's earliest newspaper writing in the light of his intellectual and artistic experience before 1892 and continues with an analysis of his work in the order that it was produced. Since Crane proceeded generally upon the assumption that art is a direct reflection of life, much of his materials and many of his themes were drawn from actual experience, and it has been necessary to consider the biography which had direct bearing upon his
literary production. In addition, the study touches upon various aspects of late nineteenth-century thought and social attitudes which affected, sometimes negatively, the personal philosophy which so powerfully directed the course of his art.

His thinking, which was curiously split between the materialistic monism fostered by nineteenth-century science and the orthodox faith in the dignity and strength of the self-reliant individual, can be accounted for in part by his association with intellectual radicals and in part by the orthodox faith of his parents. His theory of literature was derived in great part from the principles of the impressionist painters with whom he was associated from the late 'eighties to 1895.

Crane's attitude toward life and art had taken characteristic shape by the time he started his career, and if the stories of Kipling, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce guided him somewhat in his first writing, the Bowery novels and stories of the following year probably owe little or nothing to the French naturalists. The style, method, and attitude reflected in Maggie, George's Mother and The Red Badge are essentially those of his earliest writing, and Crane's subsequent development is, except for minor modifications, a matter of refinement of the techniques of his early newspaper sketches. The form of his poetry, though perhaps suggested initially by the verse of Emily Dickinson and the epigrams of Ambrose Bierce, is based upon the highly compressed metaphorical expression of his early fiction. In an early sketch, "The Men in the Storm," Crane experimented with symbolism and the patterning of language and motifs, a technique which he used with ever increasing effectiveness up to "The Open Boat," written at the high point of his career in 1897.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Stephen Crane died in 1900 his work all but disappeared from the public and critical view. Two books came out in the year of his death, and three more, all that remained on the hands of the publishers, had appeared by 1903. Except in the editions printed in his lifetime, most of Crane's work was unavailable for almost twenty years. The exceptions are those works upon which his reputation has rested and to a great extent continues to rest—Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, which has always been felt to have historical significance as the first naturalistic novel in American literature, and The Red Badge of Courage, the novel which made Crane famous and which is generally regarded as his masterpiece. But his work in the shorter form, "The Blue Hotel," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," and "The Open Boat," to name only three of high excellence, lay neglected in turn-of-the-century books until their republication in the thirties and 'forties.

If his work received little attention from the publishers, Crane received even less from the critics. Most of the pieces about him which appeared before 1920 were reminiscences by friends and fellow writers, mere literary anecdotes, for the most part. Richard Harding Davis recalled Crane as a war correspondent, Hamlin Garland reviewed briefly the years he knew Crane as a New York Bohemian, and Carl Sandburg acknowledged him as a forerunner of the Imagists. But with the exception of H. G. Wells' essay

1 See the Bibliography for references to books and articles mentioned in the Introduction.
in 1901 nothing which deserves consideration as serious criticism appeared. Even the number of reminiscences is far from impressive, less than twenty appearing in as many years. Crane was for the most part forgotten.

The first revival began in 1921 when Vincett Starrett edited a collection of his short stories in *Men, Women, and Boats*. Two years later Thomas Beer marshalled what little material was then available into the first biography, and interest in Crane began to rise. Wilson Follett edited his complete work, which appeared in the years 1925-27 with introductions by friends and fellow writers, some with biographical recollections, a few— those by Hergesheimer, Cather, Mencken—with literary criticism of definite value. Despite an increased interest in the writer, however, no extended study of his art was made, and the comparatively casual interest began to deteriorate with the advent of the sociological 'thirties. Oddly, Crane's poetry, which appeared in a collection edited by Wilson Follett in 1930, continued to be read, along with *The Red Badge of Courage* and, to a lesser extent, *Maggie* and *George's Mother*.

The steadily mounting interest in Crane since the beginning of World War II promises to put the writer at last on a secure footing with the critics and the public. *The Red Badge*, always a good measure for Crane's popularity, since it has been available from time to time from the first, went through eight separate editions in the years between 1940 and 1951. Twenty of the short stories appeared in a collection edited by Carl Van Doren in 1940 and were reprinted in 1945. Interest in the development of Crane's technique as artist gained through the publication of his apprentice work, *The Sullivan County Sketches*, edited by Melvin Schoberlin in 1949, the year after the appearance of a very full bibliography by Amos Williams.
and Vincent Starrett, who cited the need for a new biography and pointed to the lack of a critical study of Crane's writing. Another biography, John Berryman's *Stephen Crane* appeared in 1950, immediately followed by Lars Ahnebrink's *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, the first extended effort to discover the origins of Crane's art. More recent (1952) is Robert W. Stallman's *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, a collection of the writer's most important work and his letters, which are here brought together for the first time.

The times in which Crane's work has been revived help to explain, generally, both the author and the period. The skepticism and irony which so strongly characterize Crane's stories appealed to the decade following the First World War; that decade found in him an almost illusionless commentary on war, and the intensity of his expression, the direct, deliberate chiseling of the ironical phrase suited well the postwar mood of the 'twenties. Like Melville, Crane seems to have written for the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century. He stood in full revolt against the dominant concept of fiction in his own time, with its notion that not life, but polite society's theory of life, was the domain of the writer of fiction. Two World Wars and their aftermaths of spiritual disruption have somewhat delimited society's notions, and Crane, even with his narrow range and relatively slender contribution, is at last finding a sympathetic hearing.

The first full biographical study was Thomas Beer's *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters*, a book which remained the standard authority on Crane until 1950. Beer's work, excellent as it is as a scintillating
piece of literature in its own right, has serious shortcomings, for its picture of Crane, painted in terms of ironic impressionism—a style which might have won the approval of the subject—is, with its confused chronology and omissions, distorted and misleading. But since Beer had access to material which is no longer extant—he worked from memory, leaving practically no notes or documents—his record preserves much that would have otherwise been lost. A close examination of the book reveals, however, how surprisingly little of the definite and concrete it offers, or for that matter how little about Crane it offers at all, if the brilliant surveys of the literary and intellectual temper of the 1890's are removed. Beer makes fear the dominant motif of his subject's life, and though he ignores Crane's writing for the most part, he suggests again and again that fear was the ruling emotion in Crane's art.

Berryman's biography, as one critic has justly pointed out, is for the most part simply a reworking of Beer's. The guiding concept is again fear, explored this time with the aid of depth psychology. Nevertheless, the study is an advance over its predecessor, for it fits Crane's important work against the background of his life experience, corrects much of the mistaken chronology, and fills in some of the more serious omissions. But for the student of Crane's art, this study, too, except in the sympathetic and revealing treatment of Crane's poetry, is unsatisfactory, chiefly because the critical portions are often merely confirmations of Berryman's conclusions about Crane's psychological—or psychopathic—condition rather than objective analyses of his art.

Academic performance in regard to Crane has been even more disappointing. By 1952 only two published studies had appeared, neither of which attempts to explain the writer in relation to his total work. Lars Ahnebrink's study of the origins of American naturalism makes Crane one of a trio with Garland and Norris and attempts to show that the author of The Red Badge had his artistic origins in the work of Zola, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Ibsen. Though Ahnebrink goes astray in his enthusiasm to show that the sources of Crane's art were continental, he does the service, at least, of fully investigating the recurrent suggestion that the writer was a spawn of European naturalism. Literary historians had allowed this task to remain unchallenged for over fifty years.

In Robert W. Stallman's Stephen Crane: An Omnibus, a carefully selected collection of the writer's best work, students have in the critical introductions and the elaborate scholarly apparatus the first truly significant Crane scholarship. It is critically important because it tries, for the first time, to present in one book the best of the writer's work, and the analysis of the work itself is intended to explicate Crane's best writings as works of art rather than as adjuncts to biographical study. Insofar as Crane scholarship is concerned, Stallman renders the student an inestimable service in bringing together all the published and currently available Crane letters, heretofore accessible only in widely scattered pamphlets, school papers, little-known periodicals, and private collections. With new evidence, contained partly in the letters, some of Berryman's and Beer's chronology is corrected, and, in addition, some glimpse at least of Crane as a working artist is provided by a collation of the two existing manuscripts of The Red Badge of Courage.
Since 1950, then, Crane has been served well, but before that he had lain long in neglect and much work remains still to be done. Even if it is decided, after sufficient study, that he is to be relegated to a minor place in American letters, or that he is to be judged, as he has been, a "one book genius," there is in Crane much to interest the student of the writer as artist. When it is remembered that his total working period was confined to the nine years between 1891 and 1900, the velocity of his literary development is no less than astonishing. A rough indication of his progress in the first five years of his career is furnished by the difference in literary quality between the early sketches for the New York Tribune, his first published work, and "The Open Boat," the story which stands at the high point in his artistic development. The Red Badge of Courage, most generally regarded as his masterpiece, was written less than two years after The Sullivan County Sketches, his early experimental pieces. In less than six months after these sketches appeared in the Tribune, Crane had revamped his literary creed and rewritten Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, a work, as more than one historian points out, that dates the beginning of modern American literature.

The present study is an attempt to account for Crane as an artist by an analysis of his total achievement as it unfolds from one stage of his remarkable career to another. It is an attempt to show not only the sources of his art, but how each work, as it was conceived and executed, grew out of Crane's intellectual and artistic experience. The second chapter deals with the apprentice work of 1892, and tries to show that the chief characteristics of his later thought, style, and technique were present in his earliest work. The next five chapters deal with various
aspects of Crane's most important literary period, the years between 1892 and 1895, when the young writer was living and working in bohemian New York and was drawing upon his experience in the East Side slums for the materials of his early writing and upon his literary and artistic associations for his basic philosophical outlook and for new ideas about the art of fiction. The eighth chapter considers the work which resulted from his sojurn in the West and Mexico; the ninth chapter deals with the work produced in England between 1897 and 1900, the final chapter treats in the nature of a summary Crane's development as a poet and writer of fiction from 1892 to 1900.

Though the study is essentially concerned with the development of Crane as an artist, it proceeds upon the assumption that the relation between the man and his art is fundamental. Even so, it attempts to explain only those aspects of the man which seem to bear directly upon the literature that he produced. These aspects, broadly, would seem to include Crane's philosophy of life, or at least his attitude toward life, which is relevant, surely, to his choice of material, and perhaps more fundamental still, to the provision—to use a phrase of Emerson's which Crane himself so much admired—of "the long logic" underlying his fiction. Then there is the matter of Crane's philosophy of art, which is certainly relevant not only to the selection of material but to the immediate method he brought to its treatment. Finally, there is the question of the help he received from the thinking and work of other writers. An understanding of the origins of the writer, even if it is not necessary to the understanding of the writing itself illuminates his artistic achievement by uncovering the process by which it came into being. These matters, however
necessary they are in showing Crane's development as a writer, subserve one of still more importance: the explication of Crane's most important writings as works of literary art.
In the summer of 1892 Stephen Crane, after much urging from his older brother Townley, showed a handful of manuscripts to Willis F. Johnson, an old friend of the Crane family and one of the editors of the New York Tribune. Among these manuscripts was a draft of a story about a prostitute in East Side New York, a sketch about a witty old ferry captain, and several little stories about Crane's camping experiences with three friends in the wilds of Sullivan County, New York.\(^3\)

The story about the prostitute Crane had drafted in the Delta Upsilon fraternity house at Syracuse University in the spring of 1891\(^4\) while he was miserably failing in his not too serious efforts to get a college education. The others Crane had written early in the summer of 1892 in the attic of his brother Edmund's house in Lakeview between excursions into New York City and Sullivan County.\(^5\) Johnson was enough impressed with Crane's ability as a writer of sketches to buy five of the Sullivan County yarns for the columns of the Sunday Tribune, and the first one used, "Four Men in a Cave," was published July 3, 1892; the others appeared on the four succeeding Sundays.

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\(^3\) Willis F. Johnson, "The Launching of Stephen Crane," The Literary Digest International Book Review, IV (April, 1926), 288.

\(^4\) Frank W. Hoxon, "The Real Stephen Crane," The Step Ladder, XIV (January, 1928), 5.

Meanwhile Crane handled much of the resort correspondence for Townley's Tribune news agency, and as he had been an unofficial apprentice to his brother for a number of years (since 1687, according to Johnson) Townley left the younger brother much to his own devices. Crane made the most of his opportunities. Casting off the formal jargon of the run-of-the-mill resort reporter, he began to dress his routine accounts of Asbury Park arrivals and departures, odd characters, dances, beach sports and other amusements in the elegant garb of literature. In the reports concerning odd characters he made the most of his chance to comment with sardonic humor upon certain aspects of nineteenth-century respectability, and in the accounts of the flow of life in and about the sources of entertainment, he took the opportunity to jibe at the ideals of the bourgeois vacationer. In so doing, he revealed himself as a youthful stylist and philosopher.

This apprentice work is of value to the student of Crane's art, for despite its obvious juvenility and its almost negligible value as literature, it shows what Crane began with and immensely illuminates the progress he was to make in the few years left to him after 1892. It reveals the characteristic temper of his mind and suggests how his mind was to take expression in literature. It suggests, too, an already strongly formed notion of what writing should be about, for after one or two experiments with the conventional fictional materials of the time (one a story about a dog named Jack, another about a tenor's experience

6 Johnson, p. 288.
with an African king) he turned for materials to the scene about him, upon which his faculties of sight and imagination could work directly. This early work, too, shows Crane as a conscious stylist, as an impressionist and an ironist, and it provides a convenient point of departure for going both backward and forward to study the sources and the development of one of the most striking literary styles in late nineteenth century American literature.

Some of the sketches reveal how perceptive and objective the mind of the twenty-year-old Crane was in his analysis of the human situation in Asbury Park and how, even as early as this, most of his social and economic views, which so deeply infused some of his later art, were taking shape. Asbury Park, a resort for fashionable idlers, culture seekers from the neighboring Avon-by-the-Sea, where Garland had lectured on the novel the summer before, and religious enthusiasts from nearby Ocean Grove, Crane made his stage for a microscopic *comedie humaine*. With sardonic humor he "reported" the arrival of the summer crowd:

Pleasure seekers arrive by the avalanche. Hotel-proprietors are pelted with hail storms of trunks and showers of valises. To protect themselves they do not put up umbrellas, nor even prices. They merely smile copiously. The lot of the baggage-man, however, is not an easy one. He manipulates these various storms and directs them. He is beginning to swear with a greater enthusiasm. It will be a fine season.

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7 The dog story was rejected by *St. Nicholas* because the market was then flooded with such stories. The African story, "The King's Favor," was published in the Syracuse school paper, the *University Herald*, XIX (May, 1891), 128-131.

8 *New York Tribune* (July 3, 1892), p. 28. (Hereinafter referred to as *Tribune*.)
On another occasion Crane explained what the typical individual Asbury Park vacationer was like:

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 enjoys himself in a very mild way and dribbles out a lot of money under the impression that he is proceeding cheaply.9

This tone of amused condescension toward nineteenth-century respectability suffuses the Asbury Park sketches. Clearly, Crane saw the main elements in the character of the self-satisfied, respected Victorian: sufficient wealth, physical well-being, close family ties, a certain lack of enthusiasm for the frivolous, and a rather comic innocence about the ways of the world:

He stands in his two shoes with 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 the hotel proprietors with a calm indifference; he will pay fancy prices for things with great unconcern. However, deliberately and badly attempt to beat him out of fifteen cents and he will put his hands in his pockets, spread his legs apart and wrangle in a loud voice, until sundown.10

In his portrait of James A. "Founder" Bradley, originator and part owner of Asbury Park and easily the most respectable citizen in the community, despite certain eccentricities, Crane warmed his irony into heated satire, which occasionally falls just short of sarcasm and ridicule:

He is noted for his wealth, his whiskers and his eccentricities. He is a great seeker after the curious. When he perceives it he buys it. Then he takes it down to the beach and puts it on the boardwalk with a little sign over it, informing the traveller of its history, its value, and its virtues.11

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9 Tribune (August 14, 1892), p. 17.
10 Loc. cit.
11 Loc. cit.
In the comments on "Founder" Bradley's abilities as an artist and the smug rectitude of his moralizing, Crane expresses his rebellion against the prescriptive propriety and pointed didacticism of the "Thou shalt not" variety:

There is probably no man in the world that can beat "Founder" Bradley in writing signs. His work has an air of philosophic thought about it which is very taking to any one of a literary turn of mind. He usually starts off with an abstract truth, an axiom, not foreign nor irrelevant, but bearing somewhat upon a hidden meaning in the sign—"Keep off the grass," or something of that sort. . . . He may devote four lines to telling the public what happened in 1869 and draw from that a one-line lesson as to what they may not do at that moment. . . . Strangers need no guide-book. They have signs confronting them at all points, under their feet, over their heads and before their noses "Thou shalt not" . . . .

And just as direct is Crane's attack on fin de siècle prudery and delicate sentiment. "Modesty of apparel," "Founder" Bradley had painted on a signboard near the beach, "is as becoming to a lady in a bathing suit as to a lady dressed in silks and satins:"

"There are some very sweet thoughts in that declaration," Crane commented. "It is really a beautiful expression of sentiment. It is modest and delicate. Its author merely insinuates. There is nothing to shake vibratory senses in such gentle phraseology. Supposing he had said: "Don't go in the water attired merely in a tranquil smile," or, "Do not appear on the beach when only enwrapped in reverie." A thoughtless man might have been guilty of unnecessary uncouthness. But to "Founder" Bradley it would be impossible. He is not merely a man. He is an artist."

Finally, Crane attacks what he must have felt in Bradley to be the ultimate vanity of ostentatious respectability.

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12 Loc. cit.
13 Loc. cit.
It warms his heart to see the thousands of people tramping over his boards, helter-skeltering in his sand and diving into that ocean of the Lord's which is adjacent to the beach of James A. Bradley.\textsuperscript{14}

Besides the attacks upon conventional respectability Crane devotes a great deal of space in his dispatches to ironical comment upon the amusements of the fashionable. The presence of the toboggan slide and the "arrangement called a 'razzle-dazzle,'" in which "desperate persons" were to go "around and around, up and down," amused him greatly; the "razzle-dazzle," he slyly remarked, "was, of course, a moral machine."\textsuperscript{15} To the polite amusement of dancing at one of the resort hotels he gave an entire report, observing, among other things, that the floor was taken up by "skinny little girls with curls, short white dresses and a superabundance of blue ribbon," and that their performance of "dancing in the barn" and "other gems of the dancing school delighted their admiring parents."\textsuperscript{16} And for ironic contrast he discussed at some length the lack of more worldly entertainment such as the "shell game," setting his description of it over against an account of the innocuous tin-type gallery and the tame amusement of the sleight-of-hand Italian.\textsuperscript{17}

Ocean Grove events gave Crane the opportunity to reveal his feeling about orthodox religion as it was manifested by the congregation of ministers that assembled there each season to hold summer conferences:

\textsuperscript{14} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{15} Tribune (July 3, 1892), p. 28.
\textsuperscript{16} Tribune (September 11, 1892), p. 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Tribune (July 17, 1892), p. 16.
The sombre-hued gentlemen who congregate at this place in summer are arriving in solemn procession with black valises in their hands and rebukes to frivolity in their eyes. They greet each other with quiet enthusiasm and immediately set about holding meetings.18

And he noted—ironically, as always—that the frivolity of the "moral machine" had got into open conflict with the "quiet enthusiasm" of the "sombre-hued gentlemen" and had lost.

... residents of Ocean Grove came and said that the steam organ disturbed their pious meditations on the evils of the world. Thereupon the minions of the law violently suppressed the wheel and its attendants.19

To take such liberties with some of the most highly cherished sentiments in the conventional outlook of the 1890's bespeaks either a reckless courage or a remarkable innocence. Crane, at twenty had not the latter quality, but in explaining the minor disaster that resulted, almost inevitably, one feels, in August from his satirical "reporting" he precisely attributed his lack of prudence to innocence of mind, at least insofar as his editor, Willis Johnson, was concerned. Ignoring the fact that Whitelaw Reid, owner and publisher of the Republican Tribune, was at this time a candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the United States and was busy, in a hard campaign, wooing the labor vote, Crane tried his irony in a report of the Junior Order of the United American Mechanics parade through Asbury Park:

The parade of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics here on Wednesday afternoon was a deeply impressive one to some persons. There were hundreds

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18 Tribune (July 2, 1892), p. 15.
19 Tribune (July 24, 1892), p. 22.
of the members of the order, and they wound through the streets to the music of enough brass bands to make furious discords. It probably was the most awkward, ungainly, uncut and uncarved procession that ever raised clouds of dust on sun-beaten streets. Nevertheless, the spectacle of an Asbury Park crowd confronting such an aggregation was an interesting sight to a few people.

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. Their clothes fitted them illy, for the most part, and they had no ideas of marching. They merely plodded along, not seeming quite to understand, stolid, unconcerned and, in a certain sense, dignified—a pace and a bearing emblematic of their lives. They smiled occasionally and from time to time greeted friends in the crowd on the sidewalk. 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. Hence the tan-colored, sun-beaten honesty in the faces of the members of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics is expected to have a very staggering effect upon them. The visitors were men who possessed principles.20

This is the earliest extant evidence of Crane's social and economic views, though Frank Noxon recalled that while a student at Syracuse he had read a paper to a Delta Upsilon fraternity meeting "on some serious political subject related to Russia,"21 and at another time during his college

20 Tribune (August 21, 1892), p. 22.
21 Noxon, p. 4.
career he wrote a political essay entitled "Foreign Policy in Two Glimpses." Neither of these papers has survived, but the nature of the topics suggests that Crane was early concerned with the questions of social relations.

There is no doubt where the writer's sympathy lay. But it is noteworthy that despite his deep resentment he felt at the demonstration of the injustice evidenced by the wide social gulf between the stumbling, uncouth marchers for labor and the grinning, indifferent idlers of wealth, Crane maintained the position of the detached ironist, much the same as he had in the report of the conflict between the "sombre-hued gentlemen" and the "moral machine," both of which he obviously felt were a little ridiculous. One needs to recall only one passage in Maggie to understand that Crane is here demonstrating one of the most characteristic features of his art. When angry policemen come out to break up a traffic jam, Crane, who loved horses passionately, merely notes that they "beat the soft noses of the responsible horses." The detached, ironical, unimpassioned expression of sympathy for the helpless and the down-trodden is a notable trait in Crane's thought as it appears in his writing.

Garland, recalling the parade incident forty years later, heightened the political significance of the report; Crane, he remembered, was deeply affected by the sight of "a pale-faced, weak-kneed, splay-footed lot, the slaves of a triumphant civilization, wearing their chains submissively,


working in the dark for careless masters, voting for privilege, seemingly without the slightest comprehension of their own supine cowardice . . . " and his report of Crane's comment upon the incident shortly after it took place is probably somewhat emotionally intensified.

I was so hot at the sight of those poor, misshapen fools shouting for monopoly that I gave no thought to its effect upon my own fortunes. I don't know that it would have made much difference if I had. I wanted to say those things anyway."

Garland's account takes on something of the tone of the exaggerated protests of the democratic press, which loudly accused the Tribune of insulting labor. Letters demanding public apologies flooded the office of Whitelaw Reid, and Crane appeared before Willis Johnson, according to the editor, "repentant," to ask advice. Johnson denied dismissing him, but admitted that he "improved the occasion" with two suggestions: one, "that ordinary news reporting was not a good place for subtle rhetorical devices," and two, "that a man who could write 'Four Men in a Cave' one of the Sullivan sketches ought not to waste his time in reporting that 'The Flunkey-Smiths of Squadunk are at the Gilded Pasaza Hotel for the season.'" This was the first turning point in Crane's literary career, for it turned his attention perforce from the current scene at Asbury Park as a field for satire to the slums in the New York East Side as a source for the materials for fiction.

The Sullivan County Sketches had been appearing, however, through

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25 Ibid., pp. 190-191.
26 Johnson, p. 290.
the summer of 1892 along with the resort reports, and in these first efforts at fiction the student of Crane sees how the writer proposed to express his detached and sardonic view of life in literature. It is clear that Crane recognized early the necessity for a special kind of discipline in his fictional pieces, for he pitched The Sullivan County Sketches in a lower key and submerged his personal view far below the surface of the narrative. But his ironic sense of the comic in the relations of the four campers to the Sullivan County wilds gives the stories their peculiar tone and direction and shows that the temper of mind which lay behind the resort satires lay also behind the Sullivan County tales.

The controlling theme of these somewhat crude anecdotes is centered in the inadequacy of their chief character, "the little man," to cope with his perpetual enemy, circumstance. Chance, or ill-luck, and his own serene egotism constantly victimize him, and his extreme wrath, or fear, or ludicrous triumph, provides effective ironic contrast to his complacent self-assurance, his dominant mood when he is not taking the brunt of some mis-adventure. In "Killing His Bear" the "little man" is a hunter of big game, and the triumph that he feels in destroying the animal is all out of proportion to the value of the deed. As he fires the fatal shot, he experiences "mad emotions, powerful to rock worlds." He runs to the bear he has just killed and waves his hat "as if he were leading the cheering of thousands. He ran up and kicked the ribs of the bear. Upon his face was the smile of the successful lover."27 Contrasted ironically

27 "Killing His Bear" in The Sullivan County Sketches, ed. Melvin Schoberlin (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1949), p. 54. All references to The Sullivan County Sketches are to this edition.
to this exaggerated emotion of triumph in the little man is the feeling of the hound who brought the bear under the hunter's gun. When the dog's baying is first heard, there is in it "a strange vindictiveness and blood-thirstiness:

Then it grew mournful as the wailing of a lost thing. . . . A hound as he nears large game, has the griefs of the world on his shoulders, and his baying tells of the approach of death. He is sorry he came.28

The situation is reversed in another sketch when the hunter is put for a while at the mercy of another bear, and while the animal wrecks the interior of his tent, the little man is crying with terror in a nearby treetop. "He moaned a little speech meant for a prayer and clung convulsively to the bending branches," gazing with "tearful wistfulness" at his dying campfire. When the bear becomes ensnared in the tent and runs off into the woods, the little man recovers from his "giggling hysterics," and intimates with pompous composure to his companions, who have returned to the camp just in time to witness the animal's confused flight, that the bear's hasty exit was the result of his own combative powers: "There's only one of me—and the devil made a twin."29

The ironic contrast between self-esteem and cowardly incompetence is again the theme of "The Mesmeric Mountain." The little man grovels with fear before a mountain which, he feels, is alive and malignant. He scurries away from it, sobbing, his brain turning to water, and returns to shriek at it with rage. At last he attacks the mountain and scrambles wildly up its sides:

28 Ibid., p. 52.
29 "A Tent in Agony," Ibid., pp. 63-64.
... the little man at last reached the top. Immediately, he swaggered with valor to the edge of the cliff. His hands were scornfully in his pockets.

He gazed at the western horizon, edged sharply against a yellow sky. "Ho!" he said. "There's Boyd's house and the Lumberland Pike."

The mountain under his feet was motionless.  

In most of the stories the little man is a victim of collaborative circumstances. He has the ill-luck to be mistaken for the person responsible for poisoning the seven babies of a furious virago and receives a terrible beating for the real culprit, a jolly fly-paper salesman.  

In "The Octopush" he, along with his friends, is the victim of a tippling old guide who leaves the four fishermen stranded for a night on stumps in an eerie Sullivan County lake. In "The Ghoul's Accountant" he is forced by two ruffians to settle an argument in arithmetic, knowing that he will receive a beating, regardless of his answer, from one or the other of the angry men. And in "Four Men in a Cave" the little man is victimized at poker by his chance encounter with a madman in a cave he and his companions explore.

Considered all together, these little sketches have a central ethical meaning, which may be summarized in the statement that the little man's mistaken sense of values and his enormous ego are ludicrous in the face of the unrelenting circumstances that control his life. The little man's pomposity, ironically set over against his obvious weaknesses that spring from his complacency and a distorted sense of his own importance, recalls

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31 "The Explosion of Seven Babies," ibid., pp. 55-60.
Crane's satirical portraits of "Founder" Bradley and the "average" Asbury Park vacationer. The insignificance of the little man— he is mentioned by name only once, and even then in the dialogue of another character—is impressively portrayed, yet he is made to take himself quite as seriously as do the "sombre-hued gentlemen" at Ocean Grove, or as does James A. "Founder" Bradley when he is controlling his beach "adjacent to the ocean of the Lord" at Asbury Park.

By the time he was doing his first writing, then, the peculiar philosophy which informed Crane's later work was already present in his thinking. The controlling element was irony, the chief stylistic instrument in both The Sullivan County Sketches and the Asbury Park satires. He was already intensely aware of the vanity of mankind, and whether it is expressed in the overweening complacency of the citizens of Asbury Park or in the enormous self-conceit of the little man, Crane was taking pains to deflate it. Finally, there is in the Sullivan sketches the controlling idea that insignificant man is at the mercy of accumulating circumstance; and though he shows it operating to nothing more evil than a crude, though sometimes cruel, joke, it is, when the humorous intention is disregarded, the same mercilessly indifferent Determinant that causes the death of the oiler in "The Open Boat."

It is, of course, difficult to account for anything so complex as the human mind and the even more complex interaction of all the components which have given it a characteristic shape. But certain patterns in Crane's experience before 1892, perhaps as significant as any single literary force which can be traced in his work, explain, at least in broad terms, the development of his peculiar intellectual coloring.
From the satires and stories that he published in 1892 it may be seen that Crane's mind, if not already in revolt against the established directions of thought in the 'nineties, was at least well-disposed toward revolt. His first rebellion can be traced to his childhood antipathy for the extreme orthodoxy of his father's theology. The Reverend Johnathan Townley Crane repudiated Presbyterianism because he was profoundly disturbed by the question of infant damnation and embraced the strict Methodism of the old stamp. From the routine of administering to his pastorate he found time to write several serious books "deeply concerned with such sins as dancing, breaking the Sabbath, reading trashy novels, playing cards, billiards, chess, and enjoying tobacco and wine. . . ."32 He doubtless spent many hours in "pious meditation upon the evils of the world," for he noted in his diary in 1879: "Began to try my ideas down on paper, in regard to a very interesting, but difficult subject, the original state of man, his fall, etc."33 Biblical drunkeness he was anxious to excuse, and he offered an elaborate rationalization of Noah's excesses:

The Scriptures tell us that Noah planted a vineyard and on one occasion drank of the wine until he was drunken. Very possibly the process of fermentation had not before been noticed, the results were not known, and the consequence in this case were wholly unexpected.34

Late in his life Stephen Crane testified to his father's innocence of mind: "He was so simple and good that I often think he didn't know much of anything about humanity."35

32 George Harvey Gensmer, DAB, III, p. 506.
33 Berryman, p. 11.
34 Gensmer, p. 506.
35 Stallman, p. 691. All references to Crane's letters are to this source.
But occasionally Dr. Crane expressed ideas which belie his innocence of human nature. He saw some irony in the position of militant missionaries, and he knew that no special virtue accrued to the small town because it was isolated from the evil of big city life. "Some are more interested," he wrote of missionaries, "to clothe the naked bodies of the heathen than to enlighten their minds," and he observed apropos small towns that he was "much more concerned that we live truthfully and kindly here than that we should be busy in condemning the luxuries and sins of New York City." And he knew something of the task of trying to reform the vices and follies of mankind. "Mrs. Crane," he wrote in reference to his wife's efforts with the Christian Temperance Union, "is much impressed by this project. I do not think it exactly practical. ..."

Like her husband, Crane's mother was zealously religious. She took part in reform movements, as both a writer and a speaker, and contributed religious articles to the Methodist papers, the New York Tribune, and the Philadelphia Press. Young Crane seems to have early become a trial to her:

Once when I was fourteen an organ grinder on the beach at Asbury 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 and Mother was tickled to death. And, mind you, all because this nefarious Florentine gave me a red drink out of a bottle. I have frequently wondered how much mothers ever know about their sons, after all. She would not have found it much of a joke.


37 Loc. cit.

38 Stallman (Letters), pp. 692-693. Crane's imaginative reconstruction of this incident provided an important passage for George's Mother.
When her health permitted, she was "always starting off...to some big prayer meeting or experience meeting," and according to Schoberlin, at these times Crane "wandered ragged and hungry along the streets of Port Jervis and Asbury Park."39

Against the regimen of orthodoxy Crane revolted under the leadership of his sister Agnes and his brother Will. Agnes let it be plainly understood that she was "politely revolutionary," and there is testimony to her repudiation of strict Methodism in her expressed doubts that she was a "Christian lady."40 Her influence on the brother who was fifteen years her junior was very strong, and the two were often rebels in the family together.41 His brother Will furnished him a view diametrically opposed to that of his parents. "My brother Will," Crane recalled later, "used to try to argue with her [Mrs. Crane] on religious subjects such as hell but he always gave it up...it hurt her that any of us should be slipping from Grace and giving up eternal damnation or salvation or those things."42 Will evidently tried to protect his younger brother against the terrors of the paternal theology: "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."43

If Crane's lack of sympathy with theological matters, clearly shown in his first writing, had its origins in his early life, the reminiscences

39 Schoberlin, "Introduction," The Sullivan County Sketches, p. 3.
40 Berryman, p. 13.
41 Schoberlin, p. 3.
42 Stallman (Letters), p. 692.
43 Loc. cit.
of his classmates at Claverack College and Syracuse University show that as a young man he had extended this theological recalcitrance into a more general skepticism. Wickham recalls that at Claverack, where Crane enrolled in 1888, there was a tremendous fight one spring that started when Crane pronounced Tennyson "swill"; and he had other unorthodox ideas: "There is nothing save opinion—and opinion be damned." It was his 'pose,'" the classmate recalls, "to take little interest in anything save poker and baseball, and even in these great matters there was in his manner a suggestion of noblesse oblige." His favorite expression was a bored "Ho hell!" And he smoked, one of the few boys who did, consorted with the social outcasts, in this instance a group of Cuban students, and held aloof from all activities which involved collective action, such as the burning of an unpopular student in effigy.

By 1890, the year he entered Lafayette College as a freshman in mining engineering, he had angular opinions about literature. Count Tolstoy he considered the world's greatest writer; Flaubert's Salammbô was much too long, but it was better than anything Robert Louis Stevenson could do. He knew nothing of Henry James, but when he tried The Reverberator the same fall, he found it dull and tedious. His repudiation of authority extended to the school discipline, and since he seldom attended classes and failed every subject but French, the faculty advised him to leave.

At Syracuse he continued the role of the young man in revolt against

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45 Loc. cit.
the accepted ideas of his times. "When I ought to have been at recitations I was studying faces on the streets, 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," he wrote about his Syracuse days.46 The opinions he expressed in the classroom when he did appear there were in shocking contradiction to the ideas of his moral philosophy teacher. "Tut tut, what does Saint Paul say?" the professor queried to Crane's demurrer about the nature of sin, and Crane countered, "I know what Saint Paul says, but I disagree with Saint Paul."47 A Dr. Charles Little, Professor of History and Logic, called Crane to his desk one day and warned him to beware, that he was going very wrong indeed.48 His refusal to meet the reformer Frances Willard "on the ground that he thought her a fool," an opinion which, oddly, echoed his father's view of reform, seriously shocked another professor's wife.49 By mutual consent of Crane and the school authorities, the young man withdrew from Syracuse at the end of the spring semester of 1891.

By this time Crane's rebellion against Christian orthodoxy was complete, and though Christian ethics were to appear in various ways in his future work by furnishing motifs and symbols for his later stories, his concept of values in life was never to be in any sense the traditional one. Crane's niece, Helen, daughter of his brother Edmund, to whose house he moved after leaving Syracuse, recalled something of his point of view in 1891:

46 Stallman (Letters), p. 627.
47 Berryman, p. 21.
49 Beer, p. 57.
by this time he was in full rebellion against the traditions on which he had been nourished and reared. His mother's memory was dear to him, and although he never questioned her ways when he was outside the family portals, he did marvel always that such an intellectual woman, a university graduate, and capable of being a regular contributor to magazines and newspapers, could have wrapped herself so completely in the "vacuous, futile, psalm-singing that passed for worship" in those days.50

And Arthur Oliver, a young Asbury Park friend who often sought Crane's advice about writing as they lounged on the beach in the summer of 1891, remembered that he seemed to be ahead of the conventional thought of his time:

As an intellectual personality "Stevie" Crane always impressed me as very old for his years when we were young chaps together down on the Jersey shore. Beneath a somewhat diffident exterior, he had a keen sense of the real meaning of things. He saw and felt deeply. Even as a boy, he had a richly developed vein of satire.51

From Asbury Park and his reporting job with Townley's news agency the unregenerate ex-student began to go into New York to idle about the East Side slums and study the people in the saloons up and down the Bowery. It was here, doubtless, that he acquired the knowledge which is reflected in the 1892 sketches in his depiction of the drunken guide in "The Octopush" and his discussion of the "shell game" in the Asbury Park report.

Toward the end of the summer he fell in love with a young American singer named Helen Trent, whom he had met at Asbury and who was now in New York as a companion to a wealthy elderly lady who travelled. He


called to stare at her and shock her with his unorthodox utterances: Hamlin Garland, the young man lecturing at Avon on the local novel, was like "a nice Jesus Christ;" Christianity was "mildewed," but there might be something to Buddhism; the Bowery was the most interesting place in New York; and Stevenson was not a sincere writer. Despite her exasperated efforts to reform him (she lectured him against the idling in the Bowery and was properly shocked by his religious views) Crane developed an intense feeling for her. A love note of September 20, 1891 reads:

You have the most beautiful arms I ever saw. You never should have to wear dresses with sleeves. If I could keep your arms nothing else would count. It would not matter if there was nothing else to hope for in the world. In dreams, don't you ever fall and fall but not be afraid of anything because somebody safe is with you?

When the lady told him two days later that she was engaged to be married to a young London surgeon, Crane clapped his hands to his face and stumbled blindly from her house. Perhaps something of the depth of this emotional experience is indicated by the fact that Crane, more than two years later, transposed the love note almost phrase by phrase into a poem for The Black Riders:

Should the wide world roll away
Leaving black terror,
Limitless night,
Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand
Would be to me essential,
If thou and thy white arms were there,
And the fall to doom a long way.

Doubtless, Crane's intellectual and emotional makeup was acute and

52 Beer, p. 61.
53 Stallman (Letters), p. 590.
54 Work, VI, 6.
responsive, and he brought to the composition of his very earliest work a respectable range of mental experience, despite his complete failure in formal education. When we place his total known intellectual experience over against the thought revealed in his scanty early sketches, it becomes clear that his was the sort of mind which dealt more surely with the reality of the present and actual than with the abstract and vicarious. There is no evidence that he ever wrestled greatly with the theory of life or that he needed any special ethical system to follow in order to construct his own views of life's values and meaning. He once said that he "got his artistic education on the Bowery,"55 by which he meant, surely, that he got some of his materials and a great deal of his philosophy there.

The little man in the Sullivan Sketches is the forerunner of most of Crane's later heroes, however less crude and more complex the later fictional characters were to become. But like Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage the little man is in the hands of a whimsical, not altogether scientific, Determinant, and like the men adrift in the open boat, he is cast against the background of a completely indifferent universe. One difference in the situations of the correspondent in the open boat and the little man atop the mesmeric mountain is that in one case it is the universe that does not move, in the other merely a Sullivan County hill. Not the least difference, though, is that the little man in his enormous egotism does not seem to be aware that the mountain is motionless, while the correspondent is aware almost to despair that the universe is indifferent.

55 Stallman (Letters), p. 674.
Although Crane in 1892, unlike Garland and Norris, seems to have taken his point of view altogether independently of any philosophical system and to have owed nothing to sources outside his own personal experience, he had definitely called upon his literary and other artistic experience for the principles of his style. "I began to write special articles and short stories for the Sunday papers and one of the literary syndicates," Crane wrote in reference to this period, "reading a great deal in the meantime and gradually acquiring a style." He was a studied stylist from the beginning, and as both his statement and the character of his early writing show, he carefully wrought his style out of his reading and his own intellectual resources.

The strongest and most important characteristic in his writing is the stylistic use of irony, a mode of expression to which his particular intellectual temperament was well-suited. He usually achieves an ironical effect in the use of incongruity, as in the carefully paralleled utterance on Bradley's pleasure in seeing people enjoy the "ocean of the Lord's which is adjacent to the beach of James A. Bradley," or in the ironic contrast between the little man's egotism and the mountain's indifference in the last sentence of "The Mesmeric Mountain." Frequently Crane achieves effective ironic suggestion by the use of laconic commentary in a climactic position. Of the Asbury Park Ferris-wheel he states merely that "it is, of course, a moral machine," and in pointing up again the little man's egotistical triumph in the slaying of the bear, he ends the story with the brief statement that "upon his face was the smile of the successful lover."

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56 Ibid., p. 627.

57 Tribune (August 14, 1892), p. 17.
Other characteristic stylistic devices appear in the early work. In the laconic and synecdochic expression Crane achieved the effect of intense compression, and he seems even at this time to have been working toward the condensation which was to be later a chief component of his style. He portrays the little man's fear in "Killing his Bear" by reducing the cringing victim to mere hands and eyes; he represents the terribleness of the specter in "The Ghoul's Accountant" through his fiercely red skin and infinitely black whiskers, and he suggests the character of the officious Bradley with the phrase "fierce and passionate whiskers." Occasionally in The Sullivan County Sketches Crane tries to produce special effects by ascribing emotion and movement to natural or inanimate objects:

Two sculls, whittled from docile pine boards.

... the sun... was peering at them like the face of an angry man over a hedge.

Once a campfire lay dying in a fit of temper.

... a mass of angry, red coals glowered and hated the world.

Dusk came and fought a battle with the flare before their eyes.

58 Schoberlin, p. 39.
59 Loc. cit.
60 Tribune (August 14, 1892), p. 17.
61 Schoberlin, p. 34.
62 Ibid., p. 35.
63 Ibid., p. 39.
64 Ibid., p. 29.
65 Ibid., p. 35.
He thus tried to reduce the metaphor and simile to their highest degree of compressibility to place before the eye his colorful imagery in its most emphatic expression.

But the most striking stylistic feature of this work is Crane's use of color. Both the Asbury Park dispatches and the Sullivan sketches glow with verbal pyrotechnics; color is associated with moods and emotions—there are red rages, a glum "slate-colored" man, and violet curses. In nature Crane's perceptive eyes discovered multitudes of brilliant colors, and his descriptions of sunrises, sunsets, moonlight, and the shrieking light of a Sullivan County high noon he wrought with studied care. In "The Broken Down Van," a sketch which appeared in the Tribune in mid-summer, Crane created a symphony of color in the first three paragraphs. Red, as it does in his later writing, predominates. A broken-down furniture van is red, a horse car behind it is red, its bullseye light is red, the dashboard is red—even the driver's hair is red. Another car is green, another blue, and so on until in the long line of vans and cars which assemble in the New York dusk there is a flashing panorama of primary colors. Red and black is a favorite combination. The torches of the four men in the cave "became studies in red blaze and black smoke;" in "The Octopush" dusk fights a battle with red sunglare, and a ghoul has "fiercely red skin" and "infinitely black whiskers."

Crane was fearlessly experimenting in 1892 with all of these stylistic features, irony, intense compression, bold metaphor, and color, and the

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66 Tribune (July 10, 1892), p. 8.
68 Ibid., p. 40.
insolent originality of it in the view of the literary world of the early 'nineties was the result of Crane's "reading a great deal, . . . and gradually acquiring a style" in 1891 and 1892. How Crane arrived at the style through his early reading is one of the most instructive aspects of his literary development.

Crane's references to his reading are very few. Except for a casual mention to a book in his correspondence—there are no more than half a dozen such references in the letters now known to exist—Crane's statement that he "was reading a great deal" in the year after his college experiment is about all the evidence the writer himself has left for the identity of his early literary models. Beer, who had access to sources which no longer exist, is the authority for the books frequently mentioned in connection with his formative period. Tolstoy's Sevastopol he acquired from a lady in Asbury Park in the summer of 1890,^69 and so far as the record shows, it was upon this one book that he judged Tolstoy to be the "greatest writer in the world."^70 He read one novel of Flaubert's and some of Stevenson's stories. Since he received an "A" in Dr. Sims's English Literature at Syracuse, the only grade recorded for him, he must have known something of the standard English writers. Lastly, his knowledge of the Bible, to be expected of the son of Dr. Jonathan Crane, is obvious from the many biblical allusions throughout his work.71 But

^69 Beer, p. 54.

^70 War and Peace he seems to have read for the first time in 1896. See Berryman, p. 154.

^71 In writing of the dance music in the resort hotels he described it as "a wailing cornet and a piano, which resembles a Christian who hath not charity, in that it long ago became as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." Tribune (September 11, 1892), p. 15.
other authors are behind *The Sullivan County Sketches*. Twain, H. Bierce, Poe, perhaps Kipling, a writer whom Crane himself acknowledged in 1893 as one whose "style" he wished to escape.72

Mark Twain's influence upon these experimental writings is perceptible, first of all, in the choice of material, for Crane was attempting to make literary capital, as Twain had in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of *Roughing It*, out of his camping experiences in the great and wild outdoors. About the time that he was reading and forming his style Crane was tramping about Sullivan County with his friends, exploring old caves and encountering bears and odd backwoodsmen. Twain's suggestion about the use of his experience in fiction might have been timely. But more important is the over-all tone in the Sullivan tales of the humor sketches in the "tall tale" tradition of the Western writers which Crane knew through Twain and possibly Bret Harte.73 The little man is intended to be essentially a comic character in his gross incompetency to cope with the exigencies of outdoor life, and in his fantastic and furiously exaggerated frustrations when circumstances, as they inevitably do, work to his discomfort. This comic device Twain used throughout *Roughing It*. Five of the sketches—"Four Men in a Cave," "The Octopush," "The Holler Tree," "The Cry of a Huckleberry Pudding," and "The Explosion of Seven Babies"—were doubtless conceived as imitations of the humorous sketches Crane found from chapter to chapter in *Roughing It*.

