379
N81
No. 2115

# NATURALISM IN THE WORK OF STEPHEN CRANE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

211788

Mary Scruggs Conerly, B. A.

Abilene, Texas

August, 1952

211788

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| I. | THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY NATURALISM. . . . | 1 |
| II. | NATURALISTIC INFLUENCES IN CRANE'S EARLY LIFE. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 31 |
| III. | TALES OF THE BOWERY . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 44 |
| IV. | _THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE_ AND OTHER STORIES OF WAR. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 67 |
| V. | SHORT STORIES: AFFIRMATIONS AND REAFFIRMATIONS. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 98 |
| VI. | CONCLUSION. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 116 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 123 |

## CHAPTER I

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY NATURALISM

Any critical discussion of literary naturalism in this country inevitably involves the name of Stephen Crane. Some critics see him as the forerunner of naturalism, whereas others deny that he was a naturalist at all. It is at first difficult for the neophyte to see through the impressionist in Crane and to realize that here is one who is kin to Zola, Hardy, and Dreiser. A careful study of his work, however, will reveal a common viewpoint with these writers and will place him firmly in the vanguard of naturalism.

The purpose of this study will be to determine the extent to which Crane was naturalistic. This leads to a definition of naturalism, to a study of its origins, and to a comparison of Crane's work with other works generally considered naturalistic.

The term _naturalism_ is used in a number of different fields. Webster's _New International Dictionary_ specifies a philosophical, a theological, and a literary meaning. These meanings are closely related; nevertheless, they may be distinguished one from the other. _Naturalism_ in philosophy is defined as being "the doctrine which expands conceptions drawn from the natural sciences into a world view, denying

that anything in reality has a supernatural or more than natural significance; specifically the doctrine that cause-and-effect laws, such as those of physics and chemistry, are adequate to account for all phenomena, and that teleological conceptions of nature are invalid."[1] This denial of the supernatural is also integral to the meaning of the term when it is used in theology. As a theological term _naturalism_ is "the doctrine that religious truth is derived from nature and not from miraculous or supernatural revelation; the denial of the miraculous and supernatural in religion."[2] As it relates to literature the term has both a general and a specific meaning. In its general literary sense, _naturalism_ is the theory that art and literature should conform to nature; more specifically, however, it is "the principles and characteristics professed or represented by a nineteenth century school of realistic writers, notably by Zola and Maupassant, who aimed to give a literal transcription of reality, and laid stress on the analytic study of character, and on the scientific and experimental nature of their observation of life."[3] It is the last meaning of the term with which this study is particularly concerned. It is our purpose to judge the extent to which

---

[1]_Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language_, second edition, unabridged.

[2]_Ibid._

[3]_Ibid._

Crane conformed to the practices of this group and the extent to which he is kin to the principal twentieth century naturalists.

Naturalism was not a literary movement which sprang full grown from the brow of Zola, but was rather the ultimate result of nearly two centuries of scientific and philosophical growth. In any of the manifestations previously defined, naturalism had its roots in seventeenth century rationalism. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when many thinkers turned away from the theological, supernatural explanations of natural phenomena and sought a natural explanation of the universe, several notable contributions were made to the growth of naturalism. The first to make such a contribution was Descartes. Descartes explains passions on the basis of what he terms the "animal spirits." These "animal spirits," particles of blood to which the heart communicates its heat, are the channels through which the brain receives the impressions from the external world. When excited by a stimulus from either the external world or the brain, they produce passion and thus influence one's actions. It is not the fault of Descartes that his knowledge of physiology was defective. What is of more importance is that he views the passions without sentiment and that he views them as originating in the body.[4] According to Descartes, a passion

---

[4]William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature, pp. 265-266.

is morally good or bad only in so far as the action resulting is beneficial or harmful to mankind; and the latter question can be decided only by the reason, which supplies the judgment with which to approve or condemn a passion. Descartes further argues that if reason is the absolute judge of good and evil, it has no power to force the choice between them. This choice depends on the will, which is the faculty whereby man sets one of his passions against another and with the help of the imagination brings forth a good passion which may be lying dormant.[5] Man, therefore, should not accept anything until it has been sanctioned through an examination by his reason. Here, then, is found the idea that there is no innate good and evil; what is good for one man may be evil for another, if after being subjected to reason it resolves into good or evil for mankind. A little of the experimental method is found also in the pitting of one passion against another to see what may come of it.

In the teachings and philosophy of John Locke the beginnings of many of the scientific concepts of naturalism are seen. Locke and his followers originated the doctrine of empiricism which attributes the origin of all knowledge to experience. This empirical idea is shown in the aspects of positivism to be found in naturalism. This positivistic spirit had an important influence on the thinking of Emile Zola. It insisted

---

[5]*Ibid*.

on the acceptance of scientific findings as the ultimate knowledge. Its chief object was to learn from nature the reason for the occurrence of events rather than to look behind experience for some hidden, unseen substance or force which purportedly gives rise to the phenomena observable by man.[6] This method of scientific investigation and looking to nature for the answer to man's questions is one of the outstanding characteristics of naturalism.

During the eighteenth century men of letters studied nearly all of the sciences with great diligence for many were philosophers, and philosophy found, or claimed to find, its inspiration in all phases of science. In the early nineteenth century, on the other hand, the gap between the scientists and the men of letters grew ever wider. It was becoming scarcely possible to encompass them both in one career; one had to choose between them. Whereas the philosophers of the eighteenth century distrusted metaphysics, those of the nineteenth century plunged ardently into such studies.[7] After 1860 the situation was changed; writers and scientists drew closer together again, as science was gradually recovering interest in the problems of life. Scientists had come to realize that it was impossible to separate science from life. Before this time the physical sciences, geology, chemistry,

---

[6]Joseph B. Burgess, _An Introduction to the History of Philosophy_, p. 480.

[7]Daniel Mornet, _A Short History of French Literature_, p. 259.

and physics had succeeded, while the biological sciences were hardly more than definitions.

This great change in scientific thought and philosophical theory came about in 1859 when Darwin published his Origin of the Species. This work marks an epoch in modern thought and sets another milestone along the road to naturalism. This radical departure from the current thought was the theory that the various forms of life have evolved from one another by some process of transformation. Darwin's mechanical theory of natural selection asserts the struggle for existence, the annihilation of the unfit, and the subsequent "survival of the fittest." It rests upon the evident fact that every species of animal produces more young than will develop. The ones who survive are naturally the strongest and have been preserved because of a certain greater fitness for their environment. This slight advantage will be inherited, with the result that the next generation will start from a fitter plane, and, by a continuance of this selective process in successive generations, perfect adaptation will result.[8] Zola's works show a negative application of this theory in that he brings out the strengthening of certain evil traits from generation to generation until the evil is the governing factor in the character's life.

---

[8] John Herman Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind, pp. 487-488.

The acknowledged leader in this new movement in philosophy was Herbert Spencer, whose idea of philosophy was a system of completely coordinated knowledge. His system is a scheme in which everything is to find its place and is to be seen as a resultant of a single principle.[9] The view of philosophy as science further coordinated brings Spencer's doctrine into line with positivism, thus having its influence upon naturalism. His purpose was to interpret the phenomena of life, mind, and society in terms of matter, motion, and force.[10] Randall says that evolution, to Spencer, meant that the whole process of the universe is working to achieve "a society organized upon free competition and laisser-faire and individual initiative. . . . The future evolution of society, in accordance with the great cosmic law of evolution, will be toward a more and more complete adaptation of human institutions to the natural and biological environment of man; and of every man's pleasure to every other's."[11]

A more spectacular use for the theory of evolution is found in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose idea of a slave and a master morality stemmed from his misinterpretation of the Darwinian theory and his superficial claim for

---

[9]W. R. Sorley, A History of English Philosophy, pp. 268-269.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Randall, op. cit., p. 579.

it as being the gospel of eternal struggle, the triumph of the strong. He imagined a group of "free spirits," sharing his ideas, who might one day exist. Nietzsche saw the world as a struggle in which the master will emerge, rather than the whole race of man rising to greater heights. In the master morality the virtues are the excellences which give power to the master; his morality is that of the aristocrat, the noble. He is not altogether ruthless; he has a love which extends to his equals, which may even reach the inferior types where they do not stand in his way. The slave morality with its mediocre virtues is to be maintained and encouraged for the inferior, the ordinary man. It becomes disastrous only when those who are born to be masters allow themselves to be imposed upon by it, thus losing their birthright of independence.[12]

Through his mouthpiece, Zarathustra, Nietzsche gives his idea of the Superman:

> I bring you a goal. I preach to you the Superman. Man is something to be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All things before you have produced something beyond themselves and would you be the ebb of this great flood? Would you rather go back to the animal than transcend man? What is the ape to man? A jest or a bitter shame. And just that shall man be to the Superman, a jest or a bitter shame. You have travelled the way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. . . . Lo, I preach to you the Superman. The Superman is the meaning of the earth.[13]

---

[12]_Ibid._, pp. 608-610.

[13]Friedrich Nietzsche, _Thus Spake Zarathustra_, p. 4.

The Superman of Nietzsche is not found to a great degree in the works of Zola and the early naturalists, but he is found in the works of Theodore Dreiser. This will be brought out later in a brief discussion of naturalism in Dreiser's work.

Having looked briefly at the development of naturalism in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century science and philosophy, and having sketched some of the contributions to naturalism which were made by the great minds of that time, we come to the central figure of literary naturalism, Emile Zola. Zola, like many of his contemporaries, grew up in an age of romanticism. Early in his life the straitened circumstances of his family made it necessary for his mother to take him to Paris, where his brief education was of a scientific rather than of a literary character. Zola was unable to pass his examinations, and he was forced to leave school. Finding himself unable to obtain any sort of employment, he was confronted with the direst poverty. His romanticism was unable to stand against the daily assaults of hunger, dirt, and squalid surroundings. At a time when he appeared to have reached the very bottom of his pit of despair, he was able to obtain employment as a clerk in a publishing house. Here he resumed his reading in the field of science, which resulted in his being inclined more and more toward nature. This transfer of allegiance he expressed in a letter to his boyhood friend, Cezanne, "I believe there is a great source of

poetry in the study of Nature, as she is." He began to read Balzac, Stendahl, and the Goncourt brothers. He plunged into a defense of the Goncourts' novel Germinie Lacerteux and its theme: "A given personality, conceived as a unit in a mass, pitted against its environment, the milieu into which it is born."[14] This set him further on the road toward realism and positivism. By focusing all of his attention upon science, he lost his religious faith. Gradually he came to a belief that by the utilization of the perfect knowledge of science such things as universal understanding, social progress, and brotherhood were easily within the reach of man.[15]

In his essay The Experimental Novel, Zola acknowledges his debt to Claude Bernard, a French man of science. Bernard had wrought a transformation in the fields of physiology and medicine, by striving to make them sciences capable of experimental demonstration. Zola says that he intends to intrench himself behind Claude Bernard, that it will only be necessary to replace the word "doctor" with the word "novelist" to make his meaning clear and to give it the ring of scientific truth.[16] It was Zola's belief that experiment was possible in literature even though observation had been the only method previously employed. In his idea of the experimental method

---

[14]Matthew Josephson, Zola and His Time, p. 92.