Besides the suggestions for material and a comic treatment, Twain


73 Schoberlin (p. 19) states that Crane's mother was a writer of tall tales.
had quite obviously a more specific influence on Crane in what he taught the younger writer of style. Crane adopted the technique of achieving a comic effect in the use of anti-climax, incongruous combinations, and ironic contrasts which are occasionally pure Twain: "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." In the comments on Bradley's didactic signs and the sarcastic remarks about "Founder's" sentiments about modesty, there is the tone of Twain's ironic raillery against the Mormons or the Christian Scientists or the piety of Aunt Polly.

Twain doubtless furnished suggestions for style and material, but he is in no way the only detectable influence. According to Schoberlin, Crane read with admiration the stories of Ambrose Bierce when they appeared in Soldiers and Civilians in 1891, and certainly a great deal of what Berryman calls the "clouded, obsessive, and grotesque," of Bierce and Poe appear in The Sullivan County Sketches. Some of the stories in Bierce's collection are squarely in the tradition of Poe'sque horror, and it is evident that they appealed to Crane. The appearances of ghouls or grotesque or unnatural figures in "Four Men in a Cave," "A Ghoul's Accountant," and "The Black Dog" the first two of which represent a commingling of elements of both the western humor tale and the horror story, conform to Bierce's and Poe's practice of creating terror by means of the unknown or the imperfectly understood. In Bierce's story "The Famous Gilson Bequest" the ironic conclusion depends upon Gilson's return.

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74 Tribune (August 14, 1892), p. 17.
75 Schoberlin, p. 3.
76 Berryman, p. 41.
after death as a ghoul, and in "The Boarded Window" and "The Man and the Snake" is the Poesque idea of death occurring through sheer fright, a device which Poe uses in "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Crane capitalizes upon the fear of the unknown in "The Cry of a Huckleberry Pudding." After eating a supper of huckleberry pudding, the four campers retire to their sleeping areas around the campfire. In the night three of them are awakened by terrible, inhuman cries:

The cry of the unknown instantly awakens them to terror. It is mightier than the war yell of the dreadful, because the dreadful may be definite. But this whoop strikes greater fear from hearts because it tells of formidable mouths and great, phantom force which imagination declares invincible, and awful to the sight.77

Though the situation is resolved in a joke—the little man crying in the dark is merely suffering from a violent stomach-ache—the unknown cry strikes terror into the hearts of his companions.

"The Black Dog" shows a more direct relation to Bierce than any of the other sketches. A superstitious old man, who believes that his death will be attended by the howling of a spectral dog, is found sick in the attic of his lonely cabin. When a stray cur wanders by the window and howls for food, the old man, believing that his end has been announced, dies in a paroxysm of fright. The little man throws articles through the window at the dog:

A mug, a plate, a knife, a fork, all crashed . . . to the ground, but the song of the specter continued. The bowl of beef tea followed. As it struck the ground the phantom ceased its cry. . . .

77 Schoberlin, p. 69.
"He's eatin' the beef-tea," said the slate-colored man, faintly.
"That damn dog was hungry," said the pudgy man.
"There's your phantom," said the little man to the pudgy man.
On the bed, the old man lay dead. Without, the specter was wagging its tail. 78

Bierce used the same idea in his "The Man and the Snake." A guest in the home of a scientist who collects snakes and keeps them alive in his laboratory is reading in his room one night when his eye is attracted by two gleaming points of light under the bed. He perceives the light to be the two eyes of a coiled snake. The scientist and his wife, hearing a scream from the guest room,enter to find the man dead:

"Died in a fit," said the scientist. . . .
He reached under the bed, pulled out the snake and flung it, still coiled, to the center of the room.
It was a stuffed snake; its eyes were two shoe buttons. 79

Bierce used this device in two other stories in Soldiers and Civilians. In "The Suitable Surroundings" a man is frightened to death by the cry of a wild animal at a crucial point in a horror story he is reading, and in "A Watcher by the Dead" a young man is frightened to death in the course of a long death-watch by the movement of what he thinks is the corpse.

Through Bierce, then, Crane's early work relates to the tradition of the horror story, and through this writer he may have learned, too, how to treat in fiction those ironical themes which rely upon the role of blind circumstance for their effect. But neither Twain nor Bierce could have given Crane the most characteristic aspects of his style, its heavy reliance upon the effects of color and its extreme compression. To

78 Ibid., p. 49.
explain this element in Crane's early art the student must turn to his early association with painting and the art of the colorist, particularly his knowledge of the impressionistic techniques in painting.

Frank Moxon states that Crane once remarked that a passage in Goethe "analyzed the effect which the several colors have upon the human mind," and that this "had made a profound impression" upon him. Where Crane might have seen an extract from Goethe's *Farbenlehre* is a mystery—he did not, as Berryman suggests, find it in his college text-book on psychology—but it is, according to the testimony of artists, a valuable contribution to the knowledge of color. Goethe singled out certain characteristic psychological values for the different colors: "an impression of power is conveyed by painting in which the active colors yellow, orange and purple predominate. Gentleness is conveyed by painting in which the passive colors blue, violet and purple predominate." This may have suggested to Crane the possibility of using color to convey psychological effects, but it is clear that he did not use Goethe's interpretation of the meaning of individual colors, for in *The Sullivan County Sketches* Crane relies upon the more traditional psychological associations. Red he associates with wrath, yellow with the sinister, black with gloom, and grey with gravity and seriousness. Later, in "The Blue Hotel" Crane used blue, which Goethe associates with gentleness, to produce a psychological setting for extreme violence.

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80 Moxon, p. 6.
Goethe's remarks doubtlessly interested Crane, if he saw them, for even before his Syracuse days he had developed an interest in painting. His sister, Mary Helen, taught art in Asbury Park in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties, and at Claverack College he was for a time in love with the artist Phebe English. By 1891, when he was a student at Syracuse, he had come into contact with the new Impressionist movement which was in the process of transplantation from France to America during the 'eighties and 'nineties. Besides his painter's awareness of color, revealed on every page of his early writing, Crane indicates that he was aware of the technical aspects of Impressionism in his sketch of "Founder" Bradley. In the account of Bradley's sign painting technique Crane wrote that "he is no mere bungler nor trivial paint-slinger. He has those powers of condensation which are so much admired at this day." Thus Crane expresses in non-technical language one of the central practices of the Impressionists, and at the same time the one concept which was to be the most adaptable to his literary purposes.

Impressionism began with a group of French realists—Monet, Manet, Renoir, Degas, Pissaro, to name the most important—who revolted against the formalism of the School in much the same way that the literary realists revolted against romanticism. The traditionalists saw the art of painting as the means "for expressing an abstract, literary idea," or a moral value; the subject was distorted into an elevation or idealization of nature for

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84 Ibid., p. 332.
85 Tribune (August 14, 1892), p. 17. Italics mine.
the sake of a moral concept. The formalism of School painting excluded
a realization of the subject as it really existed by asserting the
superiority of the idea over the matter. The Impressionists reasserted
the importance of the subject and its "visible realization" because they
found in the object itself, shorn of its sentimental idealism, "the very
principle and thought of life."

The Impressionists, in rejecting the academic formalism of the
traditionalists, turned to the realization of objects in life and nature
for their subject matter. The reality and the ethical meaning of the
real world they attempted to catch in a single, unified impression which
excluded everything external to the object of central interest. In
execution the use of strong color was of primary importance because the
Impressionist, proceeding from the fact that every shade is a blend of
the primary colors, painted in brilliant reds, blues, yellows, and greens
and left it to the eye to blend them in the painting just as it blends
the colors in the natural world.

This new theory of realism Crane knew something of before he did
his first writing. The function of color as he adapted it to literary
uses was to strengthen the visualization of the image or scene, not as
the casual observer might see it in ordinary blended tones, but as the
eye of the graphic artist would break it down into the strong component
primary colors. The Impressionists' theory of condensation, which led
them to portray the subject as the eye saw it at a glance, with its more
characteristic aspects in the center of focus and the less significant
either subdued or completely excluded, Crane utilized to achieve the
swift, economical effect of the single stroke.

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This economy of visualization and the recognition of the literary values of light and color abound in the Sullivan sketches. "In a wilderness sunlight is noise. Darkness is a great, tremendous silence, accented by small and distant sounds" thus opens "A Ghoul's Accountant." And in "Four Men in a Cave" Crane creates a tableau with two swift sentences: "The swirling mass went some twenty feet and lit upon a level, dry place in a strong, yellow light of candles. It dissolved and became eyes." The little man, trapped in a tree top by a rampant bear, "shriveled to a grip and a pair of eyes." 88

Crane's later association with the young artist at the old Art Student's League building in New York, where the principles of the new art were doubtlessly discussed again and again, perhaps strengthened his faith in Impressionism, but it is clear that he was an Impressionist from the beginning. The movement had already given him the strongest characteristics of his style when he was writing for the Tribune in the summer of 1892.

The importance of the Sullivan sketches in the study of Crane as an incipient artist is all out of proportion to their intrinsic literary values. Berryman rightly observes that in this writing "we see a mind at stretch which has no clear idea why it is at stretch," and certainly the sketches show that Crane was grabbing desperately for a literary

87 Schoberlin, p. 39.
88 Ibid., p. 27.
89 Ibid., p. 63.
90 Berryman, p. 37.
raison d'être. He was attempting to formulate a technique in fiction by taking whatever appealed to him in the art of others and forcing or fusing the foreign components into one suitable for his own purposes. A lack of focus and direction was inherent in the very eclecticism of his method and the results were understandably unhappy. The sketches are cast in the form of jokes, but the point of view that directs them is fundamentally serious; there is valuable insight in the conception of the little man warring so ineffectually against circumstance, oblivious to the irony in his own inflated opinion of himself, but the idea is ineffectively sustained, carried as it is in the framework of Kipling's flippancy, Twain's drawling hyperbole, and Bierce's clever grotesqueness. And the carefully studied pyrotechnics of style Crane brandishes with all the ostentation of the proud with a newly acquired possession.

Nevertheless, all the important elements of his mature art, crude as they may appear in these sketches, are recognizable in both the controlling thought and its literary execution. Crane's growth was to be more a matter of shifted emphasis and addition than a change in fundamentals. His growth is contained in the process of refinement, clarification, and expansion. It is this which lies between The Sullivan County Sketches and "The Open Boat."

Crane never concerned himself much with the expression of his philosophy of art and the few convictions to which he gives utterance are scattered in brief, and sometimes cryptic, sentences throughout his correspondence covering the ten-year period in which he pursued his career. Of the origins of the aesthetics he gave a hint or two, but even these are misleading. His reference to the Sullivan stories as
being in a "clever Rudyard Kipling style" is only very loosely accurate, for though there is something of Kipling's flippant irony and clever manipulation of plot in them—the qualities, apparently, Crane meant to characterise—he may as well have assigned these characteristics to Bierce or even, in part at least, to Poe. Though Crane's early experiments show that his aesthetic philosophy was still in the process of formulation, some of the principles basic to his mature theory of art he seems to have adopted by the time he set about composing the sketches.

First of all, there is explicit in the theory of Impressionism, which owes its origins to the nineteenth-century revolt against "hothouse" art, the idea that the true materials for art are in life itself. The naturalist school, championed by Zola and the graphic art critic Castagnary, had grown from the early realistic group surrounding Courbet, who had proclaimed the new realism forcefully in 1855. "Let's be a little ourselves, even though we might be ugly!" Fernand Desnoyers, the spokesman of the group, declared. "Let's not write, nor paint anything except what is, or at least what we see, what we know, what we have lived. . . . Any figure, whether beautiful or ugly can fulfill the ends of art."

And in a letter to one of his students Courbet wrote that "realism, without being a defense of the ugly or the evil, has the right to show what exists and what one sees." When the realists failed to fulfill the promise of their philosophy, some of their more aggressive associates broke away to form the naturalistic school, and their principles, enunciated by their leader Castagnary, gained the enthusiastic support of Zola:


92 Loc. cit.
The naturalist school, Castagnary explained, declares that art is the expression of life under all phases and on all levels, and that its sole aim is to reproduce nature by carrying it to its maximum power and intensity. It is truth balanced with science. The naturalist school re-establishes the broken relationship between man and nature... By placing the artist again in the center of his time, with the mission of reflection, it determines the genuine utility, in consequence, the morality of art. 93

In 1891, when the doctrine of the Impressionists—as the French realists and the naturalists later came to be called—was becoming known in America, Crane, ruminating on the function of art, was developing strong ideas about the proper materials for literature:

I cannot see why people hate ugliness in art. Ugliness is just a matter of treatment. The scene of Hamlet and his mother and old Polonius behind the curtain is ugly, if you heard it in a police court. Hamlet treats his mother like a drunken carter and his words when he has killed Polonius are disgusting. But who cares? 94

Garland's lecture on the local novel at Avon-by-the-Sea, which Crane reported accurately enough to arouse in the mid-Westerner an intense interest in the younger man, 95 emphatically sustained this view. "Local color," Garland preached, "means that the writer reflects the life which goes on around him." 96 And in the youth who had already started a draft of Maggie, Garland's suggestion that "the novel of the slums must be

93 Ibid., pp. 130-31.
94 Berryman, p. 21.
written by one who has played there as a child, and taken part in all its
amusements, must have struck a chord of sympathy.

The Sullivan sketches, even though hardly extensive enough to indicate
that Crane was following these adjurations to turn to real life for the
materials of art, at least suggest in the context of his other work that
he might have deliberately selected actual experience for his first
literary efforts. Referring to this period in a letter to Leslie's
Weekly in November, 1895, Crane stated that he "decided that the nearer
a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist. . . ." This
principle lies at the very center of Crane's approach to literature,
and it is both a testimony to his sincerity as an artist and to the con­
sistency of his view that he did not violate it, as a principle, in all
the eight years remaining to his career. It motivated not only his
artistic practice, but his whole life experience, for it was the driving
motive behind his whole conduct of life.

Garland, too, had preached revolt in his lecture on the local
novel, and when he and Crane lazily played catch through the long summer
afternoons, the older man, full of his hopes for the future of American
literature, must have elaborated for Crane his message of Emersonian
independence. "The great artist never conforms. He does not trail after
some other man's success. He works out his individual perception of
things," he stated in his lecture. The American artist, if he were

97 Ibid., p. 72.
98 Stallman, p. 627.
100 Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 73.
to be a man independent of others, was also to be a man of integrity. "... each man stands accountable to himself first, and to the perceived fact of life second." How well Crane learned this lesson is revealed by the testimony of Arthur Oliver, a fellow resort correspondent who talked literature with him in 1891. "Treat your notions like that," Crane counseled, throwing a handful of beach sand to the wind. "Forget what you think about it and tell how you feel about it. Make the other fellow realise that you are just as human as he is. That's the secret of story-telling. Away with literary fads and canons. Be yourself!"

To Helen Trent, the same summer, Crane complained of Stevenson's insincerity. The material for literature, he understood already, was life itself; the literary treatment was, he understood, too, to be truthful and honest. "... I understand," he wrote in one of his most revealing statements, "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."

If these ideas had been impressed upon him by Garland and the Impressionists, they were surely reinforced by the artistic principles enunciated by Dick Helda, the hero of Kipling's The Light That Failed, which Crane almost certainly read, along with Plain Tales from the Hills,
sometime between 1890 and 1892. Dick is not only an impressionistic painter who talks interminably of the value of color, but he has the notion, too, that real life, even in its ugly aspects, treated with honesty and truthfulness, is the basic requirement for art. But not until he has learned the lesson from his friend Torpenhow, whom Dick tells of his attempt to do a realistic painting honestly:

... I lured my model, a beautiful rifleman, up here with drink. ... I made him a flushed dishevelled, bedevilled scallawag, with his helmet at the back of his head, and the living fear of death in his eye, and the blood oozing out of a cut over his ankle-bone. He wasn't pretty, but he was all soldier and very much man. ... The art-manager of that abandoned paper said that his subscribers wouldn't like it. It was brutal and coarse and violent. ... I took my "Last Shot" back. ... I put him into a lovely red coat without a speck on it. That is Art. I polished his boots. ... That is Art. I cleaned his rifle—rifles are always clean on service—because that is Art. ... I shaved his chin, I washed his hands, and gave him an air of fatted peace. ... Price, thank Heaven! twice as much as for the first sketch. ... 106

Torpenhow destroys the repainted picture and delivers to Dick a long

104 Kipling is the only author Crane ever mentioned specifically in referring to his literary origins. In a letter to Lily Brandon Munroe he characterized his style as "clever Rudyard-Kipling" but it is likely that he was not using the phrase literally, since the Kiplinesque qualities of The Sullivan County Sketches—the ironic flippancy of tone and the studied manipulation of plot—may be associated with Bierce, who was more direct influence, or even, in part, to Poe. Even so, Kipling's stories may have represented to Crane in 1892 an ideal in fiction, particularly one like "Lispeth," a bitterly ironic commentary on practical versus theoretical Christianity.

105 "What color that was!" he exclaims about the scenery of Soudan. "Opal and amber and claret and brick-red and sulphur—cockatoo-crest sulphur—against brown, with aigger black rock sticking up in the middle of it all, and a decorative frieze of camels festooning in front of a pure pale turqoise sky." The Light That Failed, p. 53.

106 The Light That Failed, pp. 55-56.
impassioned lecture on truth and integrity in the practice of art, after
which the penitent young painter concludes, "You're so abominably
reasonable." 107

Crane in 1892, as it has been pointed out, had within his grasp all
the elements that were to go into the development of his later art. His
intellectual personality had already taken definite shape, and though it
was still, in The Sullivan County Sketches, groping for expression, it
was recognisable at least in its basic characteristics. Crane was already
in the process of excising from his thinking the illusions inherent in the
traditional thought of the late 'nineties, and he was already in the
habit of expressing these revised views of the values in life in terms
of irony.

Irony was the hallmark of his style, and if his style were over­
brilliant, too studied in its feeling toward originality, the chief Crane
characteristics, the vital condensation, the pyrotechnic appeal to the
sense of sight, were in clear evidence. The question of the function
of art, to reveal life itself, regardless of the approval or disapproval
of the literary traditionalists, was doubtless rooted in his thinking from
the first. Finally, the conception that the artist must treat his materials
with truth and integrity, not with expedients and tricks, even if it were
not altogether a part of his creed when he wrote the Sullivan sketches,
was to become a part of it before the end of the year. For in the fall,
before he went to New York to cast his lot with a group of struggling

107 Another idea, less basic perhaps, which Dick Helda might have
suggested to Crane is that true art is the result of suffering. Dick
expresses this view several times and later Crane echoes it almost every­
where he has occasion to comment on literature.
bohemian artists and to peddle a third version of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets to a group of adamant editors, he "revised" his literary creed:

You know, when I left you (the fall of 1892) 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 and in this way I became involved in the beautiful war between those who say that art is man's substitute for nature and we are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth, and those who say—well, I don't know what they say. Then they can't say much but they fight villainously and keep Garland out of the big magazines. Howells, of course is too powerful for them.

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.108

Short as Crane's apprenticeship in the "clever school in literature" was, he learned a great deal and laid enough groundwork to create the illusion for the literary historian that he appeared upon the scene spontaneously as an original artist, "springing without antecedent into life," without sources of philosophy and art.109


CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORAL PHILOSOPHY:

1892—1895

For a few days after the Asbury Park parade debacle Crane entertained the idea of going into the "great honest West," as he once phrased it, as a free lance journalist, and late in August of 1892, he wrote upon the imposing letter-head of The New Jersey Coast News Bureau (defunct, it would seem, since Stephen's flight of literary irony in the August 21 Tribune) to the manager of the American Press applying for a position as a correspondent.\(^1\) But either Crane changed his mind or the Press refused him a place, for early in the fall he made his way into the New York East Side, where he was to remain, observing and writing in wretched poverty, for the next two and a half years.

This way of life Crane led by choice, like Dick Heldar in The Light That Failed, and like Kipling's hero, the young writer might have felt that such experience was valuable, perhaps even indispensable to his development as an artist. "There are few things more edifying unto Art than the actual belly-pinch of hunger...," the English writer explained when he put Dick into the slums of London to starve and paint within walking distance of an affluent friend, and Dick is made to say "I never knew what I had to learn about the human face before" when he comments upon the hungry man's game of peering into the faces of the obviously

\(^1\) Stallman (Letters), p. 591.
well-fed. When he is finally paid for some art work, Kipling's young painter calls upon the affluent friend and states that he could not have asked for help because "I owe you too much already, and besides, I had a sort of superstition that this temporary starvation—that's what it was, and it hurt—would bring me more luck later." Much later one of Crane's nieces, recalling her uncle's misery during these years, was puzzled by Crane's conduct: "We still wonder why he went through such experiences when he was always so very welcome at both our house and Uncle Edmund's. Perhaps he was seeking his own 'Experience in Misery'... altho doubtless it came also through his desire to make his own way independently." To these views Crane himself assented, but a more significant explanation for his "foolishly proud" conduct, as he once termed it, lies perhaps in his persistent notion that great art is born of the "belly-pinch" of hunger:

It was during this period that Crane wrote to the editor of Leslie's Weekly about November, 1893 that I wrote "The Red Badge of Courage." It was an effort born of pain—despair, almost; and I believe that this made it a better piece of literature than it otherwise would have been. It seems a pity that art should be a child of pain, and yet I think it is. Of course we have fine writers who are prosperous and

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2 Rudyard Kipling, The Light That Failed, in The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1898), IX, 41.

3 Loc. cit.


contented, but in my opinion their work would be greater
if this were not so. It lacks the sting it would have
if written under the spur of a great need.6

But whatever suggestion Crane may have got from Kipling's young
artist-hero for a conduct of life,7 the twenty year old writer moved
to New York from his brother Will's at Port Jervis late in September, 1892,
and lost himself in a group of bohemian painters, actors, and newspaper
men. The fall and winter he spent with Frederick Lawrence at the Pendennis
Club at 1064 Avenue A, East Boulevard, jobless and hungry, writing the
version of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets which he published privately
with borrowed money in February, 1893. Meanwhile he supported himself
precariously as reporter for the New York Herald, though he was never a
very successful newspaper writer. Editors fumed when he turned in as an
interview of an alderman charged with political corruption the single
impressionistic statement that the suspect official merely "sat like a

6 Ibid., p. 628. Crane often repeated his literary comments
word for word. In 1897 he wrote the same account to John N. Hilliard:
"It was an effort born of pain, and I believe that it was beneficial
to it as a piece of literature. It seems a pity that this should be
so—that art should be a child of suffering; and yet such seems to be
the case. Of course there are fine writers who have good incomes and
live comfortably and contentedly; but if the conditions of their lives
were harder, I believe that their work would be better" (ibid., p. 673).

7 Coincidence or not, there are many striking parallels between
Dick's and Crane's philosophical and artistic attitudes. Both were war
correspondents who believed that extensive experience with the world
abroad was necessary to art. Both were rebels against ethical and
artistic tradition. Dick was an ironist whose experience had made him
aware of the prevailing injustice of the world (The Light That Failed,
p. 47). Both were realist-colorists who thought the materials for art
were the common and low and that the basic requisite of treatment was
an uncompromising integrity. There is convincing testimony that Crane
studied Kipling's book closely. The famous image in The Red Badge, "The
sun was pasted against the sky like a wafer" (Work, I, 98), occurs in
Kipling's novel in various phrasings three times (Writings, IX, 13, 31, 63).
See S. C. Osborn, "Stephen Crane's Imagery: 'Pasted Like a Wafer,'"
AL, XXIII (November, 1951), 363.
rural soup tureen in his chair and said, 'Aw!' sadly whenever ash from
his cigar bounced on his vest of blood and black." The Herald fired
him in late February, and unable to find a place as a regular reporter,
he roamed the Bowery and the tenement house areas in search of materials
for special articles at five dollars a column for the New York Press and
other papers.

Crane's circle of bohemian acquaintances was large. Besides the
newspaper reporters he knew intimately a large group of young painters
who lived in dingy rooms and studios scattered through the West Thirties
and who congregated in such gathering places as Maria's and Jauss's to
celebrate their modest accomplishments and talk art. Among these artists,
few of whom ever achieved celebrity, were George B. Luks, R. G. Vosburgh,
Corwin Knapp Linson, John Hilliard, and Walter Dunckel. The two Pike
brothers, around whom one group formed, had just returned in 1893 from
Paris and were introducing French manners and art to their coterie, and
Gustave Verbeek was painting impressionistic portraits of prim young
ladies that were considered extremely avant-garde in the 'nineties. At
various times during his two-year sojourn in Bohemia Crane lived with
first one and then another of his artist friends, sharing clothes with
them, sleeping on their studio couches, and writing in whatever free corner
their studios provided him.

8 Thomas Beer, Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters (New
York: A. Knopf, 1923), p. 82.

9 Albert Parry, Carreets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism
in America (New York: Covici-Friede, 1933), p. 89, passim.

10 Henry McBride, "Stephen Crane's Artist Friends," Art News,
XLIX (October, 1950), 46.
When he was not writing Crane continued the study of "unvarnished human nature" which he had started at Syracuse University by idling about the police courts and the railroad station when he should have been in classes. His classroom now, though, was the Bowery and his subject the welter of outcast humanity of the slums and its cheap saloons and one-night hotels. "He disappeared for days," Corwin Knapp Linson testifies, "and was suddenly dug up looking as if he had lived in a grave. All this time he had inhabited the tramp lodging-houses nights, and camped on the down-town park benches days."\(^{11}\) His impressions of the tide of human outcasts flowing along the wet pavements under the flickering lamplight or against the background of looming tenements and factories Crane recorded in a notebook which "overflowed with observations of tramps and men of affluence and power, of whores and social darlings."\(^{12}\) R. G. Vosburgh, at whose studio Crane lived in the fall of 1893, states that this occupation delighted the young writer:

This was the kind of work that pleased him best, for he said it was in such places human nature was to be seen and studied. Here it was open and plain with nothing hidden. It was unvarnished human nature, he said.\(^{13}\)

He returned to his studio friends to report with "grim delight . . . how an old acquaintance had passed him a foot away, as he sat with a genuine hobo in front of the City Hall, and how the police had eyed his borrowed

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\(^{11}\) Corwin Knapp Linson, "Little Stories of 'Steve' Crane," The Saturday Evening Post, CLXXV, (April 11, 1903), 19.

\(^{12}\) Schoberlin, p. 11.

\(^{13}\) R. G. Vosburgh, "The Darkest Hour in the Life of Stephen Crane," Book-Lover, II (Summer, 1901), 338.
rage askance, or indicated with official hand that another bench needed dusting."\textsuperscript{14}

But there were times when Crane was scarcely better off materially than the tramps whom he so carefully studied in the Bowery flop-houses. When he returned from a trip to Virginia, where he went in the late summer of 1893 to gather material for a story of the Civil War, he was wearing rubber boots because he had no shoes. At times he seems to have had no place of his own, but to have maintained himself by moving from studio to studio, peddling meanwhile without success his Bowery sketches to magazine and newspaper editors. It was as if he were compelled by the strength of his own will to conduct mercilessly his own experiment in misery.

During this year of 1893, though, Crane made valuable literary contacts. Hamlin Garland recalled afterward that in March he received in the mail a copy of the yellow, paper-bound \textit{Maggie} by "Johnston Smith," guessed the author from the style, and wrote Crane to call at his apartment in Harlem. The thin, seedy author appeared to acknowledge the book and receive Garland's praise and encouragement. This was the first of many such visits; Crane trudged out to Harlem often thereafter, bringing as he finished them the manuscripts of his Bowery stories, his second novel of the slums, \textit{George's Mother}, and later \textit{The Red Badge of Courage}. The stories Garland tried without much success to place in the magazines, writing notes to B. O. Flower of the \textit{Arena} and other editors imploring them to be generous because the author was hungry. But Crane failed to

\textsuperscript{14} Linson, p. 19.
sell even with the help of Garland a single story in the whole year of 1893.  
Through Garland the young writer met William Dean Howells, and upon Howells' invitation, proffered after an enthusiastic reading of Maggie, Crane borrowed a suit from his friend John Northern Hilliard and went to dine with the Dean of American Letters one evening in March, 1893. "He presented Crane to his other guests," Beer recorded, "with, 'Here is a writer who has sprung into life fully armed...' and said, 'while Mark Twain was under discussion, 'Mr. Crane can do things that Clemens can't.'" Later in the evening Howells read aloud from a volume of Emily Dickinson and thus furnished Crane the catalyst which made possible The Black Riders. He returned to his world of want and misery and began to write verses.

By the winter of 1893-94 Crane's fortunes had become almost intolerable. "I'd trade my entire future for twenty-three dollars in cash," he solemnly told Garland during one of his visits, and in 1896 he recalled his despair in an inscription in a copy of George's Mother: "To my friend Eddie in memory of our days of suffering and trouble in 217th St." The summer of 1894 he spent camping at Interlaken or visiting his brother at Port Jervis, but in the fall he was back in New York, fretting over the

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15 Garland's reminiscences, upon which this paragraph is based, are in Roadside Meetings (New York: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 189-206.
16 Beer, pp. 96-97.
17 Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 190.
18 Stallman, p. 652.
publishers Copeland and Day's delay in bringing out *The Black Riders* and waiting impatiently for McClure to publish *The Red Badge of Courage*:

... so much of my row [he wrote to Garland on November 15, 1894] with the world has to be silence and endurance that sometimes I wear the appearance of having forgotten my best friends, those to whom I am indebted for everything. As a matter of fact, I have just crawled out of the fifty-third ditch into which I have been cast and I now feel that I can write you a letter that won't make you ill. McClure was a Beast about the war novel and that has been the thing that put me in one of the ditches. He kept it for six months until I was nearly mad. Oh, yes, he was going to use it, but finally I took it to Bachellers.19

Bacheller's acceptance of the war novel was a turning point in Crane's career, for Irving Bacheller, deeply affected by *The Red Badge* and the success it made when it appeared in a condensed version in the *Philadelphia Press* on December 8, offered Crane a place as foreign correspondent for his syndicate and sent him west "to write sketches wherever he liked about whatever he liked, so long as he wound up in Mexico."20 Bacheller wanted him to leave immediately, but Crane, trying to settle publishing matters, lingered almost as if he were trying to round out properly one of the most important chapters in his life. Copeland and Day were at last going ahead with the publication of *The Black Riders*; *George's Mother*, finished in November, was in the hands of a publisher, and *The Red Badge of Courage* was being considered by Appleton's for publication as a book. By January, 1895, he had satisfactorily disposed of the work on hand and late in the month he departed from "the false East" for the "great honest West."

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19 Ibid., p. 603.

20 Berryman, p. 94.
Despite the misery of the last two years the twenty-three year old
writer, achieving success and recognition at last, could well look back
upon this period as one of notable advancement. For brief as it had
been for a literary period—all of Crane's literary periods were brief—
he had accomplished much. He had established his point of view and his
manner: the cold, almost ruthless objectivity, and the flashing brilliance
of style which critics were eventually to term "pure Crane." And he
had behind him already The Red Badge of Courage, the work which made him
famous and which kept his memory alive through more than forty years of
critical neglect.

Crane's experience in the Bowery and the East Side during these two
years bears upon his development as an artist in two important ways.
First, it confirmed, if it did not originally suggest, his idea about
the use of the low and common as materials for literature. This idea
may have been firmly rooted in his artistic creed by the time he estab­
lished himself in the bohemian milieu after the Tribune debacle in 1892,
or even as early as his Syracuse University days, when he had started a
story at the Delta Upsilon fraternity house about a New York streetwalker.
In any case, Crane's move to the city and the life he pursued there until
1895 inevitably determined that he was to explore for the purposes of
literature the misery of New York tenement life.

A second and perhaps even more important way in which his experience
bears upon his literary development is that it firmly fixed his attitude
toward life. As his Sullivan County Sketches and other early writing
show, Crane was rebellious from the first against the intellectual tradi­
tions of his time, and the New York experience deepened and crystallized
his unorthodox philosophical convictions. Literary historians attempt to account for the "cold blooded determinism" of Maggie by relating Crane to the European naturalists or by suggested that he may have read some of the popularizations of the philosophical systems of the Victorian thinkers who were under the influence of the new science,²¹ but Crane was not a bookish man, and except for the short period of intense reading in 1892, when he was reporting for his brother's news agency in Asbury Park and forming his literary style, there is not much evidence, external or internal, that he ever read very much. His philosophy of life is best accounted for in his experience with "unvarnished human nature" during the years 1892-1895.

Crane's ideas never took shape as a formal philosophy, but two or three deep convictions dominated his thinking and powerfully affected the direction of his art. "There was something essentially unwholesome about his philosophy, something bitter, ironic, despairing," Garland complained when he recalled one of Crane's early visits to Harlem a few weeks after Maggie had come to his hands early in 1893.²² The three adjectives, whether by accident or design, suggest, though perhaps too strongly, the dominant characteristics of his thought. What Garland may have had in mind when he wrote "bitter" was Crane's reaction to the observed inconsistency between the ideals of virtue and respectability as they were expressed officially in the social and theological dogma of


the 'nineties and the realities which the young writer had observed in his association with the seamy, brutal life in the tenements of the East Side. This disparity between the theory and the reality of life Crane chose to express in the sometimes fierce, even cynically ironic manner which he had begun to develop in his early sketches and news reports. The note of despair which Garland observed in his talk resulted from a deepening conviction that life is controlled by collaborative circumstance which is too often stronger than the self-deluding, opinionated, morally debilitated individual, an idea which appears first in the humorous frustrations of the little man in the Sullivan County Sketches, but which comes forth in Maggie and George's Mother as a grim and humorless determinant.

In his first novel Crane relates the story of young Maggie Johnson's moral degeneration and ultimate downfall under the pressures of a brutal and strangling environment. Fear and violence dominate her childhood; she grows up in a teeming East Side tenement house with a bestial, drunken mother who alternately beats her two children and berates them for being unappreciative of their "good mudder." The sullen father objects to the beatings because they disturb his peace, and he usually spends his evenings at the corner saloon drinking because his home is a "livin' hell." Maggie's rudimentary esthetics take expression in her admiration of a foppish, boastful young bartender named Pete, upon whose face the "chronic sneer of an ideal manhood" was set before he was sixteen years old. When Maggie is seduced by Pete the Johnson family turn against her with all the indignation of outraged virtue, and Maggie, abandoned by Pete, is driven into the streets and the calling of the prostitute.
Weary and despairing, she eventually drowns herself, and the book ends with her mother shouting in an orgy of self-pity, "I'll forgive her. Oh, yes, I'll forgive her!"

Crane's purpose in Maggie, one critic thinks, "was probably to show the malevolence of all men and [the indifferent and negative attitude of society to the individual, whose ruin was of no consequence to it."\textsuperscript{23}

Crane's own statement, more accurate perhaps because he was not trying to fit himself into any particular school of literary thought, is much less sweeping in its implications, for the controlling idea of Maggie is that (environment is a ruthless shaping force.) In the inscriptions in the copies he sent to Garland, Dr. Lucius L. Button, and the Reverend Thomas Dixon, Crane affirmed the doctrine in exactly the same phrasing, a fact that seems to indicate that he chose his words carefully:

It is inevitable that you will be greatly shocked by the 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.\textsuperscript{24}

Though Maggie is in no way a moral treatise, there being no auctorial comment upon the story's ethical implications, Crane reveals in the inscriptions that he was enough of a philosophical determinist to draw the logical moral conclusion:

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.\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{23} Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction, 1891-1903, University of Uppsala Essays and Studies on American Language and Literature, IX (1950), 191.

\textsuperscript{24} Stallman, pp. 594, 611.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 611.
Only once, in the muddled thinking of Maggie's brother Jimmy, who "almost came once to the conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known how," does Crane touch upon the idea of ethical responsibility.26

But Crane either revealed his attitude only partly in Maggie or made modifications in it later, for his other stories of this period show that he was unwilling to ascribe all human degradation or moral degeneration to circumstance alone. Stallman, Ahnebrink, and other critics have interpreted Crane's Bowery stories as "submerged" social commentaries and bitter condemnations of the rich, but obvious as it is that Crane was deeply sympathetic with the poor and downtrodden, he was no social polemicist and he was too objective in his analyses of society to see the well-to-do as the invariable social villain. Crane makes his attitude perfectly clear in a passage in "The Men in the Storm," a story he wrote after standing half a winter evening with a crowd of derelicts waiting for a Bowery cot-house to open:

There were men of undoubted patience, industry, and temperance, who in time of ill-fortune, do not habitually turn to rail at the state of society, snarling at the arrogance of the rich, and bemoaning the cowardice of the poor, but who at these time are apt to wear a sudden and singular meekness, as if they saw the world's progress marching from them, and were trying to perceive where they had failed, what they had lacked, to be thus vanquished in the race.26a

On aesthetic grounds this may be, as Stallman states, "bad writing and

26 Work, XI, 194.

26a Work, XI, 40.
bad artistry,26b but it is highly germane to and perfectly consistent with a central tenet of Crane's moral philosophy: part of the responsibility for all the evil of the world lies with the individual as well as with the systems within which he lives.26c

In "An Experiment in Misery," another of the stories written after Crane returned from one of his sojourns in the Bowery, the protagonist buys a bum a three-cent breakfast and hears "the assassin," as he is called, comment upon the injustice of the world:

"—great job out'n Orange. Boss keep yeh hustlin', though, all time. I was there three days, and then I went an' ask 'in t' lend me a dollar. 'G-g-go ter the devil,' he says, an' I lose me job. . . .

"I was raised in northern N'York. O-o-oh, yeh jest oughta live there. No beer ner whisky, though, 'way off in the woods. But all th' good hot grub yeh can eat. B'Gawd, I hung around there long as I could till th' ol' man fired me. 'Git t' hell outa here, yeh wuthless skunk, git t' hell outa here, an' go die,' he says. 'You're a hell of a father,' I says, 'you are,' an' I quit 'im."

Later "the assassin" grows expansive. "B'Gawd, we've been livin' like kings." "Look out, or we'll have t' pay fer it t'night," his companion warns him, "but the assassin refused to turn his gaze toward the future. He went with a limping step, into which he injected a suggestion of lamb-like gambols."27

26b Stallman, p. 12. See also Ahnebrink, p. 92.

26c Crane may have felt that the reformer-socialists neglected to take this into account. "I was a socialist for two weeks but when a couple of socialists assured me I had no right to think differently from any other socialist and then quarrelled [sic] with each other about what socialism meant, I ran away." Stallman, p. 649, n.

27 Ibid., p. 32-33.
Implicit in this passage is the suggestion that not environment alone but moral weakness is a factor in the degeneration of character. Unlike the strict determinist Crane never seems to have discounted the operation of the free-will or the existence of moral responsibility, except in Maggie, the only one of his stories which is purely deterministic in philosophy. "In ... 'An Experiment in Misery,'" the author explained to a young lady correspondent who had evidently taken the writer to task because he had not sentimentalized the plight of the poor in his Bowery stories, "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." If Crane merely suggests this in the short story, he expands it into the theme for a full-length novel in George's Mother. In this story George Kelcey, unlike Maggie, has the devoted care of a mother who makes their tenement a comfortable and relatively wholesome home. But there is a fatal weakness in George, "a sort of cowardice," that leads him to drink and ruin. George's whole life pattern is identical with that of "the assassin" in the earlier story, "An Experiment in Misery," in that both characters bring themselves to the utter depths of degradation through their own lack of moral courage.

28 Stallman, pp. 655-56.

29 Ahnebrink, p. 185, thinks that Crane's philosophy denied the existence of free will. It is assumed in this study, however, that those plots which admit in the protagonist an ability to make a choice between two or more courses of conduct admit by implication the existence of free will. Thus Maggie is genuinely naturalistic because the heroine is ethically incapable of realizing a proper course of conduct. George Kelcey, on the other hand, recognizes that his course of action is disastrous, but he cannot muster the moral strength to repudiate it. He comes to a bad end not because his will is enslaved, but because he is morally too weak to exercise it. ("He saw his life problems confronting him like granite giants, and he was no longer erect to meet them. He had made a calamitous retrogression.... His stomach informed him that a good man was the only being who was wise." Work, X, 59.) On these grounds George's Mother is based upon the assumption of free will and in this respect is less deterministic than Maggie.
In *The Red Badge of Courage* Crane made use of altogether different materials, but the central ethical theme is the same as that of the Bowery stories. Again he studies a character under the pressures of external and internal forces, the environmental force of the battle situation and the psychological pressure of his moral cowardice. When Henry is being marched to his first battle his quaking consciousness perceives the significance of the external situation:

> . . . he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It enclosed him. And there were iron bars of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box.

As he perceived this fact it occurred to him that he had never wished to come to the war. He had not enlisted of his free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government. And now they were taking him out to be slaughtered.

Though this passage is often quoted to show the deterministic cast of Crane's thinking, it is just as frequently forgotten that Henry Fleming's perception of his situation at this moment is heightened into morbidity by sensibilities made abnormally acute by his own fear. The real significance of the author's point of view in the novel lies in Henry's self-rescue through the exercise of the will, or at least through the successful assertion of his personal moral strength. In the end he triumphs completely over the "moving box."

He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. . . . He knew that he would no more quail before his guides, wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.

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30 *Work*, I, 48.

31 Ibid., p. 199.
Crane's assertion in the inscriptions of *Maggie* and by implication in the story itself that "environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless" receives important modification in the themes of the stories that came after his early study of Bowery life. Environment is a force of terrible proportion, one that cannot always be successfully overcome, but its ruthless mechanics generate no insuperable force, provided the human element is able to meet it with a strong will and indomitable moral courage. Crane's thought leaves ample room for the operation of the free will; if "the assassin" and George Kelcey succumb before the force of circumstance, then it is because there is a lack of strength in their opposition, not because of the unconquerable force of circumstance.

Only rarely, however, does the Crane character bring to his battle with external forces the necessary moral strength to win, and it is this unbalance of forces which gives to his writing the tone of despair which Garland found so striking in his talk in 1893. "All that his various experiments in misery really taught Crane was that the world was an unreasonable place, and that a man's chances of salvation rested with himself," one student of his philosophy observes. But then, Crane makes as much of the unreasonable of the self-deluding, self-pitying rationalizing of his protagonists as he does of the circumstantial systems which surround and press them down. Henry Fleming's weaknesses, which are the weaknesses of everyman, are paraded in full dress before he is allowed his moral victory, but his victory springs after all from his own

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worth. The wretch in "An Experiment in Misery" loses, and his loss springs from his own worthlessness. The last two paragraphs of this story bring into close juxtaposition the two factors in Crane's attitude toward moral incompetence and its effect upon the relation of man to his environment:

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 rim of his hat began to glance guiltily, wearing the criminal expression that comes with certain convictions. 33

This story, one critic believes, is "a bitter denunciation of society," and, referring to the first of these two paragraphs, he states that the skyscrapers are "the symbols of the nation" so indifferent to the plight of the lowly and the down-trodden. 34 However sympathetic Crane may have been with the social outcast, and that he was is clear, to cite one instance, from his statement that there is room in Heaven "even for an occasional street-girl," he was too objective to ascribe altogether the world's unreasonableness to the irresponsibility of society. If by implication his denunciation of society is "bitter," then his denunciation of the morally weak is no less acid. "I do not think that much can be done with the Bowery as long as the blurred are in their present

33 Work, XI, 34.

34 Ahnebrink, p. 192.
state of conceit," he wrote to Catherine Harris in 1896. "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."35
The weakness of the individual, Crane made clear in his stories of the
New York slums, contributes quite as much to his tragic predicament as
the unfeeling force of his environment.

Another and far more pessimistic level of Crane's thought is his
philosophy of man's relation to God and nature, which is the subject of
a great many of the poems in The Black Riders. In a letter to the editor
of Leslie's Weekly written in November, 1895, he explained that this book
incorporated his philosophy of life:

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 ampli-

And his answer to the abuse that was heaped upon his "crazy poems" was:
"Some of the pills are pretty darned dumb, but I meant what I said."37
Crane in this remark anticipated the judgment of one of his twentieth-
century critics, who points out that despite the "adolescent "Weltschmerz"
of his despair "it was a pessimism which he retained until his death in his
twenty-ninth year..."38

35 Stallman, p. 655-56.
36 Ibid., p. 628.
37 Berryman, p. 119.
38 Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature
Crane's pessimism is directly in the tradition of the Victorian despair over the revelations of mid-century science, which taught that man is but a midge, God-forgotten, existing in an infinitely insignificant world flung into the outermost reaches of the universe. With Hardy-like mockery he represents the world as a mere accident of creation:

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill 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, for ever rudderless, it went upon the seas
Going ridiculous voyages,
Making quaint progress,
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing.39

And the theme of "The Open Boat" is anticipated in a short poem which images an infinite, indifferent universe:

If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky;
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant—
What then?40

The mountain image, which Crane used in one of the stories in The Sullivan County Sketches to symbolize the indifference of nature, appears again in The Black Riders in "Once I Saw Mountains Angry" as a malevolent force.41

39 Work, VI, 38.
40 Ibid., p. 109.
41 Ibid., p. 54.
and in "There Was Set Before Me a Mighty Hill" as an utterly indifferent force of nature. 42

Many of the poems have as a theme the futility and hopelessness of man's plight in a universe which he does not know and can never hope to understand. Truth he represents as unattainable and man's aspiration for it as pathetically futile. "I am lost," cries the learned man who had boasted that he knew the way, 43 and another man futilely pursues the horizon, speeding around and around, shouting "you lie" when he is told his task is hopeless. 44

Yet Crane was not consistently as pessimistic as this, for in some of the poems he again takes up the motif of personal courage, a virtue which seems in his thought to have a place even in the face of the cosmic indifference of the universe:

Once I saw mountains angry,
And ranged in battle-front.
Against them stood a little man;
Aye, he was no bigger than my finger.
I laughed, and spoke to one near me,
"Will he prevail?"
"Surely," replied this other;
"His grandfathers beat them many times."
Then did I see much virtue in grandfathers—
At least, for the little man
Who stood against the mountains. 45

Too, there is the idea in Crane's philosophy that if the universe is

42 Ibid., p. 58.
43 Ibid., p. 52.
44 Ibid., p. 56.
45 Ibid., p. 54.
unreasonable and incomprehensible it is not wholly owing to a cosmic malevolence, but partly to the limitations of man's understanding:

I walked in a desert.
And I cried,
"Ah, God, take me from this place!"
A voice said, "It is no desert."
I cried, "Well, but—
The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon."
A voice said, "It is no desert."