[15]Ibid., p. 112.

[16]Emile Zola, The Experimental Novel, pp. 1-2.

the search for facts is accompanied by an hypothesis so that often the experimentalist makes his experiment to confirm or verify his experimental idea. The observer merely records what he sees, whereas the experimentalist investigates the causes and purposes leading to that which has been observed. The novelist is a searcher for truth. The experimental novelist observes a certain thing such as the effect of the amorous temperament of a man upon his home. He then subjects his characters to a series of trials and conditions in order to show how they will react to the different stimuli. Thus the experimental novel is the report of the experiment that the novelist conducts before the eye of the public.[17]

In Zola's work there is found science brought into the domain of the novelist. He believed that the novelist should operate on the characters, the passions, the human and social data in the same way that the physicist operates on the inanimate beings and the physiologist operates on living beings. The experimental novel was to Zola the literature of a scientific age, just as the classical and romantic literature was the expression of a scholastic and theological age. Zola's theory is expressed in his own statement of his goal, to "possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the machinery of his intellectual and

---

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

sensory manifestations, such as physiology shall give them to us, and then finally to exhibit man living in social conditions produced by himself, which he modifies daily, and in the heart of which he himself experiences a continual transformation."[18] According to Zola's belief, everything in a man's life is determined by his physical constitution which he received through heredity. For instance, the physical weakness of an ancestor would be handed down through each succeeding generation, growing ever stronger with each one until eventually it would produce inebriates, prostitutes, and neurasthenics. Zola studied the natural man, governed by natural and chemical laws, and modified by the influences of his surroundings. He applied the experimental method of the scientists, that of going from the known to the unknown, to the study of nature and of man. He did not consider naturalism to be a school, for it was not the result of the ideas of one man or even of a group of men, but consisted simply in the application of the experimental method to the study of nature and of man. It was a vast forward movement in which everyone had a part, according to his own bent.

No certain form was advocated by Zola for the naturalistic novel. He felt that form should show the individuality of the writer. He was also of the opinion that an exaggerated importance had been given to form and stated his opinion when

---

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

he said, "He who writes the best will not be the one who gallops madly among hypotheses, but the one who walks straight ahead in the midst of truths."[19]

Perhaps the best summary of the characteristics necessary for the experimental novelist would be found in Zola's own words. "The experimental novelist is therefore the one who accepts proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled, and who tries to test, as much as he can, this personal sentiment, this idea _a priori_, by observation and experiment."[20]

In turning from the theory of Zola to his actual work one finds that determinism dominates everything. This characteristic is found throughout the main body of his work, a cycle of volumes, the _Rougon-Macquart_ series, beginning in 1870 with _La Fortune des Rougon_, and ending with _Le Docteur Pascal_, in 1893. Among the chief books of the cycle, which traces with scientific methods of social and psychological research the fortunes of one family and exposes the differing effects of heredity and environment, are: _La Faute del' Abbe' Mouret_, a study in provincial life; _L'Assommoir_, dealing with the drink problem; _Germinal_, descriptive of the

---

[19] _Ibid._, p. 48.

[20] _Ibid._, pp. 53-54.

mining industry; La Terre, a study of peasant life; and Le Debacle, a picture of the Franco-Prussian War. The family traced in this cycle originates from a neurasthenic and a drunkard and prolongs that double taint through its many members and diverse environments.

The aspects of Zola's naturalism are easily discernable in his novel Nana, the ninth in the series and a picture of the courtesan. Like other books in this series, Nana is founded largely on documentary evidence obtained from police records of Paris. Nana is pictured as the direct product of her heredity and environment, descended from a drunkard, sister of another drunkard, having in herself the same taint of blood that was in him, nurtured in a background of depravity, gradually sinking deeper and deeper into the lowest levels of corruption. The work abounds in detail with scene after scene complete to the last sordid detail. Nana is pictured with no sense of ethical responsibility, no free will, a creature governed solely by her instincts.

A vivid picturization of war in all of its horror and futility is found in Le Debacle, a work which is considered one of the great arguments against war because of its detailed and terrible pictures of war as it really is with all the glamour stripped away. Determinism, one of the chief characteristics of naturalism, works throughout the novel to bring Jean inevitably toward the end to which his heredity and environment have destined him--the killing of his friend,

brother to his sweetheart, thus making it impossible for them to marry. No free will is expressed here. Jean is the pawn in the game which has been working toward this climax for generations. In this depiction of war, all levels reached a common level; all moved against their will by a force which none of them understood.

As has been previously stated, Zola stands at the head of the naturalists in France, but there are others of his period who are important in any study of naturalism. Conflicting opinions are found as to the position of Balzac in naturalism. Zola saw him as an exponent of the experimental method. In his essay The Experimental Novel he said of Balzac's Cousine Bette that the author takes his subject, starts from known facts, proceeding through a series of situations so as to exhibit the working of his emotions. Zola saw Balzac's purpose as an experiment to show what a man's passions acting in such surroundings and circumstances would produce from the point of view of the individual and society.[21]

The work of Balzac abounds in lurid melodrama, fantastic adventure, secret hiding places, and villains. He is a romantic in his liking for sentimentality and in his tremendous power of imagination which enables him to conceive not human beings but terrifying and uncanny monsters. In spite

---

[21] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

of this tendency his work is characterized by an unusual ability to see and reproduce the world in which he lived. It may safely be said that he stands at the parting of the ways, a representative of a declining romanticism and at the same time heading the new movement for realism in French literature.[22] With his subordination of the romantic ideals of love and honor to the modern predominance of gold and his careful study and depiction of the physical objects which form the background for modern existence, he opens the way for the rise of the school of naturalism in fiction.[23]

One of the earlier French writers who has been called naturalistic is Gustave Flaubert. He began his career as a romanticist, later to rebel and turn to realism. He violently objected to having his novels called naturalistic and was known to have expressed himself as regretting having written _Madame Bovary_, the work which has been termed naturalistic.[24] Although Flaubert was not properly in the naturalistic movement, his novels have all the appearances generally considered to be naturalistic. The characters are not heroic in stature; there is much detail; the plot is concerned with the dissolution of character; and some emphasis is laid on environmental factors. On the other hand, his characters are morally

---

[22]Maxwell A. Smith, _A Short History of French Literature_, p. 232.

[23]_Ibid_.

[24]Josephson, _op. cit._, pp. 243-244.

responsible for their actions. Madame Bovary is pictured as a free agent. Satire is found also in Madame Bovary and satire has no place in Zola's theory of naturalism.[25] These characteristics make it impossible to classify Flaubert as a true naturalist, but they are sufficient to place him in the foreground of the movement.

Prominently placed among these earlier writers who showed evidences of naturalism are the Goncourt brothers. In Germinie Lacerteux, published in 1865 before any important work of Zola's, the Goncourt brothers had anticipated Zola and his theories of naturalism. This work deals with the life and loves of a servant girl and anticipates Zola's theory in three ways: first, in the substitution of notes and documents for psychology; second, in their attempts to study with the methods of the hospital cases which are pathological rather than psychological; and third, in their doctrine that the true domain of realistic art is the life of the lower classes.[26] They did not, however, represent naturalism with Zola's force and single-mindedness.

It is perhaps misleading to classify Alphonse Daudet among the naturalists, although he is characterized by a fondness for jotting down notes to serve as a basis for reproducing reality, and by a tendency to study the lower classes of

---

[25]Nitze, op. cit., pp. 613-617.

[26]Ibid., pp. 627-629.

society. His sensitive artistic nature found an outlet in a highly colored, impressionistic style, far removed from the positive, scientific ideas of Zola. Like the naturalists, he desired to reflect actual life in his art, but he was too sympathetic and emotional to represent scientific naturalism. He was not a severe and impartial recorder of the world's woes. It would be more accurate to name him a sympathetic realist rather than a naturalist.[27]

Such a wide departure from the accepted forms of literature was certain to exert its influence on the literature of other countries. Crossing the English Channel one finds that literature in England at this time was in a period of transition. The Victorian novel, sentimental, moral, capacious, was giving way to the novel which pictures life stripped of glamour, saturated with detail, complete with analysis of thought and feeling. Thomas Hardy was showing a tragic intensity in the lives of simple country folk; George Moore was depicting in pathetic detail the lives of English people of the lower classes. Heroines in Hardy's work have an elemental purity of nature, and so long as they are led by instinct they are true, but they make no fight against circumstances. They show an impassioned receptivity and their love is blind and impulsive. Mr. Hardy proclaims that human life is governed by inscrutable forces, that human beings are puppets of fate,

---

[27] _Ibid._, pp. 629-633.

and destined to misery. This idea is carried all through the novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles, where it is seen that Tess was changing from peasant ignorance and convention when she met Clare, who was at the same time changing from the culture and belief of a higher station. Their two natures came together, she straining upward to reach his level, he stooping to meet hers: the result was a tragic discord. Tess makes no fight against circumstances; she is a puppet in the hands of fate, a creature who is blown hither and yon by the winds of her environment.

Some of the same characteristics are to be seen in Esther Waters, a novel by George Moore. Esther is a girl of no particular pleasing personality who is turned out of her home into service by a cruel, overbearing stepfather. Her story is one of betrayal, brought on by her own sullen disposition, which she seems powerless to control. Although she eventually marries her betrayer, she is first pulled through depths of degradation by the forces of circumstance. Her marriage is doomed from the beginning by the shadow cast by the gambling activities of her husband. Esther is a member of the Puritan Brethren, but she is powerless to exert her influence over her husband; circumstances are just too much for her.

The work of George Gissing properly belongs in this period of transition in English literature. His work shows characteristics of both periods, and although he does not deliberately practice the rules laid down by Zola, the two have

some common characteristics. In his representation of men and women, amorousness, sometimes furtive, sometimes brutal, plays a large part. Another resemblance is seen in the fact that both authors treat of poverty. Thus there are found two characteristics of naturalism, a representation of a base love and a vivid portrayal of a lower level of society, becoming apparent in the literature of England in the nineteenth century. It might be said that upon the shoulders of Hardy, Moore, and Gissing rests the mantle of naturalism in England. The characteristics of the French theory of naturalism, the individual caught in a web of inexorable environmental and hereditary factors, the selection of characters from the lower walks of life, the importance given to the physical aspects of love, all are present in the works of these men.

Having traced briefly the growth of naturalism in France and having touched lightly upon its slight influence in England, let us now turn to America for a look at its influence upon American literature. Here, there was evidence of an increasing effort to find new methods to express the old and unchanging issues of human experience in terms of naturalism. This naturalism could not take root as quickly in American virgin soil as it had in the richer soil of Europe, and though these writers in the naturalistic vein were being read in America, no American writer had as yet attempted a work of this type. Zola had demanded that the novelist be a scientist, an analyst, and an anatomist, and that his work must have the

certainty and solidity of a work of science, but until Dreiser produced Sister Carrie no novelist in America had taken this new idea seriously and no one in America had produced a work of pure naturalism. Realism in America before this period had not gone beyond the relatively mild novels of Henry James and William Dean Howells. Carl Van Doren says that the naturalism which emerged in the fiction of this period was "not so much a deliberate principle or a definite school as a variety of dissents from the official type of realism favored by Howells."[28]

It must be remembered, however, that Howells was the fountainhead of realism in America. It is difficult to determine by which approach Howells arrived at his intensive realistic beliefs. No doubt his extensive reading in European literature was a factor. He was always impatient with glorious deeds, fanciful tales, and other romantic embellishments. He abhorred Scott, and his earliest enthusiasms were for Pope, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens, and Heine. His choice of literature furnishes a clue to his break with romanticism. Howells' definition of realism is well known, "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material."[29]

---

[28]Carl Van Doren, The American Novel 1789-1939, p. 225.

[29]"Realism Defined: Wm. Dean Howells," Literary History of the United States, II, p. 878.

Howells was always interested in a truthful representation of life. If he objected to the content of some works on the grounds of morality, it was just that he did not regard it as a truthful representation of life. His autobiographical writings yield evidence that his squeamishness about the subject of sex and the nude in art was fully developed in his boyhood on the Ohio frontier, leading one to the conclusion that he is not quite honest in attributing the necessity for reticence to the young lady reader. The fact is that his own sensibility dictated it. Business reasons, according to Howells, also indicated a necessity for suppressing this material in magazines. As he expressed it, such material may be published in a book and locked away from the children, but no American magazine would publish anything that might not safely be left for young ladies to read.[30] Business and a natural prudishness, therefore, combined to make Howells' practice incompatible with his theory of realism. He was wilfully blind to types of evil which a keen realism would in later years possibly overemphasize. He shied away from the French naturalists because they dwelt too much on the sordid aspects of life. When he called for "truth" in the depiction of life, he did not admit that what was immoral was true of life in general; this immorality was the exception rather than the rule.[31] Even so, in his condemnation of the French naturalists he said, "French naturalism

---

[30] _Ibid._, pp. 893-894.

[31] George Snell, _Shapers of American Fiction_, pp. 198-199.

is better at its worst than French unnaturalism at its best."[32] Actually the two major causes for the triumph of the realism of Howells and its apotheosis, naturalism, were the intensification of the nineteenth century industrialization and widespread acceptance of the theories of Darwin. Science assumed the successful management of all departments of human welfare. Enthusiasm for science and a rational explanation of human behavior indicated that literature could also become scientific.

It was inevitable that there should be dissenters from the type of realism favored by Howells. These dissenters, Garland, Crane, Norris, Dreiser, and others, felt that it was no longer sufficient to skim the "rosy surfaces," to present the "smiling aspects" so much preferred by Howells. According to these writers, the novel, a powerful modern agent for civilization, must go deeper than it had gone in the United States, must turn to the light many ugly realities, hitherto neglected, which were growing more ominous every day. It must deal candidly with political corruption, economic injustice, religious unrest, sexual irregularities, with greed and doubt and hate and cruelty and violence, as well as with more customary subjects. The novel must assert its right to speak of anything it chose, provided that thing were true.[33]

---

[32] William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction, p. 60.

[33] Van Doren, op. cit., p. 225.

Foremost among the dissenters was Hamlin Garland, who asked that American fiction separate itself from tradition and imitation, that it explore truth to its underlying meaning, that it deal with the unpleasant as well as the pleasant aspects of life, and that it develop a form based on the moment of experience.[34] Garland saw in writers such as Stephen Crane the artist that he could not himself become and made himself the public apologist for these young writers who were not afraid to discuss poverty, hardship, and the problems of society and religion and who were working toward an instrument of expression which would interpret as well as record.[35]

Three American novelists of this period deserve the title of "naturalist" more than any others of their generation. These are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. To Crane goes the distinction of being the first to write in the naturalistic tradition. A discussion of his works will not be given at this point, as it is proposed to make a critical examination of his work later in this study. Before doing this a brief discussion will be given of some of the other naturalists.

The first of these to be considered is Frank Norris. Norris, like others among the naturalists, began as an admirer of romance, but after a few years became a devout disciple of

---

[34] The Literary History of the United States, p. 1020.

[35] Ibid.

Zola. For Norris, naturalism existed not only in picturing the everyday occurrences of life but in accentuating the terrible or the tragic. In his own words:

> The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of a naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death.[36]

This definition sounds a bit like romance, but in Norris' work naturalism is shown more in his choice of characters than in what happened to them. He did, however, write truthfully of them and their environment and tried to report truthfully the things that were suppressed in the polite fiction of his time.

Norris' hero in McTeague certainly reflects animal characteristics in his behavior as well as in his physical aspects. His habits, when on Sunday he brought home a pot of beer and fell asleep in the warm stifling atmosphere of his office, are the mode of relaxation and expansion of animal nature. The dog eats all it can hold, then stretches out in a warm spot to sleep. In McTeague the hero and heroine are followed through all the steps of degeneration--animalism in their relations with each other, greed in the desire for gold, the gradual dissolution of character--and the fatalistic retribution which comes to McTeague when he finds himself in the

---

[36]Snell, op. cit., p. 226.

desert, chained to his nemesis, a dead man. The novel itself carries out Norris' theory to perfection. He contended that a novel must move slowly, carefully, toward the climax, but that it must increase with great acceleration toward the big scenes and must end in a blaze of shocking power.[37]

The second of these American naturalists, at least in so far as chronological order is to be observed, is Theodore Dreiser. When American naturalism is mentioned, most people think of Dreiser rather than of Crane or Norris. Possibly this is because his works have been more widely read. Van Doren says he "has been the wheelhorse if not the spearhead of American naturalism."[38] When Sister Carrie burst upon the American scene in 1900, much more hue and cry was raised than when translations of Zola's works were published. The American public had a very dim view of French morals at best, and they were not scandalized at Zola's representation of these morals. It was a different thing entirely when an American writer portrayed American sin with an American girl as the central figure. The wife of Dreiser's publisher demanded that the book be withdrawn from the public--and it was!

Dreiser believed, with Zola, in going directly to life in order to present reality. He also believed in giving a wealth of detail so that the reader might have a photographic

---

[37] Ibid., p. 228.

[38] Van Doren, op. cit., p. 259.

picture. In Sister Carrie the details which form the basis for the book are taken from the life of one of his wayward sisters who had been the mistress of an architect and who later eloped to New York with a restaurant manager. From a naturalistic point of view, Carrie is successful in the struggle because she possesses an animal-like quality for absorbing shock and defeat in her pursuit of success. Carrie, the fallen woman, should have progressed downward; instead she goes upward. In fact, the novel seems to have few characteristics to mark it as definitely naturalistic other than the general implication that man is just another animal in an accidental universe. Stuart Pratt Sherman, however, says that Dreiser's novels all are illustrations of a crude and naively simple naturalistic philosophy. Society is pictured as a jungle in which the struggle for existence continues, the victory going to the animal most physically fit and mentally ruthless, unless the lesser animals combine to crush him.[39]

Other characters who are the victims of circumstances beyond their control are found in his novel Jennie Gerhardt. Jennie, like Carrie, is a member of a poverty-stricken family and is compelled by the force of circumstances to lead the life of mistress, rather than of wife. Sherman says this novel is not true to life. Dreiser gives Jennie strict Lutheran parents who bring her up in a religious atmosphere.

---

[39]Stuart Pratt Sherman, "The Barbaric Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser," On Contemporary Literature, p. 91.

All of the family accept this doctrine. Jennie, however, with no apparent resistance, yields her virtue to the first aggressor. This pious girl feels no shame over the prospect of an illegitimate child. Later when she talks over another "proposition" with her mother, the mother hesitates, not on moral grounds, but because she will have to deceive the father. The "unreality of the whole thing is preposterous,"[40] says Sherman. Jennie is a much more romantic heroine than she should be as the central figure in a naturalistic novel. There are no real evidences of animalistic brutality. There is apparently no determinism; the characters make free, moral decisions. The personal reaction of the writer is to agree with Sherman that Jennie, with her background, would not have reacted as she did. It remains, however, that since Jennie did react in this manner, the story must necessarily move to its conclusion in the naturalistic manner, rather sordid and degraded.

Dreiser's inner struggles provided him with one of the chief characteristics of his fiction: the conflict between instinct and what is recognized as convention. The biological urges of his characters are very apparent and lead them to actions which infringe upon the social and moral code. These are reflections from his own life--the constant poverty and transient status of the family, the rejection of the children by each new neighborhood--all of these are shown

---

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 98.

in his writing. His characters receive their education from life itself in a real and bitter fight for social recognition, rather than in schools. In both _Jennie Gerhardt_ and _Sister Carrie_ there is found the struggle of an uneducated and underprivileged girl for full recognition of her personality and her place in society. Dreiser sees life as a search for beauty and for power, and as such it becomes a struggle for money and position, and for sexual satisfaction. In this struggle his subscription to the Darwinian theory is apparent, for the strongest win out whereas the weak are crushed. To this biological factor is added social determinism. Just as the strong man overpowers the weak, just so are organized groups stronger than the individual.[41] Only the strong have power to withstand social pressure. The novels of Dreiser bring out this point very clearly. The strong character in his work emerges as the victor, whereas the weak character, though perhaps morally good, is trampled underneath.