In *The Black Riders* Crane revealed that his thought was not altogether perfectly synthesized, for on one hand there is the black pessimism of the man who has looked squarely at the reality of the world and found it altogether out of harmony with his most cherished ideals, and on the other there is the optimism of one who has faith in the ability of man to prevail, or at least to acquit himself with dignity, in the face of a vast cosmic malignity. (This dichotomy probably is explained by the two broad and violently contrasting areas of his experience, the optimistic orthodoxy of his family life and the pessimistic implications of his experience in the New York slums.) His despair doubtless sprang in part from his reaction against the faith of his parents and late nineteenth-century idealism. He had chosen in the New York years to investigate an aspect of life far removed from that upon which the official and accepted view of life was based, and he had found that life as a whole could not be explained in the traditional, orthodox terms. (He had found man weak, insignificant, caught up in the hopeless maze of an incomprehensible natural system and his own moral debility.) Yet his revolt against traditional thought, oddly, did not extend so far as to deny completely the efficacy of the

46 Ibid., p. 75.
will or the virtue of personal courage. The perfect embodiment of the
Crane hero is the little man standing against the angry mountains ranged
in battle-front, uncomprehending but determined to prevail. So much of
his faith in human morality had Crane salvaged, it seems, from his
religious background.

But no more than this, for of the sixty-eight poems in The Black
Riders almost a third are ironical denunciations of religious orthodoxy
and Victorian respectability. Crane’s anger, as one critic has pointed
out, “was directed against the frauds, the shams, and the untruthfulness
which were the stuff of which half the national paradox was made. It
was not so much injustice per se that aroused him as it was the fact that
injustices were committed by individuals who professed a love of righteous-
ness.”47 In his reports from Asbury Park Crane had humorously satirized
the "sombre-hued gentlemen" who collected at Ocean Grove to hold pious
meetings, but during the New York years he ceased to draw upon the clergy
for humorous effects. "Perhaps you have been informed," he wrote to
Catherine Harris, "that I am not very friendly to Christianity as seen
around town,"48 and in Maggie he made a clergyman’s hypocrisy a symbol
of evil:

Suddenly she came upon a stout gentlemen 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 with good will.

47 Knight, p. 113.
48 Stallman, p. 655-56.
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. 49

And an important motif of George's Mother is the indulgent Mrs. Kelcey's wrong use of religion, continuously nagging young George to attend prayer meeting with her and undergo the supercilious stares of the congregation and the minister, "a pale-faced but plump young man in a black coat that buttoned to his chin," who looked at the unregenerate George "gravely, solemnly, regretfully." 50

In The Black Riders, though, Crane's attack upon tradition and orthodoxy is much more pointed and intense. "Tradition, thou art for suckling children. Thou art the enlivening milk for babes," he begins one poem, 51 and in another he expresses his rebellion against the regimenting force of mass thought:

"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." 52

His rebellion against the concept of the stern, unyielding, Mosaic deity is most vehement, and the poems about God, of which there are a considerable number in The Black Riders, usually present in ironic contrast the compassionate God of the "soft eyes / Lit with infinite comprehension" and

49 Work, X, 207.
50 Ibid., p. 67.
51 Ibid., VI, 78.
52 Ibid., p. 80.
the "Blustering God/ Stamping across the sky/ With loud swagger." 53 It is the very vehemence of Crane's denunciation of the God of Moses which leads one to suspect that the conflict between the concept of the unyielding God of his parents and the realization in the light of his experience in the East Side of the total inadequacy of such a concept created a difficult problem in his personal philosophy. Behind the personality of Mrs. Kelcey in George's Mother there lurks scarcely defined, but always suggested, the presence of the awful God of wrath and unreason, and in Maggie it is the unforgiving righteousness of the respectable clergyman which denies the wretched street girl the consolation of religion.

But in The Black Riders Crane brought all his rage to bear upon the element of his thought to which he seems to have been most sensitive in 1894. "I hate Thee, unrighteous picture/ Wicked image, I hate Thee" he shouted to the Deity who visits the sins of fathers upon the heads of children for generations, 54 and when Copeland and Day, the publishers of Crane's first volume of verse, proposed to omit such lines, the poet wrote almost rude objections:

We disagree on a multitude of points. In the first place I should absolutely refuse to have my poems printed without many of those which you just as absolutely mark "No." All the anarchy perhaps. It is the anarchy which 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.

53 Ibid., pp. 85, 87.
54 Work, p. 44.
If my position is impossible to you, I would not be offended at the sending of all the retained lines to the enclosed address.55

No other aspect of Crane's thought seems to have been so sensitively felt as that which condemned the heartless, revengeful deity of stern and unyielding orthodoxy.

Between the years 1892 and 1895 Crane's philosophy grew increasingly more grim and bitter. In the Asbury Park sketches the young Tribune reporter had made good fun of the serious young clergyman, and he had been amused by their private little war with frivolity. Respectability he had treated with flippant humor. But after two painful years in the slums, where he observed the misery and despair of human beings battling life for the barest existence, Crane's attitude toward life was no longer one of wry and ironical amusement. The concept of the insignificance of man in the face of collaborative and often cruel circumstance, which the young writer had merely hinted at in his first writings, became more and more pronounced in the years after 1892. No longer did Crane see as a joke the self-righteous sanctimoniousness which he saw in the practice of Christianity, nor was the self-deluding complacency characteristic of the solid citizen of the Asbury Park type any more a matter for the bantering wit of satirical sketches. Crane's attitude had crystallized into a grim, despairing philosophy whose pessimism was alleviated only by the continued assumption that man, despite the hopelessness of his plight, was still subject to the control of his own will.

Since Crane's philosophical attitude determined powerfully the

55 Stallman, p. 602.
character of his writing, furnishing as it did the themes for all his important work, the source of his thinking is highly relevant to the study of his development as an artist. The difference in philosophical tone between the sketches written in mid-1892 and the printed version of Maggie which appeared in 1893 is in accord with his phenomenally rapid literary growth. From the Impressionistic school of painting and perhaps a suggestion from Garland Crane had already by 1892 formulated a basic theory of art—that it was to reflect life, not an idealization of life, and that the low was as fit a subject for literature as the noble. His method was impressionistic from the first, and his style already showed all the economy and concentration of phrase that was to be its chief characteristic in his later work. But for the most part Crane's point of view must be accounted for in the period 1892-1895, despite the fact that his later attitude is suggested to some extent in the early work. When Crane moved to the city in September of 1892 his rebellious and ironical mind, though as yet incompletely formed, was a fertile ground for the ideas with which he came in touch as a bohemian newspaper reporter.

Garland perhaps suggested that Crane utilize the slums for literary material when the young author met him in the summer of 1891, and if he did so it is possible that he sent Crane to Zola's L'Assommoir for a model. Though Maggie and the French novel have little in common insofar as literary method and style are concerned, there is something to suggest that Crane might have been impressed by the deterministic doctrine which is implicit throughout L'Assommoir. Gervais, the central character of Zola's novel, is like Maggie a victim of her environment and in both cases the moral degeneration of the characters is in accordance with the doctrine of
materialistic monism, which assumes an absence of free will and ethical responsibility. Maggie, like Gervais, is at the mercy of a blind and incontestable force, and Maggie's ignorance and innocence is roughly parallel to Gervais's wistful indolence, the respective weaknesses in the two women which permit the ultimate triumph of their environments. In these respects, at least, Crane was in his first study of New York slum life as naturalistic as Zola, and it is quite possible that the Frenchman helped to temper the mind which produced the American naturalistic novel.56

The evidence for Crane's dependence upon the European naturalists, either literary or philosophical, for his attitude toward life is less impressive, though, than the indications that he simply drew upon the intellectual coin current in the group in which he moved during the two years he spent in bohemian New York. Unlike Garland and Norris, both of whom studied closely the literature of nineteenth-century science and the continental fiction which resulted from it, Crane was not a bookish man, neglecting to read even the writers whom, according to his own testimony,

56 It is not certain that Crane knew L'Assomoir. Ahnebrink makes an elaborate case for the influence of the novel on Maggie by citing numerous parallels, many of which seem merely coincidental. Crane resented being told that his Bowery stories resembled the work of the French naturalists, and in a letter to James Huneker in 1897 he complained bitterly that Englishmen were ill-mannered enough to ask from which French realist he should steal his next book (Stallman, p. 674 n.). Ford Madox Ford in Portraits From Life (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), p. 35, states that Crane denied "with expletives that he had never heard of those fellows [Zola or Maupassant] and, at the next, displayed a considerable acquaintance with their work." Beer, p. 148, records a critical comment of Crane's: "... this girl in Zola is a real streetwalker. ... Zola is a sincere writer, but is he much good? He hangs one thing to another and his story goes along but I find him pretty tiresome." But this was in 1897, and when Crane read L'Assomoir, if he did, is not known.
he most admired.\footnote{57} He is said to have refused to read for fear of imitating, but whatever the reason the fact remains that he was woefully ignorant of books.\footnote{58} It is perhaps suggestive that Crane's inventory of books includes only seven titles, while Garland's and Norris' are several printed pages in length.\footnote{59} There is little doubt that most of the ideas which took possession of Crane's mind came to him second-hand from his literary and artistic associates. "There was about him a simplicity," one Crane student has noted, "that tempted his friends to tell him things, almost to try to educate him."\footnote{60}

It is in this way that the philosophical outlook which produced \textit{Maggie, George's Mother}, and \textit{The Red Badge of Courage} may be accounted for. As a newspaper man, Crane was continuously in touch with the almost cynical attitude toward the world of affairs which characterized the thought and opinion of his editors and fellow reporters, and this association was in effect a sort of education in itself:

Essentially the attitude forced upon newspaper men as they interviewed politicians, evangelists and convicted criminals was the same as the attitude they derived or might have derived from popular books on evolution. Reading and experience led to the same convictions: that Christianity was a sham, that moral professions were false, that there was nothing real in the world but force and, for themselves, no respectable role to play except that of detached observers gathering the facts and printing as many of them as their publishers would permit.\footnote{61}

\footnote{57} He read \textit{War and Peace} for the first time in 1896 (Berryman, p. 154), though he \textit{professed} Tolstoy to be his favorite writer (Stallman, p. 627).
\footnote{58} Berryman, p. 24.
\footnote{59} Ahnebrink, pp. 415 ff.
\footnote{60} Whitehead, p. 97.
If such ideas, all of which it will be noted, were given expression in *Maggie* and *The Black Riders*, were current in the thinking of his colleagues, Crane had the ideal opportunity in his studies of Bowery life to prove them by first-hand experience, which told him that the common man was at the mercy of economic forces beyond his control and that his chief consolation was that he might meet his defeat with courage and dignity.

Temperamentally incapable of closing his eyes to the gulf between the real and the ideal, the young writer doubtless fell easily into the kind of thinking described by Theodore Dreiser in his recollections of his newspaper days in the early nineties:

> Most of them [newspaper men] were . . . free from notions as to how people were to act and what they were to think. To a certain extent they were confused by the general American passive acceptance of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes as governing principles, but in the main they were nearly all mistrustful of these things, and of conventional opinion in general. . . . Most of these young men looked upon life as a fierce grim struggle in which no quarter was either given or taken, and in which all men laid traps, lied, squandered, erred through illusion. . . .

To Crane's naturally rebellious mind such ideas evidently had an enormous appeal, and his association with them during his two years in New York both confirmed and extended his pessimistic view of life.

Much of this kind of thinking found permanent expression in the pages of the *Arena* magazine, which was under the editorship of the radical reformer B. O. Flower. Though it is not likely that Crane knew Flower until sometime after *Maggie* was written, it is evident that a connection with the *Arena* and its editor was established by March, 1893,

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for Crane wrote in 1896, referring to Garland's and Flower's warm reception of his first published book, that "B. O. Flower of the Arena has practically offered me the benefits of his publishing company for all that I may in future write." According to Berryman, Flower even contemplated for a time bringing out Maggie as a respectable publication, but the plan did not develop and Flower contented himself with buying "An Ominous Baby," one of Crane's Bowery stories, and holding it for more than a year before it appeared in May, 1894. In any case, Crane likely had an interest in the Arena, not only because it provided him with much needed encouragement in regard to his publishing hopes, but because the intellectual interests of the magazine and its contributors were in close harmony with his own.

With its circulation of over one hundred thousand the Arena, according to one student of the intellectual currents of this period, was "the leading exponent of progressive and reformative thought and a forum for the discussion of social and economic questions." Flower was deeply concerned with the social problems raised by the existence of the slums, and in numerous editorials pointed out the misery of life in New York's East Side. Like Crane in 1893, Flower was convinced that environment is a "tremendous thing," and in one of his editorials he noted the plight

63 Berryman, p. 67.
64 Loc. cit.
65 Ahnebrink, p. 96.
66 For examples, "Deplorable Social Conditions, Arena, XV (February, 1891), pp. 375-84; and "Cancer Spots in Metropolitan Life," Arena, IV (November, 1891), 761-62.
of the "poor factory and sewing girls, whose fate is often so grimly tragic that it is only their splendid moral strength which keeps them from the abyss of vice. . . ." 67 In this Flower was setting the tone for his contributors, one of whom presented the whole doctrine of materialistic monism in April, 1891, about the time Crane conceived and started writing the first draft of Maggie at Syracuse:

The relation which the environment of humanity bears to the human conscience, or instinct of morality, receives altogether too little attention. . . . Yet men are what the surroundings of themselves and their ancestors make them. . . . The greatest factor in the development or debasement of a race is the environment to which its component parts are subjected. 68

This writer might well have been sketching an outline for the character Jimmy in Maggie when he elaborated this thesis with an example:

Take, for example, a boy brought up in the slums around Tomkins Square, in New York City. From his earliest childhood he is of necessity familiar with all manner of wickedness; the best dressed women of his neighborhood are fallen women; the boys who have the most money to spend are those who lead vicious lives; the brightest house is the saloon. . . . Can a child spend his life amid such environment without being, both in body and brain, affected by it? . . . If a child is born and bred to manhood in such environment, he has no choice but to become wicked. He is not free to choose good from evil. He has no discriminating sense of right and wrong. His moral responsibility is nil. He has no conscious remorse—no self contempt for his wickedness. He is beyond reformation: for his brain has been shaped by the thoughts which his environment necessarily engenders, until it is incapable of willing virtue—just as the feet of certain Chinese women are put in clamps until they are permanently deformed and incapable of locomotion. 69

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69 Ibid., p. 574.
The currency of these ideas in the very groups in which Crane moved in the early nineties seems to make it unnecessary to look to the work of Spencer, Darwin, or the continental naturalists for the source of Crane's "cold blooded determinism," as almost every commentator on Crane suggests. 70

It is clear from glancing through the early 'nineties issues of the Arena that most of Crane's unorthodoxy was identical with the opinion of a respectably large component of American thinking. Besides the articles stressing the philosophy of determinism, there were liberal attacks upon American prudery 71 reminiscent of Crane's mockery in the Asbury Park reports, denunciations of the shams of respectability, 72 repudiations of religious intolerance in the fundamentalist sects, 73 and pleas for respectful recognition of religious skepticism. 74 The editorial attitude toward contemporary literature was strongly sympathetic with the new realism and energetically attacked the orthodox romanticism that was keeping the young and obscure realistic writers out of the better known magazines. 75 Insomuch as it served, as one student has put it, "as a

70 The standard opinion is epitomized in The Literary History of the United States, ed. Spiller and others, p. 1021.

71 Helen London, "Morals and Fig Leaves," Arena, XV (February, 1891), 334-40.

72 Albert Ross, "What is Immoral in Literature," Arena, XV (March, 1891), 438-39. "We are in the midst of an end of sham," the author points out. "We do not care so much that vice exists as that it be well-dressed."


74 Marion Shutter, "Liberal Churches and Skepticism," Arena, XVII (June, 1893).

75 David H. Dickinson, "Benjamin Orange Flower, Patron of the Realists," Al, XIV (May, 1942), 148-56.
vent for those . . . not in harmony with conventional, conservative and reactionary opinions,76 the Arena might well have been a powerful formative influence upon Crane's thinking.

In Maggie, the first book Crane produced after he moved to New York in 1892, the young author showed himself to be for literary purposes at least a rigid philosophical determinist. The action of the story is determined almost completely by ruthless economic and social forces which form the characters into creatures of monstrous degradation, and there is the implication throughout that since the characters in the tragedy are not subject to the operation of free will they are not ethically responsible for their conduct. At this time Crane's thinking was evidently under the influence of the advanced liberal thinking of the day, particularly the attitudes of his newspaper and magazine associates, though he might have known something of Zola's naturalistic L'Assommoir.

In George's Mother Crane revealed an important modification in his naturalistic thinking, for this novel, like one of his short stories written about the same time, tacitly assumes moral responsibilities for the characters. It is a study not of the enslaved will, but of the will which is too weak to operate effectively against the forces opposed to it. In both "An Experiment in Misery" and George's Mother Crane wrote from a moral rather than an amoral viewpoint, and in this lies the fundamental distinction in attitude between these stories and Maggie. Pessimistic as his basic philosophy was, he did not abandon for long the concept of the worth and dignity of the individual, which he felt to be manifested in the assertion of moral courage and strength.

Crane, however, was no optimist, for rarely does he show in his characters the alleviating virtue of moral courage. External forces, he seems to have felt, usually triumph because of man's propensity to debilitate the effective forces of his virtue through self-delusion, acceptance of social sham, hypocrisy, and self-pitying rationalization. Since he is seldom capable of realizing his potential dignity, his defeat by the forces of life is sadly ignoble. Of all the characters whom Crane portrays in conflict with life—Henry, the Bowery derelicts, the brutal young bartender, Pete, Maggie's animalistic brother Jimmy, and the weak-willed George—Henry Fleming is the only one who shows the strength necessary to win.

But as he exists in the larger framework of the universe man counts for little. In The Black Riders Crane rejected the idea of the universe as reasonable and just and pictured with profound despair the futility of the hope that man might comprehend his place in the total scheme of nature. Only rarely does the poet assert the belief that man in his ignorance might prevail. In general he saw nature as a vast malevolent force, and the stern Mosaic God with whom he seems to associate cosmic unreason and injustice, he denied with the vehemence of a bitter and despairing rage.

Crane's philosophy had an immense effect upon his writing, for it accounts not only for his basic theme—the conflict of man with the external forces of society and nature—but also for the illusionless objectivity and almost cynical irony of his style. In his early writing irony is a clever and flippant literary device, but in his later work it is a merciless instrument of social and psychological criticism, coupled as it is with his skeptical, despairing, almost illusionless philosophical point of view.
CHAPTER IV
THE THEORY OF LITERATURE

In method and style Crane was one of the most original writers of the decade, but his code of esthetics, much less original than the work it produced, was derived for the most part from the established creeds of contemporary literary realists and impressionistic painters. It was for this reason, perhaps, that Crane never fully stated, in the sense that James, Howells, and Garland did, in any case, his views on the theoretical aspects of literature, affecting usually to dismiss theory as the province of the critic and the academician. "There is nothing to respect in art save one's own opinion of it," he wrote to John Northern Hilliard about 1893, less than a year after he had enthusiastically reconstructed his literary program and found it "identical with the one of Howells and Garland." 1

Nevertheless, the broad principles of Crane's esthetic, as they may be reconstructed from occasional comments in his letters and from his practice of literature, are clear, and although one important Crane student denies it, 2 they are, as the author of The Red Badge insisted in 1892, in almost complete harmony with the ideals of literature which characterized the whole realistic movement in the last years of the nineteenth century. As his practice of idling about the police court and the railroad station

1 Stallman (Letters), p. 596.
2 Ibid., p. 648.
3 Berryman, p. 54.
to study "humanity" at Syracuse indicates, he was convinced from the very first of his writing career that literature should be based upon direct experience with life. The *Sullivan County Sketches* reveal that he thought as early as the summer of 1892 that literary expression should be simple and concise, thus espousing a principle that he was later to state explicitly as a central literary belief. It was after he became familiar with the doctrines of Howells and perhaps of Garland that he added the principles that writing should be objective and carefully non-didactic and above all that the literary artist should possess an absolute integrity in dealing with his materials. The function of literature, he came to believe, is to reflect the truth, and any deviation by the author from this purpose he was unwilling to forgive either in himself or others. Around these simple principles, which he stated from time to time in his correspondence and evidently in his talk with his literary and artistic acquaintances, Crane formulated the ideal of literature which was to guide him throughout his whole writing career.

The fall of 1892 marks an important turning point in Crane's career as a writer, for it was about this time, he stated in a letter to Lily Brandon Munroe in 1896, that he revised his whole artistic outlook. He became convinced, he reported, that "art is man's substitute for nature and we are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth..."4 This view, according to the letter, was to supersede the principles which had guided him in his work in "the clever school in literature," of which, doubtless, he regarded *The Sullivan*

County Sketches as good examples, for he referred to them in 1895 as "eight little grotesque tales of the woods which I wrote when I was clever." It appears that Crane's shift in point of view is concerned with the substitution of man and nature for "clever and witty expedients" as the crucial principle for his art, and in this he aligned himself with the doctrine of realism which Howells and Garland had preached in Criticism and Fiction and Crumbling Idols. It is perhaps not far from the truth to state that Crane was shifting from the literary camp of Bierce, Poe, and the early Kipling to that of the American realists, Howells and Garland.

Because of Crane's highly original style and method, it has been denied that his allegiance to the principles of the American realists was as strong as he pretended, despite the fact that he mentioned the two realists in the letter to Lily Munroe and on another occasion expressed a debt to Howells in an inscription to a copy of The Red Badge of Courage:

To W. D. Howells this small and belated book as a token of the veneration and gratitude of Stephen Crane for many things he has learned of the common man and, above all, for a certain re-adjustment of his point of view victoriously concluded some time in 1892.

This, Berryman thinks, refers to some social view which Crane had gleaned from Howells's writings and does not acknowledge an obligation to his esthetic program:

... the difficulties with supposing Stephen Crane's 'little creed of art' indebted to the views of Howells or Garland are two: it does not resemble theirs, and he already had Tolstoy before him.

5 Ibid., p. 616.
6 Ibid., p. 620.
7 Berryman, p. 54.
But it is helpful, perhaps, to distinguish between literary theory—which Crane doubtless meant by "creed of art," since he remarks upon the nature and function of literature in the same context—and literary style and execution. Crane's work, it is true, does not resemble either Garland's or Howells's in its execution, since neither of these writers is an ironist or a self-conscious stylist, but the motive and ideals of the literary art are identical in all three writers.

Establishing the correct relationship between the esthetics of Crane and the two older realists insofar as influence is concerned is difficult, though, because it cannot be stated with certainty that Crane read Criticism and Fiction or Crumbling Idols, and the problem is further complicated by Crane's known association with a group of impressionistic painters whose artistic ideals were fundamentally in agreement with those of the literary realists. But in view of Crane's statements about his indebtedness to Howells it seems reasonable to conclude that Garland, whom Crane met in 1891, familiarized the young literary aspirant with the doctrine of literary realism, that Crane found it to be a convenient translation of the ideals of impressionism into literary terms, and that after he had "victoriously re-adjusted" his point of view in 1892, he gratefully accredited Howells with an important part in the development of his literary esthetics. Crane's statement that he discovered "later" that his creed was identical with Garland's and Howells's is perhaps a significant qualification of his indebtedness to the two critics, for he doubtless recognized that their dicta were for the most part confirmations of the principles of impressionistic painting.

Nevertheless, the critical principles of both Howells and Garland
must have been of immense importance to Crane, not only because they reassured the beliefs he had garnered from the impressionists, but because they effected a perfect expression in literary terminology of his own artistic objectives. Garland stands as the logical connecting link between realism and impressionism, for he, like Crane, was a student of both movements and saw in them the same basic artistic principles. "It will be seen," he was pointing out in 1891 in his essay on impressionistic painting, "that these men are veritists in the best sense of the word. They are referring constantly to nature." 8 He was recognizing, too, that the impressionists' revolt against "hot-house" art was in complete harmony with the realists' point of view:

This singleness of impression [in impressionistic paintings] destroys, of course, all idea of "cooked up" pictures, as the artists say. There are, moreover, no ornate or balanced effects. . . . He [the artist] takes intimate views of nature; but if he painted the heart of the Andes, he would do it, not as the civil engineer sees it, but as he himself sees it and loves it. 9

"It seemed to me," Crane wrote in reference to his re-adjustment in 1892, "that there must be something more in life than to sit and cudgel one's brains for clever and witty expedients." 10 Art, then, the realists, the impressionists, and Garland the "veritist" were saying, takes nature as its subject and its worth as art is directly proportional to the degree of its truthfulness. Like Garland, Crane saw in impressionism a perfect medium for the truth, and when he arrived in New York in 1892 to establish

8 Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 123.
9 Ibid., p. 126.
himself as a writer, he immediately became attached to a group of artists, some of whom at least, were avid practitioners of the impressionist canons and techniques.\(^{11}\) R. G. Vosburgh, one of the artists at whose studio Crane worked a great deal during these years, wrote:

> Impressionism he said, was truth, and no man could be great who was not an impressionist, for greatness consisted in knowing truth. He said that he did not expect to be great himself, but he hoped to get near the truth.\(^{12}\)

With truth as the goal of his art, Crane elevated honesty and integrity in the artist into a guiding principle. Even as early as 1891 he had condemned romanticism on the grounds that it was not a sincere approach to life. "Everyone tells me that Mr. Stevenson was a fine fellow, but nothing on earth could move me to change my belief that most of his work was insincere."\(^{13}\) And in a letter to Joseph O'Connor in 1898, Crane revealed how highly he valued the quality of sincerity in art:

> The one thing that deeply pleases me in my literary life—brief and inglorious as it is—is the fact that men of sense believe me to be sincere. . . . Personally I am aware that my work does not amount to a string of dried beans—I always calmly admit it. But I also know that I do the best that is in me, without regard to cheers or damnation.\(^{14}\)

Crane felt that it was the high mission of the artist to report life according to his own vision and that the falsification of the truth for the sake of traditional artistic modes was the most reprehensible of literary practices:

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\(^{12}\) Vosburgh, p. 338.

\(^{13}\) Beer, p. 231.

\(^{14}\) Stallman (*Letters*), pp. 679-80.
. . . 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 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.15

The high integrity of the artist is one of the principal concepts in the literary theories of both Howells and Garland. "Will he play us false," Howells asks in Criticism and Fiction, "or will he be true in the operation of this or that principle involved? . . . he must be true to what life has taught me is the truth."16 The artist, Garland wrote in Crumbling Idols, "works out his individual perception of things."17 The secret of success in art and one of the basic concepts of Garland's veritism is the power of the artist, free of every model but contemporary life, to state his convictions with the utmost sincerity, the only way which the cause of truth may be championed.18

Since Crane's move to New York in 1892 occurred about the same time he became convinced that art is a truthful reflection of nature and that the artist is bound by his conscience to report life according to the dictates of his own vision, it is clear that his experience with New York low life was not acquired through mere accident. He moved by calculated

15 Ibid., p. 680.
17 Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 73.
18 Ibid., p. 22.
design, if not upon Garland's and Howells's suggestion, at least in the assurance that his objectives were in accord with those of a more or less established literary theory. He went into the Bowery to observe, to learn, and to gather material for his art, and in the attitude that prompted this course of action he seems startlingly modern. Like Hemingway he wanted to see "the way it was" and nothing but direct experience could satisfy his resolve to write sincerely, and thus significantly.19

Both Howells and Garland had suggested that truth and nature might be found in the low and common, the latter having even applied his theory to a fictional study of Boston slum life in Under the Wheel, published as a play in the Arena in 1890 and as a novel, Jason Edwards, in 1892. "Now we are beginning to see and to say that no author is an authority except in those moments when he held his ear close to Nature's lips and caught her very accent,"20 Howells wrote in Criticism and Fiction, and quoting Emerson he suggested specifically where nature and man might be profitably studied:

"How few materials," says Emerson, "are yet used by our arts! The mass of creatures and of qualities are still hid and expectant..." The ordinary English novel with its hackneyed plot, scenes, and figures is more comfortable to the ordinary American than an American novel, which deals, at its worst, with comparatively new interests and motives... It is only the extraordinary person


20 Howells, Criticism and Fiction, p. 234.
who can say, with Emerson: "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic... I embrace the common; I sit at the feet of the familiar and the low."21

"I decided," Crane wrote in 1895 in reference to the re-adjustment of his artistic outlook, "that the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist, and most of my prose writings have been toward the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism."22

Insofar as the definition, nature, and function of literature are concerned, Crane's creed of art was identical with the literary ideals of the two arch realists, Garland and Howells, and even though their theories were essentially expansions of the basic doctrines of the impressionistic painters, they were doubtless of immense value to the young writer who was struggling in 1892 to find a definitive approach to literary art. And even though Crane had little in common with either writer's style or method, he enthusiastically approved their advocacy of simple, "unliterary" language. "We poor fellows," Howells bemoaned after praising the use of "local parlances" in American writing, "who work in the language of an old civilization, we may sit and chisel our little verbal felicities, only to find in the end that it is a borrowed jewel we are polishing..."23 Like Garland, who also advocated a colloquial English in literature,24 Howells believed that literature should be written in the language of the people in the shops and fields, and he admonished the artist to remember "that no language is ever old on the lips of those who speak it, no matter

21 Ibid., p. 231.
22 Stallman (Letters), p. 627.
23 Howells, p. 255.
how decrepit it drops from the pen." With these sentiments Crane was in complete agreement, for wherever he had occasion to express his view of literature, he emphasized the ideal of a simple, natural language. "My chiefest desire," he wrote in the summer of 1893, "was to write plainly and unmistakably, so that all men (and some women) might read and understand. That to my mind is good writing." Toward the end of his life he set down again his conviction that simplicity of expression was a major ideal in his theory of art: "I endeavored to express myself in the simplest and most concise way. If I failed, the fault is not mine."  

In *My Literary Passions* Howells praised Tolstoy as the noblest of all his literary enthusiasms, but on one ground the great critic condemned the Russian:  

His didactic stories, like all stories of the sort dwindled into allegories; perhaps they do their work the better for this, with the simple intelligences they address; but I think that where Tolstoy becomes impatient of his office of artist, and prefers to be directly a teacher, he robs himself of more than half his strength with those he can move only through the realization of themselves in others. The simple pathos, and the apparent indirectness of such a tale as that of *Policoushka*, the peasant conscript, is of vastly more value to the world at large than all his parables.  

Crane, much as he admired the Russian writer, condemned him on the same

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25 Howells, p. 256.

26 Stallman (Letters), p. 596. This statement is repeated almost word for word in a letter to Clarence Peaslee in 1895 (*ibid.*, p. 611).

27 Stallman, p. 673.

28 Howells, p. 187.
grounds. His opinion of Anna Karenina, read when he was in Athens in 1897, was that it was "bully" but too long because the author "has to stop and preach." Later the same year he wrote Hilliard why he had aimed to keep the didactic element out of his writing:

> 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 the reader a slice out of life; and if there is any moral or lesson in it, I do not try to point it out. I let the reader find it for himself. . . . As Emerson said, "There should be a long logic beneath the story, but it should be kept carefully out of sight."

The extreme, almost obsessive objectivity of Crane's most important writing bears out the strength of this conviction.

Another view of Howells's which may have touched on Crane's method or practice in literature is suggested by a striking parallel between the theorist's idea of structure and the characteristic form Crane adopted for all his longer writings. When Howells commented generically upon the structure of the novel, he would almost seem to have been referring specifically to Maggie or The Red Badge of Courage:

> A big book is necessarily a group of episodes more or less loosely connected by a thread of narrative, and there seems no reason why this thread must always be supplied. Each episode may be quite distinct, or it may be one of a connected group; the final effect will be from the truth of each episode, not from the size of the group.

Like the Sullivan County Sketches, which, it has been noted, taken together comprise a series of episodes that might make a book almost

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29 Berryman, p. 183.

30 Stallman (Letters), p. 672.

31 Howells, p. 259.
as compact in form as any of Crane's other stories, 32 Maggie, George's 
Mother, The Red Badge, indeed all of Crane's longer works, are groups 
of more or less artfully related tableaux or scenes which build cumula­
tively to a larger form. This form, if it did not have its origins in 
the episodic effect of impressionistic painting, Crane may have adopted 
from the theory of Howells's. But even if Crane were not indebted to the 
older novelist for this concept, it must have been a reassurance for the 
young writer to know that such a literary practice had the sanction of 
respectable theory.

How completely in harmony Crane's conception of fiction was with 
Howells's can be no more forcibly illustrated than by comparing the 
creed of art Crane adopted in 1892 with some of the sterner passages in 
Criticism and Fiction. Fundamental to Crane's conception was the belief 
that literature is a substitute for nature, that it should be an objective 
rendering of truth, not a rearrangement of reality nor an idealization of 
life. The ideal literary artist he conceived as a writer independent of 
all pre-conceived notions of what literature should be and dedicated to 
the duty of honestly recording his personal vision of life and the meaning 
of life. The literary artist, however, is not a moral polemicist, and 
if there is an ethical meaning in his work it is to be implicit within 
the neutrality of complete artistic objectivity. The ideal literary 
expression he conceived to be simple, precise, and clear, without ornament 
or affectation. This creed compelled Crane to write for the most part 
about the life he saw about him and to write about it simply, clearly, 
and honestly.

32 Schoberlin, p. 20.
These ideals are identical with Howells's. Oscar Firkins, a student of this realist, has pointed out the strength and simplicity of the critic's conception of the nature and function of literature:

Mr. Howells's object is truth, and truth is universal, or rather has its universal side. But truth, to be verified, must be observed, and observation belongs to a spot and a moment. . . . A man, a fact, and honesty—that is the sum of the essentials, the nucleus of literature.33

Howells, more concerned with and more articulate about the theoretical aspects of literature, expanded this concept throughout Criticism and Fiction, and in so doing he spoke the literary credo of both Garland and Stephen Crane, despite the differences between the men in the actual technique of their fiction:

. . . let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their true proportions; let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language, that most Americans know—the language of unaffected people everywhere—and there can be no doubt of an unlimited future, not only of delightfulfulness but of usefulness, for it.34

If "the truth must be observed, and observation belongs to a spot and a moment," as Firkins observes of Howells's theory then Stephen Crane had the temperament and the will to force himself into whatever he thought to be the very core of life experience. Thus he went into the Bowery to

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34 Howells, p. 244.
seek out "unvarnished human nature" and his motive for doing so is dis-
coverable in a tenet of his artistic credo. He "wasted his genius,"
Stallman believes. "Under the mistaken notion that only those who have
suffered shipwreck can become its interpreters, he expended himself in a
search for experience."35 Yet another critic wonders where Crane got the
experience of life which made Maggie: A Girl of the Streets a literary
possibility.36 It is perhaps a moot question, but one well worth raising,
as to whether the psychologizing of Henry Fleming in The Red Badge, a book
which violates on one level at least Crane's theory of the function of
personal experience in art, would have been possible without the knowledge
of life the writer acquired from his association with "unvarnished human
nature" in the New York slums.

But whether for better or worse, this attitude dictated the course
of Crane's whole adult life, which he lived with all the ferocious
velocity of a man who is compelled to make himself the tester of every
possible experience. Garland, perhaps inconsistent with his own doctrine,
anticipated Stallman's view when he advised Crane in the mid-nineties to
retire to his brother's house in Sullivan County to "settle down to the
writing of a single big book." "Alas!" Garland comments, "he did not. He
took a commission to go to Greece and report a war. On his return from
Greece he went to Cuba."37 Unlike Howells, who thought The Red Badge

35 Stallman, p. xxv.
36 Berryman, p. 27.
37 Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 203.
inferior to Maggie because it violated Crane's esthetic, Garland felt that Crane dissipated his powers in his pursuit of the first-hand experience. "To send him to report actual warfare was a mistake. His genius lay in depicting the battles which never saw the light of day, and upon which no eyes but his own had ever gazed." 39

But even though Crane's whole life direction was dictated by his argument for personal experience as the foundation of art, it is true, as Stallman points out, that there is a duality in his theory, for Crane, perhaps compelled by the embarrassing source-nature of The Red Badge, argued as well for imaginative experience. 40 "They all insist," he wrote of this novel's reviewers, "that I am a veteran of the civil war, whereas the fact is as you know, I never smelled even the powder of a sham battle." 41 Yet the war novel, his first successful work, had to be justified, even at the expense of contradicting an essential principle of his literary philosophy. "I know what the psychologists say, that a fellow can't comprehend a condition that he has never experienced, and I argued that many times with the Professor." 42 But this was a rationalization in which he was uneasy. "I am going to Greece for the Journal," he wrote later, "and if The Red Badge is not all right I shall sell out my claim on literature and take up


40 Stallman, p. xxxi.

41 Ibid., p. 672.

42 Loc. cit.
Berryman is doubtless right when he states that Crane's "lightness is deceptive," that "stung by the continual gibe that he did not really know what he was writing about, he had to find out."\textsuperscript{44} The Red Badge, in a sense an artistic accident, occurring without the pale of Crane's theory of art and experience, could be justified only by an argument for imaginative experience, but Crane never really abandoned at all his conviction that art has its source in the actualities of life.\textsuperscript{44}

In theory, then, Crane was a thorough realist, his artistic point of view being identical with that of Garland and Howells, though it is by no means necessary to assume that the critical principles that Crane encountered in his association with Garland and whatever intellectual contact he had with Howells, either through Garland or Criticism and Fiction, were new to him in the fall of 1892.\textsuperscript{43} The theory of art germane to the impressionist movement was in principle in accord with the realistic ideal of art, and Crane in all likelihood knew this theory before he met either Howells or Garland. He by no means abandoned his sympathies for impressionism even after he "re-adjusted his point of view" in 1892; recognizing the theoretical rapport of the movements in the graphic art and literature, he merely adopted the terminology of the latter. Impressionism, he declared, was his faith and it was through impressionism that he intended to get at the truth.

The realistic movement led by Howells, however, furnished Crane an artistic identification so important that it would be difficult to overestimate

\textsuperscript{43} Stallman (Letters), p. 659.
\textsuperscript{44} Berryman, p. 174.
the influence it had upon his development as a writer. Since Garland in
the early 'nineties was fulfilling his ambition for literary success through
his connections with the radical Arena, his enthusiasm for a new realism
in literature was doubtless at its highest, and it was at this time that
Stephen Crane, casting about for a point of departure as a writer, met
him. Garland's sympathies with both impressionism and realism doubtless
provided the connecting link between his and Howells's program and Crane's.
Stephen Crane remained an impressionist, but his guiding principle was
realism.
CHAPTER V

THE PRACTICE OF LITERATURE: THE BOWERY TALES,

MAGGIE, AND GEORGE'S MOTHER: 1892-1895

During the time Crane was attempting to define a consistent program of literary action he was drafting and redrafting the story about a New York streetwalker he had started sometime in the spring of 1891, more than a year before he wrote the ten little sketches about his camping experiences in Sullivan County. These early drafts of Maggie would be instructive, no doubt, for what they would show of the effect his identification with realism had upon his early art, but unfortunately none of the three early versions of the story is known to exist. On the evidence of The Sullivan County Sketches, also written before Crane "victoriously concluded" his literary re-adjustment in 1892, it may be reasonable to assume that the early versions were conceived according to the dictates of the "clever school in literature," despite the nature of the material with which the young author dealt. At any rate, Crane seems to have repudiated these early attempts later, for in March of 1893 he wrote Lily Brandon Munroe that the "three months which have passed have been months of very hard work to Stephen Crane. ... I wrote a book;"¹ and on another occasion he stated that he wrote the story "in the two days before Christmas [1891],"² neglecting in both instances to mention the previous version or versions.

¹ Stallman, p. xxxi.

² Loc. cit. Crane about this time was writing at his brother Edmund's house in Lakewood. "Most of Maggie was written," his niece recalls, "at our house in two or three nights" (Helen Crane, p. 27).
Even though each version may have been a rewriting to conform to Crane's maturing conception of literary art, the first 1891 version was not without qualities which could have been impressive, perhaps even sensational, to the reader of fiction in the early 'nineties. Pages from the Syracuse draft, scattered about the floor of the Delta Upsilon fraternity house, Noxon recalled, "were picked up and read by droppers-in," and Willis Johnson remembered this draft when Crane brought him a bundle of manuscript in the summer of 1891. "I found it to be not a Sullivan County Sketch, but a tale of the slums of New York; the first draft of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. It was in some respects crude, but powerful and impressive." It was "exuberant with adjectives," Johnson continues, and the dynamic story seemed alive and active in every line. This description fits very well the version Crane published in 1893, but the question insofar as the influence of the author's new literary outlook is concerned is how the overall treatment and purpose were changed in the revisions. Without the early drafts it is impossible to say, but if The Sullivan County Sketches are a fair indication of the level of Crane's literary maturity in the summer of 1892, then it is not

3 Noxon, p. 5.

4 Though Johnson gives the date 1891, it probably is an error for 1892. He coaxed Crane to show him some of the Sullivan sketches in August, 1892, and it was evidently some of these stories that he expected to see rather than Maggie. Even if Crane had a Sullivan sketch in 1891, the question of publication did not arise until August, 1892. At any rate, this version of Maggie was written prior to Crane's readjustment of his literary outlook.

5 Johnson, p. 289.
likely that these Maggie, though they perhaps contained the same incidents and had the same general stylistic characteristics, were like the Maggie Crane brought out in 1893.

It is not clear how many drafts of the book Crane wrote, but he seems to have worked at it intermittently from the spring of 1891 until early in 1892, when he took it, "ready for high inspection," in Beer's phrase, to Ripley Hitchcock, a reader for D. Appleton to whom Willis Johnson had given him a note of introduction. Although Hitchcock appreciated the grim little novel, he was perhaps too competent a judge of popular taste and morality to think Maggie could be offered with impunity to the reading public of 1892. At any rate, the story was refused, and late in March Crane submitted his manuscript again, this time to Richard Watson Gilder of the Century. Gilder, an old friend of the Crane family, received the young writer courteously enough, but Maggie shocked his tastes and sensibilities and he tried to pass the story off with good advice about excess adjectives and split infinitives. "Do you mean that the story's too honest?" Crane tactlessly interrupted Gilder's embarrassed comments, and the critic, "being a gentleman as well as an editor gave his courteous little nod. . . ." Disappointed, Crane stowed the novel away until the winter after he had established himself in New York, writing the Sullivan County stories meanwhile and satirizing the respectable clientele of the Asbury Park resort. When he took up the novel again he had repudiated his sketches, and so possibly the latest version of Maggie. His literary work during

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6 Beer, p. 86.
7 *Loc. cit.*
the early part of his bohemian career in the 'nineties seems to have been with this novel, and since he was working now with an altered outlook, *Maggie* probably underwent another thorough revision. But when he finished this rewriting he wasted no effort on editors. Borrowing money from his brother William, he arranged to have *Maggie* privately printed, and in mid-January he copyrighted the book for this purpose. His experience with editorial opinion had perhaps taught him to be circumspect, for though he seemed convinced that *Maggie* would take the literary world by storm, he seemed curiously loath to bring it out under his own name. It appeared in ugly, mustard-colored paper covers as a novel by "Johnston Smith:"

> I hunted a long time for some perfectly commonplace name. I think that I asked [George Post Wheeler] what he thought was the stupidist name in the world. He suggested Johnson or Smith and Johnston Smith went on the ugly yellow cover of the book by mistake. You see, I was going to wait until all the world was pyrotechnic about Johnston Smith's 'Maggie' and then I was going to flop down like a trapeze performer from the wire and, coming forward with all the modest grace of a consumptive nun, say, I am he, friends!...⁸

But when the book appeared sometime early in 1893, it evoked no wild response from the literary world; indeed, there is a strong impression that no one except a few friends who received complimentary copies from

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⁸ Crane's letter to the Librarian of Congress states that he enclosed "a printed copy of the title page." This may have been a typescript page or an advanced printing of the title page. This letter was doubtless Beer's authority for stating that the novel was published in January (p. 91).

⁹ Beer, p. 90.

¹⁰ The month of publication is not definitely known. Berryman thinks it was February, 1893 (p. 56), and Stallman states it was in the spring (p. 14). Linson states that he received his copy one day in the winter of 1892-93 (p. 19).
the enthusiastic young writer even read the book. It was not even
attacked, as Crane had anticipated it might be. It was ignored. None
of the newsstands would handle it (except Brentano's, which took copies
and returned all but two), and Crane began to give them away, "to his
brothers, friends, creditors, anybody. 'Miss Wortsman,' one is inscribed:
'This story will not edify or improve you but I owe your papa $1. 30 for
tobacco. S. Crane.'"11 Garland's review in the Arena came some months
later, in June, and then Maggie was forgotten until Appleton gave it a
respectable publication in 1896. "My first great disappointment was in the
reception of 'Maggie, a Girl of the Streets,'" Crane lamented in 1895. "I
remember how I looked forward to its publication, and pictured the sensa-
tion I thought it would make . . . . It fell flat. Poor Maggie! she was
one of my first loves."12

Crane's feeling for his first novel is understandable, for with this
book he established the manner and direction of his mature art. "Everything...
inexpertly foreshadowed in the Sullivan sketches is blazing in Maggie,"
Berryman points out,13 and it is true that Crane appears to have expunged
here most of the characteristics of literary juvenility apparent in his
early work and rescued and reshaped those which account for the daring
and striking qualities of his mature manner. In Maggie the suave sopho-
morism of the Sullivan sketches has disappeared. Here there is no superior
seculorial smirking at the insignificance and helplessness of little men,

11 Berryman, p. 64.
12 Stallman (Letters), p. 629.
13 Berryman, p. 53.
and if the lack of expressed sentiment gives the book a tone of ruthless
grimness, the absence of attitudinizing and condescension gives it a
quality of sincerity and mature purpose so notably lacking in the Sullivan
stories. In the novel there is less obvious laboring for brilliance of
style and less reliance upon clever manipulation of materials for super­
ficial dramatic effect. But a more striking evidence of Crane's advance
is the increased surety of his conception of life, which appears vague,
formless, and directionless in the sketches, but which emerges in Maggie
firmly crystallized and controlled. Even in full recognition of the
artistic weaknesses of Maggie, the student of Crane will probably always
count the literary advances between August, 1892 and January, 1893, a
mystery of his literary art.