Definite characteristics of literary naturalism emerge from this brief discussion of the origin and history of the movement. First of all, the naturalist concerns himself with man in his natural state. He believes that man is the direct product of his heredity and environment, and he pictures him as being moved along the pathway of life powerless to deny the forces of circumstance. The naturalist denies

---

[41] _Literary History of the United States_, pp. 1205-1206.

the existence of any supernatural explanation for the universe and holds fast to the theory of empiricism which attributes all knowledge to experience. He follows a method of scientific investigation, going from the known to the unknown, and places his characters in every conceivable situation in order that their reactions to different sets of stimuli may be observed. This acceptance of the data obtained by scientific investigation as the ultimate knowledge gives the characteristic of positivism to naturalism. The naturalist in his pursuit of the character of the "natural" man places great emphasis upon the animality of man. Man's struggle for survival and his efforts to satisfy his animal hungers are given much prominence in the work of this group of authors.

With this brief history of the development of naturalism in France, its slight influence in England, the background for the movement in America, and a few brush strokes at Crane's contemporaries, we come to the most important part of this study, the discussion of Crane and the manifestations of naturalism in his work.

## CHAPTER II

## NATURALISTIC INFLUENCES IN CRANE'S EARLY LIFE

Stephen Crane, often called the forerunner of naturalism in America, was born the fourteenth child of Jonathan and Helen Crane on November 1, 1871, in Newark, New Jersey. His parents were very pious folk, and Stephen spent his early years in an atmosphere dominated by the religious discipline of the Methodist Church.

It is interesting to speculate upon what influence, if any, Crane's early environment may have had upon his work. Stephen's father, Jonathan Townley Crane, was the youngest of the six children of William and Sarah Townley Crane. He was a descendant of Stephen Crane, who, coming probably from England or Wales, settled at Elizabethtown, New Jersey, as early as 1665. Jonathan Crane prepared himself for the Methodist ministry and spent many years on various circuits in New Jersey and New York. The influence exerted upon Stephen by his father was probably very slight, for he died when Stephen was only ten years of age. In my opinion this minister, characterized in the _Dictionary of American Biography_ as "a strict Methodist of the old stamp, filled with the sense of God's redeeming love, deeply concerned about such sins as dancing, breaking the Sabbath, reading trashy

novels, playing cards. . . enjoying tobacco and wine, and too innocent of the world to do more than suspect the existence of greater viciousness," would never have approved of his son's writing; in fact it is difficult to believe that he would have approved of anything realistic or naturalistic. The world was good; people were kind; there were sermons to write and preach; there were people to be ministered unto; the sordid side of life, if there was such a thing, surely was not acceptable for literary efforts. I fear he would have been sorely grieved over his son's first novel, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.

Modern psychologists might say that Stephen's work was the result of too much parental stress on religion and the "finer things of life." They might even explain his naturalism as being a revolt against the teachings of his childhood. Stephen's mother, Helen Peck, was the daughter and sister of famous Methodist preachers. She was a well-educated, well-read woman, and she was very religious. It appears, however, that she did not instill very much religion into her son, Stephen. He said, "I used to like church and prayer meetings when I was a kid but that cooled off when I was thirteen or about that, my brother Will told me not to believe in Hell after my uncle had been boring me about the lake of fire and the rest of the sideshows."[1]

---

[1]Thomas Beer, Stephen Crane, p. 50.

Stephen's mother was an ardent crusader for various reforms, and Stephen appears to have been proud of her accomplishments in this field. He said of her,

> It is in me to think she did some good work for the public schools. One of my sisters was a teacher and mother tried for years to get women placed on the school boards and to see that whiskey was not sold to boys under age.[2]

Just how much his mother influenced his writing is a matter for conjecture. He loved and respected her, and it is doubtful that he would ever have made sarcastic remarks about her religion in her presence. Possibly she was dogmatic; perhaps Stephen resented being coerced. It is possible that he might have been more religious had she been less so. Only one thing is certain: she had a fine mind and the ability to write, and these things she left as a heritage for her son.

In 1874 Jonathan Crane's time at the Newark church was up and the family moved to Bloomington. Subsequently another move was made to Port Jervis, and it was here that Stephen entered school on his eighth birthday. He could already read and write, and he was disgusted to be in class with "infants" of five and six years. "They tell me," he said, "that I got through two grades in six weeks which sounds like the lie of a fond mother at a tea party but I do remember that I got ahead very fast and that father was pleased with me."[3]

---

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 40.

The death of his father in 1881 was a great blow to Stephen. They had been very companionable, and Stephen often went with him on long drives around Port Jervis when the elder Crane went to preach in the smaller churches. His father's death and his funeral made a lasting impression on the child. He was stricken with terror at the country women who stood in the kitchen and sang hymns, at his brother's black clothes, at his mother's weeping in the parlor, and at the coffin of his father. Stephen said in later years that he remembered every iota of this. As he expressed it, "We tell kids that heaven is just across the gaping grave and all that bosh and then we scare them to glue with flowers and white sheets and hymns. We ought to be crucified for it."[4] Could it be that this fear of death haunted him through adolescence and that he was forcing himself "to face it" when he wrote The Red Badge of Courage? Beer says that Crane's whole life was dominated by fear.[5] Stephen's mother spent hours teaching her son that he must not be afraid of anything. He was told not to be afraid to stay on his horse; he was not allowed to cry when some one threw a ball to him and hurt his hands; when he woke screaming from a nightmare of black riders on black horses, he was again told not to cry.[6] The young Stephen was left with the firmly-rooted idea

---

[4]Ibid., p. 41.

[5]Ibid., p. 117.

[6]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

that to cry meant that one was afraid and that above all else one must not be afraid.

It was in 1883 that the family moved to a small house in Asbury Park, New Jersey, a resort advertised as quite free from sin. This advertisement, however, like many others, did not happen to be quite true, for Stephen saw and heard many things which he kept from his mother. It was here that he saw a white girl stabbed by her negro lover, and though he was thoroughly frightened, he said nothing about it to his mother. Other lesser vices were observed by Stephen and perhaps even sampled. It is amusing to read his account of his willingness to attend prayer meeting with his mother after having been given a "red drink out of a bottle"[7] by an organ grinder. As a usual thing the prospect of prayer meeting brought a long face from Stephen, but in his exhilerated state he was happy to go. He said, "I have frequently wondered how much mothers ever know about their sons, after all. She would not have found it much of a joke."[8]

At the age of seventeen, armed with six pipes which he smoked with some uneasiness, and several volumes of Harry Castleman's romances, Crane entered Hudson River Institute at Caverack, New York, a college which stressed strong moral atmosphere. It appears that every move made by Stephen's mother was toward the strengthening of his moral growth, and

---

[7]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 50. [8]<u>Ibid</u>.

this early training may have been responsible in some measure for the honesty and sincerity exhibited by him throughout his life.

The summer of 1888 was happy with new excitement for Stephen. He went to work for his brother, Townley, collecting items for Townley's press bureau at Asbury Park. The beaches were crowded with newcomers; there were all sorts of exciting things to report. He met odd people, the riffraff of cheap entertainers and idlers, the attendants at shooting galleries and carrousels, and the "mercenary pilgrims" of a small circus that disbanded at Asbury Park. Stephen learned many things besides the art of newspaper reporting. He learned that the world is a large place, that it contains many strange but interesting people, and more important to him, that all of these people do not conform to the rules of conduct which he had been taught to respect. It was probably at this time that Stephen formed his penchant for seeking out people from the lower walks of life--people who come to life in his stories. Before this time he had been sheltered from the world and from worldliness; now suddenly he realized that the world was an exciting place filled with exciting people, and he burned with a desire to know more about this world and these people.

The next year of Stephen's formal schooling was spent at Lafayette College, and from here he went to Syracuse University. During his stay at Syracuse University he worked as correspondent for the <u>New York Tribune</u>. Syracuse was pleasant

enough, and Mrs. Crane consented to the changing of Stephen's course of study from engineering to writing. He spent much of his time in the back room of a restaurant; he impressed his fellow students by selling articles to the Detroit Free Press and by telling them that the police court was the most interesting place in Syracuse. He shocked the members of the faculty by telling one of them that he disagreed with St. Paul's theory of sin. Such a non-conformist as Stephen Crane must have been notable in a Methodist university.

Very little distinction came to Crane during his college years other than the honor of being chosen captain of the baseball team. He did very little reading. According to his own evaluation it was not that he disliked books, it was merely that he disliked the cut-and-dried curriculum of college and found humanity a more interesting study.[9] Whatever reading Crane did was not along traditional lines; he read whatever pleased him. There is no real evidence that he read Zola, but he did read Flaubert's Salammbo, pronouncing it "too long." He read from Tolstoy and was acquainted with Shakespeare, Emerson, Whitman, Mark Twain, and Kipling. Stevenson he disliked, feeling him to be insincere.[10]

It would be far from the mark to say that Crane's reading influenced him to become a naturalistic writer. There is

---

[9]John Berryman, Crane, p. 24.

[10]Beer, op. cit., p. 231.

similarity between his work and that of the early naturalists, but Crane himself denied any debt to them, and I am inclined to think he was right. Crane's unusual style grew from his own inner convictions of what constitutes a good story, and these convictions were essentially naturalistic.

With the death of his mother during his year at Syracuse it might be said that Stephen's home life came to an end. Aside from summers in Asbury Park and occasional visits to his brothers, his life in the next two years was that of a struggling writer in New York, actually hungry and sometimes ill in the old Art Student's League on East 23 Street. He reported intermittently for the Herald or the Tribune, but he never had enough money to live in comfort. He was very independent in financial as well as intellectual matters and refused to rely on his brothers for financial aid.

Crane's experience at this time foretold his entire career as a journalist. By nature he was not a reporter, and he would never learn to be one. He invariably recorded his impression of a scene instead of confining his reports to facts. Joseph Conrad once wrote of him "He is the *only* impressionist, and *only* an impressionist."[11] Once when he was sent to "cover" a large fire, his report contained an account of the "impatient horses kicking grey ice of the gutter into silvery angles that hurtled and clicked on frozen stone,"[12]

---

[11]Berryman, *op. cit.*, p. 288. [12]Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

and no mention was made of the building's owner, the street or number, or the amount of the insurance! No city editor could countenance such reporting as this. It was in this same manner that in later years he left the reporting of specific battle, battle movements and the like to others more interested in such things while he wrote whole paragraphs about the loss of his toothbrush.[13] Shall I confess that I never realized how truly disastrous the loss of one's toothbrush could be until I had read this poignant account? The picture of row upon row of soldiers marching, armed with all sorts of weapons, and with their toothbrushes stuck in their hats is graphic indeed. It brings to mind the episode in Crane's youth when he lay on the sand of the beach with a companion, tossed a handful of sand into the air, and told the companion to treat his notions about writing as those grains of sand, to throw them all away, and then to write how he felt. Crane saw the true things, the human things, little things that escaped the notice of one interested in troop movements, battle maneuvers, and other matters more properly left within the province of the commanding general.

Although Crane was only twenty years of age when he came to New York, his opinions of the literature of the past and present were already formed. His mind had stripped itself of all respect for the current theories of romantic writing.

---

[13]Stephen Crane, The Work of Stephen Crane, IV, p. 229.

He was already a realist; he was able to write what he saw and thought with absolute disregard for the effect which it might have on the public. Perhaps it was the complete disregard for public opinion that caused him to go immediately to the slums to live; perhaps it was only his curiosity about a people who had not been adequately represented in American literature at that time. He said he did not consider that a sincere book had been written about these people before this time.[14]

Another reason for Crane's affinity with the lower classes was the fact that he saw and was sensitive to the social problems of his day. He could see that people born in an environment such as existed in the Bowery had very little chance to rise above that environment. An experience in his own early life had brought the "fallen woman" into his consciousness. His mother had befriended an unfortunate girl and by so doing had brought upon herself the criticism of the "good" women of the community. As Crane expressed it, "Inopportune babies are not part of Methodist ritual but mother was always more a Christian than a Methodist. . . . Mother's friends were mostly women and they had the famous feminine aversion to that kind of baby."[15] His fine scorn is shown in this characteristic expression: "It is funny that women's interest in babies

---

[14]Berryman, op. cit., p. 29.

[15]Beer, op. cit., p. 49.

trickles clean off the mat if they have never met papa socially."[16] The literature of naturalism must of necessity be the literature of social criticism, for one of its principal characteristics is that it deals with people and subjects from the lower walks of life, and it is on this level that social injustice is most apparent.

These, then, are the influences in the early life of Stephen Crane which may have caused him to turn to naturalism as the outlet for his creative powers. To clarify that statement, however, and to refrain from leaving a false impression let me hasten to reiterate that I do not believe Crane consciously turned to naturalism for expression; I believe that he expressed himself in the only way that he could, and that way was naturalistic. A background of stern, uncompromising religious parents most probably turned Stephen away from religion rather than attracting him to religion. His mother, always adjuring him "to be good, always honest, and always independent," in all probability did more harm than a less forceful person would have done. On the other hand, Crane was all of the things that she wished him to be, other than religious, and her influence was probably greater than is apparent on the surface. His disgust with the sentimentality of romantic literature undoubtedly led him to seek a new outlet for his writing. His firm conviction that life was not all

---

[16] Ibid.

flowery and beautiful led him to the Bowery to see how life was lived in the shadows. It was here that he found what he so passionately craved: the sight of life really lived without restraint, where he could tear himself loose from his repressions and write about life as he really saw it, not life nicely bound around by convention, social and moral obligations, and habits of "nice living."

In his search for the reality of life he was often misjudged and maligned. He was accused of being a dope addict, a drunkard, of having a sordid character, even of madness itself. None of these things were true, although during his lifetime they were believed to be true. True, he did often have the appearance of being all of these things. All too often, however, this was the result of no sleep, of illness, or of simple personal carelessness.

What makes a naturalist--environment, training, revolt against fixed boundaries of expression? Some things in Stephen Crane's environment may have contributed their share to his naturalism as I have shown. Training had very little to do with it in my opinion. Crane's training consisted of his experience as a newspaper man, and not a very good one at that. I have shown that his reading could not have influenced him very greatly in this direction. Possibly a revolt against fixed boundaries must share equally with environment in the preparation of Crane for naturalism. He was rebellious against the romanticists and sought a new

means of expression. Whether he was conscious of it or not, he was the spearhead of naturalism in America. This will be shown in subsequent chapters in which specific works will be discussed and their naturalistic content examined.

# CHAPTER III

## TALES OF THE BOWERY

The mainstream from which the naturalist draws his pictures of life in low environments was found by Stephen Crane in the Bowery. The true naturalist delights in the study of characters whose lives are spent in the slums. He studies them in their struggle against the forces of heredity and environment, in the display of their animal natures as they struggle to satisfy their desires or for survival itself.

Crane had a burning interest in the people of the Bowery. He felt that the stories depicting their lives had been insincere. These stories were sentimental or admonitory, usually with a strong moral tone. Emphasis was laid upon dialect and upon the picturesque atmosphere. Crane's desire was to picture these people as they really were, their loves, their hates, and their inevitable destinies. In order that he might do this with authority he felt that he must go and live among them. He therefore chose to live in the Bowery rather than in a "better" part of New York. In later years, long after the writing of *Maggie*, he would often disappear soon after reaching a new place, only to be found in some low dive, usually with a cigaret unsmoked in his hand and a glass of beer untouched before him, in deep and earnest

conversation with characters of low reputation. He never lost his desire to observe at first hand the lives of these more unfortunate people. It was this more or less scientific method of observation that gave him the proper background for the writing of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.

The first version of Maggie was written in the days immediately following the death of Crane's mother. At least this is what Crane told his friend, Wallis McHarg, when he visited with Crane in January, 1892. The two men had returned from a walk along the Bowery when Crane abruptly gave the manuscript to McHarg to read. McHarg, bewildered, said no one would print anything so realistic, and that certainly the characters should have names.[1] William Townley Crane, Stephen's brother, was similarly confused at his first reading, and it was actually he who later named the book Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. Crane made no effort to get this version published. In March of that same year, after some revision, armed with a note from Townley, he presented it to Richard Gilder, a friend of the family and editor of The Century magazine. Gilder did not enjoy it. He was profoundly shocked, and he protested to Crane that it seemed "cruel." He pointed out details which he called extreme until Crane asked him if he really meant that the work was too honest,

---

[1]Berryman, op. cit., p. 32.

and Gilder had to admit that this was the truth.[2] Crane tried several other magazines without success.

Following this failure he went with some friends to Sullivan County, and here he wrote a series of strange stories, The Sullivan County Sketches. He did not like these sketches, and with the advent of his twenty-first birthday he determined to return to his story of Maggie.

Berryman has gathered evidence to support his statement that this was actually a fourth version, but he does not go into definite detail about the third version.[3] When Crane finished the story this fourth time, he did not waste any time or hope upon editors. He used what money was coming to him from his mother's estate plus what he could borrow and published the book himself. Thus it was that Maggie went on sale for fifty cents a copy. There was no demand for the book, and it did not enjoy much sale. Many dealers would not handle it at all. Several dealers sent back most of the copies they had taken, and these volumes lay around in Crane's rooms until they were yellow with age.

The public was not ready to receive such literature as Maggie. Readers were shocked out of their conventional patterns of thought by this "too honest" picture of life in the lower environments. They had been on slumming expeditions to the Bowery where they found life picturesque and different,

---

[2]Ibid., p. 36. [3]Ibid., p. 52.

but surely people did not really live as Crane's characters did! Here was a cross section of life with bestiality and brutality laid bare before their timid, retiring eyes. They were not conditioned to it; it was too much to understand all at once.

The outstanding quality of Maggie as a pioneering effort and one of the reasons it received so little recognition in its time lay in its amorality of viewpoint. Crane's detached, amoral objectivity confounded his readers. These same readers might have forgiven his sordid themes if the works had possessed an element of moralizing. Crane contented himself, however, with an austere coverage of what he had observed in the Bowery. Snell says the "world of Maggie is sinful without realizing its sin, ignorant without the possibility of knowledge, devoid of hope without dreaming there can be a salvation."[4]

When Maggie came from the publishers, Crane addressed a copy to the Reverend Thomas Dixon; across the cover he wrote these words:

> It is inevitable that the book will greatly shock you, but continue, pray, with great courage to the end, for it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in this world, and often shapes lives regardlessly. If one could prove that theory, one would make 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.[5]

---

[4]Snell, op. cit., p. 225.

[5]"Stephen Crane," The Bookman, I (1895), 229.

Robert H. Davis tells of an encounter which he and Crane had on a street corner with one of these girls and of the exquisite chivalry of Crane's replies to her.[6]

The world of misery, the world of poverty, the very presence of exploiting meanness abound in Stephen Crane's first novel. It is the story of the poor among the poor, of a warm-hearted girl, a stitcher in a collar factory, who is betrayed and deserted by a bartender and remains in poverty through the last despair of her failure in her final calling as a street walker. It is a first-hand picture of tenement life in the slums of New York City: the tenement dwellers, the tenement streets, the saloons, the alleys, the trash heaps, the sordid lives of sordid people.

A graphic picture of the environment is found in the words,

> Eventually they entered a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and gutter. . . . Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. . . . The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.[7]

What sort of people are produced by this environment? Crane makes us aware of the fact that these people are influenced very strongly by their environment almost from birth. The babies that fight with other babies, or sit stupidly in

---

[6]Crane, *op. cit.*, II, p. xvii.

[7]*Ibid.*, X, pp. 141-142.

the way of vehicles, are learning the meaning of life in the slums. The dirty streets and filthy alleys, the cluttered steps and "gruesome doorways" are their playground. The disheveled rooms are bad enough; add to these a drunken mother and a drunken father, and the sordid picture is complete.

The naturalistic concept of man as a helpless animal, driven by instinct and imprisoned in a web of circumstances beyond his control, is present in _Maggie_. Maggie is truly a victim of circumstances. She cannot escape her destiny. Her very virtues lead her downward. Pete's attentions, such as they are, are the nearest thing to kindness she has ever known. The transforming power of love makes him into a gallant lover and makes easy her seduction.