In the Sullivan sketches Crane was artistically wasteful. Of the four
characters—the little man, the pudgy man, the tall man, and the quiet
man—only the first two have an organic function in the tales. In Maggie
Crane reveals a substantial advance in his conception of economy in
literature, for every character, as indeed every story element, functionally
supports the central purpose of the novel, which is to show that moral
degeneracy under the external pressure of environment and the internal
pressure of moral and spiritual debility is inevitable. The morbid,
crushing entity that hangs over the lives of the three Johnson children
like a blighting cloud of evil is specifically embodied in the drunken,
cyclonic old mother. The sullen father, who skulks to the corner saloon
because he cannot bear the cries of his beaten children or the angry
shouting of his drink-maddened wife, exemplifies the cowardly moral
passivity which, transmitted to Maggie, ultimately brings about her downfall.
Pete, the dandy young bartender, like the girl's brother Jimmy, represents in his twisted personality the product of a system which teaches that the height of moral accomplishment is the ability to assault successfully the rights of others or the blindness to judge the worth of every individual according to his ability to prosecute a street brawl. And even in the babe Tommie, who dies from neglect early in the story, there is an artistic purpose, for Tommie's fate is symbolic not only of Maggie's bad end, but also of the spiritual deaths of the whole Johnson family.

The economy of Maggie is exemplified further in its extreme narrative compression, the whole story of Maggie's and Jimmie's career from childhood to maturity occupying less than one hundred pages of print. In form it consists of nineteen tableaux, swiftly sketched impressionistic scenes from the life of the Johnsons, fitted loosely together with little concern for either chronological progression or logical relationship of incident. From the traditional point of view there is neither plot nor, except in a psychological sense, any incident which depends for its motivation upon a preceding occurrence. Yet the arrangement of the story is by no means without art, for the author carefully balances one tableau against another for contrasting and ironical effect, scene six, for example, ending with Mrs. Johnson tossing drunkenly on the floor, blaspheming and giving her daughter a bad name, and scene seven opening in the tinselled, and to Maggie beautiful, world of a cheap and gaudy Music-hall. In scene eleven Jimmie indignantly rebuffs a girl whom he has seduced and deserted, and in scene twelve he self-righteously revenges himself upon Pete for seducing and brutally casting off the forlorn Maggie. The form of Maggie is in effect like a series of artistically contrasted tableaux of a medieval pageant.
play, each scene developing some fundamental aspect of the ethical or sociological implications of the story as a whole.

This technique of compression is evident not only in the handling of the material of Maggie, but also in the further condensation of expression, evident in the early stories in the laconic synecdoche and the bold and striking compression of metaphor. In the swift and sketchy descriptions Crane brushed in with single stroke the main lines of his picture, seldom resorting, like the European naturalists, to the lineation of a scene in scientific detail. Yet through the skillful use of synecdoche Crane gives lasting descriptive impressions. The sordid congestion of the tenement in which Maggie lives, for example, is suggested in one paragraph of swift and telling descriptive strokes:

Eventually they entered a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early Autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags, and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odours of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.14

As in the Sullivan stories, Crane is here a highly self-conscious stylist, searching for the unusual metaphor and carefully truncating it into blunt and brilliant imagery:
He wheeled about hastily and turned his stare into the air, like a sailor with a searchlight.\(^{15}\)

After a time his sneer grew so that it turned its glare upon all things.\(^{16}\)

The characteristic device of assigning feeling to insensate objects which Crane used in the early stories emerges in *Maggie* as an established stylistic trait:

> A stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic whiskers, went stolidly by, the broad of his back sneering at the girl.\(^{17}\)

The open mouth of a saloon called seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage.\(^{18}\)

Generally, though Crane shows that he was learning in *Maggie* to subordinate the stylistic effects so that they are less intrusive upon the reader's consciousness than in the Sullivan stories. There is a less lurid, more purposeful use of color adapted as it is to the highlighting of the dramatic scene, as when Jimmie, stumbling panic-stricken away from a drunken brawl between his father and mother is suddenly caught in the light of an open door which throws an ominous red glare on the boy's contorted face.\(^{19}\) As a loutish young man Jimmie stands on the street corners to watch the world go by, "dreaming blood red dreams at the passing of

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pretty women,"20 and when he disputes the right of way with certain pedestrians, he puts up "flame-coloured fists."21 The highly melodramatic last scene, in which Mrs. Johnson indulges in an orgy or self-pity upon hearing that Maggie is dead, is ironically colored by the morbid light of the evening sun: "the inevitable sunlight came streaming in at the window and shed a ghastly cheerfulness upon the faded hues of the room."22 Though color floods the pages of Maggie it is adapted more effectively to the total artistic effect than the sometimes tasteless and pointless chromaticism of The Sullivan County Sketches, in which lurid yellows and ominous or wrathful reds are often splashed through the stories gaudily and indiscriminately.

In Maggie Crane's devastating irony becomes more than a stylistic trait, for it gives the otherwise structurally loose little novel its most effective continuity. The first sentence, "A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honour of Hum Alley," sets the key for the story and as the narrative progresses from episode to episode the ironical pitch gradually rises until in the last scene it reaches the tone of high and lurid melodrama. "Oh, yes, I'll forgive her!" screams the self-pitying old mother when she hears that her daughter is drowned. "Oh, yes, I'll forgive her!" and thus the book closes with a final outburst of strident irony which has been carefully deepened and complicated from the first scene to the last. Scarcely a paragraph of the story is without bitter ironic implications, and the whole moral fiber of the story is made

20 Ibid., p. 152.
21 Ibid., p. 155.
22 Ibid., p. 217.
continuously visible through the ironic superstructure. In the implicit condemnation of the folly of self-esteem, self-delusion, and blighting self-righteousness the more terrible directness of irony is substituted for the directness of auctorial comment, and in this sense *Maggie* is the most didactic of novels parading in the guise of complete objectivity.

Though the use of irony is much more lavish in *Maggie* than in the Sullivan stories, Crane reveals in the former that he had learned to employ it more flexibly, often gaining striking effects of humor and pathos with deftly compressed ironic touches:

The babe, Tommie, died. He went away in an insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian.  

As a young Bowery hoodlum, Jimmie and a companion wander into a soup kitchen:

He clad his soul in armour by means of happening hilariously in at a mission church where a man composed his sermons of "you's." Once a philosopher asked this man why he did not say "we" instead of "you." The man replied, "What?" While they got warm at the stove he told his hearers just where he calculated they stood with the Lord. Many of the sinners were impatient over the pictured depths of their degradation. They were waiting for soup-tickets.

If Crane's use of irony has become more flexible and thus more artistically effective in *Maggie*, an even greater artistic advance is evident in the young writer's mastery of dialogue. In the Sullivan stories the attempts to reproduce the idiosyncrasies of the characters'
Talk is ludicrously unsuccessful, except perhaps in the drunken slurrings of the old guide in "The Octopush." The stagey exaggeration in the talk of Willerkins in "Four Men in a Cave" has the flavor of the incongruous dialect of a stock character in a melodrama:

"Well, you see," said Willerkins, slowly, as he took dignified pulls at his pipe, "Tom Gardner was once a fambly man, who lived in these here parts on a nice leetle farm. He uster go away to the city offten, and one time he got a-gamblin' in one of them there dens. He went ter the dickens right quick then. At last he come home one time and tol' his folks he had up and sold the farm and all he had in the worl'. His leetle wife she died then. Tom he went crazy, and soon after—"25

The vocabulary of Tom Gardner is singularly inappropriate in the talk of the demented backwoodsman who lives in a Sullivan County cave and fleeces passers-by at poker:

"What?" shrieked the recluse. "Not call me! Villain! Dastard! Cur! I have four queens, miscreant."26

But in the jargon of the Bowery tough which he reproduces in the speech of Pete and Jimmie in Maggie, Crane shows a mastery in his handling of realistic dialogue, carefully studied in its peculiar phonology and banal, repetitious rhythms:

"I met a chump deh odder day way up in deh city," he said, "I was goin' teh see a frien' of mine. When I was a-crossin' deh street deh chump runned plump inteh me, an' den he turns aroun' an' says, 'Yer insol'n' ruffin' he says, like dat. See? 'Oh, gee!' I says, 'Oh, gee! git off d' eart!' I says, like dat. See? 'Git off d' eart!' I like dat. Den deh blokie he got wild. He says I was a contempt'ble scoun'el, or somethin' like dat, an' he says I was doom' teh ever-lastin' pe'dition, or somethin' like dat. 'Gee!' I says, 'gee! Yer joshin' me!' I says. 'Yer joshin' me.' An' den I slugged 'im. See?'27

25 Schoberlin, p. 30.
26 Ibid., p. 29.
Crane’s concern for the accurate reproduction of his characters’ talk accounts for long passages of empty, meaningless repetitions which intensify the aridity and pathetic ineffectiveness of his people’s personalities. The conversation in a Bowery saloon between the drunken Pete and several disreputable girls anticipates the technique of Ernest Hemingway in the artistic use of banal dialogues:

As the waiter pased out of the door the man turned pathetically to the women. "He don’ know I’m goo’ f’ler," cried he, dismally.
"Never you mind, Pete, dear," said the woman of brilliance and audacity, laying her hand with great affection upon his arm. "Never you mind, old boy! We’ll stay by you, dear!"
"Dass ri' I" cried the man, his face lighting up at the soothing tones of the woman’s voice. "Dass ri'; I'm goo' f'ler, an' w'en any one trea's me ri', I trea's zem ri'! Shee?"
"Sure!" cried the women. "And we're not goin' back on you, old man."

The man turned appealing eyes to the women... "Shay, Nell, I allus trea's yeha shquare, didn' I? I allus been goo' f'ler wi' yehs, ain' I, Nell?"
"Sure you have, Pete," assented the woman. She delivered an oration to her companions. "Yessir, that’s a fact. Pete’s a square fellah, he is. He never goes back on a friend. He’s the right kind an’ we stay by him, don’t we, girls?"
"Sure!" they exclaimed...
"Girlsh," said the man, beseechingly, "I allus trea's yehs ri', didn' I? I'm goo' f'ler, ain' I, girlsh?"
"Sure!" again they chorussed.
"Well," said he finally, "le’s have nozzer drink, zen."

In the technical manipulation and treatment of his materials Crane shows notable literary advances in Maggie. In this grim little story he established the literary form that he was to employ during the rest of his writing career—a succession of loosely related scenes, often ironically contrasted, which comprise an impressionistic, organic whole. His style,

28 Ibid., p. 213.
if not altogether mature in its studied angularity, its obvious searching for the unusual and clever turn of phrase, is nevertheless essentially that of the mature Crane, nervous, abrupt, flashing with fresh and compact metaphor, jagged with devastating irony. Somehow during the eighteen months after the Sullivan County tales appeared in the Tribune Crane became the master of a flexible and realistic technique in dialogue writing.

But striking as Crane's literary progress is in these respects the most notable advance is shown in his increased competency in the handling of the psychology of character. In the early sketches there are but three emotions, fear, wrath, and feeling of unseemly triumph, all ludicrously exaggerated. But some of the psychologizing in Maggie, particularly that of the two Bowery toughs, Jimmie and Pete, shows that the twenty-two-year-old author during his sojourn in the New York East Side had gained a penetrating insight into "unvarnished human nature." Like his hero Jimmie, he "studied human nature in the gutter, and found it no worse than he thought he had reason to believe it," and if the knowledge of human nature displayed in Maggie is somewhat limited, it can at least be said that it is penetrating within its limitations. "He spoke wisely and kindly about them [the poor]," Howells wrote in remembrance of one of Crane's visits during his New York years, "and especially about the Tough, who was tough because, as he said, he felt that 'everything was on him.'" The Petes and Jimmies and all the other human derelicts Crane saw as afflicted not only with a monstrous personal conceit and an enervating

29 Ibid., p. 151.

30 William Dean Howells, "Letter to Mrs. Stephen Crane," The Academy, XIX (August 18, 1900), 123.
moral cowardice, but above all with an infinite capacity for deluding
themselves with self-glorying rationalizations for the most deplorable
social attitudes:

He [Jimmie] maintained a belligerent attitude toward all
well-dressed men. To him fine raiment was allied to weakness,
and all good coats covered faint hearts. He and his orders
were kings, to a certain extent, over the men of un tarn is hed
clothes, because these latter dreaded, perhaps, to be either
killed or laughed at. Above all things he despised obvious
Christians and ciphers with the chrysanthemums of aristocracy
in their buttonholes. He considered himself above both of
these classes. He was afraid of nothing.31

The level of Jimmie's ethical development is typically illustrated by the
passage which represents his desertion of a friend who has volunteered to
help in a fight with Maggie's seducer and who has for his pains been taken
into custody by a policeman:

At first Jimmie, with his heart throbbing at battle heat,
started to go desperately to the rescue of his friend, but
he halted. "Ah, what's d'uae?" he demanded of himself.32

Even though "two women . . . caused him considerable annoyance by breaking
forth, simultaneously, at fateful intervals, into wailings about marriage
and support and infants," Jimmie's indignation when he learns that Pete
has seduced his sister is terrible in its outraged righteousness:

"Ah, dat's anudder story," interrupted the brother. "Of
course, dat Sadie was nice an' all dat—but—see?—it ain't
dessame as if—well, Maggie was diff'ent—see? —she was
diff'ent." He was trying to formulate a theory that he
had always unconsciously held, that all sisters excepting
his own could, advisedly, be ruined.33

31 Work, I, 152.
32 Ibid., p. 187.
33 Ibid., p. 180.
The dominant characteristic of all the people in Maggie is complete egocentricity, a trait which even the unreal Maggie, whose virtuous purity in other respects is scarcely consistent with the animalistic brutality of her parents, friends, and brother. Early in the story Maggie introduces the motif of egocentricity when she upbraids her brother for fighting, not because she is concerned that he has been injured, but because she fears his brawling will put her mother in a bad humor: "... yeh knows it puts mudder out when yehs come home half dead, an it's like we'll all get a poundin' ... ." When the mother begins to maltreat the boy Jimmie, the father becomes annoyed, not because the boy is being maltreated, but because his cries disturb his peace: "Let the kid alone for a minute, will ye, Mary? Yer allus poundin' 'im. When I come nights I can't get no rest 'cause yer allus poundin' a kid." The old woman berates the drunken husband to keep Jimmie from fighting for reasons no more humanitarian than "because he tears 'is clothes ... ." Nor does Jimmie as a young man respond to the world with more admirable humanity, for his concern with Maggie's disgrace is no less egocentric. Because Maggie's expulsion from her home disturbs his sense of pride he approaches as near to forgiveness as his nature will allow:

Well, look—a—here, dis t'ing queers us! See? We're queered! An' maybe it 'ud be better if I—well, I t'ink I kin look 'er up an'—maybe it'ud be better if I fetched her home an'—

34 Ibid., p. 142.
35 Ibid., p. 143-44.
36 Ibid., p. 149.
37 Ibid., p. 191-92.
And when he condemns his sister it is hardly on moral grounds:

Of course, Jimmie publicly damned his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane. But arguing with himself, stumbling about in ways that he knew not, he, once, almost came to a conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known how. However, he felt that he could not hold such a view. He threw it hastily aside.38

Despite the over-all effectiveness of Crane's technique and some passages of astute commentary upon human failings, Maggie lacks perfect artistic focus. Only nominally does the story center on the downfall of Maggie, for Crane's point of view is focused through her brother Jimmie while his sister is dismissed as a mere cipher, inconsistently neutral, morally speaking, in a system as ethically deficient as a jungle. If the novel has, as Howells stated in 1895, "that quality of fatal necessity which dominates Greek tragedy,"39 then it is achieved with no flaw in the heroine more reprehensible than an unbelievable innocence in a world that makes no allowance for such a virtue. The artistic consistency of Maggie is destroyed in the opening sentences of scene five: "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud-puddle. . . . None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins."40 Here it becomes clear that Maggie, unlike her brother and her lover, is not to be a creature shaped by her environment, but merely a victim of those who are. She is to be a mannikin of rare and superior innocence, to be wronged, destroyed, and admitted into the heaven where she is not expected to be by many respectable persons.

38 Ibid., p. 194.
40 Work., X, 156.
If the moral atmosphere of the late nineteenth century prevented Crane, despite his rebellious attitude toward it, from accepting the artistic duty in *Maggie* of centering the story in the degradation of the heroine, then it is doubtless simply artistic immaturity that accounts for the mishandling of tone. "No American work of its length had driven the reader so hard...," Berryman states of the novel, but it should be added that for this the author incurred the necessity of maintaining throughout the story an exquisite dramatic intensity which inevitably spills over into melodrama in the climactic passages. The last scene, Knight rightly points out, is "one of the weak things about the novelette, for it is contrived and stagey and exists as Crane's outstanding indulgence in melodrama."  

Though Crane shunned the task of portraying the specific moral degeneration of Maggie and thus wrote around the theme rather than focusing directly upon it, *Maggie* in the 'nineties was a bold literary innovation even by the standards of Howells's sternest principles of realism. In its grim pessimism and bold treatment of the sordid aspects of human nature it stands in striking contrast to the general run of American fiction of the times, and it is partly for this reason perhaps that critics and historians have been prone to look to the European naturalists for explanations of the novel's origins. Scarcely ever is there absent in any general account of Crane's work a mention of his debt to Zola's *L'Assommoir*, a novel which like *Maggie* deals with the effects of big city slums upon the lives of the people who live in them.

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41 Berryman, p. 58.

42 Knight, p. 111.
In two or three general respects Maggie bears a close resemblance to L'Assommoir. The books are similar in the kind of material they treat, and they reflect the same general attitude of the artist toward his materials. But to assume that Zola influenced Crane's selection of material, it must be established that the young American read L'Assommoir sometime before he went into the New York East Side to gather material for literature. Crane began his story of New York in the spring of 1891, but when he read L'Assommoir, if he did at all in his early career, is unfortunately not known. Even so it is not necessary to think that the French naturalist guided him in his choice of subject, for in August of 1891 Crane met Garland, the author of Jason Edwards, a novel about the Boston slums, who was suggesting in his lecture on the local novel the possibility of slum life as material for literature. There is no conclusive evidence that L'Assommoir suggested Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.

The American novel, like the French, is deterministic, the object of both being to show the power of environment to shape human lives. It has been pointed out, however, that Crane's attitude can be accounted for within the limits of his own intellectual and other experience, and perhaps the most that can be said for the influence of Zola's point of view, if Crane knew it, is that it confirmed, or was confirmed by, Crane's observation of the misery and degradation of the New York tenement sections. And, too, there is a difference between the naturalism of Crane and that of Zola, as Berryman point out, referring to the first part of chapter six.

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of L'Assomoir, which details the magnificent strength of the metal worker Ettiene. "The worship of force (strong men, and even better than strong men, machines) Crane's work shows a perfect contempt for, here and every-where." Unlikely Norris, who took over Zolaism wholesale and wrote fiction in which the motif of brute strength and force play a dominant role, Crane never portrays the crushing power of dynamic physical forces.

In method Crane owes nothing to Zola, for unlike the Frenchman, who viewed the creation of fiction as a scientific process which involves minute study of his materials and an accurate, detailed report of them in the stories in which he turned them to account, Crane, as an impressionist slighted detail, working with broad verbal strokes and brushing in only enough background material to suggest the general characteristics of the people and scenes he depicted. In his treatise on fiction Zola set forth the method by which "the great novelists" of his day worked:

They base nearly all their works on profuse notes. When they have studied with scrupulous care the ground over which they are to walk, when they have gotten information from all the possible sources, and when they hold in their hands the manifold data of which they have need, then only do they decide to sit down and write.

The "dream of the physiologist and the experimental doctor," he remarks further, "is also that of the novelist, who employs the experimental method

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44 Berryman, p. 62.

45 See Ahnebrink, pp. 277-308.

46 Berryman states that "this doctrine is crucial to Naturalism" (p. 62). It would be more accurate, perhaps, to say that it is rather a characteristic of some naturalists, as of Zola and his American disciple Norris.

in his study of man as a simple individual and as a social animal." 48

This view of course accounts for the long, profusely detailed analyses and descriptions, the closely packed catalogues of facts and minutiae which characterise Zola's literary method. As an impressionist Crane displays none of these characteristics, the hallmark of his method being the sketching of the scene or character with quick, bold strokes and leaving the reader to supply the details as his imagination directs. 49

About the parallels in character and incident between the two novels it is difficult to be so certain, for, as Ahnebrink has pointed out in an elaborate study of similarities between the novels, there are resemblances between the Johnsons' and the Coupeaus' tenements, between saloons, between the various fights and brawls, and between Maggie's and Nana's development from children to young women, though Maggie never exhibits the sensuality of her French counterpart. 50 But many of these parallels seem inherent in the nature of the materials of the novels; street brawls, grimy flats, brutality, gross sensualism, saloons, and prostitutes do not vary in nature from one country to another, and it is likely, particularly in view of Crane's theory about writing from personal experience, that most of the scenes, characters, and incidents in Maggie were suggested by his own observation in the tenement districts of New York.

On the question of the influence of Zola upon Stephen Crane it seems

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48 Ibid., p. 25.

49 On this and other points in this discussion Ahnebrink disagrees. He believes Crane to have been influenced by Zola in choice of material (p. 178), in artistic method (p. 182), and in his attitude toward his materials (p. 411).

50 Ahnebrink's list of parallels is much longer. See pp. 251-64.
more reasonable, in the light of the evidence now available, to agree with Salvan, whose study of Zola's influence upon American naturalism, though not as detailed as Ahnebrink's, leads to a different conclusion. Salvan finds nothing of Zola's manner or style in any of Crane's novels and upon the evidence of the latter's work, little to point generally to a knowledge of the French writer. Crane may have read *L'Assomoir*, but it is almost certain that it played no great part in the composition of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.

If *Maggie* is inclined toward scientific determinism, *George's Mother*, another novel which utilizes tenement life for its material, is a study in weak will and moral cowardice. Crane began this novel sometime after *Maggie* appeared in the spring of 1893, probably shortly before or about the same time he got the idea to write a war story, laid it aside for


52 Ibid., p. 164. "Dans la question toujours délicate d'établir un rapport d'influence définie entre Zola et Stephen Crane, nous sommes forces de rester sur une note evasive. Il n'est guère douteux que l'auteur de Maggie manquait d'une connaissance très entendue de la littérature française du XIXe siècle en général."

53 He began *The Red Badge* late in March, 1893. See his letter to Mrs. Armstrong (Stallman, p. 593). The final version of *George's Mother* was not finished, of course, until *The Red Badge* was already in the hands of a publisher, but since there is no evidence to the contrary, it is better to consider *George's Mother* a predecessor of the war novel. The best evidence for this view is internal: *George's Mother* is patently a companion piece to *Maggie* and was doubtless suggested sometime during the writing of the first novel. Though it shows advances over *Maggie*, it is far below the level of the war tale in artistic maturity in that it lacks the careful ironic control, the subtle handling of artistic contrast, the mature use of symbolism, the unity of theme, and the flexibility of style which characterize *The Red Badge of Courage*. 
The Red Badge of Courage, and then took it up again in May, 1894, when he referred to it in a letter to Garland as "another novel which is a bird." On November 15 he wrote Garland again: "I have just completed a New York book that leaves "Maggie" at the post. It is my best thing. Since you are not here, I am going to see if Mr. Howells will not read it."55

Howells, who was impressed by Maggie and whose interest in the young writer was strong, may have known the new novel a month after Crane finished it, for when the reporter interviewed him on realism for the Sunday, October 28, New York Times, the critic perhaps alluded to Crane's novel when he mentioned that he would "like to see the novelists treating some of the other important things in life—the relation of mother and son..."56 Though it was perhaps finished by October, 1894, the book was not published until 1896, long after Crane had achieved fame as the author of The Red Badge of Courage.

George's Mother, originally called A Woman Without Weapons,57 is the story of young George Kelcey's moral degeneration through the use of alcohol. Unlike the young men in Maggie, George has not suffered the effects of a

54 Stallman, p. 599. It is just possible that this is a reference to a novel about a boy prostitute, Flowers in Asphalt, which Crane started about this time. According to Berryman, James Huneker told Beer that Crane encountered such a boy one night in April or May, 1894, fed him, and carefully quizzed him. Shortly after he began the novel and showed part of the manuscript to Garland, who was disgusted and begged him to discontinue it. Huneker never knew whether Crane finished it. The manuscript has since disappeared (Berryman, p. 86).


56 Ibid., p. 172.

57 "Stephen Crane," The Bookman, I (May, 1895), 230. "Among other manuscripts which are now in the publisher's hands is one entitled "A Woman Without Weapons!"
strangling environment, though he lives in the same tenement house as the Johnsons. He has evidently led an exemplary workman's life, attending his work regularly and returning faithfully in the evenings to his widowed mother. Mrs. Kelcey, who dotes on her son, has evidently made their home as wholesome as her fond and fanatical religious nature will permit. Her pampering and doting treatment of George, however, has made him a moral weakling, and when he falls under the influence of a crowd of saloon loafers and Me'er-do-wells, led by old Bleaker, he becomes a victim of drink, loses his job, and eventually ends one of a gang of hoodlums who, like Jimmie and Pete, pass their "red years without working" and "menacing mankind" from the street corners. Mrs. Kelcey's continuous efforts to persuade George to attend prayer meeting with her go for nought, and broken-hearted and despairing over her wayward son, the old lady grows physically and spiritually weaker until finally she dies of a heart attack. When George receives the news that his mother is dying, he is about to fight Blue Billy, one of his hoodlum friends, over a pail of beer.

In this novel Crane reveals that his attitude toward slum life was not altogether as rigid as Maggie implies. The degeneration of George is in no way attributable to the pressures of his social environment; on the contrary, George in the beginning has all the advantages which the Johnson children lacked—a decent home, parental love, and financial security. If Maggie emphasized the power of external social pressure to warp the human personality, then George's Mother shows the destructive power of moral weakness. It rounds out a fictional expression of Crane's view of life in the modern slum world, for Maggie intends to say that environment is a terrible thing that shapes lives regardless, and its
companion novel purposes to show that as great an evil lies in man's failure to assert his will.

This theme one suspects was much more compatible with Crane’s moral convictions than the purely deterministic motif which underlies his first novel. In any case, the author of Maggie is on surer grounds in his second novel, for George’s Mother shows a decided advance in the quality of its artistic handling. There is none of the shrill and desperate melodrama of Maggie, none of the hurried sketching which fills in months and years of the characters’ careers in the first novel. In the quieter and more natural tone of George’s Mother Crane shows for the first time that he is learning something of restraint in tone, a quality which is patently absent in both The Sullivan County Sketches and Maggie.

These qualities seem to depend upon a maturing fictional technique, particularly in respect to method and style. Crane’s whole approach to the story of Mrs. Kelcey and her son indicates that he was becoming aware that the longer fictional form, which is not altogether compatible with his sketchy impressionistic styling and high ironic compression and perhaps not even with his restless, careless, impatient temperament, required a more careful handling than he showed in his first novel. The sheer bulk of material in Maggie is worthy of the expanded treatment of a Zola or Morris, but Crane attempted in a novelette to account convincingly for the development of Maggie Johnson from early childhood to young womanhood, and then to show the progress of her degeneration from her seduction to her tragic suicide. In George’s Mother there is a more careful limitation of chronology and materials. The story focuses upon two characters, Mrs. Kelcey and her son, and it opens only a few weeks in point of time from its denouement.
Even if there is not perfect artistic focus in Crane’s second novel, it is at least more effective than the misplaced emphasis that so weakens the art of Maggie. The tastes and taboos of his time made it inadvisable for a writer, no matter how rebellious against the current canons of "decency" and respectability, to explore fully the psychology of sexual deviation, and thus the development of Maggie is prudishly awry of the novel’s intended objective. No moral stigma was attached, however, to the open treatment of the evils of alcohol, and the writer was left free in George's Mother to center his novel with impunity on the actual degeneration of young George. Yet there is a flaw in this respect, for Crane obviously intended George's Mother to be a study of the conflict between a young man and his doting mother, and though the story focuses, as it should, upon the resulting moral degeneration of the protagonist, Crane failed to explore adequately the nature of his two characters' relationship. The motives for the reactions between the two personalities are little more than suggested and the result, as Grant Knight points out, is that George's Mother is "far from being a patient and conclusive examination of the misunderstanding between two generations..."58

Yet the penetrating analysis of the individual characters in George's Mother points toward the brilliant exploration of the mental processes of Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage. George presents a more complex study in psychology than either Jimmie or Pete, for unlike the young men of Maggie, he is made cognizant of right and wrong, and therefore

58 Knight, p. 115.
the necessity arises for relating the mental conflict that results from his struggle to exercise ethical choices, though the struggles, to be sure, are never very strong. George is too incompetent morally to escape the trap of his own self-delusion. In depicting Kelcey's awed reaction to old Bleeker's fine world of boast their first evening together in the saloon, in the ironic portrayal of Kelcey's dreams of "an indefinite woman" in which he saw himself "icy, self-possessed" while she "was consumed by wild, torrential passion," in chronicling his alternate moods of self-pity and wild self-esteem, Crane builds up if not a memorable character, then at least a memorable type of a weak and ineffectual young man. Like George, Mrs. Kelcey is a victim of self-delusion, for she sees in her son a projection of her better and finer self, "a white and looming king among men," and to the evidences of his feebleness and spiritual incompetency she is as oblivious as George himself. "She became convinced that she was a perfect mother, rearing a perfect son." The skillful psychological touches in the story of George and his mother show that he is able to handle successfully more complex psychological problems than those raised by the limited and brutal minds in Maggie.

One of the most striking characteristics of Maggie is the intensity of its irony, and though the novel shows that Crane was feeling his way toward a mature adaptation of the ironic manner to total organic structure, it shows too that the author had not learned the value of proper restraint. In George's Mother there is less self-conscious striving for ironic effect,

59 Work, p. 44.
60 Ibid., p. 41.
though something of the earlier manner remains in the treatment, for example, of George's daydreaming in one moment of the "indefinite woman and the fragrance of roses that came from her hair," and in the next his violent attraction to Maggie Johnson as she mounts the tenement stairs with "a pail of beer in one hand and a brown-paper parcel under her arm." Generally, though, the ironic situations in the second novel appear less artificially arranged, seeming to arise naturally from normal circumstances and situations.

This more subtle adaptation of the ironic method is manifested in the first really significant appearance of symbolism in Crane's writing. The humble and courageous Mrs. Kelcey has arranged her life so that it revolves around but two things, George and the church; and in contrast her son, egotistical and cowardly, has ordered his life so that it revolves around himself and a trivial series of self-indulgences and dissipations. As Mrs. Kelcey wishes to identify her life with the church, George longs to identify his with the city:

He had begun to look at the great world revolving near to his nose. He had a vast curiosity concerning this city in whose complexities he was buried. It was an impenetrable mystery, this city. It was a blend of many enticing colours. He longed to comprehend it completely, that he might walk understandingly in its greatest marvels, its mightiest march of life, sin. He dreamed of a comprehension whose pay was the admirable attitude of a man of knowledge. He remembered Jones. He could not but admire a man who knew so many bartenders.62

The church and the city symbolize the relationship between George and his

61 Ibid., p. 45.
62 Ibid., p. 43-44.
mother, and Crane anticipates the impending tragedy of their lives when he brings the symbols together in a memorable paragraph of ironic impressionism:

In a dark street the little chapel sat humble between two towering apartment-houses. A red street-lamp stood in front. It threw a marvellous reflection upon the wet pavements. It was like the death-stain of a spirit. Farther up, the brilliant lights of an avenue made a span of gold across the black street. A roar of wheels and a clangour of bells came from this point, interwoven into a sound emblematic of the life of the city. It seemed somehow to affront this solemn and austere little edifice. It suggested an approaching barbaric invasion. The little church, pierced, would die with a fine illimitable scorn for its slayers. 63

In this sort of symbolism George's Mother points directly toward the subtler and more flexible art of The Red Badge of Courage.

Like Maggie, Crane's second novel has been accounted a descendant of continental naturalistic fiction. Ahnebrink points out a similarity between young Kelcey's career in George's Mother and Coupeau's progress toward ruin in L'Assomoir. 64 Coupeau, like George, is a respectable, hard working laborer who gradually comes under the influence of alcohol and shows thereafter a steady moral deterioration. The developments of these stories, quite naturally, include long accounts of drinking parties such as Coupeau's wife gives in L'Assomoir and old Bleecker sponsors in George's Mother. The source for the weak and emotionally unsound George has been found in Turgenev's stories of superfluous men, particularly Tschulkaturin in The Diary of a Superfluous Man, to which, Ahnebrink

63 Ibid., p. 65.
64 Ahnebrink, p. 271.
suggests, Howells and Garland, who knew Trugenev, might have introduced Crane in the early 'nineties.65

But in linking Crane's early studies of slum life with continental naturalism, it has been pointed out, two facts should be borne in mind; first, Crane from all evidence had no more than a highly superficial knowledge of continental literature, and second, all the materials in both Maggie and George's Mother are known to have come within the field of Crane's direct observation. His whole literary program was based upon the guiding principle that direct experience with the life about him was the special material for literature, and insofar as his own experience with the drunkeness of Bowery and tenement life was extensive, it appears unnecessary to provide literary sources for his writings about it, particularly since no parallels in artistic methods or style can be established between his writings and the works suggested as their predecessors.

In all likelihood the author of George's Mother drew upon a fragment of his own biography for the central idea of the novel. George's revolt against the ideals and thinking of the religious Mrs. Kelcey may well have been a dramatization of Crane's own youthful revolt against his mother's stolid Methodism. "I used to like church and prayer meetings when I was a kid but that cooled off..." Crane wrote of his youth,66 and it may have been some debate between him and his mother that the writer had in mind when he depicted Mrs. Kelcey pleading with her recalcitrant son on various occasions to go to church with her. In another autobio-

65 Ibid., p. 328.

graphical passage Crane relates how a "nice long drink out of a nice red bottle" affected his attitude toward his mother's cajoling:

I had been sulkv all morning and now I was perfectly willing to go to a prayer meeting and Mother was tickled to death... I have frequently wondered how much mothers ever know about their sons, after all. She would not have found it much of a joke. 67

If the misunderstanding between mother and son in the novel was suggested by this relationship with his mother, then it is altogether likely that George's drinking career might have been a reflection of the interest in the drink problem current in the early 'nineties that suggested his use of the theme for a novel. As a newspaper man and seeker after experience in the tenement sections, Crane could not have been unaware of the rife debates about the rum evil which was engaging the attention of reformers and social thinkers during the period in which the novel was conceived and written. During Crane's temporary and permanent residence in New York during the years 1891 to 1895, B. O. Flower of the Arena published several articles dealing with various aspects of the problem,

67 Ibid., pp. 692-3. Harvey Wickham, one of Crane's classmates at Claverack College, states that George's Mother "was a book drawn from two relatives of mine. George, whose real name was Frank, was in life a handsome youth much given to dress and leisure; his mother was a more estimable lady and a devout follower of Mrs. Grundy. Crane transposed them to the slums preserving only the characters—a plausible and worthless young man with an indulgent and credulous parent. The only incident which really happened was George's amazing lunch—a charlotte russe and a beer. Frank actually gave this order and consumed it, much to Crane's delight..." (p. 295). George, however, is not a "dandy" as Frank was, and Mrs. Kelcey is not intended as a "devout follower of Mrs. Grundy," a type which Crane particularly disliked and treated in a highly characteristic manner in The Monster and The Third Violet. The ordering of beer and a charlotte russe, incidently, occurs also in Maggie (p. 200).
pointing out in one editorial the debilitating effect of drink upon the moral nature. "... like opium, it weakens when it does not destroy the moral nature; it wipes out the line of moral rectitude from mental discernment. ... It dries up the soul and shrivels the higher impulses and nobler aspirations of its victims." In these matters Crane had doubtless instructed himself through personal observation, but the current debate may have suggested George's career as a timely topic. It seems altogether likely that *George's Mother*, like *Maggie*, is an imaginatively extended treatment of his own experience.

*George's Mother*, not completed until late in 1894, was laid aside for long periods for other work. Besides writing *The Red Badge*, started in April, 1893, and the group of poems that were later collected as *The Black Riders*, begun shortly after his visit with Howells in March, the writer continued his fictional study of East Side slum life in a series of sketches dealing variously with the characters and themes already touched upon in the two novels. By mid-April, 1894—almost exactly a year after he had got *Maggie* off his hands and launched into a strenuous career as reporter, novelist, short-story writer, and poet—Crane had enough stories to begin thinking in terms of a book. "Counting five that

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69 Garland saw them in late March, 1893. See *Roadside Meetings*, p. 193.
are sold, four that are unsold, and six that are mapped," he wrote Garland on April 18, "I have fifteen short stories in my head and out of it. They'll make a book." 70

A few of these stories can be dated specifically. Linson, one of Crane's artist friends, testifies that in 1893 he had "several short sketches in hand which he casually called the Baby Stories," 71 and another contemporary states that he wrote "most of them... in one night" about the time he began *The Red Badge.* 72 The phrasing in both these references implies a considerable number, and Berryman consequently states that Crane wrote a "series," 73 but only three have survived and it is likely that no more were written. 74 "An Experiment in Misery" and "The Man in the Storm" were written in the late winter or early spring upon Garland's suggestion that the young writer "make certain studies of East Side life in New York City," 75 and another sketch, "The Reluctant Voyagers" a negligible tale in the manner of the Sullivan stories, Linson illustrated for him "on spec" in the early spring. The other short tales can be placed less accurately, but "An Eloquence of Grief," a police

70 Stallman (Letters), p. 599.
71 Linson, p. 19.
72 Voisburgh, p. 338.
73 Berryman, p. 69.
74 Linson writes "I had three of them in camp that summer to study for pictures, but nothing came of them" (p. 19). These three were probably "A Dark Brown Dog," "A Great Mistake," and "An Ominous Baby," the only "Baby Sketches," if there were ever more than three, that have survived.
75 Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 197.
court scene about a girl charged with theft, and "The Duel That Was Not Fought," a tale about a Bowery tough's altercation with a Cuban duelist, can be assigned to this period on the basis of their subjects. "A Detail" and "A Desertion" employ the characters of Maggie and George's Mother and were probably written sometime during the composition of the second novel. One of the finest sketches Crane wrote during the spring of 1893, "The Pace of Youth," the only instance in which the writer deals successfully with romantic love, is placed in this group by Beer.76

In the "Baby Sketches" Crane related three adventures of the three-year-old Tommie in Maggie, adumbrating in them the sympathetic and penetrating understanding of child psychology which infuses The Monster and other later stories. In "An Ominous Baby" Tommie, "his baby face covered with scratches and dust as with scars and with powder-smoke," wanders through the tenement in search of adventure, and when he discovers a small boy with a brilliant red fire engine, he advances like a wee battler in a war. The "small barbarian" wrenches the toy from the "pretty child" and disappears down a dark street as into a cavern. "In a Great Mistake" the covetous baby is discovered taking fruit "in a manner of heart shaking greed" from the stand of a fierce Italian vendor, and when the sleeping Italian suddenly awakens and whirls the baby about, he finds clutched in the little fingers a lemon.

More significant than these two studies of a child's barbaric mentality is "A Dark Brown Dog," which touches upon the psychological

76 Beer, p. 102.
relationship of "tyranny and adoration." A small brown dog attaches himself enthusiastically to the babe Tommie, and despite his new master's continuous cuffings and beatings, during which the dog lies upon his back offering "small prayers" with his eyes and ears for forgiveness, he follows the child to the dark interior of his tenement home. Here the two become great comrades, and the child protects the animal against the sadistic beatings of a drunken father, though the boy himself occasionally strikes the contrite and apologetic dog without "what truly could be called a just cause." One night the father hurls the little brown dog from a sixth-floor window of the tenement, and the baby crawls backwards down the long flights of darkened stairs to sit by the broken body of his adoring friend. In this compactly written story Crane employs irony and pity to achieve a genuine pathos, suggesting in the juxtaposition of the emotions of fear and love and sadistic feeling a wide range of complex psychological relationships. Like George's Mother and the earlier novel, the "Baby Sketches" show Crane advancing steadily in psychological understanding of the characters about whom he writes.

"An Experiment in Misery," written during the winter, perhaps in February or early March before George's Mother was started, marks an important turning point in Crane's attitude toward his slum materials. In the ending of the story which the writer provided for the New York Press version published in April, 1894, the narrator states that his point of view has undergone a considerable change because of his experience.

77 Berryman's terms. See p. 69.
in Bowery flop-houses and soup kitchens, and through the thin veneer of the story's objectivity appears clearly the idea that the root of the Bowery's evil is "conceit" and "moral cowardice." But this moralizing, like that of George's Mother, is entirely implicit in the short story, at least in the shorter version, and Crane in no sense violates his canon against patent didacticism in literature. In the fierce compression of its irony and metaphor it is closer to the style of Maggie than to George's Mother. Of a grim Bowery lodging house Crane observes that "from the dark and secret places of the building there suddenly came to his nostrils strange and unspeakable odours, that assailed him like malignant diseases with wings." And again, of the derelict who represents the typical Bowery tramp, he wrote that he had "a mouth which looked as if its lips had just closed with satisfaction over some tender and piteous morsel. He appeared like an assassin steeped in crimes performed awkwardly." The description of the interior of the cheap cot-house shows how skillfully the writer was learning to use the technique of impressionistic verbal painting:

The youth sat on his cot and peered about him. There was a gas-jet in a distant part of the room, that burned a small flickering orange-hued flame. It caused vast masses of tumbled shadows in all parts of the place, save where, immediately about it, there was a little grey haze. As the young man's eyes became used to the darkness, he could see upon the cots that thickly littered the floor the forms of men sprawled out, lying in death-like silence, or heaving and snoring with tremendous effort, like stabbed fish.

78 Stallman, p. 31.
80 Ibid., p. 24.
81 Ibid., p. 25.
A companion piece, "The Men in the Storm," is more openly sympathetic with the plight of the poor than any other story. In quick, impressionistic strokes the writer paints a street scene of late afternoon crowds hurrying through the blizzard to hot dinners and contrasts with them the bleak huddle of outcasts standing before the closed doors of a cheap lodging house in the bitter gusts of wind and sleet waiting for a place to go that is warm and light. Across the way, from the brilliantly lighted window of a dry-goods shop, a fashionably dressed man with a Prince of Wales beard looks down at the mob "in an attitude of magnificent reflection." "From below, there was denoted a supreme complacence in him. It seemed that the sight operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own delightful environment."  

Like George's Mother, "The Men in the Storm" makes use of symbolism, the closed door of the lodging house representing the barrier which holds the derelicts from the blessings of society, the merciless blizzard beating down upon the cowed heads of the men symbolizing the social buffettings to which they are subjected, and the street lamp struggling to illuminate the scene emblematizing the ineffectualness of social reform.  

Crane's sympathetic view of the social conditions in the slums, it should be remembered, was not altogether condemnatory of society, and it may be significant that he recognizes in "The Men in the Storm" two distinct classes of social outcasts—the "professional strays," and those "who, in time of ill-fortune, do not habitually turn to rail at the state of society."  

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82 Ibid., p. 43.
83 Stallman points out these symbols (p. 12).
84 Work, p. 40.
Other Bowery sketches draw upon character types which appear in the two novels. The Bowery tough, Patsy Tulligan, "who was not as wise as seven owls," but whose "courage could throw a shadow as long as the steeple of a cathedral," is a counterpart of Jimmie, Pete, and Blue Billy in the novels, and Crane tries in "The Duel That Was Not Fought" to capitalize upon the incongruity of matching this Irish streetbrawler against a delicate little Cuban sword fighter who would have spitted the redoubtable Patsy had not a policeman intervened before the two had been provided with swords. In "A Desertion" the better part of Maggie finds a counterpart in the factory girl Nell, who makes a comfortable home for her father in the tenements and carefully protects herself, with the help of her father, against the advances of men like Pete and Jimmie. The story ends on a carefully contrived note of ambiguity. As Nell returns from work one evening she passes a knot of tenants predicting her downfall, and as she goes about preparing her father's supper, chatting about the values of his protection, she suddenly discovers that he has died in his chair at the table. Thus with the prediction of the tenement gossips hanging in the air at the very moment Nell loses a chief source of her moral strength, the impact of the story occurs somewhere beyond its actual end.

This technique, though, Crane uses once only, for the other stories are straightforward accounts of rather commonplace New York scenes and incidents. In "A Detail" a courageous old lady reminiscent of Mrs. Kelcey walks the streets deferentially but firmly asking for work, and in "An Eloquence of Grief" a young woman charged with theft collapses protesting her innocence when a police court judge tells her that she will be held for trial. "The Silver Pageant," an odd little fantasy on artistic life,
relates how Gaunt, a painter who has just returned from Paris to New York, sits around apathetically with the "shadow of his thoughts in his eyes... watching that silver pageant across the sea." He is thought to be mad; but one day he rushes with wild excitement into a friend's studio, announces that he is going to paint a picture, and hurries out again to his own studio. When his friends arrive just behind him, they find him dead on the floor, with "a little grey mist before his eyes."

More successful than this is the whimsical little story about the elopement of a merry-go-round owner's daughter with her father's ticket-taker, notable as the only story Crane ever wrote which successfully treats romantic love. This Crane manages in "The Pace of Youth" because the courtship of the two young people is carried on through glances and signs rather than by dialogue, the mechanics of the story effecting in this way a naturalness which Crane was never able to achieve in the dialogue patterns of his later love stories. The quiet contrast between conservative and circumspect age and impetuous, hopeful youth in the elopement sequence lends the story a genuine pathos:

He /the father, in a carriage chasing the eloper/ began to feel impotent; his whole expedition was a tottering of an old man upon a trail of birds. A sense of age made him choke again with wrath. That other vehicle, that was youth, with youth's pace; it was swift-flying with the hope of dreams. He began to comprehend those two children ahead of him, and he knew a sudden and strange awe, because he understood the power of their young blood, the power to fly strongly into the future and feel and hope again, even at that time when his bones must be laid in the earth. 85

The well-sustained and delicate tone of this natural and felicitously told story makes it one of Crane's outstanding achievements in 1893.

85 Ibid., p. 73.
Many of these stories are ephemeral enough as literature, some of them being mere sketches or isolated scenes. But to the student of Crane, they have significance, for they show that the writer was rapidly becoming a master of the method and style which characterizes his more important work. *Maggie, George's Mother,* and the stories reveal a maturing sense of tone, strained and uncontrolled in the first novel, quieter and more relaxed in the second, and in such stories as "The Face of Youth" quite natural and artistically useful. Crane's impressionistic technique, too, becomes less an exotic literary trick, more maturely a manner for serious artistic expression. Even in such failures as "The Reluctant Voyagers," an artistic throwback to the Sullivan stories in which it is related how two squabbling friends are forced on a hundred-mile voyage in their bathing suits, there is a noticeable increase in fluency and naturalness of style, though the subject is negligible and the farcical humor infelicitous. Though the conscious searching for the pat simile, the striking and original metaphor shows through Crane's style from the beginning to the end of his career, the work after *Maggie* nevertheless shows a progressive effort on the writer's part to subordinate stylistic characteristics to the total artistic effect. Consequently, the sequence of stories after the first novel shows an increasing fluidity of execution and generally decreasing signs of stylistic self-consciousness.
CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF LITERATURE: THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE: 1893

In The Red Badge of Courage Crane's achievements as a stylist, a psychologist, and as a verbal impressionist came to focus. Begun late in March, 1893, on the heels of the bitter disappointment over the indifferent reception of Maggie, the novel was originally conceived outside the framework of Crane's esthetic system. "I deliberately started in to do a pot-boiler," he told his friend Senger, "something that would take the boarding-school element—you know the kind. Well, I got interested in the thing in spite of myself, and I couldn't, I couldn't! I had to do it my own way!" Yet no manner of conscientious attention to the execution of The Red Badge could reconcile it with Crane's dictum that literature grows out of personal experience, and in this respect the novel stands as the one great paradox in his practice of literature. It stands on the one hand as his supreme achievement in the longer fictional form and on the other as the outstanding violation of his aesthetic. William Dean Howells, knowing and approving the principles which Crane had set up as guides for his literary career, deplored this artistic defection and for this reason regarded The Red Badge as his worst book:

When it came to The Red Badge of Courage, where he took leave of these simple aesthetics and lost himself in a whirl of wild guesses at the fact from the ground of insufficient evidence, he made the failure which formed the break between his first and second manner.

1 Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 204.

Crane himself was uneasy about the artistic validity of the novel, and it was the worrying knowledge that he had betrayed his own literary dicta that doubtless led him into contradictory and ineffectual defenses of it. "... I wrote intuitively; for the Cranes were a family of fighters in the old days, and in the Revolution every member did his duty," he rationalized to John Northern Hilliard in 1897, but this defense was pointed to those critics who like Howells attempted to judge the novel primarily as a documentation of war. English criticism was more astute than American, and in approving the more penetrating judgment of the British reviews, Crane was on sounder grounds of defense. "... the big reviews," he wrote Hilliard in the same letter, "praise it for just what I intended it to be, a psychological portrayal of fear."

The Red Badge of Courage is in reality only superficially a novel about war. Fundamentally it is no different from Maggie and George's Mother, for like these two novels it is basically a study of human nature under stress. Whether the pressure source is an unjust economy, a biased social structure, a psychological weakness, an indifferent universe, or a horrifying war, it is in the last analysis relatively unimportant in Crane's writing. The pressure source is merely the catalyst which exposes the strengths and weaknesses of human nature, the courage, capacity for sacrifice, moral cowardice, the propensity for self-delusion, and the

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3 Stallman (Letters), p. 673.
4 Stallman (Letters), p. 672.
debilitating egocentricity that man brings to bear against the goad of life. War stands in the same relation to *The Red Badge* as the tenement house and Mrs. Johnson stand to *Maggie* or as drink and Mrs. Kelcey stand to *George's Mother*. It is the circumstance under which the soul of Henry Fleming is revealed, and in this sense *The Red Badge* is not a novel about war, but an account of how a young man, a recruit to life as well as to war, loses himself and then, through the baptism of his own experience, finds himself.

The real source of *The Red Badge* is what Crane discovered about "unvarnished human nature" in the early days of his New York residence. The mystery of the novel lies not in the question of how Crane learned enough about war without even smelling "the powder of a sham battle" to write *The Red Badge*, but in the question of how one so young assimilated in so short a time enough knowledge of life to construct the psychology of a Henry Fleming. It is not quite accurate to say with Howells and all the other critics between him and Robert E. Spiller in *The Literary History of the United States* that Crane sprang into life "fully armed," for *The Sullivan County Sketches* show that Crane's beginnings were sufficiently crude and humble, but the mystery, apparently as unresolvable as any which concerns special capacities of abilities, is how Crane armed himself so rapidly and so effectively. However this may be, he brought to the composition of the novel a formidable array of literary arms which included a fresh, hard, flashing style, a practiced method and form, and above all a penetrating knowledge of human nature.

By discarding the idea of writing a pot-boiler and resolving to do it his own way Crane brought *The Red Badge of Courage* more nearly in line
with his theory that literature springs from a direct experience with life, for his significant literary capital was to be not the incident and adventure of war but his own knowledge, gathered in Bowery flop-houses, from street-brawls, and even from football games, of the mind under stress. In selecting war as a setting, Crane's problem with sources, as the extant evidence clearly indicates, was to determine how human nature as he already understood it reacted under a specific condition, and since the war literature of his day was limited somewhat to the recounting of the heroic incident and the thrilling adventure, he often expressed impatience with those writers whom he consulted for specific information. Zola's *La Débâcle*, which is often cited as a source, he started and threw aside, affirming to Acton Davies that he could do better. He borrowed a certain Mrs. Armstrong's copies of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (1884) and returned them on April 2, 1893 with a note expressing his disappointment with them:

Thank you very much for letting me keep these so long. I have spent ten nights writing a story of the war on my own responsibility but I am not sure that my facts are real and the books won't tell me what I want to know so I must do it all over again, I guess.

The superficial facts were doubtless real enough, but Crane had in mind another kind of fact—the fact of specific psychological reaction to the specific situation of war. Linson wrote:

In the spring of '93 Crane used to spend hours in my place rummaging through old periodicals, poring over the Civil War articles. . . . He did express some

5 Berryman, p. 66.
6 Stallman (Letters), p. 593.
impatience with the writer, I remember. "I wonder that some of those fellows don't tell how they felt in those scraps. They spout enough of what they did, but they're as emotionless as rocks." 7

Except for the brief period in which he entertained the idea of writing a traditional fin de siècle war story, Crane had in mind from the beginning that The Red Badge was to be a study of Private Henry Fleming's painful development to manhood.

For the war material, however, Crane gathered whatever facts he needed to supplement his own imaginative impressionism, and much of the study of The Red Badge within the past twenty years has been concerned with the literature to which the novel is indebted for its various scenes and incidents. Crane himself has left in the record an account of his research for the war episodes, and it is noteworthy that his statements about the sources always emphasize the psychological aspects of the soldier rather than the appearance and technique of war. "I believe that I got my sense of the rage of conflict on the football field," he wrote in 1897, 8 a statement which is perhaps only apparently facetious, for examination reveals that the dominant emotion of Crane's soldier in battle is an acute and desperate rage. R. G. Vosburgh, who was with Crane a great deal during the gestation period of The Red Badge, comments upon his reaction to newspaper accounts of football games:

7 Linson, p. 19. In Friday Nights (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1922), p. 213, Edward Garnett reports that Crane complained of the same thing after his trip to Virginia in the summer of 1893 to question veterans about the war. "He described that on questioning Veterans... about their feelings, he could get nothing out of them but one thing, viz., 'we just went there and did so and so.'"

8 Stallman (Letters), p. 673.
War and fighting were always deeply interesting to him. The football articles in the newspapers were an especial pleasure. "Ah!" he would say after reading one of them, "that's great, that's bully, that's like war!"

But Crane's interest in war can be traced almost to his babyhood. Beer relates that his favorite childhood pastime was the marshalling about of tin soldiers, and that he spent many pre-school age hours poring over the illustrations of the Civil War in the Century Magazine. Besides baseball his only real interest during his college years was in the student battalion at Claverack College, where he was a student from 1888 to 1890. He rose to the rank of first lieutenant during his first year, acquiring enough of the officer's mannerisms, a classmate recalls, to have a "perfectly hem-like attitude toward the rank and file."

The H. R. I. (formerly Claverack College) was a military academy, equipped by the government with antique rifles in furtherance of some naive plan of preparedness, and that touch of personal experience so essential to the birth of a great idea must have come to Crane through his connection with Claverack's student battalion.

There may be another connection between The Red Badge and the Hudson River Institute. One student has pointed out that some of the incidents in the novel may have originated in the war tales of a certain General Van Petten, a Civil War veteran who taught elocution at the Institute and who entertained the students assigned to his table in the dining hall with stories of the rout of the 34th New York regiment at the battle of

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9 Vosburgh, p. 338.
10 Beer, p. 47.
11 Wickham, p. 294.
12 Ibid., p. 293.
Antietam in 1862. As a chaplain with the regiment, Van Petten was probably an eyewitness to the disastrous rout of the New Yorkers when they were cut off from its main force and lost half their men under a withering rebel fire. The old soldier's story of the panicky flight that followed may have suggested the routs depicted in Crane's novel.13

The talk of General Van Petten probably added to the store of war imagery that Crane accumulated from the talk of others. His brother William was a student of the Civil War and a noted authority among his college friends on the strategy of the battle of Chancellorsville, the particular military engagement Crane had in mind in the writing of The Red Badge.14 Doubtless, some of the incidents and episodes stored up from their talk found their way into the novel.

Various literary sources perhaps contributed to The Red Badge, particularly Wilbur F. Hinman's Corporal Si Klegg and his "Pard" and various other realistic accounts in the Century's Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. In the light of Crane's great concern for getting as close as possible to the reality of war during the composition of The Red Badge, it seems very likely that he read Hinman's novel, a very popular15


14 In a later story, "The Veteran," Henry Fleming appears as an old man, recounting his experiences at the battle of Chancellorsville.

15 In its second edition by 1890, the book had sold more than twenty-six thousand copies (Pratt, p. 285).
fictionalized account of a raw recruit's experience in the Civil War.

Hinman based Corporal Si Klegg upon his own experience as a lieutenant colonel in the 65th Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry, and his concern with presenting war realistically, particularly the attitudes of the common soldiers, accounts for the similarity in the two writers' attitudes toward their materials. The hero of Hinman's book, Si Klegg, is as prone as Henry Fleming to self-dramatization. Like Henry, he indulges in much soul-searching before he goes into his first battle: "... Si lay with his eyes wide open, looking up at the stars, and wondering how he would act when he got into the battle."16 And unlike most of the accounts Crane heard or saw, Corporal Si Klegg deals with the psychology of soldiers, not merely with their physical acts:

He [Si] was simply going through the struggle, that every soldier experienced, between his mental and physical natures. The instinct of the latter at such a time—and what old soldier does not know it?—was to seek a place of safety, without a moment's delay. To fully subdue this feeling by the power of the will was not, in most cases, as easy a matter as might be imagined by those who have never been called upon to "face the music." Some there were who never could do it.17

This was precisely the kind of information Crane's research was trying to uncover, and considering the close resemblance between Si's and Henry's reactions to the terrors of battle, it seems likely that Crane may have drawn upon Hinman's character for much of the psychological framework of his own hero.

16 Wilbur F. Hinman, Corporal Si Klegg and his "Pard" (Cleveland: N. G. Hamilton, 1890), p. 395.
17 Ibid., p. 398.
Pratt points out a number of other similarities and parallels between the two books. Both heroes suffer through post-enlistment scenes with their mothers, both distinguish themselves by seizing the enemy's flag in battle, both learn that they have been praised by their officers for outstanding bravery, both have as friends tall soldiers of considerable sang-froid. But such incidents are related, too, in various accounts in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, which, according to Crane's and others' testimony, the young writer studied in the early stages of the novel's composition. Warren Goss's "Recollections of a Private," a serial account of actual war experience in the Century series, accounts for most of the incidents in the opening sections of The Red Badge. Both accounts have farewell scenes with mothers and friends, and both relate the young soldier's tendency to overload himself with supplies and equipment. One paragraph of Goss's narrative corresponds closely to an early paragraph in The Red Badge:

... we started for Washington, by rail and boat, and the following morning we took breakfast in Phily, where we were attended by matrons and maidens, who waited upon us with thoughtful tenderness, as if they had been our own mothers and sweethearts. The recruit in Crane's novel has the same experience:

On the way to Washington his spirit had soared. The regiment was fed and caressed at station after station until the youth had believed that he must be a hero. There was a lavish expenditure of bread and cold meats,

18 Pratt points out all of these parallels, (pp. 285 ff.).

coffee, and pickles and cheese. As he basked in the
smiles of the girls and was patted and complimented by
the old men, he had felt growing within him the strength
to do mighty deeds of arms.20

Another writer for the Century series, David L. Thompson, may have
contributed to, or at least supported, Crane's realistic attitude toward
the reaction of the common soldier in combat:

We heard all through the war that the army "was eager
to be led against the enemy." It must have been so, for
truthful correspondents said so, and editors confirmed
it. But when you came to hunt for this particular itch,
it was always the next regiment that had it. The truth
is when bullets are whacking against tree-trunks and
solid shot are cracking skulls like eggshells, the
consuming passion in the breast of the average man
is to get out of the way. Between the physical fear
of going forward and the moral fear of turning back,
there is a predicament of exceptional awkwardness from
which a hidden hole in the ground would be a wonderfully
welcome outlet.21

Something of the same attitude toward the reaction of the soldier
under fire appears in Tolstoy's Sebastopol, a novel which Crane knew as
early as his student days at Lafayette.22 In this novel Crane may have
found in the ironic attitude toward human weaknesses under the stress
of war some suggestions for his depiction of Fleming, for Tolstoy shows
that beneath the outward sang-froid, prompted by vanity and the desire
for self-glorification, there is a great and over-powering fear. The
officer Kalouguine, very proud of his reputation as a brave man, suffers

20 Work, I, 28.

21 Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, II (New York: Century,
1884), 662. Crane saw the original magazines in Linson's studio, but he
also borrowed the bound volumes printed under this title from a Mrs.
Armstrong. See Linson, p. 19 and Berryman, p. 66.

22 Beer, 54.
something of the same mental anguish as Henry in his efforts to keep his
secret fear hidden from his fellow soldiers:

... a mortar-bomb rising in the air seemed to fly straight for his breast. Seized by a sudden terror, he rushed on several steps and threw himself down. When the bomb had burst some distance off he was very angry with himself and got up. He looked around to see if any one had noticed him lying down. . . .23

Kalouguine's difficulty in overcoming his fear is almost as great as
Henry's, and in Tolstoy's depiction of this officer, there is the same
ironic detachment that characterizes so much of The Red Badge:

... he breathed with difficulty; he was bathed with sweat, and he was astonished that he made no effort to overcome his fright. Suddenly, at the sound of a step which approached, he quickly straightened up, raised his head, clinked his sabre with a swagger and lessened his pace.24

If it may be judged from Crane's avowed respect for Tolstoy it is likely
that the Russian novel had some bearing upon the attitude toward fear in
battle which appears in The Red Badge, though it should be observed that
no conclusive parallels, either in style or narrative incident, can be
drawn between the two books.25

Even though Crane is known to have thrown Zola's La Débâcle aside
after reading the first few pages, it is often mentioned in connection

24 Ibid., p. 86.
25 Ahnabrink points out resemblances in the two writers' premonition
of death (p. 355) and in the comparisons of the peaceful country side with
slaughter on the battlefield (p. 356). This student regards The Red Badge
as deterministic, and thus makes a connection between Crane's and Tolstoy's
view of man as devoid of free will (p. 354)
with The Red Badge. As in some of the other realistic accounts of war which Crane may have seen, there are similar details, such as the dropping of knapsacks, the depiction of armies in bivouac in the opening scenes, and the use of the sun’s breaking through clouds as a symbol of hope.  

It is in the general plan and design of La Débâcle, however, that the book more closely resembles Crane’s novel, and it may be suggested that this, more than the specific narrative incidents, influenced The Red Badge in some respect. An overall view of La Débâcle Crane may have got in a review of the novel in the New York Tribune in the summer of 1892 which provides a remarkable statement of the aims, method, and point of view which characterize The Red Badge of Courage:

Since no one is more painstaking than M. Zola in collecting and verifying the facts employed in his books, it is fair to assume that the representations in La Débâcle are trustworthy and not exaggerated. That they agree in the main with historical chronicles is self-evident, the one distinction between him and contemporary French historians being that he makes no effort to soften anything, but aims at presenting the truth of the terrible events he describes, as he has been able to ascertain it. It is the war with Germany which he treats here; not, of course, in detail, but upon large lines, marked by well-chosen pictures of particular episodes, intended to emphasize the chief causes of disaster. . . . In making his witnesses private soldiers or non-commissioned officers, he has clearly taken a leap from Tolstoy’s "Peace and War". . . . The plan is indeed a good one, his purpose being to show what the experiences and sufferings of the rank-and-file really were. . . .

The scene opens in a camp of raw troops near Mulhausen. The men are still full of the blind confidence which was expressed in the popular cry, "To the Rhine!" Yet nobody knew the plans of the generals, and they did not appear very clear about them themselves. Then came rumors of encounters, victories, defeats. Next came a confused series of marches, first in advance, then in retreat. From day to day the

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26 See Ahnebrink’s discussion of these parallels (pp. 264–69).
soldiers became more bewildered and irritated. . . . The heavy marching began to demoralize the young troops. . . . As to the individuals in the story, they are little more than pegs to hang descriptions upon. . . . 27

Crane's novel resembles this description in several important particulars. The Red Badge opens with a depiction of the armies at rest, with soldiers waiting impatiently for orders to move and expressing doubts as to the competence of their generals. This sense of uncertainty, balanced against the mood of wild expectancy, is an integral part of the whole design of The Red Badge. The confused marching to and fro, the chaotic ordering and counter-ordering heightens the ominous business of war and furnishes an artistic foil to the disturbed mind of the young recruit whose doubts about his competency as a soldier are as strong as his sense of the futility of military maneuvering. Crane's basic purpose is precisely that which the reviewer attributes to Zola—"to show what the experiences and sufferings of the rank-and-file really were," and the young writer, if the article suggested a war story to him, may have seen here a chance to allegorise in it a young man's progress to spiritual maturity.

Crane no doubt read this review, for it appeared in the issue of the Tribune which carried his sketch "The Broken-Down Van." 28 It was during this period, it will be remembered, that Crane's first work, The Sullivan County Sketches and his Asbury Park sketches, were appearing for the first time in print, and the writer was doubtless searching about for materials for a "pot boiler" to bolster his almost nonexistent income. The popularity

28 Ibid., p. 8.
of Zola's novel, Crane's own interest in war, and his own need for a popular success in all likelihood drew this review to his attention.

If Zola suggested the broad outlines for The Red Badge, the method and approach to the telling of a war story may have been in some ways suggested by the battle scenes in Kipling's The Light That Failed and Ambrose Bierce's Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, both of which Crane read in the very early 'nineties. A student of Bierce has noted that most of the Tales of Soldiers and Civilians are written "from the viewpoint of the individual sufferer in war," and "that on the reportorial level... they are the best minor pictures of modern warfare up to their time." When Crane chose to depict a scene in realistic detail, something he rarely did, his technique resembles closely the reportorial method of Bierce.

In his story "Chickamauga" Bierce describes with almost naturalistic precision the corpse of a woman:

There, conspicuous in the light of the conflagration, lay the dead body of a woman—the white face turned upward, the hands thrown out and clutched full of grass, the clothing deranged, the long dark hair in tangles and full of clotted blood. The greater part of the forehead was torn away, and from the jagged hole the brain protruded, overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the work of a shell.

29 Scott C. Osborn, in his "Stephen Crane's Imagery: Pasted Like a Wafer," American Literature, XXIII (November, 1951), 363, suggests that the famous line in The Red Badge was taken from The Light That Failed. Crane's admiration for Bierce was great. "Read Bierce's 'Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,'" he admonished Robert Davis in 1896. "Nothing better exists. That story contains everything" (Robert H. Davis, "Introduction," The Work of Stephen Crane, II, xx). The Sullivan County Sketches show that Crane knew Bierce before 1892.


For the special pointing of the horror Henry feels in coming face to face with a corpse in the forest retreat, Crane uses virtually the same technique:

He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a column-like tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had 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 grey skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of bundle along the upper lip.32

Such passages as these reflect strongly the attitude and method of the European naturalists, but since Crane evidently studied Bierce more closely than Zola, he in all likelihood took hints for depicting the gruesome from his American contemporary.

In The Light That Failed Kipling pointed the way for treating war impressionistically, even though, like Crane, his attitude was thoroughly realistic.33 Like the American writer, Kipling generalizes his battle scenes, painting them in broad strokes and bringing to focus only those events which create the effect of wild and chaotic struggle:

The wounded, who knew that they had but a few hours more to live, caught at the enemy’s feet and brought them down, or staggering to a discarded rifle, fired blindly into the scuffle that raged in the center of the square. Dick was conscious that somebody had cut him violently across his helmet, that he had fired his revolver into a black, foam-flecked face which forthwith ceased to bear any resemblance to a face...34

32 Work, p. 83.

33 Kipling’s hero is an impressionist painter who delivers in one place a bitter oration against those who demanded an idealized portrait of a combat soldier (The Light That Failed, pp. 55-56).

34 The Light That Failed, p. 30.
This technique is evident in all the descriptions of the battle scenes in Kipling's novel, and though Crane had thoroughly mastered the technique of literary impressionism before he began his own novel the portrayal of war in *The Light That Failed* may have suggested to him something of the application of the method to the depiction of battle scenes in *The Red Badge*.

The difficulty with establishing the origins of Crane's war novel lies in the fact that any number of sources could have served, and probably did serve him in some way or another. But placing its composition against the background of his interests, experience, and literary intentions at the time he conceived the story, it is easy enough to conjecture the story's origins. Crane's fascination with the subject of war, which extended far back into his childhood, was stimulated in the very early 'nineties by the popularity of Zola's *La Débâcle*. Bitterly disappointed by the reception accorded *Maggie* in the early spring of 1893, and nearly destitute from his year of suffering and privation in bohemian New York, he resolved to write a popular war story somewhat in the vein of *La Débâcle*, and began late in March his research in the *Century* series for incidents and facts. As his interest in the project grew, he cast aside the idea of making his story a "pot boiler" and began seriously to draw upon his resources as an artist. The emphasis was shifted from a narrative to a psychological and, ultimately, ethical level, and Crane thus drew heavily upon the knowledge of life acquired in the New York East Side. Henry Fleming began to take shape as an extension of George, Jimmie, and Pete, differing notably from these characters in his strength of will and sensitivity of conscience. Meanwhile, Crane's research for the fact of war led him to Himman's *Si Kleng* and other realistic accounts of the
war. Supplementing this matter with his reading of Bierce, Kipling, with his military experience at Claverack College and possibly with the war tales of his brother William and General Van Petten, he turned his facts into metaphor and impressionism.

Sometime early in the spring of 1893 Crane's first draft was finished...he took it to Garland, who was fairly taken "captive" by the first sentence, a description of "a vast army in camp on one side of the river, confronting with its thousands of eyes a similar monster on the opposite bank." This version Crane reworked at least once, for the copy which Garland retrieved from the typist in February, 1894, did not have this metaphor. This manuscript Crane submitted to McClure's Monthly Magazine late the same month, but by August, 1894, no move had been made to publish it:

McClure was a Beast about the war novel and that has been the thing that put me in one of the ditches. He kept it for six months until I was nearly mad. Oh, yes, he was going to use it, but finally I took it to Bachellers. They use it in January in a shortened form.

Bacheller cut the original fifty-five thousand words to eighteen thousand by eliminating all the background materials such as the flashback.

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35 Garland, "Stephen Crane as I Knew Him," p. 498. Garland states that he saw this version "one clear winter's day 1893," but Crane's letter to Mrs. Armstrong shows that The Red Badge was not started until late March. See Stallman (Letters), p. 593.

36 Garland, "Stephen Crane as I Knew Him," p. 505. Two manuscripts of The Red Badge are extant, a short version, i.e., a fragment of one draft, and the final handwritten copy from which, evidently, it was published in book form.

37 Stallman (Letters), p. 604. See also Stallman, pp. 201-24.
to Henry's enlistment and the letter-returning scene, so that The Red Badge became, as one student has put it, "just a tough tale of what one man felt and thought and did." In this form it appeared in print for the first time in the Philadelphia Press as a serial in the first week of December, 1894, and on the basis of its immediate popularity, Ripley Hitchcock bought the war novel for publication in its original length; it appeared in book form for the first time the following year. It is in this version that the full significance of Henry Fleming's moral crisis is revealed.

Henry is scarcely more impressive as a literary figure than Jimmie, Pete, or George Kelcey. "He is getting to be quite a character now," Crane remarked, referring to the hero of The Red Badge about the time of the dinner with Howells, but character creation in the usual sense, the portrayal of the unique qualities of an imagined personality, Crane never very successfully managed. Henry, like Crane's other creations, is an Everyman whose psychic experience is more or less universal. He embodies psychological concepts, not unique personality traits, and for this reason much of Henry Fleming is discernible in the case histories of his forerunners, Jimmie, Pete, George, and to a certain degree, even in the little man of the Sullivan stories. All, at times, assume ridiculous egotistical postures against the world, all are victims of self-delusion, all are inclined to self-pity, and all rationalize their conduct to their


39 Willis Johnson, p. 289.
own satisfaction. But in one important respect Henry is distinguishable from the young men in the preceding novels: he has a conscience, and this lends him a sense of values and the capacity for brooding, if not always accurate self-criticism. Despite his innate weaknesses he has in this quality the means to his salvation, and where George Kelcey and Pete lead themselves in their blindness to self-destruction, Henry moves painfully to a realization of his own worth and dignity.

The different stages in Fleming's moral death and rebirth control the structure of the novel. At first Henry is confident that he is destined to play the part of the heroic soldier in Homeric movements, but with the rumor that his regiment is about to move into battle, "some new thoughts" come to him. "He tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle." Eventually "a little panic fear" grows in his mind, and at last he furtively questions Jim Conklin. When this competent and steady soldier confesses that under certain circumstances he might run in a battle, the youth is reassured. But this assurance is short-lived. His doubts return in two-fold intensity, and at the time he enters the battle his mental anguish has become almost intolerable. There is a moment of supreme elation and self-satisfaction when he slowly becomes aware after the fight that he has stood his ground, but when the rebels unexpectedly counter-attack, Fleming finds himself suddenly in full and open flight, oblivious to everything but a wild and uncontrollable desire to save himself from the "onslaught of redoubtable dragons." When he at last gains control of his churning mind, his

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40 Work I, 30.
outlook has completely changed. Now he sees that those responsible for
the prosecution of the war are mad and that those who would stay to meet
the enemy merely to be destroyed have no sense of military economy, since
once destroyed they can no longer return to fight again.

With this new point of view Henry finds it easy to rationalize his
behavior. He discovers that it is not natural to expose oneself to
danger, and the proof of this he finds in the scampering of a squirrel
from his tossed pine cone. But this rationalization is momentary, for
the humble and courageous tattered man joins him to recall unintentionally
to him the shame of his desertion and the whole elaborate structure of
his self-delusion topples. His anger, shame, and self-contempt are
enormously intensified by his meeting with the mortally wounded Jim
Conklin, and with the tall soldier's violent and impressive death Fleming's
frustration and impotent rage reach a climax.

Later, when he sees a column of infantry moving briskly into the
battle area, Fleming experiences a poignant longing to be of their kind:

He wondered what those men had eaten, that they could
be in such haste to force their way to grim chances of
death. As he watched, his envy grew until he thought
that he wished to change lives with one of them. He
would have liked to use a tremendous force, he said;
throw off himself and become better.41

But the deep moral promptings of his conscience are immediately vitiated
by delusions of grandeur:

Swift pictures of himself, apart, yet in himself came
to him—a blue desperate figure leading lurid charges
with one knee forward and a broken blade high—a blue

\[41\text{Ibid., p. 98.}\]
determined figure standing before a crimson and steel assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all. He thought of the magnificent pathos of his dead body. \(^2\)

He is torn between self-assertion and the despicable hope that his vindication will come about through the flight of his whole regiment in the next battle. But gradually his rationalizations and illusions begin to work upon his wounded soul like a drug, and at last his self-hate and deep moral humiliation give way to self-pride and arrogance. "His panting agonies of the past he put out of his sight." \(^3\) Since his ignoble flight had not been discovered, he saw no reason to shrink before the glance of his comrades. "He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man." \(^4\)

Though he can now feel the deepest scorn for his comrades whom he has seen run from battle, his deep-seated and almost obliterated self-contempt occasionally sends to his consciousness flashes of shame and humiliation. "Well, don't we fight like the devil? Don't we do all that men can?" he cries out hotly once when the regiment has been criticized by its officers and is immediately dumbfounded when he realizes that these words have come from his lips, he who is worthy only of a "slang name." \(^5\) With the advance of the enemy for the second engagement, though, the youth's buried and smoldering self-contempt suddenly bursts forth in a wild and unreasoning rage. Now all his self-hatred is projected

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 105-6.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 106.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 135.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 141.
outwardly to the enemy, whom he sees to be responsible for all his agony.

"The tormentors were flies sucking insolently at his blood, and he thought
that he would have given his life for a revenge. . . ." 46 He saw clearly
now that it was not the world which was against him, merely the enemy:

Yesterday, when he had imagined the universe to be
against him, he had hated it, little gods and big gods;
to-day he hated the army of the foe with the same great
hatred. He was not going to be badgered of his life like
kitten chased boys, he said. It was not well to drive men
into final corners; at those moments they could all develop
teeth and claws. 47

In the battle that follows this change of attitude, Henry fights with
all the fury of a man possessed, and in so doing takes his first step
toward moral absolution:

Regarding it, he saw that it was fine, wild, and, in some
ways, easy. 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. 48

His fear mastered through the sublimation of his self-hate into hate for
the enemy, Fleming is able to account for himself well, even heroically,
in subsequent engagements. "His mind was undergoing a subtle change. . . .
At last he was enabled to more closely comprehend himself and circumstance." 49
Momentarily the ghosts of his disgraceful flight, his brutal desertion of
the tattered man, wounded and weary with pain, in the field return to
haunt him, but gradually he musters the strength to lay them:

46 Ibid., pp. 146-47.
47 Ibid., p. 146.
48 Ibid., p. 150.
49 Ibid., pp. 196-97.
And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them.

With this conviction came a store of assurance. He felt a quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides, wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.

Although Crane's statement that The Red Badge is a psychological study of fear is more pertinent than Howells's evident assumption that it is essentially a war story, his pronouncement is too succinct to be altogether accurate. Fear is too limiting, for it is not only Henry Fleming's war-fright, but all the emotions and attitudes—the self-doubts, arrogance, self-pity, remorse, shame, moral humiliation, self-contempt, and animal rage—engendered by the stress of war that are under study. Henry's fear unlocks and sets his real mind into motion, forces it into the open, as it were, so that his moral death and rebirth are shown in close and compact sequence. As a documentary study of fear The Red Badge is relatively insignificant. Its real value lies in its penetrating analysis of a mind struggling through various emotions toward an assertion in action of the moral consciousness.

The continuous contrasting of Henry's mixed emotions is only one of the threads in the structural fabric of The Red Badge. In no other story has Crane so carefully worked out themes and anti-themes and played them one against the other so carefully as in his account of Henry Fleming. The underlying moralism of Maggie and George's Mother takes expression in

50 Ibid., p. 199.
The Red Badge in a weave of complex religious symbolism in which Henry stands first as the anti-moral agent in contrast to the spiritually great Jim Conklin and then, through his absolution, partly brought about by the death of the tall Christ-like Conklin, as a regenerated moral force. The forest is to the youth a religious sanctuary, where he flees to rid himself of the shame of having lost his spiritual manhood, and here he goes "from obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity."  

At length he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine needles were a gently brown carpet. There was a religious half light.  

Religious ritual is continuously suggested in the metaphors and the Biblical phrasing:

The trees began softly to sing a hymn of twilight.

So it came to pass that, as he trudged from the place of wrath, his soul changed.

The death of Jim Conklin, the martyr to the great cause of the human spirit, is symbolic of the crucifixion; the horrified Henry observes at the moment Jim strikes the ground "that his side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves," and in the terrible moment immediately following Jim's impressive death, the youth experiences the deep spiritual emotions

51 Ibid., p. 83.
52 Loc. cit.
53 Ibid., p. 85.
54 Ibid., p. 199. It will be recalled that Crane's knowledge of the Bible was extensive and that Biblical phrasing occurs in his earliest sketches.
55 Ibid., p. 98.
attendant upon receiving the communion. The sense of his own sin, heightened by Conklin's sacrificial death, rises here to the climax of his spiritual frustration, and Henry, ironically, blasphemes in his spiritual misery against the very symbol of his coming absolution:

The youth turned, with sudden livid rage, toward the battlefield. He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a philippic.
"Hell—"

The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer.  

Nevertheless, at this moment begins Henry's spiritual recuperation; his subsequent absolution occurs through the moral emulation of the Christly Jim Conklin.  

As in the other early novels, ironic implications play a great part in the patterning of *The Red Badge*. The mercurial shifts from hope to despair in Henry are echoed in the hopes and disappointment engendered by rumors in the whole regiment. Change and motion, as Stallman points out, suffuse the whole structural pattern. Changes in the weather and in the landscape balance Henry's and the regiment's changes in mood and attitude, sometimes in quiet ironic contrasts, as when Henry's great mental anguish is portrayed against a background of a calm and indifferent nature:

The sun, suddenly apparent, blazed among the trees. The insects were making rhythmical noises. They seemed to be grinding their teeth in unison. A woodpecker stuck his impudent head around the side of a tree. A bird flew on lighthearted wing.  

Off was the rumble of death. It seemed now that nature had no ears.  

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56 Loc. cit.  

57 This and the following paragraph are greatly indebted to Stallman's analysis of the structure of *The Red Badge* (pp. 191-201).  

58 Work, I, 82.
But at times nature is harmonious with Henry's spirits. When he has proved himself in battle he is still haunted by his sins of the past which hang over him like a cloud; yet Henry feels that he has partly redeemed himself, and the clouds of his past are broken by golden rays of his future. Thus in the closing passages of the book, Henry's psychic condition is supported symbolically through nature images:

It rained. The procession of weary soldiers became a be-draggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low, wretched sky. Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking-sticks. He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle... He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace.

Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds.

In its interweaving of the contrasting moods of Henry, of the nature and religious motifs, of the patterns of motion and change, The Red Badge is a complex arrangement of artistic designs, most of which Crane had been experimenting with in his earlier writing but which he brought in the war story to their fullest artistic fruition. The religious symbolism of George's Mother, the psychological portrayals in Maggie and the story of George Kelcey, the conscious arrangement of contrasts in the episodic structure of the earlier stories all find a place in the more subtle artistic structure of The Red Badge of Courage. No other longer story of Crane's approaches the careful artistry of his account of Henry Fleming's moral absolution.

59 Ibid., p. 200.
On the narrative level The Red Badge is about war, and so skillful is Crane's depiction of the terror and destruction, the chaotic movement, the carnage, the horror, the desperate rage and conflict of battle that his "realism" has been the favorite topic of almost every commentator on the novel since its publication in 1895. But Crane is not a realist in the usual sense. As a rule, he shuns the detail, the technical explanation, much of the esoteria of military jargon. Equipment is almost never described, there are no explanations of the movement of forces, military tactics, or the advantages or disadvantages of terrain. The business of war is presented metaphorically:

The guns squatted in a row like savage chiefs. They argued with abrupt violence. It was a grim powwow. Their busy servants ran hither and thither.

The details of the surge and excitement of battle are lost in the impressionistic stroking of panoramic scenes, so that the sense of movement and of desperation, of wild and chaotic conflict, is portrayed with the skillful single stroke rather than depicted by cumulative detail:

The battle flag in the distance jerked about madly. It seemed to be struggling to free itself from an agony. The billowing smoke was filled with horizontal flashes. Men running swiftly emerged from it. They grew in numbers until it was seen that the whole command was fleeing. The flag suddenly sank down as if dying. Its motion as it fell was a gesture of despair.

Wild yells came from behind the walls of smoke. A sketch in grey and red dissolved into a mob-like body of men who galloped like wild horses.

Such passages have the effect of literary montages, of fluid phantasies which paradoxically create the illusion of transcendent realism.

60 Ibid., p. 69.
61 Ibid., p. 59.
From the standpoint of artistic achievement The Red Badge is the most important work Crane produced in the years between 1892 and 1895. It forcibly demonstrates that by the middle of 1894, at least, when Crane was scarcely twenty-three years old, he had reached artistic maturity, despite the less successful novels and the immense amount of journalistic writing that was to follow in later years. Superficially considered, the novel appears in the line of Crane's artistic development as an astonishing tour de force, as a mysterious and fortunate literary stroke which can be accounted for only by resorting to the notion that the writer sprang upon the literary scene fully armed. Yet the elements which make The Red Badge an outstanding achievement in Crane's writing career can be traced back to his very earliest apprenticeship work, to the ironical attitude toward life which appears in the Asbury Park sketches and the Sullivan tales, to the experiment with literary tone in Maggie and the introduction of religious symbolism in George's Mother, and to an interpretation of human nature which first appears in the mockery of the little man who stands so ineffectually against the mammonic mountain.

The chief elements of Crane's mature art began to assume characteristic form in Maggie. Here the patterning of language, the intense compression, the odd, angular metaphor appears as stylistically mannered, perhaps, as any prose in American literature up to Crane's time. In Maggie Crane was absorbed with manner, and if the matter is shaped somewhat awry it can be remembered that the novel is actually a stylistic etude. Structure, character, even valid artistic objective is sacrificed to the careful fashioning, ordering, and refashioning of phrase, simile, and metaphor, and the result is a style as hard, jagged and inflexible as broken granite.
In some of the short stories, particularly the "Baby Sketches" and "The Pace of Youth," Crane managed an appropriate relaxation of style without sacrificing precision of language, and in The Red Badge of Courage he managed further to give a more flexible and subtle style an organic place in the total artistic framework.

In comparison with The Red Badge, Crane's earlier work is far less complex in structure, Maggie being but a series of episodes arranged for maximum ironic effect. George's Mother, though superior in its more effectively controlled tone, is merely a more tasteful adaptation of the same method. In the use of symbols in this novel and in one of the short stories, "The Men in a Storm," Crane anticipates the more complex religious symbolism of The Red Badge of Courage. The ironic structure in the earlier work transposes into the more artistic arrangement of contrasts and the sense of conflicting motion on both the physical and psychological levels in the war story. Even within the limitations of the episodic framework Crane appears in The Red Badge as a master of structure.

Crane's literary development between the Sullivan sketches and Maggie and between Maggie and The Red Badge of Courage is scarcely explicable in terms of literary associations, though Howells's and Garland's theories of realism doubtless helped the young writer formulate a program consistent with his own literary aims. The difference in the levels of maturity in the art of Maggie and the Sullivan stories must be assigned ultimately to Crane's own artistic propensities. Maggie, like George's Mother and The Red Badge, transcends its literary predecessors because, as the author himself might have claimed, it was conceived within a wider area of experience. As Crane's experience with the raw elements of life widened,
the contrast between the theory and practice, between the ideal and the real in life became more and more evident. His ironical point of view solidified into a habitual mode of thought, and this Crane gradually adapted into an art of which the very essence is contrast. In Maggie the literary structure springs from the contrast between the world of the deluded Johnsons and the world of ethical ideals; in George's Mother the form is controlled by the contrasts between the worlds of Mrs. Kelcey and her son George. In The Red Badge of Courage Crane reaches a high point in the use of artistic contrast, for he is no longer confined to the ironical contrast of false and true ethical systems or social ideals and realities. The Red Badge is a study in the weaving and patterning of contrasts of moods, of motion and rest, of man and nature, of the noble and the ignoble. Crane's experience with life is transformed into myth and metaphor, and the stony rigidity of Maggie becomes in The Red Badge of Courage a fluid and flexible art.
CHAPTER VII
CRANE'S POETRY

The character of Crane's prose, the sensuousness of its color, the tight compression of its phrasing, and the neat quality of its striking metaphor and imagery suggest that within the writer was a strong feeling for poetic language. It is altogether understandable that the delicate irregularity and bold unconventionality of Emily Dickinson's verse may have brought about in Crane the realization that the traditional poetic forms might be as effectively altered as the traditional fictional manner. Doubtless, though, his unorthodox poetry\textsuperscript{1} was also a part of his general program of literary rebellion. "Crane... told me," Harvey Wickham, an old Claverack schoolmate recalled, "that it was the outcome of a fit of desperation. 'No one would print a line of mine,' he said, 'and I just had to do something odd to attract attention.'\textsuperscript{2}

Whatever may have prompted Crane to write the verses which made up his first collection of poems, The Black Riders and Other Lines, he appeared at Garland's Harlem apartment one spring morning about two weeks after showing his patron the first draft of The Red Badge of Courage with a sheaf of poems:

\footnote{1 Except in letters to his publishers, Crane always referred to his poetry as "lines." Beer quotes Crane as saying that he "wrote the things in February, 1893" (p. 119). But since Crane had not by then heard Emily Dickinson's poetry, he was doubtless in error about the date of composition.}

\footnote{2 Wickham, p. 297.}
The roll, I found [Garland reports] contained a dozen poems (all short but of extraordinary imaginative power), written on legal cap paper in the most beautiful script, all without blot or erasure. Every letter stood out like the writing on a bank bill...

After finishing these remarkable lines, I looked up and gravely inquired, "Did you do these?"
"Yes."
"When?"
"This morning," he replied; and putting the tip of his finger to his right temple, quaintly added, "I have four or five more standing in a row up here—all they need is to be drawn off; but I can't write among those 'Indians.'"

Garland was impressed and asked Crane to demonstrate his ability to "draw off" a poem:

... he sat down at my table and immediately transcribed several other poems... He wrote steadily in beautifully clear script with perfect alignment and spacing, precisely as if he were copying something already written and before his eyes.

The poem Crane transcribed for Garland was No. VI of The Black Riders, which begins "God fashioned the ship of the world carefully." The incredulous Garland reported later his impression of Crane's poetry writing:

The composition of these lines was an entirely automatic, subconscious process... It was precisely as if some alien spirit were delivering these lines through his hand as a medium.
"There is a ghost at your shoulder," I said in mock seriousness...

Of course I was only half in earnest as I said this; but at the same time it was evident that his composition (even to the process of punctuation) went on beneath consciousness, and that setting his poems down was for him a kind of transcribing from a printed page.

This conclusion helps to support Garland's theory that Crane was an inexplicable genius, a type in literary myth to which he evidently gave

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5 Ibid., pp. 502-3. The italics are Garland's.
his awed admiration. Yet there is more convincing evidence that Crane was a careful and highly conscious artist, despite his and others' statements about the rapidity of his composition. Linson, one of Crane's artist friends who was with him a great deal during this period, recalled the speed with which the writer produced his initial drafts:

His facility used to astonish me. Sitting on my couch, rings of gray smoke circling about him, a pad on his knee, he would turn out a complete story in a half-hour. Sometimes it was a fragment that would be laid by for future use.6

Crane himself liked to create the impression that he produced his poems and stories with almost incredible fluency. Referring to Maggie, he once coolly remarked that he "wrote it in two days before Christmas,"7 and another time he told Garland "that the first pages of The Red Badge of Courage came to him . . . every word in place, every comma, every period fixed."8 Yet Garland notes in another passage in the same account that the first pages of the novel were extensively revised, the long opening sentence in the first draft, which had taken him "captive" having entirely disappeared in a later revision.9 Vosburgh's account of Crane's compositional method, if not as romantic as Linson's and Garland's, is probably more accurate:

6 Linson, p. 19.

7 Beer, p. 81. Crane helped create legends about himself. He told an English lady that his father had been a Methodist Cardinal, and gave varying accounts of his birth and experiences. See Ford M. Ford, Portraits from Life, p. 34.


9 Ibid., p. 506.
In his work he always tried for individuality. His daring phrases and short, intense descriptions pleased him greatly. They were studied out with much care, and after they had been trimmed and turned and changed to the final form, he would repeat them aloud and dwell on them lovingly.\textsuperscript{10}

In all probability the poem Crane "drew off" for Garland had been carefully fashioned by the poet before he sat down to demonstrate that he was actually the author of the batch he brought with him.