Search as I may, however, I can find nothing in Maggie's heredity to account for her virtues. Crane himself said she "blossomed in a mud puddle."[8] She appeared to be untouched by the dirt and filth of Rum Alley. The Rum Alley "philosophers" themselves were puzzled by it. This may be regarded as a weakness in Crane or at least evidence that he was not the complete naturalist. Here is an effect for which he provided no cause.

The story begins with a street brawl between children of adjoining neighborhoods. "A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing

---

[8]_Ibid_., p. 156.

stones at howling urchins from Devils' Row. . . . His small body was writhing in the delivery of oaths."[9] Maggie grew up in such an atmosphere, and the natural expectation is that she would be a coarse, hard, swearing, cheating, and hating girl. Crane, however, pictures her sympathetically. She deplores her mother's drunkenness; she hates for Jimmie to fight, for she knows that a scene will follow when he arrives at home. She attempts to bring some sort of order out of the chaos that is her home; she recognizes the deplorable condition of her mother and father and would like to better herself and her surroundings.

In the beginning Maggie is a "small, ragged girl" who upbraids her brother for fighting, only to be struck by him for her efforts. She is too frail to defend herself, and she lives in constant fear of beatings from her mother. In spite of this fear she does her best to protect the baby, Tommie, from the cruelty and bestiality of the mother.

Animal behavior characteristic of naturalistic literature is seen in the mother and father, but no evidence of this is seen in Maggie herself. The mother is more bestial than the father, for it appears that he expostulates mildly with the mother, urging her not to be "allus poundin' a kid." When he has become sodden with drink, his brutality comes to the fore, but the woman is sheer brute, in physical appearance as well as in actions. Crane's picture of her is vivid.

---

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 137.

> In the middle of the floor lay his mother asleep. . . .
> Her face was inflamed and swollen from drinking. . . .
> Her tangled hair tossed in waves over her forehead. . . .
> Her bare red arms were thrown out above her head in an attitude of exhaustion, something, mayhap, like that of a sated villain.[10]

This drunken mother was a new character to the American reading public, or would have been if it had read the book.

There is no description of Maggie's physical appearance beyond the fact that she was pretty. Crane did say that she "blossomed in a mud puddle," a classic piece of understatement which gives a hint of the impressionist in Crane. He simply mentions that she is pretty and allows the reader to fill in the details of hair, eyes, and complexion to fit his own ideas of beauty.

Maggie was dissatisfied with her home, and Crane's understanding of human nature is shown by Maggie's thoughts after she met Pete, the bartender. She looked upon him as the shining knight of her dreams and wondered what sort of home he lived in. She regarded her own home with new eyes. Pete made her see the dark, dirty walls, the broken furniture, the faded carpet, the piteous attempt to freshen a curtain with a bit of blue ribbon. She pictured Pete's world as elegant, with fine clothes, fine food, and fine friends. The realities of Pete and his world, however, constitute a fine irony. There is no striving for sensational effects in _Maggie_. The seduction of this girl is brought to the reader's consciousness in a conversation between her mother and her brother. Her inability

---

[10]_Ibid._, p. 150.

to accost men on the streets is handled briefly in less than two pages. This is not in the tradition of the naturalists who, according to Saintsbury, have the ambition "to mention the unmentionable with as much fulness of detail as possible."[11] There is no comparison possible between the effects in Maggie and those presented in Zola's Nana. The description of the emotions in the music hall when Nana makes her appearance is pure animal. "A wave of lust had flowed from her as from an excited animal, and its influence had spread, and spread, and spread till the whole house was possessed by it."[12] Contrast this with Crane's treatment of Maggie's solicitation,

> A labouring man marched along with bundles under his arms. To her remarks he replied, "It's a fine evenin', aint it?". . . Farther on in the darkness she met a ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimy hands.[13]

Another bit of irony, a characteristic not found in most naturalistic literature, is the attitude of the mother when she learns of Maggie's death. She finishes her meal before she bursts into lamentations. The neighbors come in to mourn with her, and she makes the most of the situation; she is the center of interest; she is being comforted. A "woman in black" begs her to forgive Maggie. "Yeh'll forgive her Mary," pleaded the woman in black. The mother plays up to what is expected

---

[11]George Saintsbury, A Short History of French Literature, p. 564.

[12]Emile Zola, Nana, p. 32.

[13]Crane, op. cit., II, p. 210.

of her. Her shoulders heave; her voice breaks; tears scald her cheeks. Finally she finds her voice and screams, "Oh yes, I'll forgive her!"[14]

Crane does not spend pages in characterization; the characters in his stories describe themselves by what they say, another example of his impressionism. This is not in the tradition of the naturalists. None of the wealth of detail seen in the works of naturalistic writers is evident in Crane. The father speaks only a few sentences, but one knows him perfectly. He "puffed his pipe calmly and put his great muddied boots on the back part of the stove. 'Go t'hell,' he said tranquilly."[15] The mother, who has already been discussed in some detail, is pictured by what she says, but Crane gives more description of her physical appearance than he does of any of the other characters. Jimmie, Maggie's brother, is certainly shown as the product of his heredity and environment, with his fighting, his "red" thoughts, his general outlook on life, and his brutality. He curses his parents with the same nonchalance with which they curse him. He respects no person or no law, because he does not know the meaning of respect. The only thing in the world which commanded his respect was a fire engine, and that because it had been known to overturn a street car! Typical of Crane that on a night when the stars seemed to hang lower than usual in

---

[14]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 218.

[15]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 144.

the sky he has this brutal, amoral character say, "Deh moon looks like hell, don't it?"[16]

The intellectual level enjoyed by Jimmie is shared by Pete, but life has been less cruel to him. He is hampered by no inhibitions. A supreme self-satisfaction fills his soul. His egotism makes him believe he is doing Maggie a favor by bestowing his attentions upon her. When he tires of her and leaves her, he does it with no thought at all, as simply as though he were polishing a glass behind the bar.

Crane's peculiar ability to use just the right word or simile to bring a picture into focus would be a fit topic for study in itself. Crane was able to write as much in a few pages as other authors write in hundreds. Vincent Starrett said of _Maggie: A Girl of the Streets_,

> It was, I believe, the first hint of naturalism in American letters. It was not a best seller; it offers no solution to life; it is an episodic bit of slum fiction, ending with the tragic finality of a Greek drama. . . . It is a singularly fine piece of analysis, or a bit of extraordinarily faithful reporting, as one may prefer, but not a few French and Russian writers have failed to accomplish in two volumes what Crane achieved in two hundred pages.[17]

_Maggie_, as I see it, is both naturalistic and impressionistic. The principal characteristics of naturalism are certainly present in this work: the observation of environment by the author, a sordid theme, the inability of the character to

---

[16]_Ibid._, p. 156.

[17]Vincent Starrett, "Introduction to Stephen Crane," _Men, Women and Boats_ (Modern Library Series), p. 15.

escape the inevitable end prescribed by her environment, and the impersonality of the author in stating the facts. The impressionism of Crane is shown in his deft touches of color, for example the "red" years, and the "red" thoughts of Jimmie. His failure to describe in detail, yet his ability to make one see one's own picture of the environment and characters are part of this impressionism. I would agree with Starrett that this book contains a strong element of naturalism, but it follows no school slavishly. It is the work of a highly individual artist.

The second of Crane's longer works dealing with lower walks of life is George's Mother. Crane himself thought this story better than Maggie. He wrote to Hamlin Garland saying, "I have just completed a New York book that leaves Maggie at the post. It is my best thing."[18] Critics, however, have differed with him in this evaluation of the two stories, and it is my conviction that a careful reading of the two will leave no doubt in the mind of the reader as to which is the better. Maggie is by all standards the better of the two stories, and certainly it is more naturalistic.

The setting for George's Mother is placed by Berryman on the "borderland" of the slums. Actually, however, the home of George Kelcey and his mother is the very same tenement occupied by the Johnsons, and Maggie herself appears fleetingly as one of the characters. She is the object of

---

[18]Berryman, op. cit., p. 85.

the rather vague and unspoken affections of George. This is referred to on one page and never mentioned again, and it is an example of Crane's peculiar characteristic of using the same characters over and over again. Crane gives the impression that the surroundings of the Kelceys are a little above those of Maggie's family. He speaks of a "white tablecloth," "white sheets," and "soft pillows," as contrasted with the pathetic curtains and "unholy sink" of the Johnsons. At the same time, very casually, he introduces Maggie Johnson and her drunken mother and father as living in the same building.

In George's Mother there is found a story with the old formula: a devoted son with regular habits, a chance meeting, the "little drink between friends," the association with evil companions, the gradual degradation of character, and the tragic ending. All of these elements fit into the naturalistic tradition. These elements are present, and yet they are not developed in the manner of the naturalists. They are developed rather along the line of the impressionists.

Crane does not spend pages telling that George was a devoted son who came home from the shop at five o'clock every afternoon. He says that a "brown young man" is going down the avenue, carrying a lunch pail and smoking a corn cob pipe, when he is accosted by an old acquaintance. Immediately Crane shifts the scene to the tenement and the sight of a little old woman frantically cleaning the room. She looks at the clock and remarks that it is five o'clock. Her efforts

at cleaning double in intensity. From that moment her looks at the clock become more frequent until at last her son comes in at seven o'clock. It is known that he is two hours late and that this is an unprecedented happening.

From this point it is easy to see the outcome of this story. George is pictured as a strong, healthy specimen of young manhood; yet he is powerless to withstand the influence of Jones, Bleecker, and others. Inevitably he loses his job, and when he goes to his new friends for help, they suddenly have many other uses for their money. The mother strives to interest George in going to prayer meeting, but after one session she is unable to persuade him to go again. As the mother becomes more and more worried about George, her health begins to fail. George feels that what he does is his own affair; he resents her interference and, besides, things have gone too far with him now. From one glass of beer he has progressed until now he can drink as many as sixteen at a sitting. His mother becomes ill. The neighbors prepare calmly for her death. One woman sits in the kitchen waiting for this to come about. The indifference of humanity to this one of its members who is on the verge of extinction is expressed by the conversation penetrating into the room from the hallway as George's mother dies,

> 'Johnnie!' 'Wot!' 'You come right here t'me! I want yehs t'go t'd'store fer me!' 'Ah, ma, send Sally!' 'No, I will not! You come right

> here!' 'All right, in a minnit!' 'Johnnie!' 'In a minnit, I tell yeh!' 'Johnnie--'[19]

Three general characteristics of naturalism are to be found in this story: familiarity with the environment, impersonality, and scientific determinism. Crane's familiarity with the environment of the Bowery has already been discussed at some length. Even when he projects himself into his sketches, as he does in some of his war stories, there is the feeling that he is standing off somewhere writing about himself as impersonally as if it were someone else not even remotely _related_ to himself. He never projects any bit of personal criticism or any ideas of morality into his work. In fact Crane was amused by the morality of certain people, particularly Irish policemen. Once in the Bowery he saw a young street walker fling herself upon the head of a young procurer to protect him from the kicks of his assailants. Crane ran for help and the police arrested the young woman for cursing.[20] This struck Crane as being typical of the type of morality practiced by most people. He would never have dreamed of introducing a moral note into _Maggie_, and he does not introduce any preachment against the evil of drink into _George's Mother_. He simply tells a story; the reader may accept it or reject it. The third aspect, that of determinism, is shown in the picture of George, one unit in a

---

[19]Crane, _op. cit._, X, p. 90.

[20]Beer, _op. cit._, p. 122.

mass, surrounded by semblances of respectability, inexorably dragged down by the influence of drink, helpless to fend off the forces which threaten to destroy him.

Closely associated with the characteristics which are naturalistic there are necessarily found some which are not. The characters are not wholly in the tradition of the naturalists. True, the story deals with the degradation of character through the evil influence of drink, but there is no really sordid character in the story. For instance, there are no low women. Maggie, in this story, is pictured in the freshness of her innocence, the object of George's unexpressed affection. Certainly his mother shows every evidence of respectability. George's companions are not really the lowest type to be found in the Bowery. They are fond of the saloon, but they show some of the evidences of respectability. The characters lowest in the social scale are the members of the gang which preys upon casual passers-by begging drinks. These, however, are not important in the story.

No study of Crane's work dealing with the Bowery would be complete without some discussion of the shorter pieces. For this purpose I have chosen four. These short sketches do not show as many evidences of naturalism as do his longer works, but there are some traces worthy of mention. In "An Experiment in Misery" Crane portrays a new element in the Bowery: the flop-houses, places where a bed of sorts may be had for a few pennies a night. This sketch is probably the

most naturalistic in this group, but it also illustrates his impressionism. One receives a definite impression that the young man described has seen better days. His overcoat is in tatters, but it has a velvet collar. He has progressed steadily downward to the point where he meets people whose "tatters match his tatters." Here he feels more secure. One of the best examples of Crane's impressionistic technique is his picture of the saloon.

> A saloon stood with a voracious air on a corner. . . . The swinging doors, snapping to and fro like ravenous lips, made gratified smacks as the saloon gorged itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men came in all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition.[21]

The characters in this story walk in the shadows. These are the people who drain the bitter dregs from life's cup, unable to rise from the morass into which circumstance has led them. One of these in particular Crane fittingly calls the "assassin." His description is that befitting a cruel beast, but he does not behave in a brutal manner. On the contrary, he is of a comparatively mild disposition.

> His hair was a fuddle of bushy hair and whiskers, from which his eyes peered with a guilty slant. In a close scrutiny it was possible to distinguish the cruel lines of 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.[22]

---

[21]Crane, op. cit., II, p. 22.

[22]Ibid., p. 24.

It would be interesting to digress for a moment at this point and examine this failure of Crane's to give his characters names. It was perhaps that his characters were symbols, and as such he felt they needed no names. It will be remembered that Maggie was written originally with no names at all and that it was only on a friend's insistence that Crane supplied the names. He often repeats the use of a particular name, but not for the same character type. One is therefore led to believe that Crane simply felt that the name itself was not important to the character and that he only used a name as a concession to literary tradition.

The description of the flop-house itself is in the true tradition with its "unspeakable odours, that assailed him like malignant diseases with wings."[23] The room and its inhabitants suggest sordidness and filth, but little detail is given. Crane describes one man as being yellow in color, with half-open eyes though sleeping. The young man feels as though he is being watched by a corpse. The cold, leather-covered beds, filthy covers, and sickly lighting give enough so that the other details may be filled in.

The young man is drawn irresistibly to a spot from which he can observe people from a higher level of society. Social position, comfort, and the pleasures of life have value for him, but he sees them as unconquerable kingdoms. The voice of a city's hopes heard in the roar all around him holds forth

---

[23] Ibid., p. 26.

no hope for him. "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."[24]

Without hesitation it may be said that Crane had seen many cases such as this story pictures. He knew by observation what the flop-houses were like. He pictures a young man, tattered, dirty, hopeless. This young man makes no effort to rise above the degradation in which he finds himself. Instead, he acknowledges himself to be an outcast, socially undesirable, and forever doomed to the society of such people as the assassin. Determinism in this story takes the form of a complete loss of will in the principal character.

Another short sketch of Bowery life worthy of comment is "The Men in the Storm." Here again, Crane shows a slice of the life of the social outcasts. This time it is the house of charity, where for five cents one is given a hot meal and a bed for the night. The supreme indifference of Nature to man is the dominant characteristic of naturalism to be found in this sketch of crowded humanity in a snow storm, striving for admittance to a bed and hot food. As they stand there crowding each other almost to the point of trampling upon one another, the snow flakes fall undiminished, adding further discomfort. Life is going on around them apparently oblivious to their distress.

---

[24]Ibid., p. 34.

At least two different types of men are pictured as part of this crowd. One group is made up of men who do not ordinarily snarl at society but who have been overcome by the force of circumstances and are unable to see wherein they failed to keep step. The other group is composed of Bowery flop-house dwellers, attracted to this house of charity by the cheaper price. Both types are the result of external forces. These men, crowded together by a common desire to escape the storm which rages around them indifferent to their misery, become as one homogeneous mass. As the fear rises that there will not be enough room for all, they begin to exhibit the characteristics of animals at bay. Finally, as they begin to enter the house slowly and they realize that they are not to be abandoned to the storm, the fire passes from their eyes and the snarl from their lips; they begin to look contented and complacent.

Nature's indifference to man, the animal quality in man brought out by his struggle to survive in the face of hunger, and the glance into the seamier side of life are characteristics of naturalism to be found in this story.

The familiar surroundings of the tenement greet one in "A Desertion." Women are gossiping on the stairs; the subject of their discussion is the age-old one of questionable virtue. These women, so familiar with the fate which lies in wait for pretty Bowery girls, feel certain that no matter how much the father of the girl in question tries to protect

her, she will "fool 'im" if she wants to. This sketch may hardly be called a story. Vignette would be a better word. Nell, not realizing that her father is dead, yields to the eternal feminine in seeking to rouse him to wrath by telling of the clumsy efforts of the shop foreman to offer her "brotherly advice." When she makes the discovery of his death, she screams. People in the tenement are so accustomed to screams that they attach no importance to it. With their customary callousness they merely think her father is beating her. One woman, indeed, says he is driving her into the street. The "street" to them is the ultimate end of any pretty girl in the neighborhood, theirs only to wonder that it had not happened sooner.

In this sketch an animal quality of the more vicious type is seen: the habit of some animals to kill simply for the sake of killing. These women had destroyed the reputation of this girl merely by talking about her, and they are delighted when they think her father is aiding them in her destruction. Nell has no chance. Her only champion, her father, is gone, and she will be thrown to the ravening wolves. Circumstances will be against her; she will be unable to withstand the forces which will drag her to her inevitable end. Animalism and determinism are characteristics of this story.

Crane takes another jab at mankind in his story of a man who falls in a fit on a street in New York. Fittingly,

he calls this "A Street Scene in New York." This man is talking with a little boy when he is overcome by a fit. The little boy is dumbfounded. Immediately a crowd of sensation seekers gathers. "Others behind them crowded savagely like starving men fighting for bread."[25] Advice is offered, but none is accepted. When the ambulance finally arrives and carries the man away, the crowd feels cheated. Here was a situation made to order, and they were cheated out of the sight of the finish. There was not even any blood! In these two vignettes, "A Desertion" and "A Street Scene in New York," Crane gives us glimpses of the less pleasant side of man's animal nature, of his cruelty, and of his brute desire for sensation.

From these stories of Bowery life it can be seen that Crane was filled with the desire to tell the truth about man and his fate, however unpleasant that truth might be. In this he followed the tradition of all great realists, including Zola. Like the naturalists he set out to study man first hand. He did not pile up evidence as did the true naturalists, but his characters are real and true to life in their own environment. He did agree with the naturalists in their view that man is the victim of his heredity and environment, powerless to escape the forces of his destiny. His stories show the impersonality of the author; he is merely the recorder. He writes of human misery as he has observed

---

[25]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 190.

it in the lives of these people. The evidences of impressionism and irony are characteristics of Crane's work that are not naturalistic; these are to be found in these studies, but they are not predominant.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE AND OTHER STORIES OF WAR

The naturalist delights to study man under conditions when life is reduced to its lowest common denominator, when survival is at stake. War, accordingly, is one of his favorite subjects. Zola, Remarque, Hemingway, and Mailer have presented naturalistic studies of man at war. Crane's most celebrated novel, The Red Badge of Courage, and a large number of his short stories deal with this subject. According to Crane, what does the crucible of war reveal as to the nature of man? Reduced to basic terms, what is war?

It would probably be incorrect to say that Crane's major idea in writing The Red Badge of Courage was to produce a definitive picture of war. Desperation was really the motivating force for the writing of this book. Crane was hungry. He had determined to try a pot-boiler. His starting point was a series of articles, "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," which he had found in some old copies of The Century magazine. These he felt to be mere reporting of events, for he said of them, "I wonder that some of those fellows don't tell how they felt in some of those scraps. They spout enough of what they did, but they're as emotionless as

rocks."[1] The artist in Crane, however, was stronger than the animal man demanding food, and he was unable to follow his intention. When he realized that he was moved to write a story of war but that he would have to do it in his own way, he began a thorough study of the material available concerning the Civil War. In connection with this he made trips to Virginia to talk with veterans. There are varying opinions as to the value of this bit of research. Fred Lawrence said that Crane was delighted; Edward Garnett quotes Crane as saying that he could get nothing but "we went there and did so and so."[2] For the purposes of this study it is not so important to determine the extent of the help derived from these talks; the fact that he went and made the study bears out a characteristic of the naturalistic writer: the method of gathering data by observation, although the observation itself may not be accurate.