Sometime late in the spring he showed his verses to John Barry, editor of the \textit{Forum}, who arranged to read them before a literary group, the Unsect Leaves Society, in mid-April.\textsuperscript{11} Barry then sent them off to Copeland and Day, two young Boston publishers of experimental poetry who affected unconventional formats and esthetic cover designs. When by August they had made no move to publish the poems, Crane wrote that he wished to have "his out-bring all under way by early fall. . . ."\textsuperscript{12} But by fall Crane was finding it necessary to protest his publisher’s desire to eliminate those poems which might be shocking to the late Victorian sense of propriety. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that you cut all the ethical sense out of the book. All the anarchy, perhaps. It is the anarchy which I particularly insist upon."\textsuperscript{13} By December Copeland and Day had decided to print the poems in Old English type, and Crane wrote that the idea "somewhat frightened" him, since his "recent encounters with it made me think I was working out a puzzle."\textsuperscript{14} Finally the poet and his

\textsuperscript{10} Vosburgh, p. 338.
\textsuperscript{11} Berryman, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{12} Stallman (Letters), p. 601.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 602.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 604.
publishers agreed that the book would be printed in "classic form," with all the letters capitals and without punctuation, and in April or May, 1895, after Crane had left to report the West and Mexico for Bacheller, The Black Riders appeared in vellum, "bound in grey boards with a conventionalised orchid in black trailing across both covers."\(^{15}\)

It has been the custom of students of Crane to state with Beer that The Black Riders was received with general scorn and abuse. It was, Stallman states, "brutally treated by the reviewers,"\(^ {16}\) and Beer writes that "with two favorable reviews in objection, the reading nation was told at once that Stephen Crane was mad."\(^ {17}\) There were abuses enough, as Berryman's collection of epithets testifies: "besotted," "idiotic," "opium-laded," "bassoon-poetry," "gas-house ballads," and "hamfat."\(^ {18}\) The ferocity of the attacks on The Black Riders has been," Berryman concludes, "if anything, understated, but from the beginning there were powers in opposition."\(^ {19}\) But it is important, as Thomas O'Donnell has pointed out,\(^ {20}\) to recognize that these powers in opposition—The Nation, Harper's Weekly, and The Atlantic Monthly, three of the most influential reviews of the time—were on the whole tolerant and even friendly to the poems, The Nation reviewer going so far as to say that readers should "sleep with them under

\(^{15}\) Any Lowell, "Introduction," The Work of Stephen Crane, VI, ix.

\(^{16}\) Stallman, p. 567.

\(^{17}\) Beer, p. 120.

\(^{18}\) Berryman, p. 118.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 113.

their pillows," and to suggest that the volume "should be buried with them in their early graves."

As early as 1924, Amy Lowell, in recalling the reception of Crane's first volume of poems, stated that there was discussion of it, "not very animated... and not at all intelligent, but certainly not hostile."

If the reviewers were not altogether mystified by The Black Riders, the reason probably was that Crane's highly irregular form and apparently anarchistic thought and technique had some precedence, at least, in the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. It is worth noting perhaps that most of the reviewers regarded Crane as a poetic descendant of Whitman and went to some pains to point out the likenesses and differences between the two poets. Like Whitman, Crane ignored conventional prosody, throwing out rhyme, regular meter, and traditional form, so that superficially regarded, the poetry of both men is without controlling law. Yet beneath this apparently lawless surface, Whitman's poetry, as one student has shown, is based on carefully devised and more or less consistent metrical principles:

He made use of assonance, alliteration, stanza, refrain, return, and even occasional rime. His revolution centered upon three things: a new emphasis, to the point of organic use, upon ancient repetitive devices, like epanaphora and epanalepsis; the construction of stanzas and larger units on the basis of rhythmic balance and parallelism; his conscious rejection of syllabic meter in favor of that more ancient and native English meter based on the rhythmical "period" between the stresses.

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21 "Recent Poetry," Nation, LXI (October 24, 1895), 296.
22 Lowell, p. x.
Some of these poetic devices appear in the poems in The Black Riders, but Crane's poetry generally is far less complex in both form and technique than Whitman's. Whatever poetic effects Crane obtains in his "lines" he achieves through the use of repetition, alliteration, assonance, brilliant and original metaphor, and, above all, the simple expedient of contrasting mood and idea. Only rarely, if at all, does Crane achieve in his poetry the complexity and sophistication of poetic technique which characterizes the work of Whitman. If Crane knew Whitman's poetry, it is almost certain that he made no attempt to imitate it.

Little more connection can be shown between Crane and his immediate poetic inspiration, Emily Dickinson. Howells' reading of her poetry probably aroused in Crane the impulse to write verse himself, and it may have been the unconventionality of her technique and point of view that struck in the young journalist a sympathetic chord. But Crane's poetry is not like hers in either treatment or subject matter. Dickinson's delicate irony becomes in Crane's hands ferociously heavy, and his principal subject, the cosmic despair born of a realization of the incompetency of man and the brutal indifference of the universe, is scarcely compatible with Dickinson's joy in the discovery of little thought patterns engendered by a lonely and cloistered retreat from life. Amy Lowell points out that Crane and Emily Dickinson have but one trait in common, audacity.\textsuperscript{24} Crane's literary audacity, however, had already been demonstrated by 1893, and it is difficult to conclude that he attempted to imitate the unorthodoxy of a spinster poetess whose verse he probably heard only once, and even then, perhaps, noted only its free and uninhibited rhythms.

\textsuperscript{24} Lowell, p. xi.
Other sources for The Black Riders have been suggested: the verse of W. S. Henley, the little prose-poems, Dreams, of Olive Schreiner,\(^{25}\) even the poetry of the French Symbolists.\(^{26}\) But a closer resemblance may be found in the caustic little epigrams of Ambrose Bierce, a writer with whom Crane had closer intellectual affinities than with any other writer who has been mentioned as a possible influence on The Black Riders. In their polish, compression, and climactic emphasis, most of Crane's poems bear close resemblance to the epigram form. Some of Bierce's epigrams are, like Crane's poems, allegories which reflect in their sweep of thought a skeptical, even cynical attitude toward the whole of life:

"Who art thou that weepest?"
"Man."
"Nay, thou art Egotism. I am the Scheme of the Universe. Study me and learn that nothing matters."
"Then how does it matter that I weep?"\(^{27}\)

"Whither goest thou?" said the angel.
"I know not."
"And whence has thou come?"
"I know not."
"But who art thou."
"I know not."
"Then thou art Man. See that thou turn not back, but pass on to the place whence thou hast come."\(^{28}\)

\(^{25}\) Berryman regards this as the strongest influence on The Black Riders (P. 76).

\(^{26}\) John D. Barry states in "A Note on Stephen Crane," Bookman, XIII (April, 1901), 148, that "at the time of writing that volume it is probable that Mr. Crane had never even heard of the Symbolists; if he had heard of them, it is pretty certain that he had never read them. He was then about twenty-one years of age, and he was woefully ignorant of books. Indeed, he deliberately avoided reading from a fear of being influenced by other writers."

\(^{27}\) The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce (New York: Neale, 1911), VIII, 355.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 362.
In these two epigrams Bierce touches upon the themes which occur most frequently in Crane's poetry, the disparity between man and nature and the futility of man's hope for knowledge. But more important, perhaps, is the basic resemblance between the form of Bierce's compressed little allegories and some of Crane's poems. The famous colloquy between a man and the universe is no more than an arrangement of prose lines in verse form, a characteristic of a great many of Crane's poems:

A man said to the universe:
"Sir, I exist!"
"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation." 29

As a journalist Crane may have seen some of Bierce's epigrams as they were published from time to time in various newspapers, but it can by no means be conclusively maintained that the New Yorker modelled his poetry on them. The chief value of the comparison of his "lines" to Bierce's epigrams lies in what it shows of the nature of many of Crane's poems in The Black Riders. Bierce's compact prose utterance, though it lacks the imagery of Crane's lines, being conceived, actually, as prose rather than poetry, nevertheless recalls in its angular rhythms something of the rhythmic license of Crane's poetry. In their caustic skepticism and mood of despair, in their treatment of man in relation to the universe and in their emphasis upon the disparity between the real and the ideal, the work of both men bear a striking resemblance. If no positive connection can be made between the epigrams and the "lines," it can be stated, at least, that The Black Riders stand historically between Bierce's pungent

29 Crane, Work, VI, 131.
little allegories and the free verse forms which came into full use in the poetic renaissance of the 'twenties.\textsuperscript{30}

From the scant evidence concerning Crane's origins as a poet no firm conclusions can be made, but it may be stated, tentatively at least, that the writer was looking about in 1893 for some way to distinguish himself from the crowd of young hopefuls with whom he was associated in New York's literary bohemia, and having already started \textit{The Red Badge} as a "pot-boiler," hit upon the idea, after hearing Howells read Emily Dickinson's poetry, of turning his own brilliant prose style to poetic use. He may have had some knowledge, though likely superficial enough, of the free verse patterns of Walt Whitman, W. E. Henley, and Olive Schreiner, and the epigrammatic form of some of Bierce's vitriolic little allegories may have suggested a medium of expression for his ironic and pessimistic view of man in his relation to his civilization and the universe as a whole. But it should be observed that although all of these poets and writers could have suggested the free verse form of \textit{The Black Riders}, Crane's poems are in no way direct imitations of the work of any of them.

Crane's emergence as a poet was sudden and arbitrary, even mysterious, perhaps, when his poetry is considered out of the main stream of his literary development. But it may be suggested that those poems in \textit{The

\textsuperscript{30} Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska state in their \textit{A History of American Poetry} (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), p. 136, that Crane was "unconsciously building a bridge between the epigrams contained in Ambrose Bierce's \textit{The Devil's Dictionary} and the early issues of the Imagist anthologies." The epigrams published in Bierce's \textit{Collected Works} in 1911 seem much closer to \textit{The Black Riders}, however, than those in \textit{The Devil's Dictionary}.\textit{}}
Black Riders which are poetically worthy are essentially altered forms of Crane's prose art, and in this sense Maggie, George's Mother, and The Red Badge of Courage provide better explanations of The Black Riders than any other literary work. Stallman points out that the best of the poems have "the same structural design and (some of them) even the same plot or mood as the short stories," and observes again, significantly, that "Crane used language poetically not in his verse, but in his prose." As for themes, many of the poems are simply abstractions, transposed occasionally to a cosmic level, of the ideas in the stories and novels, and in artistic method the poetry is often simply a crystallization of the technique of contrast which characterizes the art of Maggie, George's Mother, and The Red Badge of Courage. Lastly, the poems resemble the early prose work in that a significant number of them reflect actual intellectual or emotional experiences which Crane acquired in bohemian New York in the early 'nineties.

In George's Mother and The Red Badge of Courage Crane made significant use of religious motifs; indeed, the whole structure of the latter novel rests upon a framework of religious symbolism. More than a dozen of the poems in The Black Riders have religious themes, five dealing in various ways with the concept of sin, four expressing a bitter hatred for the revengeful God of Moses, two portraying longingly a kindly and sympathetic God of compassion, and two more sharply contrasting the God of hate and the God of love. The clerical cipher who turns his back upon the destitute girl of the streets in Maggie and who stares stonily from the pulpit at the sinful George Kelcey, appears in poem No. LXIII:

31 Stallman, p. 569.

32 Ibid., p. 575.
There was a great cathedral.
To solemn songs,
A white procession
Moved toward the altar.
The chief man there
Was erect, and bore himself proudly.
Yet some could see him cringe,
As in a place of danger,
Throwing frightened glances into the air,
And start at threatening faces of the past.33

In poem No. LVII Maggie and the clergyman appear in precisely the same relationship as in the street scene in the novel:

With eye and with gesture
You say you are holy.
I say you lie;
For I did see you
Draw away your coats
From the sin upon the hands
Of a little child.
Liar!34

In four poems the sacrificial myth which appears so strongly in the incident of Jim Conklin's death, is echoed in various contexts, occurring in poem No. XVII in an extreme condensation of the whole theme of The Red Badge of Courage:

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.35

33 Work, VI, 98.
34 Ibid., p. 92.
35 Ibid., p. 49.
Crane perhaps had in mind the significance of Henry Fleming's spiritual absolution when he wrote poem No. XV:

"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.36

Poem No. XXVI employs a story idea which Crane made use of in the summer of 1892 in "The Mesmeric Mountain," one of the Sullivan County Sketches. In the story the little man overcomes his fear of a hill, eventually climbs it, and after reaching the top discovers that he can see nothing but "Boyd's house," the Lumberland Pike, and the western horizon. In The Black Riders the mountain becomes the symbol, employed in three poems, for the malevolent aspect of nature, and in the poetic adaptation of the Sullivan story the hill stands between man's impossible hopes and his inevitable despair:

There was set before me a mighty hill,
And long days I climbed
Through regions of snow.
When I had before me the summit-view,
It seemed that my labour
Had been to see gardens
Lying at impossible distances.37

Again and again the minor themes and motifs which appear in Crane's prose serve for a poem as well, so that the whole attitude toward life which is the basis for the fiction of this period is reflected in The Black Riders. The helplessness and insignificance of man ironically contrasted

36 Ibid., p. 47.
37 Ibid., p. 58.
with his egotism and self-delusion appears in "Three Little Birds in a Row," and in "A Man Toiled on a Burning Road," two poems in which three birds and a jackass are contemptuously amused at the notion of man's superior place in the order of nature. The futility of fulfilling material and spiritual desires provides the theme for seven of the poems, and the injustice and stupidity of tradition furnishes the motifs for several others. Generally, Crane's skeptical and pessimistic attitude toward man, nature, and society furnishes the point of view for both the stories and the poems.

A few of the poems afford interesting examples of Crane's adaptation of specific experience to literature. An unhappy love affair provided poem No. X of The Black Riders, an almost phrase by phrase transposition of a love note Crane wrote one evening in 1891. According to Beer the ending of the striking poem beginning "God lay dead in heaven" was provided by one of Crane's experiences in a disreputable district of New York.

In the Bowery he had seen a young streetwalker cover the head of a drunken procurer with her body while the fellow's assailants were trying to stamp his face to pieces. Crane ran to bring help and the police arrested the girl for cursing.

The conclusion of the poem, a Shelleyean fantasy upon the gruesome end of all creation, is an imaginative transcription of this scene:

But of all the sadness this was sad,—
A woman's arms tried to shield
The head of a sleeping man
From the jaws of the final beast.

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38 See p. 29, this study.
39 Beer, p. 122.
40 Work, VI, 102.
The imagery of another poem can be traced back to an idea which occurred to Crane during a conversation with Arthur Oliver in 1892. When Oliver, a young journalist friend, complained that he could not find the right expression for a shipwreck story he was writing, Crane advised him by "tossing a handful of sand to the winds: 'Treat your notions like that,' he said. 'Forget what you think about it and tell how you feel about it.'"\(^{41}\) Crane drew upon the memory of this experience months later for poem No. LXV of The Black Riders:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Once, I knew a fine song} \\
\text{— It is true, believe me—} \\
\text{It was all of birds,} \\
\text{And I held them in a basket;} \\
\text{When I opened the wicket,} \\
\text{Heavens they all flew away.} \\
\text{I cried, "Come back, little thoughts!"} \\
\text{But they only laughed.} \\
\text{They flew on} \\
\text{Until they were as sand} \\
\text{Thrown between me and the sky.}^{42}\end{align*}
\]

The thematic relation between Crane's The Black Riders and his prose writing is much closer than casual inspection might indicate. Both had their origins in specific personal experience. The religious motifs in both The Red Badge and The Black Riders can be traced to Crane's early intellectual experience with the conflicting theology of his mother and father, and many of the images and themes in his little collection of verse were either taken over directly from past experience or represent typical attitudes which Crane's two and a half years in New York developed in him.

\(^{41}\) Oliver, pp. 454-5.

\(^{42}\) Work, VI, 100.
In *The Black Riders* he continued the expression of his revolt against social orthodoxy which began as early as 1892 in the Asbury Park sketches, and much like *Maggie* and the two succeeding novels, the poetry is, considered all together, an ironic commentary upon the weaknesses and limitations of mankind. The extreme pessimism of those poems which embrace Crane's thoughts "about life as a whole" can be traced to his association with the doctrine of scientific determinism current in the thinking of his time.

The structure of Crane's poems, like that of his fiction, depends chiefly upon contrast and, as Stallman points out, they fall into two groups: those which depend upon the contrast of mood and those which rely upon the contrast of thought. The poem which Crane addressed to Helen Trent, with whom he was in love in 1891, illustrates both the contrast of the colors black and white and the contrast of the ideas of hopeless loss and exquisite gain:

> Should the wide world roll away,
> Leaving black terror,
> Limitless night,
> Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand
> Would be to me essential,
> If thou and thy white arms were there,
> And the fall to doom a long way.

In poem LI the revengeful God of Crane's mother is set against the kindly God of his father, and the contrast provides the poem with a patently schematic form:

> A man went before a strange God—
> The God of many men, sadly wise.
> And the Deity thundered loudly,
> Fat with rage, and puffing,

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43 Stallman, p. 571.

44 *Work*, VI, 42.
"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."  

As in most of the stories, irony is often the controlling structural factor. Irony usually resolves the poems with an emphatic ending which gives it the peculiar force and quality of the epigram:

A man feared that he might find an assassin;  
Another that he might find a victim.  
One was more wise than the other.  

Occasionally Crane employs shifts in point of view for ironic effect, a technique which accounts for some of the sharpest irony in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets:

"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."

Crane is in both his poetry and prose an artist of contrasts, but oddly the color which suffuses the pages of the short stories and novels

46 Ibid., p. 91  
47 Ibid., p. 89.
is absent in *The Black Riders*. The most mannered of prose stylists, Crane is the most unmannered poet. Most of the verses are simply jagged, faintly rhythmical expressions of philosophical ideas or statements of moods. And if the form is based upon contrast, the poetic quality of the verses rests simply upon the oratorical quality of Biblical phrasing and occasionally the common devices of alliteration, repetition, and assonance. Poem No. XLIII affords an illustration of Crane's use of all these devices, and it will be observed that in this, as in most of the poems, the structure depends upon contrast, in this case between the first four and the last four lines, the emotional import of which is changed by the two intervening lines.

There came whisperings in the winds:
"Good-bye! good-bye!"
Little voices called in the darkness:
"Good-bye! good-bye."
Then I stretched forth my arms.
"No—no—"
There came whisperings in the winds:
"Good-bye! good-bye!"
Little voices called in the darkness:
"Good-bye! good-bye!" 48

In the title poem repetition, alliteration, and assonance are used to better effect. The repeated words "clang and clang" and "clash and clash" afford a repetitious parallelism, and the effect in the last three lines is dependent upon the alliterated "w"s and the assonance between "wind" and "Sin" in the closing couplet:

Black riders came from the sea.
There was clang and clang of spear and shield,
And clash and clash of hoof and heel,
Wild shouts and wave of hair
In the rush upon the wind;
Thus the ride of Sin. 49

48 Ibid., p. 76.
49 Ibid., p. 33.
Much of the phrasing, like some of that of *The Red Badge of Courage* is Biblical:

I stood upon a highway, 
And, behold, there came 
Many strange peddlers.50

Ironically, in poem XVI, a condemnation of the perverted practice of Christian charity, Crane draws upon the Bible for both the phrasing and the imagery:

Charity, thou art a lie, 
A toy of women, 
A pleasure of certain men. 
In the presence of justice, 
Lo, the walls of the temple 
Are visible 
Through the form of sudden shadows.51

Technically, Crane's poetry is the very essence of simplicity. The form of almost all of them is based upon the contrast of mood or thought, and the poetic manipulation of the verse resorts to no device more complex than alliteration, repetition, and assonance. In one or two of the later poems, which were collected in 1899 under the title *War is Kind*, Crane managed to achieve a genuine poetic effect with this simple technique, but in *The Black Riders* he is too patently moral and didactic, too concerned with matter, too indifferent to manner. Many of Crane's poems are little more than indignant orations against social, religious, and ethical orthodoxy, and if his ideas "shattered the peace of mind of any American who considered them thoughtfully"52 in 1895, they now seem almost

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52 *Knight*, p. 108.
as dated as the radicalism of Robert Ingersoll. Yet historically, The
Black Riders is important, for it stands as a transitional pivot between
Whitman and the free verse movement which was to come into its own in the
early part of the twentieth century. And it broke violently in its despair,
its self-conscious Weltschmerz, with the tradition of proper optimism and
sugary sentiment that appealed to the poetry reading public at large in
the mid-nineties.

Crane's poetic output after the initial spurt that produced The Black
Riders decreased, but it by no means stopped altogether. Garland reports
that the flow of poems diminished considerably after "some weeks" and that
Crane called on him in James A. Herne's dressing room one night to show him
"the very last one," saying "That place in my brain is empty." But in a
letter to Garland in May, 1894, Crane states that he has "the poetic spout
so that I can turn it on or off," and as late as October 31, 1894, Crane
sent Copeland and Day the title poem, "The Black Riders."

About a month after the publication of The Black Riders and Other Lines,
Elbert Hubbard included one of Crane's poems, "I Saw a Man," in the first
edition of his little journal of protest, The Philistine, and thereafter
Hubbard accepted and published, despite the objections of some subscribers,

53 Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 195.
54 Stallman (Letters), p. 600.
55 Ibid., p. 603.
56 In The Philistine, I (June, 1895), 27. An account of Crane's
relation with The Philistine may be found in Donald H. Dickason's "Stephen
Crane and The Philistine," American Literature, XV (November, 1943), 279-87.
57 In The Philistine, VI (May, 1898), 190, Hubbard announced that
he had contracted for a six-month's supply of Crane's poetry and humorously
advised "all parties who are unable to digest the Lines of Stephen Crane. . .
should cancel their subscriptions before the next issue."
at least one of Crane's new poems or a reprint of one of *The Black Riders* verses in almost every issue through 1898. These and a sequence of love poems, "Intrigue," make up the second volume of his poetry, *War is Kind*.

Though Crane's development as a poet is far less spectacular than as a writer of fiction, the second volume of poems is by no means without evidence of artistic growth. Generally, *War is Kind* marks no departure from the previous volume in either theme or method, but there is a marked difference in tone and emphasis. The poems about God are less vehement, less concerned with the disparity between the God of Moses and the God of love. More of the poems deal with specific emotional experience and generally less concerned with intellectual abstractions. As Crane remarked about *The Red Badge of Courage*, they deal more often with "the mere episode" and less with his ideas of "life as a whole." Pitched in a lower key than *The Black Riders*, *War is Kind* shows Crane in a more placid mood; his protest against the universe is less shrieking, less indignant, and more nearly in harmony with a philosophy that wryly accepts the world as it is.

If *War is Kind* is more mature in its total point of view it shows also significant advances in poetic technique. The handling of contrasts is more fluid, and there is a tendency to expand the simple epigrams of *The Black Riders* into more complex poetic patterns. The title poem of the collection is more complicated structurally than most of the others and represents Crane's most significant achievement in the use of repetition, assonance, parallelism, and ironic contrast.
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,  
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.

In this poem, as in others in his second collection, Crane adapts the impressionism of his prose style to poetic uses. The magnificent image of the frightened horse running on alone after its rider has thrown wild hands toward the sky is characteristic of Crane the prose writer, and possibly nowhere else in his poetry did he contrive a more genuinely moving line than that which images a mother's humble devotion by a reference to the homely, domestic button. The emotional complexity of the poem is intensified by the cumulative effect of the suggestion of

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58 Work, VI, 107-8.
three kinds of love and grief for the fallen soldier—the romantic love of the maiden, the love of the child for its father, the love of the mother for her son. The first four lines of the two refrain-like stanzas ironically contrast the traditional concept of war as glorious with the grief of the lovers, and the last two lines of the refrains effectively point the contrast in their devastating irony.

As in *The Black Riders*, shifts in point of view provide ironic structures for other poems in *War is Kind*. In poem VIII the first ten lines relate how a knight "with spurs, hot and reeking," rode down upon a castle "to save my lady" and won the day:

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

Contrasting points of view and mood are effectively employed in poem No. III, which also affords an example of Crane's increased inclination toward the use of color, an element notably lacking in *The Black Riders*:

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

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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. 60

But the most remarkable use of color appears in poem XXV, where the
massing of strong hues is reminiscent of the riotous color in some of
Crane's very early sketches, particularly "The Broken Down Van," which
appeared in the New York Tribune in 1892; 61

Each small gleam was a voice,
A lantern voice—
In little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold,
A chorus of colours came over the water. . . . 62

The opening lines of the second stanza of this poem afford another
example of Crane's drawing upon a trivial experience for his imagery and
also of his propensity for repetitious use of his materials:

Small glowing pebbles
Thrown on the dark plane of evening
Sing good ballads of God
And eternity, with soul's rest. 63

The grains of sands tossed into the evening air during his youthful
conversation with Arthur Oliver have been transposed by Crane's myth-making
faculty in beautiful imagery. It is altogether likely that an actual
incident which occurred during one of Crane's camping trips to Sullivan
County provided the materials for the myth of the little man and the mountain.
It appears again in poem XXII of War is Kind in slightly altered form:

60 Ibid., p. 111. The second stanza is a poetic treatment of the
theme of "The Open Boat."

61 See p. 33, this study.

62 Work, VI, 135.

63 Loc. cit.
When the prophet, a complacent fat man,
Arrived at the mountain-top,
He cried: "Woe to my knowledge!
I intended to see good white lands
And bad black lands,
But the scene is grey." 64

In its quieter, more lyric tone and more mature attitude *War is Kind* shows advancement over the angular, indignant posturing of *The Black Riders*. Crane evidences a growing skill in the manipulation of the simple poetic forms and in the handling of the imagery. But in the little group of love poems, "Intrigue," which are reminiscent of the rhythm and sensuous imagery of the Song of Songs, Crane resorts in his subjectivism to traditional poetic mannerisms. Poetic "thou's" and "thee's" suffuse these stanzas, twelve of which in the first poem end, oddly enough in the verse of the unorthodox Crane, with the traditional lament "Woe is me."

Though these poems are significant for what they reveal of Crane's relationship with Cora Taylor, the woman whom he met in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1897 and who later accompanied him to Greece and finally to England, they are least typical of all Crane's work. Despite a passage or two which reflect Crane's literary powers, "Intrigue" stands as a sort of biographical curiosity, far outside the main line of his literary development. 65

64 Ibid., p. 132.

65 One of the most memorable stanzas is the last one of poem No. II (Work, VI, 147):

The flower I gave thee once
Was incident to a stride
A detail of a gesture,
But search those pale petals
And see engraved thereon
A record of my intention.
Yet there are recognizable and significant relations between Crane's poetry and the development of his art as a whole. At its best his poetry exhibits the same apt and striking imagery, the same structural characteristics, and the same attitude toward life as his prose. The revolt against social conventions in *The Black Riders* is a continuation of the themes which occur in fragmentary forms in *Maggie* and *George's Mother* and some of the Bowery stories. The deterministic attitude of *Maggie* is expanded in the poems, however, into a philosophy of black pessimism, and many of the poems treat the hopeless plight of man in his opposition to an indifferent and unknowable universe. This mood intrudes less in *War is Kind*; here there is much more of the mood of acceptance and much less indignation over the concept of a cruel and brutal God of retribution. *War is Kind* is more lyrical and less sternly philosophical than its predecessor, *The Black Riders*.

Both volumes show that Crane adapted the artistic techniques of his fiction to this poetry. For structure his poems depend almost exclusively upon the use of contrast, a technique of which Crane shows a mastery in *The Red Badge of Courage*. As in the earlier work, irony, which appears nowhere more characteristically than in the title poem of *War is Kind*, is the hallmark of the poetry in both volumes. The ironic alteration of moods, the progress from hope to despair to tentative hope again in the moods of Henry Fleming, provides the framework for many of the epigrammatic utterances in *The Black Riders*. And though Crane's striking use of color is patently absent from *The Black Riders*, many of the poems in *War is Kind* depend for their effect upon the brilliant chromaticism of their imagery.
Crane is more important for his historical position than for his intrinsic merits as a poet. Striking though his attitude toward man, society, and God may have been to his contemporaries, his bold and unmannered philosophical utterances have sixty years later scarcely more force than moral cliches. In such poems as "The Black Riders," and "War is Kind" he demonstrated genuine poetic abilities, but excepting a few isolated passages or real poetic feeling and a few lines of memorable imagery, Crane's poetry is for the most part interesting only for its bold and uninhibited revolt against the poetic tradition of the nineteenth century. "If he rebelled against the older verse forms," one of Crane's most balanced critics observes, "and took up a new instrument, he never quite became a master at it. He struck a few slight strains, and then passed it on."

Berryman regards "War is Kind" as "one of the major lyrics of the century in America," but Crane's poetry as a whole is fragmentary and uneven. The extent of his failure in realizing the full potentials of the form and manner which he helped introduce into American poetry may be seen in the disparity between his achievement and that of the vers libre movement which reached its full flowering twenty years after his death.

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67 Berryman, p. 271.
CHAPTER VIII

THE WESTERN STORIES, THE THIRD VIOLET, AND THE SEQUELS

TO THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE: 1895-1897

Irving Addison Bacheller, elated over the response of the newspapers to the condensed version of The Red Badge of Courage and anxious to capitalise upon its young author's growing literary prestige, almost immediately engaged Crane's services as a foreign correspondent for his struggling newspaper syndicate. Doubtless aware of the author's intense interest in the far West, Bacheller assigned him to a tour of several western states and Mexico, stipulating only that his journey should end in Mexico City. Crane was delayed for a time by the sudden new attention publishers were giving his work, but late in February, 1895, he left New York for Nebraska and thus took the first step toward fulfilling his youthful ambition to see the far West at first hand.

Crane's interest in the West, which he had developed, no doubt, from his reading of Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and from his association with Hamlin Garland, John Northern Hilliard, and other Westerners, was cultural, social, and ethical. In the Bowery Crane saw the human soul warped by a deplorable social system, and at Asbury Park, earlier, he saw the ethical values of wealthy resort idlers warped by false social principles and erroneous cultural ideals:

We in the east are overcome a good deal by a detestable superficial culture which I think is the real barbarism. Culture in it's [sic] true sense, I take it, is a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder. It has nothing to

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1 Some of the Western stories show a slight stylistic influence of Harte. That Crane knew Harte's work is shown by a sentence in a letter of 1897 to John N. Hilliard. "He [Harte] has not done any work in recent years to compare with those early California sketches" (Stallman, Letters, p. 673).
do with an adoration for effete jugs and old kettles.
This latter is merely an amusement and we live for
amusement in the east. Damn the east! 2

But around the West Crane had built up certain appositional ideals.
He saw in the simple ethical codes of the cowboy, the gambler, and the
western adventurer an expression of his revolt against the traditional
social forms which vitiated the essential manhood of the individual. The
Westerner, he believed, lived with integrity and honor because he was
ture to his inner self, and living as he did in often dangerous proximity
with nature, he was continuously faced with the necessity for asserting
his strongest spiritual qualities:

I fell in love with the straight out-and-out, sometimes-
hideous, often-braggart westerners 2 he wrote Willis Hawkins
in 1895 because I thought them to be the truer man and,
by the living piper, we will see in the next fifty years
what the west will do. They are serious, those fellows.
When they are born they take one big gulp of wind and then
they live.

Of course, the east thinks them ridiculous. When they
come to congress they display a child-like honesty which
makes the old east laugh. And yet--

Garland will wring every westerner by the hand and hail
him as a frank honest man. I wont. No, sir. But what I
contend for is the atmosphere of the west which really is
frank and honest and is bound to make eleven honest men
for one pessimistic thief. More glory be with them. 3

Crane was not disappointed with what he found in his tour through
Nebraska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, and Mexico. From Lincoln
he sent Bacheller a dispatch which praised the "strong, fine, sturdy men,
not bended like the Eastern farmer, but erect and agile... completely
American." He found them, he reported, stoic in face of the natural

2 Stallman (Letters), p. 629.
3 Ibid., pp. 629-30.
disasters of blizzard and drought. "How did you get along," he asked one, and the reply was "Don't git along, stranger." In March he reported from Hot Springs, Arkansas, passed through Little Rock and a few days later wrote Bacheller from New Orleans. By March 12 he had arrived in San Antonio, where, Beer concludes from letters available in 1923 but since lost, "all the adolescence in him frothed to a head:"

... he fell in love with that maligned city and with Texas... His letters from San Antonio are almost childish... Here was the monument to the defenders of the Alamo with its legend: "Thermopylae had its messenger of defeat; the Alamo had none"; and that, he wrote to Hilliard, boomed in his ears like the clashing of war-bronze.

By the end of the month the correspondent was writing local color dispatches from the Iturbide Hotel in Mexico City and notifying friends at home that he was preparing to ascend Popocatepetl. Excursions into nearby villages brought trouble and furnished him with incidents for future stories. Crane and his Mexican guide, Miguel Iturbide, narrowly escaped being murdered when the "fashionable bandit" Ramon Colorado, hearing that an American was lodged in a certain village, set upon the correspondent's inn with a half dozen drunken caballeros. Crane and his guide escaped on horseback when Colorado was momentarily distracted by a

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5 Beer, p.
7 Stallman (Letters), p. 613.
group of prostitutes, but the Mexicans gave chase and were on the point of overtaking their two victims when a band of rurales, the government mounted police, came to the rescue. This experience Crane called upon later for his story "Horses—One Dash."

In San Antonio again in April, Crane rescued a sixteen-year-old boy, Edward Grover, whom he found penniless and sobbing on the Alamo Plaza, from "the red universe" and, penniless himself after buying the youth a ticket to St. Louis, took refuge in "Mex diggings with a push of sheep men" to await money from Bacheller. In this Mexican counterpart of the East Side flop-house, Crane met a quondam Bowery tough, a fugitive from Eastern police, who told Crane about shooting down a group of Mexicans who had tried to drive his sheep away from a water hole, and thus the correspondent acquired the germ for another tale of the West, "A Man—and Some Others."

After San Antonio in April Crane's trail is lost until May 29, when he wrote Copeland and Day from Port Jervis for a settlement for The Black Riders, which had appeared during his absence and which, in conjunction with the newspaper version of The Red Badge, had made him a semi-celebrity. In July he moved into New York as a member of the Lantern Club, a literary society which counted among its members Bacheller, the humorists Charles W. Hooke and Tom Masson, then the editor of Life, Willis B. Hawkins, editor of The Brains Publishing Company, Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the Century, and various other journalists, editors, and literary men. The

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8 Beer, p. 114.
club was housed in a part of Williams Street known as Monkey Hill in a
quaint room decorated as a ship's cabin. At Saturday night dinners the
members read to one another little tales and poems dealing for the most
part "with the fading old-time color of the town," and criticism was
freely offered and received. No praise, however, was allowed, the highest
tribute a poem or story could receive being complete silence.

Crane was restless, though, after his Western adventures and once
again in financial distress. Part of August he spent in Parker's Glen,
Pennsylvania, and wrote alternately jubilant and unhappy letters to his
friend Willis Brooks Hawkins, pleading on August 18 for help in composing
a notice of the publication of The Red Badge for Elbert Hubbard's Philistine and joyfully reporting from Philadelphia on September 6 that he had taken
a place with the Press as a drama critic. Four days later he wrote that
the manager of the Press had suddenly decided against him and that he was
stranded in Philadelphia. Despite minor reversals, though, Crane's fame
was growing. "Got lots of friends...," he wrote from Philadelphia,
"and 23,642 invitations to dinner of which I have accepted 2," and on
the strength of his reputation, evidently, managed to stay in Philadelphia

12 Ibid., p. 621.
13 Ibid., p. 622.
14 Loc. cit.
through mid-September, writing some but mostly waiting to hear from Hawkins that some editor had an assignment for him as a correspondent. By October Crane was in New York briefly, playing poker with his journalist friends, eagerly following the reviews of *The Red Badge* and *The Black Riders* and gradually giving up hope for a newspaper job. In late October he moved to Hartwood, where his brother Edmund had taken his family some time before, and in the quiet of this Sullivan County retreat resumed the writing which had been interrupted by the Western tour some nine months before.

During the months in which Crane wrote a novel, *The Third Violet*, two Western stories, and a half-dozen tales of the Civil War, one of which was the novelette *The Little Regiment*, his fame grew steadily. "My correspondence—incoming—has reached mighty proportions and if I answered them all I would make Hartwood a better class office and my brother a better class postmaster...," he wrote Hawkins in November. *The Red Badge*, enjoying respectable sales now, continued to arouse comment in the literary world, and publishers continued to ask for manuscripts:

There has been an enormous raft of R. B. of C. reviews and Appleton and Co. have written me quite a contented letter about the sale of the book. Copeland and Day have written for my New York sketches and Appleton and Co. wish to put my new story in their Zeit-Geist series.  

But fame was a disappointment to Crane, for suddenly he found his relations to his friends altogether changed, and continuously now in the spotlight of public attention, he found himself constitutionally unable to groom for the public gaze. As a literary lion, he was a decided failure;

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15 Ibid., p. 625.
16 Ibid., pp. 625-26.
the praise, the flattery, the envious manner of his friends rankled his sensitive nature so that he could no longer bear New York, not even long enough, on one occasion, to prosecute his business with his publishers.

To Ripley Hitchcock of Appleton's Crane wrote after missing an appointment:

> I fear that when I meet you again I shall feel abashed. As a matter of truth, New York has so completely muddled me on this last visit that I shant venture again very soon. I had grown used to being called a damned ass but this sudden new admiration of my friends has made a gibbering idiot of me. I shall stick to my hills.17

"You don't know how that damned city tore my heart out by the roots and flung it under the heels of it's [sic] noise," he wrote Hawkins in reference to the same visit. "On Friday it had me keyed to a point where I was no more than a wild beast and I had to make a dash willy-nilly."18 With his great capacity for disillusionment, Crane discovered that fame was the greatest of all illusions. "I used to dream continually of success then," he wrote the editor of Leslie's Weekly from Hartwood in reference to his bohemian days in the East Side. "Now that I have achieved it in some measure it seems like mere flimsy paper."19

This view of fame was to be shortly confirmed. Early in November Elbert Hubbard, editor of one of the three leading "little magazines" of the decade, The Philistine, [a literary magazine] which was founded for the express purpose of standing in opposition to such established journals as Harper's and the Century, suddenly decided to honor Stephen Crane with

17 Ibid., pp. 645-66.
18 Ibid., p. 629.
19 Ibid., p. 629.
a ceremonial dinner, and on November 5 paid tribute to the rising young
star in an invitation:

To Mr. Stephen Crane:

Recognizing in yourself and in your genius as a poet,
a man whom we would like to know better, The Society of
the Philistines desire to give a dinner in your honor
early in the future. If this meets with your approval
we should be glad if you will let us know upon what date
you could conveniently come to us.20

Encouraged by Hawkins, Crane reversed his initial decision to refuse the
offer, expecting, as did his enthusiastic friend, that the dinner would
"do me an immense amount of good,"21 and on November 15 wrote a modest
letter of acceptance. Hubbard, without asking Crane’s permission, printed
his letter in the Buffalo newspapers, and then set about industriously to
make the affair an immense literary occasion. It was not to be, Hubbard
wrote Crane, just "a pleasant meeting and dinner with you. But it is more
than this—you represent a 'cause' and we wish in a dignified, public
(and at the same time) elegant manner to recognize that cause."22

The banquet which took place on December 19 in Buffalo at the Genesee
House was, however, far from the dignified occasion that Hubbard had
promised Crane. "That dinner," Claude Bragdon recalled in 1929, "held
in a private room of a Buffalo hotel is still a distressing memory."23
A crowd of "pseudo-reporters" appeared bent on turning the affair into
an orgy of drunken quarreling and stupid joking:

20 Ibid., p. 633.
21 Ibid., p. 634.
22 Ibid., p. 636.
23 Claude F. Bragdon, "The Purple Cow Period," The Bookman, LXIX
(July, 1929), 478.
In the best clown and gridiron manner Taber and all
the other speakers were guyed and ragged from start to
finish. Crane, having the time of his life, was called
up, and they had as much fun with him as with the others.24

Bragdon, insulted by the tone of the celebration rose to leave, but Willis
Hawkins stopped him at the door, assuring him that Crane preferred the
"informality" of these proceedings to "solemn eulogies." Crane, exquisitely
embarrassed, "was nodding his head off" during Hawkins' speech, and
Bragdon reluctantly returned to his seat.25

Crane was aware, as his letters before the Philistine dinner show,
that his fame had not brought him the sort of recognition that he had
dreamed would come with success, but Hubbard's flattering invitation and
letters had doubtless deluded him momentarily. "... it overwhelms me
in pride and arrogance," the journalist had written Hawkins scarcely more
than a month before, "to think that I have such friends."26 But now Crane
saw that his fame was indeed a tinsel thing, and, as Stallman points out,
that he had been, like his Henry Fleming in The Red Badge, "the dupe of
his own vainglorious notions."27 Hubbard exploited the affair to the
utmost, printing three pamphlets of souvenir material, including the
invitation and acceptance in The Members of the Society, responses from
various literary figures in The Time Has Come, and several of Crane's
poems and tributes to him in the May Rovecroft Quarterly. But Crane,

24 Noxon, pp. 8-9. Noxon's account attributes little importance
to the incident. Bragdon, however, believes the episode changed Crane's
whole outlook.

25 Ibid., p. 9.

26 Stallman (Letters), p. 632.

27 Ibid., p. 632, n.
retired again to "his hills" in Sullivan County, satirized the event in a letter to Nellie Crousé, and thereafter bore his success with cold, wry, sometimes arrogant, reserve.

In March McClure sent the journalist to Washington to gather material for a book on political society, and Crane remained in the capital until early April wandering about the city trying, he wrote Hitchcock, "to know all the congressmen in the shop;" but a week later he wrote again: "You may see me back in New York for good by the end of this week. These men pose so hard that it would take a double-barrelled shotgun to disclose their inward feelings and I despair of knowing them." In March he was in New York, suffering from a growing notoriety which for the most part had its basis in the envious gossip of his former friends and colleagues, but contemptuously flouting the widely accepted report that he was a narcotic addict by writing a feature for the New York Sun entitled "Opium's Varied Dreams." Some of his friends now countenanced fantastic stories of his moral depravity. He was said to be an ex-convict, an illegitimate son of a president of the United States, Sarah Bernhardt's lover, a bigamist, an alcoholic, the father of numerous illegitimate children, and an arsonist. One evening in September when Crane was leaving a theatre in company with

28 The texts of the Crousé letters are not available, but a summary of the contents is in Jerry O. Mangione's "Stephen Crane's Unpublished Letters" Chap Book (Syracuse University Literary Magazine), II (May, 1930), 8-10.

29 Berryman, p. 133.

30 New York Sun (May 17, 1896), pt. 3, p. 3.

31 See Floyd Dell, "Stephen Crane and the Genius Myth," The Nation, CXIX (December 10, 1924), 637-38.
several women, a policeman approached and arrested one, Dora Clark, for soliciting, and threatened to arrest Crane when he protested. Against the advice of all his friends Crane insisted upon testifying against the policeman when the woman brought suit in October. The police raided his room and reported that they had found an opium layout. Upon receiving a long telegraphed complaint from Crane, Theodore Roosevelt, Commissioner of Police, criticized his department for their treatment of women, and henceforth "an aroused and resentful police department bent all its unscrupulous energies to discrediting Crane and making New York too hot for him to live in."32

Through October, however, Crane idled about New York, maligned, and waiting for Bacheller to send him wherever there were action and excitement, and suddenly at the end of the month he received seven hundred dollars in Spanish gold and orders to report to Jacksonville, Florida, to await the first opportunity to get across to Cuba. Two months later Crane sailed on the ill-fated Commodore and thus acquired an experience that produced his most famous short story, "The Open Boat."

But this masterful sea tale is in reality the culminating expression of a philosophical outlook which had been developing since Crane's bohemian days in the New York East Side and which traces clearly through his experience in the West and Mexico. As early as The Black Riders Crane's view of nature as a relentlessly indifferent force had been given expression in such epigrams as No. LXVI:

32 Letter from Frederick M. Lawrence to Thomas Beer, November 8, 1923. Quoted in Berryman, p. 146.
If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky;
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant—
What then?

In *The Red Badge of Courage* this philosophical mood is for the most part absent. To the morbid sensibilities of Henry Fleming nature is by turns hostile and friendly, but occasionally something of Crane's own attitude is revealed. After the youth's first battle he is surprised to find that nature has been utterly indifferent during the horror and destruction of the battle:

As he gazed around him the youth felt a flash of astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleaming 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.

But this view of man in his relation to nature is theoretical, based, one must suppose, upon the deterministic philosophy current in the journalistic and intellectual milieu in which he moved in the early 'nineties and abstracted, perhaps, from his experience in the East Side slums. But

\[33\] *Work*, VI, 101.

\[34\] Nature seems to Henry an unfriendly obstruction to his flight. "Sometimes the brambles formed chains and tried to hold him back. Trees, confronting him, stretched out their arms and forbade him to pass. After its previous hostility this new resistance of the forest filled him with a fine bitterness. It seemed that Nature could not be quite ready to kill him" (*Work*, I, 86). When the youth flings a pine cone at a squirrel which runs chattering with fear, he finds in Nature a friendly reflection of his own point of view. "'There was the law,' he said. Nature had given him a sign... The youth wended, feeling that Nature was of his mind. She reinforced his argument with proof that lived where the sun shone" (*ibid.*, pp. 82-83).

\[35\] *Work*, I, 70.
Crane's trip to Mexico provided him with the experience which crystallized this attitude. At Atotonilco Crane reported in a dispatch to BacheUer, that "a baby, brown as a water-jar and of the shape of an alderman, paraded the bank in utter indifference or ignorance or defiance," and later this year, according to Berryman, Crane took exception to Henry James' idea of "disinterested contemplation" which two friends has urged upon him:

What, though, does the man mean by disinterested contemplation? It won't wash. If you care enough about a thing to study it, you are interested and have stopped being disinterested. That's so, is it not? Well, Q. E. D. It clamours in my skull that there is no such thing as disinterested contemplation except that empty as a beer pail look that a babe turns on you and shrivels you to grass with. Does anybody know how a child thinks? The horrible thing about a kid is that it makes no excuses, none at all. They are much like breakers on a beach. They do something and that is all there is in it. 36

Curiously, Crane equates the utter indifference of a primitive child with the cold, natural disinterestedness of sea breakers on a beach and thus anticipates precisely in his Mexican experience his experience with the open sea off the coast of Florida.

If nature is utterly indifferent all ethical responsibility falls upon man himself, and it is this corollary idea which dominates most of Crane's writing. Pete, Jimmie, and George in the early novels are ethically incompetent; they have no inner core of moral strength to fall back upon in the combat of life and thus they are doomed to tragic failure. Through sheer force of his moral conscience Henry Fleming becomes a competent soldier and thus a competent man. In the Western stories Crane's characters face essentially the same problems as do the young men of the

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36 Quoted in Berryman, p. 104.
New York novels, and their successes and failures are measured in the same terms—in their ability to cope through fortitude of moral character with the pressure of an external situation. If in Maggie it is environment, in George's Mother alcohol, and in The Red Badge the terror of modern warfare, then in the Western stories it is the dangers and hardships of a primitive—almost natural—condition of society.

In "Horses—One Dash," the first story Crane wrote after his trip to Mexico, Richardson is confronted with the primitive brutality of a ruthless bandit who invades the Easterner's bed room to kill him for his valuables. In his extreme fright the American merely sits bold upright while the Mexican menaces him with his eyes, undecided as to whether the stranger is a great fighter or merely an idiot. It is in Richardson's case the appearance of moral courage which saves him from instant death, and when he escapes while the bandit is distracted by a troop of girls in the next room, Richardson realizes that the life saving force against the murderous renegade has been his apparent courage:

He knew that, whereas his friend the enemy had not attacked him when he had sat still and with apparent calmness confronted them, they would certainly take furiously after him now that he had run from them—now that he had confessed to them that he was the weaker.38

37 This story, an adaptation of Crane's actual encounter with Ramon Colorado, was written during Crane's sojourn in Philadelphia in September, 1895. "... I am engaged at last," he wrote Hawkins on the 15th, "on my personal troubles in Mexico" (Stallman, Letters, p. 622).

38 Work, XII, 214. An incident which occurred during Crane's student days at Lafayette oddly parallels this one. In "Comments and Queries," The Lafayette Alumnus, II (February, 1932), 6, Colonel Ernest G. Smith recalls that Crane's room was invaded one night by a large hazing party, and that the future novelist was discovered "backed into a corner with a revolver in hand. He was ghastly white... and extremely nervous. There was no time to escape what might have proved a real tragedy until Crane unexpectedly seemed to wilt limply in place and the loaded revolver dropped harmlessly to the floor." In the story Richardson reacts similarly during the moment he faces the intruder. "To Richardson, whose nerves were tingling and twitching like live wires, and whose heart jolted inside him, this pause was a long horror..." (Work, XII, 208).
This motif occurs in other stories in variant forms. Bill, in "A Man—and Some Others," is threatened with death by Mexican ranchers if he does not take his sheep from a certain range. "And what are you going to do?" a young Easterner who has drifted into Bill's camp asks. "Fight?" 'Don't see nothin' else to do,' answers Bill, gloomily, still staring at the cactus-plant, and though he is killed in the battle that follows, he achieves a moral victory by virtue of his courageous stand against overwhelming odds. "Bill was dying, and the dignity of last defeat, the superiority of him who stands in his grave, was in the pose of the lost sheep-herder." In "The Five White Mice" circumstance throws the New York Kid into conflict with three deadly Mexican street brawlers and the Easterner, though sure that he is to be killed in an uneven fight, manages to draw his revolver with enough dispatch to make the Mexicans jump back with a gasp of fear:

The cry and backward steps revealed something of great importance to the New York Kid. He had never dreamed that he did not have a complete monopoly of all possible trepidations. The cry of the grandee was that of a man who suddenly sees a poisonous snake. Thus the Kid was able to understand swiftly that they were all human beings.

Marshall Jack Potter, in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," similarly wins

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39 Written sometime in the fall of 1896.
40 Work, XII, 74.
41 Ibid., p. 83.
42 Written in England in January, 1898, before Crane sailed for Cuba as a war-correspondent in March.
43 Ibid., p. 173.
44 Written in England early in 1898.
out over the murderous brutality of the gunman Scratchy Wilson by standing calmly before the drunken renegade’s guns, pointing out with admirable sang-froid that he is unarmed. In a more famous Western story, "The Blue Hotel," a Swede manifests his almost insane fear of the wild West in offensive aggression against a saloon gambler who stabs him to death before a cash register which ironically displays the legend "This registers the amount of your purchase." Circumstance has led the Swede into a situation with which he had not the moral courage to cope.

Like The Red Badge of Courage the Western stories inspect the moral fiber of their protagonists, and if sheer Chance or Fate or Circumstance creates the situation, then it is the moral quality of the character which resolves it. The New York Kid is, after all, only Henry Fleming under the pressure of a different situation, and when he is at last faced with the choice between action and abject destruction, his reaction is precisely the same as his counterpart in the war story. At the crucial moment in his career, Henry develops a wild hatred for the enemy whose relentless formidable strikes such terror in him, and when he "fights like a pagan who defends his religion," he is surprised to find that his foes "fall like paper peaks." The New York Kid experiences the same emotional reaction at the crucial moment in his trouble with the Mexican knife-fighters, whose cry of fear and convulsive retreat before the Kid’s drawn pistol first surprise and then enrage the Americans.

45 Composed in February, 1898.
46 Work, I, 150.
He had vaguely believed that they were not going to evince much consideration for his dramatic development as an active factor. . . . Instead, they had respected his movement with a respect as great even as an ejaculation of fear and backward steps. . . . He was bursting with rage because these men had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable. . . . And, after all, there had been an equality of emotion—an equality. He was furious. He wanted to take the scrape of the grandee and swaddle him in it.

In the Western stories Crane's characters are either learning great lessons in their crises or, like Jack Potter and Bill, putting what they have learned already into practice. At the crucial moment the Crane hero either absolves his fear through superior moral force or suffers, like the Swede and George Kelcey the tragic consequences.

With the exception of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" none of the Western stories represent notable artistic achievement. "Horses—One Dash" is faulty in form, the first half dealing with Richardson's encounter with the bandit, the second half shifting its emphasis to the performance of the horse on which the protagonist escapes. "The Blue Hotel" is imperfect structurally because Crane oddly violated his own artistic canon by attaching a superfluous coda in the form of a dialogue between the cowboy and the Easterner which explains the meaning of the story. The "long logic" of "The Blue Hotel" is thus reviewed in direct expression, not kept carefully "out of sight" as Crane's literary dictum required. Both "A Man—and Some Others" and "The Five White Mice" are likewise artistically uneconomical. A long superfluous flashback forms the middle of the former, and two contradictory themes, one dealing with the inscrutability of blind fate, the other with the New York Kid's education in the way of fear,

47 Work, XII, 173-74.
destroy the unity of the latter. The unsuccessful attempt to integrate these disparate themes shows plainly that the story is far from being perfectly realized.

Much more artistically effective is "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," a story perfectly sustained in its delicate ironic humor and comic contrast between the suggestion of peaceful domesticity in Jack Potter's new marriage and the utter lawlessness of his bride's new home, Yellow Sky, Texas, where Potter is the feared and respected Town Marshall. For an hour before Potter and his bride arrive at Yellow Sky by train, every door in the town has been locked and bolted against Scratchy Wilson, a dangerous, drunken hoodlum, "a wonder with a gun" who has on another occasion been shot by the Marshall for assaulting the town with pistols. Scratchy is wandering up and down the street before the Weary Gentleman saloon giving vent to bloodcurdling yells and firing pistols in either hand at anything moving. When Potter rounds the corner to his adobe home, he and his new wife come face to face with Scratchy, who has by now sought out the Marshall's house to challenge him to a gunfight. The drunken Scratchy thrusts his pistols into Potter's chest and smiles "with a new and quiet ferocity." "I ain't got a gun because I've just come from San Anton' with my wife. I'm married," said Potter. Scratchy, once he realizes the import of Potter's words, is utterly confounded. "He was like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world," and slowly he lowers the revolver to his side:

"Well, I 'low it's off, Jack," said Wilson. He was looking at the ground. "Married?" He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier
plains. He picked up his starboard revolver, and, placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away. His feet made funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand.

In the clarity of its realization and graceful spontaneity of execution, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" represents a level of achievement in the short story form which Crane had not reached since he wrote "The Face of Youth" in the spring of 1893.

In some of the Western stories, "Horses—One Dash" and "A Man—and Some Others," Crane moves toward the masterful prose styling of "The Open Boat." Less angular than the prose of the novels and earlier stories, the writing is more rounded, more flexible, and less insistent upon the epigrammatic phrase. Irony, the hallmark of Crane's writing always, desperate and icy in the earliest writing, occasionally forced in The Red Badge, is in these stories under sure control, appearing more delicate, often humorous, seldom as wry and grim as in the first two novels. Stylistically, the early Western tales stand between the full maturity of The Red Badge of Courage and the consummate artistry of "The Open Boat."

In sheer pictorial quality the Western stories perhaps surpass anything Crane ever wrote. The effect of Western and Mexican coloring upon a young writer whose response to color was as sensitive and appreciative as a painter's, was evidently electric:

Long, smouldering clouds spread in the western sky, and to the east silver mists lay on the purple gloom of the wilderness.

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48 Ibid., p. 75.
Finally, when the great moon climbed the heavens and cast its ghastly radiance upon the bushes, it made a new and more brilliant crimson of the camp-fire, where the flames capered merrily through its mesquit branches, filling the silence with the fire chorus.

With superb impressionistic strokes Crane often sketches memorable word pictures of the vast, empty Western wilderness:

To the left, miles down a long purple slope, was a little ribbon of mist where moved the keening Rio Grande.

In "Horses—One Dash" Crane contrasts with rare effect the flashing color of the gaudy Mexican costume and landscape with the sinister and smoky shadows of night in the primitive Mexican village:

Richardson pulled up his horse and looked back over the trail, where the crimson serape of his servant flamed amid the dusk of the mesquit. The hills in the west were carved into peaks, and were painted the most profound blue. Above them, the sky was of that marvellous tone of green—like still sun-shot water—which people denounce in pictures.

These colors fade into gloomy grays with the setting of the sun:

The horsemen rode into a hollow until the houses rose against the sombre sundown sky, and then up a small hillock, causing these habitations to sink like boats in the sea of shadow.

A beam of red firelight fell across the trail. Richardson sat sleepily on his horse while the servant quarreled with somebody—a mere voice in the gloom—over the price of bed and board. The houses about him were for the most part like tombs in their whiteness and silence, but there were scudding black figures that seemed interested in his arrival.

Except for a somewhat increased flexibility and in some passages a renewed vitality of coloring, the style of the Western stories is essentially

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49 Ibid., p. 90.
50 Ibid., p. 203.
51 Ibid., p. 204.
52 Ibid., p. 205.
the style of The Red Badge of Courage. Yet Crane oddly reflects in scattered passages through most of the stories and in one story in its entirety the stylistic influence of two other Western writers, Bret Harte and Mark Twain. A certain bravado of tone Crane perhaps felt compatible with his subject, and such phrasing as he employs in the summary of Bill's life mirrors the facetious formality of expression in a Bret Harte story:

It is well here to inform the world that Bill considered his calamities of life all dwarfs in comparison with the excitement of one particular evening when three kings came to him with criminal regularity against a man who always filled a straight.53

Occasionally, Crane's style exhibits the drawling anecdotal quality of Twain's writing about the West:

The conductor of No. 419 stood in the caboose within two feet of Bill's nose and called him a liar. Bill requested him to use a milder term. He had not bored the foreman of Tin Can Ranch with any such request, but had killed him with expedition.54

One story, "Moonlight on the Snow," a humorous fantasy about a wild Western town whose citizens try for purely commercial reasons to gain enough respectability in the eyes of the law to become a civilized community by attempting to hang the suave, gentlemanly gambler Larpent, is in the manner of Harte in its style, tone and humorous incongruity of incident.

Except for "Horses—One Dash," and "A Man—and Some Others," Crane curiously abandoned Western themes for almost two years after his return to New York in May, 1895, writing "The Blue Hotel," "The Bride Comes to

53 Ibid., p. 68.
54 Ibid., p. 69.
Yellow Sky," "The Five White Mice," and various little Western sketches such as "Twelve O'Clock" and "The Wise Men," during his residence in England in 1898 and 1899. Settled in Hartwood in October, Crane almost immediately started his fourth novel, The Third Violet, which reflects in its easy, pleasant realism something of the manner of Howells and stands for the most part far outside the main stream of development of Crane's art. Except in "The Pace of Youth," an early short story, Crane never wrote successfully of romantic love, and The Third Violet, the story of an impressionist painter's and a New York belle's summer courtship at a Sullivan County resort inn, is the outstanding example of Crane's inability to overcome a certain self-conscious inanity in his writing about love between the sexes.

The writer had misgiving about The Third Violet from the beginning. "The novel is one-third completed," he wrote Hawkins on November 7, 1895. "I am not sure that it is any good. It is easy work. I can finish a chapter each day."55 A week later, when the book was half finished, Crane wrote again. "It seems clever sometimes and sometimes it seems nonsensical."56 The author's brother, Teddie, "an awful stuff in literature," probably saw the real significance of the story more clearly than Crane did at times, for the author complained indignantly that the brother "discovered the fellow and the girl in the story and read on to find out if they married."57 But Crane's critical sense eventually righted his sense of outrage, for after the manuscript had been sent to Hitchcock at

55 Stallman (Letters), p. 630.
56 Ibid., p. 635.
57 Ibid., p. 637.
Appleton's on December 27, the writer wrote Curtis Brown, editor of the New York Press that he thought it would not be accepted. "It's pretty rotten work. I used myself up in the accursed 'Red Badge.'" A month later, though, Crane judged it less harshly when he wrote Ripley Hitchcock, who was evidently dubious about the quality of the book, to go ahead with the publication:

I think it is as well to go ahead with The Third Violet. People may just as well discover now that the high dramatic key of The Red Badge cannot be sustained. You know what I mean. I don't think The Red Badge to be any great shakes but then the very theme of it gives it an intensity that a writer can't reach every day. The Third Violet is a quiet little story but then it is serious work and I should say let it go. If my health and my balance remains to me, I think I will be capable of doing work that will dwarf both books.59

There is little doubt that Crane fully recognized the artistic weaknesses of The Third Violet.

But even as a failure The Third Violet illuminates Crane as a literary artist, for it reveals in a single book the special weaknesses that mar a great deal of his writing after 1895. Except in The Red Badge and a few short stories, notably "The Open Boat," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," and "The Pace of Youth," Crane demonstrates erratic structural abilities, and The Third Violet is probably the weakest in regard to form of any of Crane's previous work. The story is an imperfect welding of two strands of biography, Hawker's painful love for Miss Fanhall being Crane's cruel experience in 1891 with Helen Trent, and the painter's

58 Ibid., p. 643.

59 Ibid., p. 646.
relation to a group of bohemian artists in New York being the writer's experience with a crowd of indigent impressionists with whom he lived when he was a free lance newspaper reporter in 1892 and 1893. The elaborate portrayal of artist life in the second half of the novel has little relation to the central purpose of the story, except to provide in the ribald, facetious artists instruments of torture for the suffering Hawker. From the inartistic digression into artist life, the story returns to the courtship, continued now in New York, and through Hawker's elaborate interpretation of the emotional motives behind Miss Fanhall's gift of three violets, the painter discovers that he is after all, loved by the almost unbelievably noncommittal lady.

Crane suffered as an artist, his editor, Wilson Follett, points out, from the constitutional inability to objectify those emotional experiences which touched him most vitally. Maggie, George's Mother, and The Red Badge, though springing directly from Crane's observation of human nature, are only remotely autobiographical. If aspects of George's and Henry's characters are auctorial self-dramatizations they involve no emotion which pierces below the surface of the intellect into the realm of pure feeling. Crane thus managed to remain coldly and objectively analytical in his dissections of the characters of his young men, and the emotions he portrayed in their stories are imaginative projections rather than literal transcriptions. In The Third Violet Crane attempted to write autobiographically, to adapt to literary expression his own personal and painful

emotional experience of 1891, and in so doing sacrifices art to personal emotional purgation through pages of irrelevant depiction of the suffering of Hawker, who represents Crane the disappointed lover, the cruel gibing of Hollanden, his writer friend, who represents Crane the self-critic. Of all Crane's writing The Third Violet is probably the least objective.

In style The Third Violet is even farther removed from the Crane norm than in subject and treatment. Impressionism is almost wholly abandoned and substituted for it is the more prosaic, reportorial style of literary realism. This competent journalistic manner Crane employs here for the first time, though it occurs as a norm in the enormous bulk of war correspondence and sketches which he was to write in the last years of his life. The irony, the studied metaphor, and the carefully turned phrasing of the earlier work are hardly apparent in the pages of The Third Violet, which might have been composed, perhaps, by almost any of Crane's writing contemporaries.

Despite Crane's concentration upon The Third Violet in the last three months of 1895, he found time to compose a little series of five stories dealing again with the Civil War, the best of which is "A Mystery of Heroism," written shortly after the correspondent's return from Mexico. This story is an additional comment upon the theme of The Red Badge in that it is an account of an ordinary soldier named Collins who discovers unexpectedly that he has the character of a war hero. When Collins' friends sneer at his casual remark that he would go across a meadow under

61 For an account of Crane's youthful love affair see p. 29, this study.
heavy rifle fire to get a canteen of water from the well of an abandoned farm house, the young soldier asks his officers' permission and doggedly sets out, much to the amazement of both the officers and men of his company. Reflecting upon what he has done, Collins himself is amazed. "It seemed to him supernaturally strange that he had allowed his mind to manoeuvre his body into such a situation." Collins feels that he is "an intruder in the land of fine deeds:"

He wondered why he did not feel some keen agony of fear cutting his sense like a knife. He wondered at this, because human expression had said loudly for centuries that men should feel afraid of certain things, and that all men who did not feel this fear were phenomena—heroes. . . . After all, heroes were not much. 62

"The Veteran," a sketch written about the same time, introduces the Swede of "The Blue Hotel" and re-introduces Henry Fleming, the hero of Chancellorsville, as an old man. Gossiping about his service at the country store, old Henry admits frankly and humorously that he ran from his first battle, much to the chagrin of his small grandson, Jimmie. But when the barn catches fire that night, the old man evacuates all the animals but two colts. The frightened Swede yells hysterically that the two animals are still in the flaming barn, and old Fleming, staring absent-mindedly at the open barn doors for a moment mutters "The poor little things," and rushes into the boiling smoke:

When the roof fell in, a great funnel of smoke swarmed toward the sky, as if the old man's mighty spirit, released from its body—a little bottle—had swelled like the genie of the fable. The smoke was tinted rose-hue from the flames, and perhaps the unutterable midnights of the universe will have no power to daunt the colour of his soul. 63

62 Work, XI, 130.
63 Work, I, 209.
The other war stories of this period are undistinguished. In "A Grey Sleeve" Crane touches again upon the theme of romantic love, trying in the account of a Union soldier's meeting with a Confederate girl to catch the pathos of young love foiled by a blighting war. "Three Miraculous Soldiers," written in the noncommittal style of The Third Violet, is the story of three Confederate soldier's escape from marauding Union cavalry. In "An Indiana Campaign," an account of a peaceful wayside village's excitement over the rumor that a rebel is hiding in nearby woods, has touches of ironic humor and passages of astute analyses of the young boy's mind imaging bold and heroic deeds, but it is a mere episode, hardly worthy of consideration as a short story. Crane himself thought highly of his novellette, "The Little Regiment," a rather ordinary story about two brothers who apparently hate one another but each of whom spends long anxious hours waiting to hear that the other has safely weathered the storm of battle. "It is awfully hard," Crane wrote to Hawkins in November, 1895. I have invented the sum of my invention in regard to war and this story keeps me in internal despair."64 But to the editor of the Critic Crane was more sanguine, writing in February that he "was now finishing 'The Little Regiment' which represents my work at its best," and that it "is positively my last thing dealing with battle."65 It is one of the ironies of Crane's literary career that this should have been written less than a year before he was to embark upon a series of adventures that was to lead him through two wars in little more than two years. But it is true that

64 Stallman (Letters), p. 632.
65 Ibid., p. 647.
the little group of war stories that followed upon the success of The Red Badge of Courage were Crane's last things dealing with imaginary battle and, paradoxically, they come at the end of the period that produced Crane's greatest writing about war.

The work produced in the months between February, 1895 and November, 1896 shows no marked literary advances, but it reveals several factors relevant to the whole stream of Crane's literary development. The stories which draw upon his experiences in the West and Mexico help define Crane's principal concerns as a writer. As in most of the work preceding this period, Maggie, George's Mother, The Red Badge of Courage, and even the Sullivan County stories, Crane is concerned in the Western sketches with man under stress, and in the primitive communities of the West he found in "straight out-and-out" cowboys, shepherders, gamblers and Town Marshalls what appeared to him a heroic type. In Nebraskan floods and droughts, in the endless expanse of Texas plains, and the primitive society of the Mexican village, Crane saw manifested the indifference of nature, and this localisation of the bleak philosophy of an "echoless, ignorant" universe leads directly to the point of view which lies behind "The Open Boat."

Crane made scanty use of the materials the West afforded him, writing "A Man—and Some Others" and "Horses—One Dash" and reserving materials for the other stories until after his Cuban adventure in 1897. By the end of 1895 his growing fame as the author of The Red Badge turned him again to the writing of war stories which were either sequels to the novel or reworkings of the battle scenes into the short story form. "A Mystery of Heroism," though it depends chiefly for its effect upon a Biercian surprise ending is an interesting restatement of the relation of fear to
courage, one of the themes treated at length in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

During the composition of these sketches and stories, the writer oddly abandoned his usual themes and called upon two autobiographical experiences of 1893 for *The Third Violet*. With this formless novel the writer for the first time abandons the detached and objective point of view which characterizes his earlier novels and demonstrates clearly that he is unable to adapt successfully to art that experience which deeply touched him emotionally. This characteristic, not at all apparent in Crane's writing before 1895, mars some of the best later work and accounts in part, at least, for his failure to produce after 1897 any work comparable in stature with "The Open Boat."

This period is, then, one of literary stagnation, despite the fact that it furnished Crane with the experience which produced a notable piece of Western literature in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." In the two Western stories Crane employs the same brilliant, impressionistic style of *The Red Badge of Courage* with even greater suppleness and flexibility, but in *The Third Violet* and most of the war stories he exhibits an inclination toward the slick and noncommittal manner of the professional journalist, a style which becomes a norm in the massive bulk of his newspaper correspondence and in some of his sketches and stories after 1897.
Crane's literary failures of 1896 mark the beginning of his artistic decline, and though the most adventurous period of his life was just beginning when Bacheller brought him out of his Sullivan county retreat in November and sent him on a filibustering expedition to Cuba, the relation between Crane's experience and his art was abruptly broken off, with one notable exception, after the Western and Mexican tour of 1895. The sinking of the *Cosmopolite* and Crane's adventure in the open boat off the coast of Florida gave him the material for his greatest short story. But his hectic chasing about Greece for experience with real war, his subsequent exile in England, his visits to Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, his service for the *New York World* and the *New York Journal* in Cuba in 1898, and his association with the most famous writers and journalists in both England and the United States during the last three years of his life contributed nothing significant to the development of his art. For the most part, Crane's production after "The Open Boat" amounts to little more than fluent and clever journalism.

It is, then, another irony of Crane's career that the period of his most pregnant and varied experience was the least productive in literature. The novel which resulted from his experience in Greece as a war correspondent contains hardly a paragraph about battle, and the *Wilcoxville* sketches, most of which were written after he had seen war at Guantanamo and San Juan,
draw not upon the battlefield for their material, but upon his observation of child life in a New Jersey village. *The O'Ruddy*, a satire on English life and manners in the fashion of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, is only remotely related to any actual observation upon the scene of life. How, then, the question arises, is it that Crane so frequently abandons after "The Open Boat" the essential principle of his art, the stern, guiding dictum that art grows directly out of experience and is a faithful reflection of real life? The answer is necessarily complex and subject to various interpretations, but it lies partly, surely, in the facts of his failing health, in his oppression by debt, worry, and public scandal, and in the ignominy of his self-imposed exile. The chief reason, however, is perhaps that the swift last three years of Crane's life as a newspaper correspondent adversely affected his life as an artist. His death in 1900 cut short the process of converting the mountainous ore of his cumulated experience into the coin of art.

It is clear that Crane's literary principles underwent no revisions. There is evidence that he clearly understood up to the very end which of his stories were truly unworthy of his artistic ideals. He came to see *The Third Violet*, which he tried to rationalize once as "a quiet little story but serious work," in proper literary perspective, inscribing a gift copy in 1897 with the words "This book is even worse than any of the others."¹ "I hope," he wrote in February of 1900 in reference to *The O'Ruddy*, "That the new book will be good enough to get me to Colorado. It will not be good for much more than that..."² Crane knew well enough

¹ Stallman (Letters), p. 660.
the difference in the design of what was intended to rid him of his debts and what was intended to pass as literature, and the theory he formulated in 1892 about the relation of art to experience he held to the last. "My idea is to come finally to live at Port Jervis or Hartwood," he wrote his brother William after his sojourn in Greece in 1897. "I am a wanderer now and I must see enough but—afterwards—I think of P. J. and Hartwood."\(^3\)

This compulsion to "see enough," the guiding force of Crane's last three years of life, drove the writer into a career of wild adventure more romantic than anything he dared in fiction. In Jacksonville in November, waiting for an opportunity to get to Cuba, Crane loitered in the back washes of the city's conspiratorial society, taciturn and watchful, spending "night after night in the back room of a grimy waterfront saloon. . . listening to the talk of oilers, deckhands, sponge fisherman, wharf-rats and dock thieves. . . ."\(^4\) In this exciting atmosphere of international intrigue, seething now from Spain's "clumsy effort to prevent an insurrection becoming a revolution,"\(^5\) he met Cora Taylor, who, after an unsuccessful marriage to an English army officer and a term as a politician's mistress, had settled in Florida as the proprietress of the Hotel de Dream. Hereafter this remarkable adventuress figured largely in Crane's life, following him to Greece as the first woman war correspondent and ultimately settling with him in England. Doubtless she determined to a great extent Crane's choice of an English residence during the last months of his life.

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3 Stallman (Letters), p. 663. Italics mine.

4 Charles Michelson, "Introduction," The Work of Stephen Crane, XII, xii.

5 Ibid., p. x.
By December Crane had made arrangements with Captain Edward Murphy to sail for Cuba as a seaman on the Commodore, a small, unseaworthy steamer carrying a cargo of cased guns and ammunition and a party of Cuban insurrectionists. The little steamer's departure was inauspicious. She grounded twice in the St. John's River on the way to the open sea, and on January 2, twenty miles off the coast of Florida she sank while Crane, Captain Murphy, and two sailors watched in the grey dawn from a ten-foot dingy riding precariously on the mountainous waves of a raging sea. Thirty hours later, Crane, the captain, and one of the sailors were dragged half conscious from the roaring surf at Daytona Beach after the other sailor, the oiler William Higginson, had lost his life in the last desperate attempt to beach the boat through the raging breakers.

Nursed back to health by Cora, Crane gradually abandoned his hopes for securing passage to Cuba, and having arranged with the New York Journal for a place as a correspondent in Europe, turned his attention toward the Greco-Turkish war. To his brother Edmund he wrote on March 11, 1897:

I have been for over a month among the swamps further South, wading miserably to and from in an attempt to avoid our deuced U. S. Navy. It can't be done. I am through trying. I have changed all my plans and am going to Crete.6

A few days later Crane was in New York arranging passage to England, and after four days in London, during which he was assigned to report the war for the Westminster Gazette, he crossed to Paris on his way, not to Crete, as he had originally planned, but to Greece. By mid-April he was in Athens, ready to begin a month of wild and chaotic chasing of battles and skirmishes. He was in Arta briefly and then in Volo and Velestino, where he witnessed

6 Berryman, p. 167.
the last stage of the Greek stand and then covered the slow, sullen Greek retreat to Domokos. In Athens again in early May, he met Cora Taylor, who was reporting to the Journal as "Imogene Carter," and then after the Greeks' final desperate struggle at Thermopylae, returned to the capital again for the signing of the armistice on May 20.

After the gruelling experience in the open boat off the coast of Florida, recurrent illness plagued Crane for the rest of his life, and he remained in Athens until June, sick, and disappointed with his first experience of war. He had high hopes when he arrived in Greece earlier of verifying the imagined battle scenes of The Red Badge of Courage. "The Red Badge is all right," he told Garnett in England later. "I have found it as I imagined it." But he expressed his disappointment frankly enough in Athens:

I guess that I expected some sublime force to lift me in the air and let me watch. Well, no! Like trying to see a bum vaudeville show from behind a fat man who wiggles. I have not been well either.

He found real war more confused and chaotic, even, than he had depicted in The Red Badge, where at least he had the auctorial license to transcend the limited view of his common soldiers and report that the generals were moving their regiments and battalions like pieces in a game of chess. But real war was altogether unlike the illusion of real war, and when Crane came to write the one short story he based upon his first view of


8 Beer, p. 154.
actual battle, he changed not at all the basic impressionistic technique with which he had created the illusion of reality in *The Red Badge*.

In June Crane, Cora, and their servants set out for England, arriving early in July without plans, evidently, for as late as September 2 his publisher Heinemann and the novelist Harold Frederic were urging him to settle in London permanently. But it was doubtless his notorious reputation in New York, made even worse now by his illegal relationship with Cora, that finally decided him. "I am disappointed with success, and I am tired of abuse," he wrote Hilliard later this year. "Over here, happily, they don't treat you as if you were a dog, but give every one an honest measure of praise and blame. There are no disgusting personalities."

Ford Madox Ford, correcting Beer's statement that Crane was coldly received in England, states that he was "accepted at once, on his achievements and personality, as a serious and distinguished human being. . . ." He was "received at once as an equal into the intimacies of Conrad and Henry James, . . ."

9 Crane's description of the terrified peasants' retreat from the mountains before the advancing Turks illustrates his continued use of the impressionistic technique: "It was a freshet that might bear the face of the tall, quiet mountain; it might draw a livid line across the land, this downpour of fear with a thousand homes adrift in the current—men, women, babes, animals. From it there arose a constant babble of tongues, shrill broken, and sometimes choking, as from men drowning. Many made gestures, painting their agonies on the air with fingers that twirled swiftly" (*Work*, XII, 241).

10 Stallman (Letters), p. 660.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 674. Crane changed his opinion of the English. "You Indians," he wrote James Huneker, American critic and writer, "have been wasting wind in telling me how "Unintrusive" and "DELICATE" I would find English manners. I don't. It has not yet been the habit of people I meet at Mr. Howells or Mr. Phillips or Mrs. Bonn's to let fall my hand and begin to quickly ask me how much money I make and from which French realist I shall steal my next book" (loc. cit.).
and Mr. Edward Garnett and all the intensely highbrow Fabians of Limpesfield, and Mr. Shaw and Professor Hobson. . . ."12

Crane's English exile, uninterrupted until his death in 1900 except for the nine months he was absent to report the Spanish-American war, bears on his development as a writer of fiction in only one positive way: it dictated his choice of themes for The Monster and The Whilomville Stories, the first social studies Crane made after George's Mother in 1893. These studies of herd thinking, malice, envy, and social brutality doubtless grew out of the suffering he incurred from his American slanderers, and from the vantage point of his exile he attempted to relieve his bitterness through the medium of fiction. Though Crane affected indifference, for the most part, to the stories of his moral depravity circulating about New York, something of his true feeling perhaps shows in the protests he made to his brother William in October:

There seem so many of them in America who want to kill, bury and forget me purely out of unkindness and envy— and my unworthiness, if you choose. All the hard things they say of me affect me principally because I think of mine own people—you and Teddie and the families. It is nothing, bless you. Now Dick Davis for instance has come to like the abuse. He accepts it as a tribute to his excellence. But he is a fool. Now I want you to promise to never pay any attention to it, even in your thought. It is too immaterial and foolish.13

Like Dr. and Mrs. Trescott in The Monster, Crane had become a victim of the mass malice of a community.


13 Stallman (Letters), p. 663.
Crane's acceptance into a remarkable circle of artists and writers that included Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Harold Frederick, Edward Garnett, Ford Madox Ford, and a host of lesser fictionists and journalists affected his writing little. He admired The Nigger of the Narcissus greatly; indeed, it was this book that led him to request an introduction to Conrad, but there is no evidence that the English novelist influenced Crane. With the publication of The Nigger in 1896 Conrad was just becoming known, and he was fond of pointing out to Crane "with affected humility" that the young American was his senior as an author.14 "I am envious of you—horribly. Confound you—you fill the blamed landscape—you—by all the devils—fill the seascape," he wrote Crane in December, and later, when a critic suggested that Conrad had imitated Crane, the author of The Nigger wrote again: "Do you think I tried to imitate you? No Sir! I may be a little fool but I know better than to try to imitate the inimitable. But here it is. Courtney says it."15

If Crane gave no thought to what Conrad could have taught him, he was even less drawn to the work of James. This novelist, peculiarly attracted to the younger and oddly solicitous of his critical opinions, presented Crane with an elaborately inscribed copy of In a Cage, and the author of Maggie admitted that he "got horribly tired half through and just reeled along through the rest. Women think more directly than he lets this girl

14 Conrad, p. 5. Conrad recalls that he "considered Crane, by virtue of his creative experience with 'The Red Badge of Courage' eminently fit to pronounce a judgment on my first consciously planned attempt to render the truth. . . ." (ibid., p. 3.)

think. But notice the writing in the fourth and fifth chapters when he has really got started..." 16 Both Crane's strength and weakness lie in the attitude which allowed him to disregard with heedless independence one of the most astute students of the art of fiction. "Oh, I've read some of ol' man James'," he once remarked to Ford, who could not remember which essay Crane named. 17 The art of the two writers was polar, and no one recognized the distinctions more clearly than Crane.

The first period of Crane's English exile gave him the leisure to write again despite the crushing burden of his debts and the worrying attention of hosts of English friends who called at Limpfield, where he settled first, and later at Ravensbrook Place. He began The Monster almost immediately upon his arrival in the summer of 1897 and finished it in September during a quick tour of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, a trip which gave Crane the material for four little familiar essays called "Irish Notes" and a light, airy account of a ride from London to Glasgow in the cab of a locomotive. He finished "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" in the late fall and in mid-February mailed "The Blue Hotel" to his literary agent, Paul Revere Reynolds, to whom Crane was now making desperate appeals for sales to alleviate his financial burdens. In December he sent Reynolds "Death and the Child," the only story besides Active Service which came out of his experience in Greece, and told his agent that he had offered McClure his Greek novel, still in the planning stage, for two hundred pounds. 18

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16 Berryman, p. 237.
17 Ford, p. 28.
18 Stallman (Letters), p. 671.
The Maine incident in Havana harbor in February had scarcely affected the writer, but suddenly in March he made a desperate plea to Conrad for money to get to New York, and Crane and his friend rushed about London trying to borrow. "Crane's white-faced excitement frightened me," Conrad recalled. "Nothing could have held him back. He was ready to swim the ocean." 19

Crane's experience in Cuba and Puerto Rico as a correspondent for the World and the Journal produced some forty routine dispatches (the best of which is his account of the battle of San Juan), thirteen short stories and sketches, and a short review of his adventures published under the title of War Memories." As a correspondent Crane was often indifferent and always dilatory. His dispatches, though occasionally enlivened with a felicitous phrase or a splash of sharp color, were hastily composed, subjective, undistinguished generally in style, filled with egotistical "I's" and indifferent realism. He was still, as always, a bad journalist, temperamentally unsuited to the exigencies of the deadline and rigid editorial formality. "His was the soul of the artist, slowly, carefully fashioning his phrases, sensitive to the time, place, and the mood," Ralph Paine, a fellow correspondent recalled. "He refused to take the responsibilities of daily journalism seriously. He had been known to shorten the life of a managing editor." 20

According to Paine, Crane often neglected for days to write accounts of what he saw. At Guantanamo he became so absorbed in the progress of the battle that he neglected to report to his paper, and a friend named MacCready had to bribe him to write an account of his experience. Crane

19 Conrad, pp. 32-33.

finally consented to dictate, although he was "very much bored."

It was a ridiculous scene—MacCready the conscientious reporter, waiting with pencil and paper—Crane the artist, deliberating over this phrase or that, finicky about a word, insisting upon frequent changes and erasures and growing more and more suspicious.

"Read it aloud, Mad, as far as it goes. I believe you are murdering my stuff."

"I dropped out a few adjectives here and there, Steve. This has to be news, sent at cable rates. You can save your flub-dub and shoot it to New York by mail..."

But Crane refused to write under the pressure of time and circumstance, and though Richard Harding Davis rated him the best of the correspondents in the Cuban campaigns, the World was displeased with his performance, refusing to give him an advance on his salary when he called at the Pulitzer offices upon his return from Cuba.

Crane's adventures in Florida and Greece had weakened his health, but the Cuban adventures broke it down completely. In July he was delerious for several days, and an army doctor ordered him to isolate himself aboard a military transport. At Old Point Comfort, Virginia, where he recuperated briefly, someone saw him with a Mrs. Bolton Chaffee and immediately spread the news that he had eloped with the wife of General A. R. Chaffee, the unmarried hero of El Caney. The correspondent wrote a wry letter of apology to the lady from Cuba:

... You must be careful about feeding runaway dogs.

Mr. Seiss informs me that you and I are sinners and that

21 Ibid., p. 246.


23 See Don C. Seitz, "Stephen Crane, War Correspondent," The Bookman, LXXVII (February, 1933), 139. "I have just kissed your little friend Stephen Crane good-bye," John Norris, financial manager of the World told Seitz one day in August. "He came here asking for another advance. 'Don't you think you have had enough of Mr. Pulitzer's money without earning it?' I asked. 'Oh, very well,' he said, 'If that is the way you look at it, by-by.' So we're rid of him."
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.24

After the short and colorless Puerto Rican campaign Crane was in New York briefly, thinking of settling in America, of buying a ranch in Texas, perhaps. But one evening in December a policeman attempted to arrest him for drunkenness when he was coming out of a theatre with Mrs. William Sonntag and her cousin, a priest, and a few days later another policeman stopped him and abused him when he was walking with a friend on Madison Avenue.25 Crane gave up the idea of settling in America and early in January he sailed back to his English exile.

The chronology of Crane's last work is uncertain. During October and part of November he had buried himself in the Hotel Pasaje in Havana and had written steadily, finishing Active Service and a number of the war stories, including "The Price of the Harness,"26 "The Clan of No Name," and "His Majestic Lie." At least one of the Whilomville stories, "His New Mittens," he had written earlier while waiting at Key West for the war to begin, and now in England, with the coming of warm weather in the spring of 1899, he turned again to these totally different series of sketches, finishing the Whilomville stories first,27 and then turning again to battle themes with "War Memories."

26 See the October letter to Reynolds in Stallman (Letters), p. 682.
27 Harper's Magazine published one in every issue from August, 1899 to September, 1900, inclusive.
Settled now in Brede Place, an ancient manor-house provided rent free by Moreton Frewen, Crane fell into the routine interrupted by the war, writing desperately again for money, receiving far too many visitors, and fighting less willfully now against the alarming inroads of consumption. Gossip about Cora's past was abroad among his English acquaintances now, and Crane thought again of moving to Texas—or any place where the climate was dry.

But he was too late. He began to hemorrhage during the winter of 1900 and in March Cora borrowed money to get her failing husband to the continent. At Dover, where he was obliged to rest two weeks, attended by James, Conrad, and Robert Barr, Crane dictated to Cora the situations of the newly begun The O'Ruddy. Early in May he was able to travel and Cora managed to get him as far as Badenweiler, Germany, before he collapsed again. He rallied briefly on June 4, wrote letters to his brothers and played for a time with his dog Sponge. He had got Barr's promise to finish The O'Ruddy and told him, when the journalist said something about future plans: "Robert, when you come to the hedge—that we must all go over—it isn't bad. You feel sleepy—and—you don't care. Just a little dreamy curiosity—which world you're in—that's all."28 During the night he was seized with a final hemorrhage, and at three o'clock in the morning, June 5, 1900, Crane died.

If he were dogged by ill-luck and public hostility that forced him into exile and at the end into writing inane romances, circumstance gave

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Crane a supreme moment in January, 1897 in which the philosophy he had derived from his whole life experience was confirmed in his adventure in the ten-foot dinghy, and from this incident Crane erected an indestructible monument to his life and art in the superb short story, "The Open Boat." None of his writings afford a better example than this story of his method in adapting experience to art. His newspaper account, which appeared in the New York Press on January 6 is in itself a tale of high adventure. With admirable restraint, Crane relates the loading of the ship the afternoon of January 1 in full view of a crowd at the docks, the harrowing experience of two groundings in the St. John's River, the ominous prophecy of the cook that the Commodore would sink, and the tense excitement in the pilot house when the captain discovers at four o'clock the following morning that the engine room is shipping water faster than the pumps can clear it. The description of the engine room recalls the characteristic impressionism of Crane's fiction writing:

The engine room... represented a scene at this time taken from the middle kitchen of Hades. In the first place, it was insufferably warm, and the lights burned faintly in a way to cause mystic and gruesome shadows. There was a quantity of soapish sea water swirling and sweeping and swishing among machinery that roared and banged and clattered and steamed, and, in the second place, it was a devil of ways down below.29

The account of pre-dawn launching of the lifeboats while the whistle of the Commodore, "a voice of despair and death," wailed "as if its throat was already choked by the water," is straight-forward and effective, but in the report of the trapped first mate's plunge from the sinking ship into

the "cold, steely sheen of the sweeping waves," Crane's simple prose becomes eloquent and moving:

... then the first mate threw his hands over his head and plunged into the sea. He had no life belt and for my part, even when he did this horrible thing, I somehow felt that I could see in the expression of his hands, and in the very toss of his head, as he leaped thus to death, that it was rage, rage, rage unspeakable that was in his heart at the time. 30

The despairing account of the futile rescue operation of the four men in the ten-foot dinghy and the account of the Commodore's dive beneath the sweeping waves lead to a dramatic climax:

We rowed around to see if we could not get a line from the chief engineer, and all this time, mind you, there were no shrieks, no groans, but silence, silence, and silence, and then the Commodore sank.

She lurched to windward, then swung afar back, righted and dove into the sea, and the rafts were suddenly swallowed by this frightful maw of the ocean. And then by the men on the ten-foot dingy were words said that were still not words—something far beyond words.

The lighthouse of Mosquito Inlet stuck up above the horizon like the point of a pin. We turned our dinghy toward shore. 31

Crane must have known instinctively which incident in this adventure suited the purposes of his art, for "The Open Boat" begins precisely where the newspaper account ends. It is clear from the last paragraph of the report that the writer made his selection almost immediately:

The history of life in an open boat for thirty hours would no doubt be instructive for the young, but none is be told here and now. For my part I would prefer to tell the story at once, because from it would shine the splendid manhood of Captain Edward Murphy and of William Higgins, the oiler, but let it suffice at this time to

30 Loc. cit.
31 Loc. cit.
Several days later, when he began the story, Crane had shifted the central point of interest from the manhood of Captain Murphy to the death of William Higgins, the oiler. The death of Higgins underscores the theme of the story, the utter, blank indifference of nature to man, and it is thus in the tragic end of the oiler that Crane finds a point of focus for the structure of "The Open Boat."

In no other story does Crane rely so heavily upon symbolism for the expression of his theme. The symbolic devices of George's Mother, the earlier "Experiment in Misery," and even The Red Badge of Courage can be isolated without doing great violence to the meaning of the story, though the structure and significance of the war story, to be sure, depend heavily upon Crane's use of symbols. But the symbols of "The Open Boat," radiating from the plight and fate of the oiler and the indifferent aspect of nature, blend both structure and meaning into an organic whole. Nature's indifference to the oiler is the cause of his death, and these two concepts—death and indifference—are reflected again and again in constantly shifting patterns of language. The raging sea is a physical representation of nature, and its waves, "most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall," "outrageously high," have not the slightest regard for the plight of the four men in the dinghy. Later it is the tall windtower on the shore which symbolizes the impassivity of nature:

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32 Loc. cit.
This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent.33

Again nature appears in the guise of "a high cold star on a winter's night, and once more in the frightful speed and power of a shark, a "thing which had followed the boat and waited" evidently grown bored..."34 Brown mats of seaweed drift heedlessly, neither one way nor the other.

With these various symbols of nature's indifference Crane contrasts the frailty and helplessness of man, expressed in the story's opening through a symbolic object closely associated with the oiler. The oiler steers with "a thin little oar, and it often seemed ready to snap."35 Thus the death of the oiler, who figuratively "snaps" at the very end of the voyage is prepared for in a symbol which is echoed in motifs expressive of general ineffectualness of all the men in the dinghy. A man in an open boat at the mercy of the sea "might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds. 'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!'"36

33 Work, XII, pp. 55-56.
34 Ibid., p. 53.
35 Ibid., p. 29. This and other symbols in the story are pointed out by Stallman, to whose analysis of "The Open Boat" this discussion is indebted. The story may have religious significance, like The Red Badge, as Stallman suggests (p. 420), but the theme of "immersion and regeneration," or salvation through change seems much more applicable to the war story than to "The Open Boat." The reference to the rescuer on the beach as a saint with a halo about his head seems coincidental, since there is no developed pattern of religious motifs.
36 Ibid., p. 41.
Helplessness is paralleled symbolically in the complete inadequacy of the ten-foot dinghy, in the captain's broken arm, and in the correspondent's utter immobility in the strong undertow when he swims for the beach.

Indifference and helplessness are then the two major motifs of the story, and around these ideas Crane weaves a pattern of figurative language in symbols, metaphor, suggestive connotations, and parallel meanings. Thus the correspondent recalls during the long night a poem about a dying soldier in Algiers, and it occurs to him that his attitude toward this man's death had always been that of nature toward his own plight. "He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers... It was less to him than the breaking of a pencil's point."

The men had been utterly abandoned to the sea by the sinking of the Commodore and likewise by the life-saving station on the shore. "Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago," the cook says. "Did they?" said the captain. The abandonment motif parallels strongly the theme of helplessness.

The structure of both "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge of Courage is essentially the same, not only in the use of symbols to achieve a unified form, but also in the careful ordering of contrasting ideas and moods. The hope-despair sequence which, Stallman points out, is a recurring device in all of Crane's important writing, provides a delicate pattern of constantly shifting moods which are often played one against the other with ironic

37 Ibid., p. 52.
38 Ibid., p. 37.
39 Stallman, p. 418.
implications. Despair is uppermost in the opening passage, and this mood emanates from the injured captain. The cook gazes eastward over the churning sea and often says "Gawd! that was a narrow clip." The oiler rows silently with his frail little oar. The correspondent merely wonders what he is doing there. But the mood of despair which suffuses the opening scene is focused in the attitude of the captain:

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy-nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he command for a day or a decade; and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a topmast with a white ball on it, that slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.40

A ray of hope alleviates this mood:

The cook had said: "There's a house of refuge just north of Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us they'll come off in their boat and pick us up."41

The conversation between the correspondent and the cook vacillates briefly between hope and despair, and then the words of the oiler close the first episode with a firm re-establishment of the principal mood:

"Well," said the cook, "perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light; perhaps it's a life-saving station."
"We're not there yet," said the oiler in the stern.42

40 Work, p. 30.
41 Ibid., p. 31.
42 Ibid., p. 32.
The second episode opens in the same sombre mood, but is almost immediately dispelled by the discovery that an overcoat will serve as a sail. Hope dominates again when the little crew expresses satisfaction with this advantage. "Then the captain, in the bow, chuckled in a way that expressed humour, contempt, tragedy, all in one. 'Do you think we've got much of a show now, boys?' said he."43 The hope theme receives its fullest statement at the end of episode three when the men perceive that the shore is indeed being gradually reached:

Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension were leaving the minds of the men. . . . The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with seawater; four were perfectly scatheless. After a search, somebody produced three dry matches; and therupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat and, with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars, and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.44 But this mood is violently dispelled by the opening sentences of the next episode:

"Cook," remarked the captain, "there don't seem to be signs of life about your house of refuge."

"No," replied the cook. "Funny they don't see us."

The contrast of mood is paralleled by other contrasts. The supreme discomfort of the men is balanced by the unconcerned comfort of the seagulls, which "were envied by some in the dinghy, for the wrath of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand

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43 Ibid., p. 33.
44 Ibid., p. 39.
45 Loc. cit.
miles inland." Artistic contrast is affected by skillfully managed irony, as in the delicately split point of view which suggests a contrast between the raging sea as seen by the derelicts and the picturesque fury of the racing torrents as it might have been seen from the comfortable vantage of the shore:

The crest of each of these waves was a hill, from the top of which the men surveyed for a moment a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid, it was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

If "The Open Boat" is a magnificent complex of symbols, language patterns, and contrasting moods that are more concentrated and consistent than those in The Red Badge, then it is stylistically more flexible than the war story. The prose of the novel is angular and occasionally overcharged in its epigrammatic compression. But the writing in "The Open Boat" is characterized by longer, less abrupt, more relaxed sentences and fuller and less nervous paragraphing. Color, though employed with good effect in the description of the sunrise at sea at the beginning of the eighth episode, is less manifest than in The Red Badge. If the novel is inclined toward brilliant chromaticism, "The Open Boat," in keeping with the stark mood of its principal theme, is etched in blacks and whites and greys: "On the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white windmill reared above them." The shore to the men in the boat is dusky, and a man waving his coat from the beach is gradually swallowed by the gloom.

46 Ibid., p. 33.
47 Ibid., p. 32.
48 Ibid., p. 55.
49 Ibid., p. 46.
The supple prose of "The Open Boat" is in the direct line of development from the early Western tales, the first of Crane's stories to indicate a shift from the hard nervous writing which characterizes Maggie and the Bowery stories and which establishes one stylistic norm in The Red Badge of Courage. The longer, more flexible, and more complex structure of the sentences in "The Open Boat" establishes the second norm, and after 1897 Crane used both styles, writing some of the war stories in the tense, mannered phrasing of The Red Badge and diluting the more fluent style of "The Open Boat" in The Monster, The Whilomville Stories, and the last two novels.

After "The Open Boat" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" Crane's art declined rapidly. The Monster, written in the late fall of 1897, is interesting as an astute, if somewhat bitter, social study, but as a work of art it falls far below the hard, purposeful objectivity of the sea tale. Like The Third Violet it was conceived in the emotion of bitter and disillusioning experience, for Crane was aware by late 1897 that he was in a very real sense a social outcast, and The Monster doubtless grew out of his desire to relieve his bitterness against the cruelty and injustice of the petty mind. Crane's contempt for hypocritical social morality traces clearly in his thought from the very beginning of his career. The humor of his satires of late Victorian respectability gives way to smoldering anger in an 1894 letter to an unknown recipient:

... If you hear that I have been hanged by the neck till dead... you may as well know that it was for killing a man who is really a pug—No, by the legs of Jehovah! I will not insult any dog by comparing this damned woman to it. There is a feminine mule up here who has roused all 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 her kitchen and grunt. But every when [sic] 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. She looks like a dried bean and she has no sense, but she is a nice woman. . . . She is just like those hunks of women who squat on porches of hotels in summer and wherever their eye lights there blood arises. Now, my friend, there is a big joke in all this. This lady in her righteousness is just the grave of a stale lust and every boy in town knows it. She accepted ruin at the hands of a farmer when we were all 10 or 11. But she is a nice woman and all her views of all things belong on the table of Moses. 50

This lady appears in long angry digressions in The Third Violet, The Monster, and The O'Ruddy and doubtless came to represent to Crane the epitome of social evil.

If it may be judged from occasional expressions in his letters and from obviously subjective passages in his writing, Crane entertained a passionate regard for tolerant and liberal social ideals. He admired the frank and open Westerner because his whole culture was based upon "a comprehension of the man at one's shoulder," 51 and in an eloquent paragraph in "The Open Boat" Crane states his ideal of human relationship:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here 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. . . . It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal

50 Stallman (Letters), p. 605-6.

51 Ibid., p. 629.
and heart-felt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat, 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.

The Monster is an expression of this shattered ideal, written under the shadow of his personal notoriety and his enforced English exile.

Henry Johnson, Dr. Trescott's genial, dapper Negro groom is horribly disfigured when he rescues Jimmie, the doctor's young son, from his burning home. The grateful doctor saves Henry's life, but the groom is faceless and, though harmless, insane. The community of Whilomville is so horrified by the Negro's fearful appearance that some of the leading citizens, voicing the opinion that Dr. Trescott should have let Henry die, call upon Trescott and propose that the monster be sent away. Trescott refuses to act, and when the monster frightens a group of children at a birthday party, the community begins to speak of having Dr. Trescott arrested. The doctor's practice begins to suffer; when he calls to attend the Winters' sick child in the absence of their family physician, the father demands that he leave the house and shrinks from him in terror, as if some of the horror of the faceless Negro has been transferred to Dr. Trescott. One evening the doctor returns home and finds his wife weeping. He sees that a large table is burdened with small cups, plates, and uncut tea cakes, and then he remembers that it is Wednesday, the day upon which Mrs. Trescott entertains her social club. There are fifteen untouched cups on the table.

The deep, brooding anger which infuses The Monster led Crane from art to social criticism. The stupid, spiteful cruelty of Whilomville is

52 Work, XII, 36.
epitomised in Martha Goodwin, who, as Wilson Follett points out, "is drawn with a fury out of all proportion to any part she is given to play," and thus Crane digresses often and uneconomically from his subject.

Structurally, the novel is almost as loose as The Third Violet, the first half of the story dealing with the irony and tragedy of Henry Johnson's terrible fate, the second half centering around the tragedy of the Trescotte's social persecution.

Yet there are memorable passages in which Crane demonstrates the ability to invest symbolic meaning in physical objects and to illuminate descriptive passages with brilliant and meaningful coloring, as in the passage which relates Johnson's progress into Dr. Trescott's burning laboratory with Jimmie Trescott in his arms. The smoke, flames, and the malignant, brilliantly colored burning chemicals are anticipatory symbols for the mean and stupid hate which the community later showers upon Henry and Dr. Trescott:

As he opened the door great billows of smoke poured out, but, gripping Jimmie closer, he plunged down through them. All manner of odours assailed him during this flight. They seemed to be alive with envy, hatred, and malice. At the entrance to the laboratory he confronted a strange spectacle. The room was like a garden in the region where might be burning flowers. Flames of violet, crimson, green, blue, orange, and purple were blooming everywhere. There was one blaze that was precisely the hue of a delicate coral.

The heated acid which destroys Henry's face is equated with the acid malice that destroys Dr. Trescott's social standing:

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54 Work, III, 45.
Johnson had fallen with his head at the base of an old-fashioned desk. There was a row of jars upon the top of this desk.

Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snakelike thing poured its thick length out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and hesitated, and then began to swim a languorous way down the mahogany slant. At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed eyes of the man beneath it. Then, in a moment, with a mystic impulse, it moved again, and the red snake flowed directly down into Johnson's upturned face.

Community fear and malice is reflected in the natural and unconscious cruelty of the child's mind. Ironically, it is little Jimmie Trescott who leads his playmates in the entertaining game of risking to touch the monster as he sits on a box by the stable, veiled in black crepe and softly crooning to himself. "Bet you dassent walk right up to him," an older boy challenges Jimmie, and the boy replies scornfully. "Dassent I? Dassent I, hey? Dassent I?" And when Jimmie fearfully walks to the monster, touches him, and scampers back to the crowd of cheering boys, he swaggers with the heroism of his deed. "Why, it's as e-e-easy," he boasts to his admiring companion.

The theme of social persecution Crane continued in most of The Whilomville Stories, a series of thirteen sketches which explore the cruel and conscienceless world of childhood. The social community in The Monster is modeled upon Port Jervis, New York, and it was here, when he visited his brother Edmund in 1892 and 1893 and organized baseball and football teams with the neighborhood children, that Crane acquired his

55 Ibid., p. 46.
56 Ibid., p. 85.
keen insight into the child’s mind. It was about this time, it will be remembered, that he wrote the three "Baby Sketches," a series of stories concerned with the adventures of the child Tommie in Maggie.

The hero of The Wilcoxville Sketches is Jimmie Trescott, and in the depiction of his boyhood adventures, Crane touches upon various aspects of his selfish, mean, egotistical, cowardly, romantic world. Jimmie and his companions stand in a rigid hierarchy which Willie Dalzell, by virtue of his abilities with his fists, heads with supreme authority. Jimmie in turn commands a group of smaller boys, and the arrogance of his relation to them is matched only by his humility in the presence of the boys who stand above him. The worlds of the girls and boys stand altogether apart, and when Jimmie is once discovered trying to bridge the gap between them with a love letter to his New York cousin, an eight-year-old counterpart of Martha Goodwin in The Monster pounces upon him with all the inherited ability of her vicious tongue:

It was her life to sit of evenings about the stove and hearken to her mother and a lot of spinsters talk of many things. . . . Thus all her home teaching fitted her to recognize at once in Jimmie Trescott’s manner that he was concealing something that would properly interest the world. She set up a scream. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Jimmie Trescott's writing to his girl! Oh! Oh!"

The motif of persecution runs strongly through these sketches. "Making an Orator" is an account of Jimmie’s exquisite torture during his recitation

57 Edna Crane Sidbury, in "My Uncle, Stephen Crane, As I Knew Him," Literary Digest International Book Review, III (March, 1926), 246, states that Crane modelled the monster on a person in Port Jervis whose face had been destroyed by disease.

of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in his elocution class at school. When the terrified Jimmie forgets a phrase, the teacher, "flushed with indignation to the roots of her hair, snaps at him: "Rode the six hundred!" "The class was a-rustle with delight at this cruel display. They were no better than a Roman populace in Nero's time."59

Though these sketches originated in Crane's acute observation of the child's world, they likely owe much of their manner and tone to the stories of Mark Twain. The depiction of the fantasy world of the child's imagination sharply recalls the romantic adventuring of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and one of the best of the Whilomville stories, "The Carriage Lamps," recounts Willie Dalzel and his "men's" fanciful and desperate "rescue" of Jimmie from his upstairs room, where he has been confined for breaking his father's carriage lamps. Willie shows Tom's concern for carrying out the operation precisely according to the code of romance, insisting upon effecting a rescue even against the wishes of the one to be "saved:"

"Are you a prisoner?" demanded the Dalzel boy, eagerly.
"No-o—yes—I a*pose I am."
The other lad became much excited, but he did not lose his wariness. "Don't you want to be rescued?"
"Why—no—I dun'no," replied Jimmie, dubiously.
Willie Dalzel was indignant. "Why, of course you want to be rescued! We'll rescue you. I'll go and get my men."
And thinking this a good sentence he repeated, pompously, "I'll go and get my men." He began to crawl away, but when he was distant some ten paces he turned to say:
"Keep up a stout heart. Remember that you have friends who will be faithful unto death. The time is not now far off when you will again view the blessed sunlight."
The poetry of these remarks filled Jimmie with ecstasy. . . . 60

59 Work, V, 71.
60 Ibid., p. 97.
Willie's insistence upon following an exact romantic formula in "The Trial and Execution of Homer Phelps" is reminiscent of Tom Sawyer's elaborate regard for the escape ritual in the rescue of Nigger Jim in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. 61

Crane's stories are amusing and pleasant, but they do not belong in the same group with his art stories. They are uncertain in tone and often quite artistically purposeless. Crane's social disappointment is forever intruding upon the fanciful world of childhood, and it is doubtless the author's attitude which accounts for the heavy emphasis upon the motif of herd brutality. Only a few have significant themes. "The Fight," in which Johnnie Hedge, the new boy, appears as the counterpart of Henry in The Red Badge, touches upon a major Crane motif when the boy is at last driven to self-assertion against the cruelty of a badgering gang. "His New Mittens," Stallman points out, suggests the theme of George's Mother in its depiction of a misunderstanding between a boy and his aunt. 62

Like the Whilomville Stories Crane's collection of sketches about the Spanish-American War are, in Willa Cather's phrase, "low pressure writing." "He hadn't the vitality after Cuba to make stories, to pull things together into a sharp design. . .," this critic states in 63

61 Like Twain, Crane seems to have based most of his sketches upon actual occurrences. The hair cutting episode in "The Angel Child" was suggested by Crane's once giving two boys money to have their little Lord Fauntleroy curls cut (John N. Beffel, "The Fauntleroy Plague," The Bookman, LXV, April, 1927, 135). "Making an Orator" is based upon Crane's own unhappy experience with Tennyson's poem (Berryman, p. 15). "Lynx Hunting" is the result of Crane's attempt at the age of seven or eight to shoot his father's cow with a pop-gun (Edna C. Sidbury, p. 248). Many passages in the Whilomville sketches strongly suggest, however, Twain's manner, and it is likely that his stories influenced Crane's choice of material and his handling of it.

62 Stallman, p. 537.

63 Willa Cather, "Introduction," The Work of Stephen Crane, IX, ix.
explanation of the ironic contrast between Crane's writing about real and imagined war. "The Price of the Harness," typical in theme and manner of all the stories, is an artistically unsynthesized account of the agony of war, of dazed and uncomprehending wounded soldiers, of delirium, disease, destruction, and death. Crane was concerned in this writing with the fact of war in all its unromantic aspects, and this regard for reportorial realism takes precedence over his regard for artistic arrangement.

"The Upturned Face" is a tiny exception. Lieutenant Timothy Lean and an adjutant are burying a man under heavy rifle fire, and while the enemy sharpshooters fire briskly at the little burial party, the lieutenant tries to remember appropriate words for the final service. The adjutant suddenly remembers a phrase from the military manual:

"O God, have mercy—"
"O God, have mercy—"
"Mercy," repeated the adjutant, in quick failure.
"Mercy," said Lean. And then he was moved by some violence of feeling, for he turned suddenly upon his two men and tigerishly said, "Throw the dirt in."

Aggrieved privates come forward to fill in the grave while snipers' bullets spit viciously overhead. They begin to fill the grave, throwing dirt on the feet. The corpse's "chalk-blue face looked keenly out from the grave."

One man is struck in the arm by a bullet and looks quietly at Lean for orders. "Go to the rear," the lieutenant says, and "the wounded man scrambled hard for the top of the ridge without devoting any glances" toward the grave. The lieutenant continues filling the grave, and "soon there was nothing to be seen but the chalk-blue face." When Lean finally tries again to throw dirt on the face, the adjutant is "pale to the lips."

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64 Work, IX, 169.
"Go on, man," he cries beseechingly, almost in a shout. Bean lifts the shovel and empties it into the grave. "Then the earth landed it made a sound—plop." This, Berryman states, affects one as pure symbol, senseless and ghastly, like one of Goya's last etchings, but the sense surely lies, as Stallman points out, in the grotesque contrast between the ideal and the reality of the officers' decent intention in burying their comrade rather than leaving his body to the advancing enemy. In its fierce and grotesque irony this little story is sheer Crane.

But "The Upturned Face" marks the end of Crane's career as a literary artist. The immense wordage of Active Service, the academic essays on war collected under the title of Great Battles of the World (1900), and the first part of The O'Ruddy contribute nothing to his literary reputation. Like The Third Violet, Active Service is a love story, an account of Rufus Coleman's courtship of Marjory Wainwright, the daughter of Rufus' old college teacher, Professor Harrison Wainwright. Coleman, a young journalist who like Crane himself harbors deep resentment against his former professors is wrathfully forbidden by the professor to marry Marjory, and in order to terminate their romance, Wainwright takes his daughter and wife to Greece with a group of college students. Coleman follows the Wainwright party only to find that the professor has stubbornly refused to be warned of the dangers of travelling in Turkey with the war imminent and has taken his party to Nikopolis. Coleman redeems himself with the professor by

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65 Berryman, p. 257.
66 Stallman, p. 376.
recessing his helpless party from a precarious position between the Turkish and Greek lines. Meanwhile, Nora Black, a beautiful and famous dancer, fellows Coleman to Turkey and joins him and the Wainwright party for the journey back to Greece. Coleman almost loses Marjory because the scheming Nora contrives to leave the impression that Rufus has been involved in her past, but eventually the truth about her intentions are made clear to Marjory and her parents and the virtuous young couple are united in love on the last page.

Except for the obvious autobiographical elements in Active Service, there is hardly a trace of Stephen Crane in the novel, certainly not of the Crane who wrote The Red Badge and "The Open Boat." The plot, the characters, and even the styling mark the book as a conventional romance. Utterly abandoning the disciplined objectivity of his best writing, Crane made Active Service a medium for expressing his prejudices and dislikes. Professor Wainwright, "one of the famous scholars of the generation," is hardly more than a caricature, a stubborn, opinionated, academic weakling given to violent outbursts of temper when his daughter interrupts him in the writing of one of his sentences, "ponderous, solemn, and endless, in which wandered multitudes of homeless and friendless prepositions, adjectives looking for a parent, and quarrelling nouns; sentences which no longer symbolized the language-form of thought, but which had about them a quaint aroma from the dens of long dead scholars." As the shameless and sophisticated foil to the pure and innocent Marjory, Nora Black is the stock wicked lady of the romance, and Mrs. Wainwright,

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who bullies the prim professor as the professor does his students, is as unreasonably obtuse and avenging as the ladies who survey local gossip from the hotel veranda in The Third Violet.

Crane's last novel, The O'Ruddy, which he designated a "satirical romance," has even more of the conventional machinery of the romance than Active Service, but its gay and facetious tone and its bubbling good humor relieve, in part at least, its essential absurdity. Insofar as the novel is a satire, it deals chiefly with the English caste system and the manners of the gentility of the mid-nineteenth century. Young Thomas O'Ruddy, heir of an illustrious Irish name, arrives in Bristol with a packet of mysterious papers which his father left him and with which he hopes to recoup the depleted family fortune. He speaks politely to a stranger at the inn, and the man stares at him suspiciously. "My speech had been so civil that he had thought perhaps I was a rogue. If later I came to bellow like a bull with the best of them, it was only through the necessity of proving to strangers that I was a gentleman." O'Ruddy's adventures carry him back and forth across England, dueling with Europe's best swordsmen, courting the daughter of the great Earl of Westport, foiling his enemies with ingenious tricks and disguises, and eventually winning the hand of the beautiful Lady Mary after withstanding the wicked Earl of Westport's siege of Brede Place. In this semi-picaresque novel Crane's hand is scarcely recognizable; indeed, the part he wrote, roughly the first fourth of the book, is in no way distinguishable from the part written by Robert Barr, the journalist who completed the story from Crane's notes in 1903.

68 Work, VII, 21.
To the student of Crane, then, most of the writing after 1897 is of negative interest only. It merely demonstrates how far ill-health and personal troubles took the writer from the main course of his art. If one recalls the idealism of his artistic intentions, set forth eagerly in a letter of 1896, the literary attitude which brought *Active Service*, *The O'Ruddy* and most of his other work into being stands in full and forceful contrast. "If I had kept to my clever Rudyard-Kipling style, the road might have been shorter," he wrote, "but, ah, it wouldn't be the true road." But it was "the true road" which led him to *The Red Badge of Courage* and "The Open Boat," his masterpieces, and if circumstances forced him to abandon it, and if death caught him before he regained it, then the loss to American literature is justly compensated for by what he accomplished during the short time he was allowed to follow the light of his artistic ideals.

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CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION: CRANE'S LITERARY DEVELOPMENT: 1892-1900

It has been pointed out time and again by literary historians and critics that Stephen Crane is a figure of mystery in American letters, and it is true perhaps that no other writer with a claim to a place in the ranks of American literary artists has left so few biographical materials for the student to draw upon. "Belonging to the vainest of professions," his first biographer observes, "he took no trouble to annotate himself for history,"¹ a fact which has discouraged other biographers and complicated the work of the literary commentator laboring under the task of explaining his work. "I spent ten years planning a study of Crane," Henry McBride, one of the artists whom Crane knew in bohemian New York, remarked to Beer, "and ended by deciding there was no such animal, although I knew him for eleven years."²

A dearth of materials, then, has inflicted upon literary history and criticism many erroneous views of Crane's artistic and philosophical origins. It is almost universally agreed that he is a descendent of the French and Russian naturalists, and when this is occasionally denied, no origins at all are assigned to him. An informed contemporary, William Dean Howells, could only say that Crane "sprang into life fully armed,"³ and another, Hamlin Garland, who wrote reminiscences over a period of almost twenty years, propagated the notion that Crane was an inexplicable genius, a medium for

¹ Beer, p. 247.
² Quoted in Berryman, p. xiv.
³ Beer, p. 96.
the recording of that which came mysteriously from the outer reaches of a ghostly literary world. These attitudes are more or less standard in literary histories even today. He was, one critic wrote in 1941, "an artist who was really not conscious at all. He arrived . . . fully equipped. He had no need to improve." And as late as 1952 it could be stated that Crane was an artist of "amazing, almost miraculous prescience," and thus "that despair of the academic critic, a highly 'original' writer."5

Original as Crane may seem in the literary and intellectual setting of the late nineteenth century, there is little reason to assume that he sprang into literary being from nowhere, and none at all to think that he entered into the world of literature a fully developed artist. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, despite its manifest artistic shortcomings, is astonishing enough even when it is related to the sum total of Crane's intellectual and literary experience. But when it is simply ascribed to transcendent and inexplicable genius, the creation of a college sophomore who intuited a philosophy of life and a brilliant attitude toward the materials, method and function of literature, then *Maggie* becomes unbelievable. And justly so, for its appearance in this light is illusion; there is ample evidence that Crane brought to his first novel not only a wide range of intense emotional and intellectual experience, but also a literary technique that was the result of serious and intense reflection upon the nature and function of literary art.


The Study of Crane's literary development properly begins with a consideration of the sources of his art, and perhaps no characteristic of his writing is more fundamental than the philosophic attitude which forms its basis. Despite his repeated repudiation of the didactic in literature, Crane's writing has consistent ethical implications; his plea was not for a literature barren of moral meaning, but for a technique which keeps the "long logic" of a story carefully out of sight. Thus a submerged pattern of meaning presented in the guise of reportorial objectivity threads through his most important writing and gives it a characteristic direction.

Crane's philosophy may be clearly understood only when it is realized that his total intellectual outlook comprises two distinct points of view, the first of which is concerned with the relation of the individual to society. In the sham and hypocrisy of late Victorian concepts of morality and decency, Crane saw the basis of a false cultural ideal, and all of his early writing shows that he was highly sensitive to the wide gulf between social ideals and social practices. He regarded practical Christianity, with its condemning and self-righteous attitude, as a chief factor in a vast system of social injustice and hypocrisy. But balancing this external and social evil is the internal moral cowardice and weakness of the individual. He saw moral cowardice in the inability to act, in the "willingness to be knocked flat and accept the licking," and he believed that at the root of this moral weakness was man's strong propensity for self-delusion and rationalization. The bums in the Bowery flop-houses he saw as guilty as the clergymen of George's Mother and Maggie in their failure to distinguish truth from romantic idealization. Enormous egotism and moral cowardice in the individual, sham, hypocrisy, and moral illusion
in society were the factors which blinded man to the truth and created for him a make-believe world of enormous cruelty and injustice.

Crane's second point of view is concerned with the relation of man to God and the universe. In this aspect of his philosophy Crane is close to the teachings of mid-century science, for he saw man in his relation to the universe as an insignificant mite, utterly helpless against a mechanical and indifferent force. The stern God of Moses epitomizes this callous indifference in Crane's thought before 1895. In The Black Riders he blasphemously and indignantly cried out against this cruel and unjust Deity. He saw the world that this revengeful God ruled with capricious cruelty as unpredictable, unreasonable, and circumstantially malignant. But in his later thought the revengeful God is replaced by an utterly emotionless and impassive nature, and Crane's furious indignation fades to quiet and wry acceptance of a blankly indifferent universe.

But despite the deep pessimism of his thought, Crane never abandoned entirely his faith in the individual; indeed, he saw in the spiritual strength and personal courage of the individual man the only positive and constructive force in a world of moral cant, injustice, and hypocrisy. The protagonists in Crane's fiction hence fall into two groups; in one are those whose self-delusion, egotism, and moral cowardice have vitiated their essential manhood, and in the other are those whose clear conception of ethical and moral values enables them to act in accordance with truth and reality. Thus the cause of the crazy Swede's death in "The Blue Hotel" is his false conception and consequent fear of the West; the cause of Henry Fleming's victory is his gradual triumph over the debilitating forces of self-delusion and adolescent rationalization.
Considered in its totality, Crane's philosophy only superficially resembles European naturalism. Maggie and "The Open Boat" indeed reflect a strong deterministic cast of thought, but it is upon these two works, the most often mentioned in classifying Crane, that his reputation as a naturalist must rest. Crane's work as a whole shows that he was essentially concerned with ethical problems as they relate to the worth and dignity of the individual; it has little of the strict naturalist's disregard for ethical and moral questions. He often chose, it is true, to demonstrate negatively that salvation lies in moral strength, but if his writing embraces a wide range of moral failures, then these failures serve to emphasize the spiritual triumphs of Henry Fleming, the New York Kid, the Town Marshall in "The Bride," Bill the sheepherder in "A Man and Some Others," Fred Collins in "A Mystery of Heroism," and even little Johnnie Hedge in "The Fight." And if crushing circumstance is solely responsible for the death of the oiler in "The Open Boat," then it is not altogether a merciless environment that directs "the assassin" in "An Experiment in Misery" to the degradation of the Bowery flop-house.

The chief elements of Crane's thought may be traced in his intellectual experience from his Asbury Park days to the sinking of the Commodore in 1897. Crane's older brother William and his sister Agnes inspired in him a skeptical attitude toward the conventional theology of his parents, and thus Crane's childhood was spent in an intellectual atmosphere in which a deep and liberal skepticism was at war with orthodox conservatism. His mother's God was the Hebraic God of revenge against which his father had revolted as a young man on the question of infant salvation, and these conflicting attitudes of his parents furnished a major theme for The Black
Riders—the disparity between the God of love and the God of wrath. In the realization of the difference between the theory and practice of Christianity lay, perhaps, the basis of the ironic attitude which Crane continued to cultivate during his brief college career and which he exercised vigorously in his satirical analysis of the social situation at Asbury Park in 1892.

In the Bowery and among the journalists and artists of Bohemia, keenly aware of the ironic divergence between the reality and ideality of the world, Crane came in contact with the skeptic and disillusioned thought of his circle of avant-garde intellectuals. B. O. Flower, editor of the Arena, and others were contributing articles advancing the ideas of Darwin and Spencer and calling for a realistic and enlightened attitude to replace the outworn Victorian point of view. As a free lance newspaper reporter Crane was one of a group of journalists whose common attitude, Theodore Dreiser testifies, was the same as that which might have been derived from a book on evolution, and though Crane never abandoned his faith in the self-reliant and morally purposeful man, such deterministic thinking as he encountered during these years powerfully affected his thinking.

Crane's experience in New York dates from the spring of 1891, and by the summer of 1892, when he wrote The Sullivan County Sketches, the most characteristic aspects of his philosophy were already present in his thinking. The "little man" of these stories is the victim of his own enormous egotism, which he impudently manifests despite his helplessness in the face of collaborative circumstances; the triumph he feels upon conquering the

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6 Dreiser, p. 70.
memetic mountain, which appears here for the first time as a symbol of passive nature, and his sense of transcendent self-importance upon killing a bear reflect ironically his distorted sense of values. Like Pete and Jimmie in Maggie, the hero of George’s Mother, and Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage, he is unable to see himself critically; his whole point of view is as twisted as that of "the assassin" in "An Experiment in Misery," or as that of the clergymen in the two early novels. Henry Fleming is the first Crane hero capable of working his way out of the maze of hypocrisies and self-delusions to ultimate moral victory.

If Maggie is naturalistic in its philosophic import, then George’s Mother introduces the problem of ethical behavior. Maggie’s tragedy is absolutely determined by her environment, for unlike George Kelcey, she can make no moral choice. Though fully cognizant of the moral problems involved in his behavior, George’s will has been so weakened by an indulgent and fanatical mother that he chooses perversely to follow a course of conduct that leads him to ruin. In turning this novel about a fundamental ethical point, Crane took a step away from the amorality of Maggie toward the full study of moral and spiritual salvation in The Red Badge. Henry Fleming, a fighter to the end, is too strong to succumb to "the moving box" by which he once imagines himself to be enclosed. Except in "The Open Boat," in which Crane returns to the theme of man’s relation to impassive nature, the writer seldom abandons in his important work the question of his heroes’ moral, spiritual, or ethical character.

Crane’s revolt against the conventions of his time was not only intellectual, but also artistic. Having decided in 1891 while a student at Syracuse University to be a writer, he was doubtless formulating about
this time a theory of literature, and he found a beginning in the principles
of the French impressionistic painters, who had founded in the 'sixties a
new school of realistic art in revolt against the academic tradition of
the "hot-house" school and whose manner and attitudes were by the late
'eighties becoming known to American painters. The impressionist movement
links closely to the American realistic school of literature through
Garland, who proclaimed these rebellious artists realists in the truest
sense. They had thrown over the formulae of the old school in the belief
that art should deal with contemporary life and that it should have as a
subject whatever reflects the truth about life, regardless of its ugliness
or beauty.

Since one of Crane's sisters taught art at Asbury Park in the late
'eighties and Crane had further association with painters and painting at
Claverack College and Syracuse University, it is likely that he knew some-
thing of the impressionist movement before he met Garland in 1891. At any
rate, Crane's association with painters in New York began in the fall and
continued when Crane moved to the city permanently the following year. In
his Asbury Park reports written in the summer of 1892, the writer's references
to the technique of impressionism in his satire of James A. Bradley's sign
painting indicate that he had by this time, at least, some understanding
of the aims, method, and technique of the new art movement.

Another connection between Crane and painting exists in Kipling's
The Light That Failed, a novel about the artistic struggles of a young
war correspondent and painter, Dick Heldar, which in all probability helped
Crane evolve his theory of literature. Dick insists that art is a realistic
transcription of actual experience, and some of his scorn for the romantic
and insincere practices of his contemporaries is reflected in Crane's continuous denunciation of insincerity in literature. Heldar's attitude toward life and art strongly supports the ideals of the impressionist painters, and in view of the similarity between Crane's and Heldar's artistic ideals the fictional artist might well have suggested to the novice writer a realistic ideal for a theory of literature.

In all likelihood the cardinal principles of Crane's literary theory were established in his thinking by the time he met Garland in 1891, but it was through this realist, evidently, that the young Tribune reporter became acquainted with the ideals of the American realistic movement. If he had not already read Garland's *Crumbling Idols* and William Dean Howells' *Criticism and Fiction*, he may have done so at this time. At any rate, he was familiar with the program of the American realists by 1892, for he later acknowledged Howells's influence upon the formulation of his literary point of view, explaining that he found in 1892 that the creed of art which he had devised "all alone" was identical with the theories of Howells and Garland. Henceforth, Crane associated himself with the American realists.

In theory, if not in practice, Crane's program agrees with that of the two older realists precisely. The aim of literature is truth, and the truth is to be found in actual experience with real life, not in idealizations of life. Since the artist searches for the truth wherever it is to be found, even the ugly and the sordid may provide the subject for literature. Truth, however, is implicit in the work of art, and the literary artist carefully avoids didacticism, for, as Crane once stated, "preaching is fatal to art." Literature utilized the simple language of people in real life and records flavorful colloquialisms of everyday speech.
Though Howells's and Garland's view of the nature and function of literature is precisely like Crane's, there is no evidence that these writers contributed to Crane's technique and style. It has been suggested by Berryman and others that Crane's irony, the outstanding characteristic of his literary manner, came directly from Tolstoy, a writer whom the young writer regarded as the greatest novelist of his time. But Crane had two American ironists, Twain and Bierce, before him when he started writing in 1891, and Kipling, in some of the early stories published as Plain Tales from the Hills in 1891, particularly in "Lispeth," treated Christianity ironically, even satirically, a manner which, in light of Crane's attitude toward orthodox theology in 1892, must have appealed strongly to the American writer. But perhaps as important a factor as the ironical influence of any other writer was Crane's own ironic turn of mind. By 1892, it is clear, Crane was searching every situation for its ironic aspects; whether it was apparent in a labor parade, in the attitude of a fellow camper, or merely in the manners of new arrivals at the Asbury resort, it was this aspect which struck Crane the most forcibly. Irony appealed to Crane so strongly that perhaps he required only the barest suggestion from any writer whatever to enable him to adapt it to literary expression.

Other aspects of Crane's manner quite obviously had their origins in the technique of impressionism. The principle of condensation is basic to both Crane's writing and impressionistic painting. In their portrayals the impressionists ruthlessly excluded detail, suggesting with single broad and carefully selected strokes the essential character of their subjects. This technique Crane practiced in his very earliest writing. A skulking manner of walking is assassin-like, thus the hero of "An Experiment in
"Misery" is simply "the assassin." The color of live coals in a campfire may be like the red face of a man apoplectic with rage, and this simile Crane telescopes to "a campfire lay dying in a fit of temper."

If Crane's early newspaper writing shows that he was then at work upon the technique of impressionistic phrase-making, then they also show that he was already experimenting with color. The idea for the use of color to portray various moods and emotions may have been first suggested to Crane in an extract from Goethe's *Farbenlehre* in his college psychology text, but since Crane's interpretation of the psychological effect of the various colors differs from Goethe's, it is more likely that this aspect of his writing style derived also from the impressionist painters. Proceeding upon the theory that every natural object is predominantly related to one of the primary colors, the impressionists splashed their canvases with brilliant reds, yellows, and blues, and in the same way the pages of Crane's early writing overflow with color and light. In the ten short Sullivan sketches alone there are one hundred thirty-nine adjectives denoting color and mood suggested by color.

By 1892 the chief characteristics of Crane's art were apparent. He was, as *The Sullivan County Sketches* show, an impressionist-ironist who was determined to turn his personal experience to literary uses. The chief aspects of his philosophy of man and nature are present in these little tales, and if he imitated Ambrose Bierce in some and drew upon the tall tale tradition through Twain for others, he was not to imitate again until most of his important writing had all been done. At the time he was writing these inconsequential accounts of his camping experience in the Sullivan County wilds, Crane was planning, in accordance with his theory
that literature springs from a direct experience with life, to move to
the East Side slum sections in New York to observe "unvarnished human
nature."

Between the years 1892 and 1895 Crane grew to artistic maturity. 
Maggie shows that he had not in 1893 become a master of fictional technique, 
but it reveals, nevertheless, that he was writing with high purpose and 
with the instincts of the artist. Composed structurally of a series of 
episodes artistically integrated through ironic contrasts, Maggie establishes 
the literary form Crane was to employ exclusively in his writings. But 
Crane's ineptness as a craftsman is apparent in the story's lack of focus 
and the mishandling of chronology. The novel is far more concerned with 
the brother Jimmie than with its ostensible heroine, Maggie Johnson. And 
in attempting to account for Maggie's career from childhood to young woman-
hood is scarcely more than eighty pages of print, the author shows that he 
had not yet learned to limit his materials effectively. Maggie's story 
reveals, too, that Crane had little control over tone, for its emotional 
pitch, too high at the beginning, rises at the end to screeching melodrama.

In George's Mother Crane made notable technical advances in both the 
limitation of chronology and the handling of materials, and the story 
focuses properly upon the moral degeneration of George Kelcey. Stylistically, 
George's Mother is more fluid, generally exhibiting less conscious straining 
for ironic effect and epigrammatic intensity of phrasing. In this novel 
Crane experimented with new technical devices, and the first significant 
use of symbolism points toward the subtler and more complex art of The Red 
Badge of Courage.

If Crane's art moves steadily in these two novels toward The Red Badge,
several short pieces, "An Experiment in Misery," "The Men in the Storm," and particularly "The Pace of Youth," reveal a maturing sense of tone and style. The impressionistic technique in these stories is less an exotic literary trick and more maturely a manner for serious artistic expression. The "Baby Sketches" confirm Crane as an astute psychologist, and one of these stories about the boy Tommie Johnson, "A Dark Brown Dog," is equal in literary value to any of the Whilomville sketches.

By 1893, with two novels and almost a score of short stories and sketches to his credit, Crane's apprenticeship period was over. In The Red Badge of Courage he brought into full play all his growing powers as an ironist, a psychologist, and a literary craftsman. The subtle scheme of ironic contrasts which show crudely in Maggie appear in the war novel in a flexible and complex weave of moods and motifs, and the scanty and incidental symbolism of George's Mother appears in The Red Badge in a consistent and artistically useful pattern. The whole story of Private Fleming's first experience with battle is tightly focused about the theme of moral death and regeneration, and even with the limitations of the episodic framework, Crane appears as a master of organic structure. In style The Red Badge represents a perfection of Crane's laconic and staccato phrasing which, if not as supple as the more sonorous and poetic periods of "The Open Boat," establishes one of his two stylistic norms. The two Western sketches written before 1897, "A Man and Some Others" and "Horses—One Dash," show Crane moving toward the second stylistic norm of the sea tale, and the work after 1897 shows the writer choosing between the two styles at will.

Though Crane's poetry stands somewhat outside the main stream of his
literary development, the basic technique of both The Black Riders and War is Kind relate closely to his artistic method. These epigrammatic little allegories apparently call upon the free verse poems of Dickinson, Whitman, and possibly the iconoclastic epigrams of Ambrose Bierce for the high unconventionality of their verse structure, but it may be observed that Crane achieved the sharp and angular rhythms of his lines by simply compressing to the utmost his already highly telescoped prose sentence. As in the three novels and most of the short stories, Crane adapted the technique of ironic contrast to his poetry, and generally the form of a given poem depends upon the artistic arrangement of contrasting moods and ideas, though in addition, as his best poems, "The Black Riders" and "War is Kind," show, Crane utilized the poetic effects of repetition, assonance, and alliteration. In the poetry there is none of the development upward which is so evident in his prose from Maggie to "The Open Boat;" on the contrary, the best poems in War is Kind were written between 1895 and 1897, and the poems written between the latter date and 1899 show that Crane's decline as a poet roughly paralleled his degeneration as a fictionist. Like some of his last stories, his poetry had become, as Amy Lowell observes, "less vital, less spontaneous, and less original than the earlier work."7

By 1895 Crane had reached a plateau in his development as a literary artist. "A Mystery of Heroism," like The Red Badge a study of a soldier's triumph over fear, depends for its effect upon a conventional surprise ending, an early indication that Crane could make concessions to the conventions of late nineteenth century fiction. The two early Western stories,

7 Lowell, p. xvii.
though showing increased command of style and occasional brilliant handling of mood and color, are digressive and faulty in form. *The Third Violet,* a low voltage novel in the manner of Howells, adumbrates Crane's rapid artistic decline after 1897 and takes its place as an artistic failure alongside the journalistic novels, *Active Service* and *The O'Kuddy.*

In "The Open Boat," however, Crane brought the superb technical accomplishments of *The Red Badge* to the development of a moving and significant theme, and in its delicately sustained tone, skillful weave of language patterns, contrasting moods, and suggestive symbolisms this masterful story shows that Crane was able to muster once again after the uninspired work of 1896 all the best elements of his art. In this study of man's relation to nature, Crane achieved for the last time in a major story the almost perfect sense of artistic detachment which is the ideal of *Maggie, George's Mother* and *The Red Badge.* In such stories as "Horses--One Dash" and "The Blue Hotel" the intrusion of the writer's personal feelings and peculiarity of outlook spoils the tone and form. But Crane's anger at the plight of man in an indifferent and unknowable universe had cooled to passive acceptance by 1897, and he could record with poetic detachment the correspondent's perplexed and angry questioning of the seven mad gods of the seas.

The inability to maintain this impersonal detachment is a glaring flaw in most of the writing Crane did after "The Open Boat." "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Five White Mice" of the Western stories and "The Upturned Face" of the later war stories are exceptions; but *The Monster, The Wilomville Stories,* and some of the war sketches reveal the bitterness against society which colored Crane's mood in his last years.
years. The astute psychologizing in the Wilomville sketches and The Monster fails to compensate for Crane's slanting the stories unduly to the theme of social cruelty, and the realistic and perceptive accounts of the private soldier's suffering in modern war fail to alleviate the repetitious reports of the physical facts of war. Flashes of brilliant impressionism occur in isolated passages through all his last work, but under the pressure of debt, time, and personal dishonor, Crane's decline as an artist in his last years was as astonishingly rapid as his development in the years between 1892 and 1895.

It is clear that the standard view of Crane as a writer needs modification. Although his literary development was almost incredibly rapid, it is misleading to suppose that he was an uninformed, intuitive genius. His art is the result of painstaking and conscientious practice. He served the first three years of his writing life in an intense and concentrated apprenticeship to his art, the principles of which he derived through careful study of the revolutionary theory and technique of impressionistic painting. His first writings were literary études, studies in which he practiced the style and method that reached full maturity in The Red Badge of Courage and, with modifications, in "The Open Boat." It is not necessary to assume that he was much influenced by the European naturalists; in fact, it is highly doubtful that he drew upon them at all. He had none of their zeal for strict scientific interpretation of man, and as an impressionist he never practiced the naturalist's method of recording experience in scientific detail. If European thought influenced his thinking, it did so not through literary sources, but through the pessimism of a minority group of American intellectuals who were beginning to revolt against the American
tradition of optimism in the late nineteenth century, and in Crane this
dark view of life was significantly alleviated by his concern for and
belief in the dignity and worth of the individual.

Crane's brilliant but ephemeral appearance upon the American literary
scene, the sheer rapidity of his rise and fall, is perhaps responsible in
part for the fact that critics have always been inclined to dispose of him
rather summarily. But it is evident, too, that much Crane criticism is
based on a misunderstanding of his total work. "Crane's fiction plainly
reflects," one critic states, "the naturalistic concept of man as a help­
less animal, driven by instinct and imprisoned in a web of forces entirely
deaf to the hopes of purposes and humanity." And another could write in
partial contradiction of this view that "what chiefly distinguishes Crane
from other writers is the entire absence of any moral or philosophical
attitude." No writer, perhaps, has been subject to more contradictory
statements than Stephen Crane. It has been proclaimed on one hand that
his artistic method "is that of any tenth-rate provincial reporter without
the wit to determine whether what he is doing is good or not," and on
the other that "he was more highly gifted than any in his generation." He
has been condemned for amorality, lack of maturity, and a "fatal
defect in human warmth."

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10 Bates, p. 69.
13 Snell, p. 226.
Most of Crane's work shows, of course, grave defects, and there can be no doubt that he has serious artistic limitations. He produced comparatively little that is truly first rate; his two masterpieces, four or five poems, and a half-dozen short stories, perhaps, are all that represent Crane at his best, and he may therefore be relegated with some justice to the second rank among American literary artists on the grounds of his scanty production alone. He had neither the vision nor the creative energy of the greatest artist. Except in The Red Badge of Courage, his only attempt at sustained analysis, he never undertook to penetrate deeply into the human soul. "To him," Knight remarks, "people either were universally and simple humbugs or they were the real thing." And it is true that Crane's people simply either succeed or fail at the crucial moment; if they fail Crane merely notes, as it were, that they are the victims of moral or physical fear, of selfishness or self-delusion; if they succeed, it is to be understood that they are possessed of moral strength, courage, or a true understanding of moral values. But the "moving why" of their successes or failures, as Knight points out, were beyond the scope of his investigation.

Within his limitations, though, Crane achieved perfections. What he saw, Wilson Follett states, "he saw as if it were for that moment the only living thing worth looking at in the visible universe," and if his

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15 Knight, p. 114.

16 Ibid., p. 113.

vision were somewhat narrow, he recorded that which came within its range with the sensitivity of the instinctive artist. If Crane does not deserve a place in the first rank of American writers, he deserves at least to be understood for what he truly was, an artist whose "gifts were his intense perception and realization of what he had briefly seen or imagined, his bright freedom from dragging illusions, his insistence on writing about what really happened...his mastery of lightning images." 18

And aside from the intrinsic value of his work he commands a place as a guiding spirit of much literature that has come after him. He made American letters free, H. G. Wells pointed out in a prophetic essay written shortly after Crane's death, of any dependence upon English criticism or tradition, 19 and certainly the spirit of Crane can be detected in the broad character of much literature since 1900. The literary energy generated by his rebellious personality, his fearless technical experimentation, and his artistic idealism burst forth after two decades into the twentieth-century American literary Renaissance and gave powerful direction to the work of the imagists and such writers as Hemingway and Anderson. The talent of Stephen Crane deserves proper study and just appraisal.


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VITA

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Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: The Literary Development of Stephen Crane

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Date of Examination: July 27, 1953