"Let it be stated that the mistress of this boy's mind was fear."[3] This is Beer's statement in regard to Crane. Whether it fits Crane or not, it is appropriate to Henry Fleming, his principal character in _The Red Badge of Courage_. Henry is dominated by fear. First of all he is afraid of being afraid. He asks Jim Conklin if he ever thought of running

---

[1]Berryman, _op. cit._, p. 66.

[2]_Ibid._, pp. 71-72.

[3]Beer, _op. cit._, p. 117.

away. When Jim replies that if others ran, he probably would run with them and would in all probability "run like the devil," Henry feels an intense gratitude. Henry spends days in endless debate with himself. He wishes to find another who is afraid, and he is convinced that those who speak of coming battles with anticipatory eagerness are liars.

When they are actually engaged in battle, Henry suddenly feels himself an integral part of the whole. He is "welded with a common personality which was dominated by a single desire."[4] As the battle progresses, he finds himself consumed by a "red rage." His anger is not directed against the men opposing him but against the "swirling battle phantoms which were choking him, stuffing their smoke robes down his parched throat."[5]

Henry feels that he has vanquished the red demon of fear and is filled with a large satisfaction with himself. All this vanishes in a flash when in the second attack he observes some of his comrades running toward the rear. Suddenly he finds himself running, too. His fear becomes magnified by flight. "Death about to thrust him between the shoulder blades was far more dreadful than death about to smite him between the eyes."[6] Henry's fear in this moment is

---

[4]Crane, op. cit., I, p. 64.

[5]Ibid., p. 65.

[6]Ibid., p. 75.

that of a small animal that flees from a larger animal threatening its destruction. Henry is not mature enough to cope with the red-eyed monster, war. He simply runs away. Henry seeks justification for his action in the behaviour of the squirrel. The squirrel ran up a tree to escape the stone. It did not stand to see if the man meant to kill or tease. Henry regards himself as one tiny bit in the large machinery of the army. He reasons that each bit is responsible for itself, and if it sees certain destruction, it is reasonable to seek protection in order that it may be reassembled with other bits to fight another day. Self-preservation is by way of being a by-product of fear. As Henry slowly makes his way back to his regiment, he exhibits other evidences of the desire for self-preservation. He finds that he could almost hope for a defeat for his regiment. A defeat would prove vindication of a sort for Henry. It would prove that he had fled because he could see clearly the outcome of the battle. This moral vindication was of great importance to Henry; without it he could not wear the "sore badge of dishonor" throughout his life. Thrusting these thoughts aside, Henry admits his selfishness and thinks he wishes himself a corpse. As a corpse he could receive honor. Henry is filled with panic when he thinks the regiment actually is being put to rout, and it is his frantic questioning of a half-crazed soldier that gets for him a blow on the

head. Thus injury enables Henry to return to his regiment without outward shame; for his fellows take it to be a wound received from the enemy.

A new fear has besieged Henry's mind as he has made his way back to his regiment: the fear of being revealed as a coward who ran away. His "wound" had assuaged this fear in some measure, but he feels constrained to speak in a loud voice, covering himself with bravado, loudly praising the fighting of the men, in the same breath denouncing the stupidity of generals. The fragile fabric of this protective covering is revealed when Henry is reduced to internal jelly by the remark of a companion, "Maybe yeh fit th' hull battle yestirday, Fleming."[7]

When Henry is faced with actual combat again his nebulous hatred becomes fixed. He sees himself as a cornered animal. Here is a new quality in the animality of self-preservation. A cornered animal will often turn and fight.

> Yesterday when he had imagined the universe to be against him, he had hated it, little gods and big gods; today he hated the army of the foe with the same great hatred. He was not going to be badgered of his life like a kitten chased by boys. . . . It was not well to drive men into final corners; at those moments they could all develop teeth and claws.[8]

His friend replies to this outburst laconically, "If they

---

[7]Ibid., p. 142.

[8]Ibid., pp. 146-147.

keep on a-chasin' us they'll drive us inteh th' river."[9] This makes Henry more animal-like than ever. "The youth cried out savagely at this statement. He crouched behind a little tree with his eyes burning hatefully and his teeth set in a cur-like snarl."[10] To Henry these soldiers "resembled animals tossed for a death struggle into a dark pit."[11] He becomes a madman, shooting deliriously but accurately to such an extent that his lieutenant commends him saying, "By heaven, if I had ten thousand wildcats like you I could tear the stomach outa this war in less'n a week."[12] From a meek, frightened lad he had been transformed in the eyes of his comrades into a war-devil. He was "now what he called a hero. And he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight."[13]

Henry had grown immeasurably in this action, and his growth was continued in succeeding engagements.

> He himself felt the daring spirit of a savage religion-mad. He was capable of profound sacrifices, a tremendous death. . . . he knew that he thought of the bullets only as things that could prevent him from reaching the place of his endeavor.

---

[9] Ibid., p. 147.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 150.

[13] Ibid.

> There were subtle flashings of joy within him that thus should be his mind.[14]

He felt a great pride in himself when the battle was over. "He had dwelt in a land of strange squalling upheavals and had come forth. He had been where there were red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped."[15]

Of what material is bravery compounded? Crane sees bravery and cowardice as but two sides of the same coin. Each is the product of circumstance. In the first skirmish Henry does not cover himself with glory to be sure, but neither does he run. The reason that he does not run is that no one else runs. He is seized by momentary fright, but he realizes that it will be impossible for him to escape. The regiment "enclosed him. And there were iron bars of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box."[16] In the second part of the battle Henry is astounded to see his comrades break and run. Suddenly he is attacked by a panic of fear and he runs blindly. In all probability if all had stood to fight, Henry would have stayed also. If fear is a madness, may not bravery then be a madness also? Let us examine this mad bravery of Henry's. In Crane's account of the first action of this regiment he tells us that Henry gradually begins to feel the effects of the war atmosphere, "a blistering heat,

---

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 189.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 197.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 48.

a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones."[17] This sensation causes a madness to rise in Henry.

> Following this came a red rage. He developed the acute exasperation of a pestered animal, a well-meaning cow pestered by dogs. He had a mad feeling against his rifle, which could only be used against one life at a time.[18]

Henry's real bravery occurs in the latter part of the story when he has assumed the position of the color-bearer. All around him men are performing acts of bravery. All of these men are touched by this frenzy, this madness. Crane's use of terms denoting insanity is seen all through this passage. In their swift and deadly rushes the men "screamed and yelled like maniacs." The men burst out "in a barbaric cry of rage and pain." The men "scampered in insane fever of haste." The boy is pictured as "shrieking mad calls and appeals." The soldiers were "in a state of frenzy." Henry "expected a great concussion when the two bodies of troops crashed together. This became a part of his wild battle madness." He uttered a "mad cry of exultation." Bravery is merely the accident of this madness, this insanity; it could just as easily turn itself into the madness of a cowardly retreat. Henry gives way to the madness of bravery in the final battles, just as he had yielded to the insanity of fear in the earlier skirmishes. Surely no man possessed of a cold sanity would

---

[17] Ibid., p. 65.

[18] Ibid.

have taken up a position behind a little tree determined to hold it "against the world." A figure of speech possibly, but Henry felt that his regiment could not possibly win, and this inspired him to fight harder. That is not the product of logical reasoning. This madness which is called bravery makes man impervious to things which ordinarily annoy him.

> The flames bit him, and the hot smoke broiled his skin. His rifle barrel grew so hot that ordinarily he could not have borne it upon his palms; but he kept on stuffing cartridges into it, and pounding them with his clanking, bending ramrod. If he aimed at some charging form through the smoke, he pulled his trigger with a fierce grunt, as if he were dealing a blow of the fist with all his strength.[19]

Henry is so completely possessed by his frenzy that he does not realize that others around him are not shooting any more. "Yeh infernal fool, don't yeh know enough t' quit when there ain't anything t' shoot at? Good Gawd!"[20] Henry is commended for bravery. He would have been even more heartily condemned for his earlier cowardice had it been known. He was not responsible for either.

This idea of bravery and cowardice as the products of circumstance is in accord with the theory of naturalism. Both bravery and cowardice are irrational. Man does not stop to see whether he will fight or run; he simply acts. If man is the product of his environment, then his actions under certain stimuli are outside of himself.

---

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 149. [20]*Ibid.*

Beer says that the Red Badge shows "a vision of man's identity faced by its end, by incomprehensible death."[21] This "incomprehensible" death may be counted one of the horrors of war. Man knows that in war he is as likely to be killed as not, but when he comes to it, he finds that he really didn't expect it at all. The body of the captain

> . . . lay stretched out in the position of a tired man resting, but upon his face there was an astonished and sorrowful look, as if he thought some friend had done him an ill turn. . . . Another man grunted suddenly as if he had been struck by a club in the stomach. He lay down and gazed ruefully. In his eyes there was a mute, indefinite reproach.[22]

The horror of war is not given as much prominence in The Red Badge as it is in The Debacle and in contemporary naturalistic treatments of war. Crane's picture of the corpse in the forest is as shocking as any in the other novels which will be mentioned, but Crane does not appear to be striving for a shocking effect; this is simply one of the natural things to expect in war. One is as conscious of this corpse as if he too were looking into those eyes which "had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish."[23] Let us look at this corpse. "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

---

[21]Beer, op. cit., p. 117.

[22]Crane, op. cit., I, p. 67.

[23]Ibid., p. 83.

upper lip."[24] Zola would have consumed two pages in his description. How deftly Crane puts this much sustained horror into four sentences. Crane does not go into detail about the activities of the surgeons on the battlefield or behind the lines. Once in a conversation he speaks of an amputation.

> Ho! there they go with an off'cer, I guess. Look at his hand a-draggin'. He's got all th' war he wants, I bet. He won't be talkin' so big about his reputation an all when they go t' sawin' off his leg. Poor feller![25]

Zola spends four pages telling in detail of the amputation of a foot. There are numerous incidents recounted of hospital scenes with all the horror of amputation without anesthetic. There is much detail given to the absence of the most elementary sanitary equipment. In direct contrast to Crane's method, a conscious filling in of detail to sustain horror is seen in Zola's work. For example, let us look at his description of the killing of a horse. Jean and Maurice have come upon four other men lurking in a ditch. They are on the verge of starvation, and they enter into a discussion as to whether or not they will kill a horse for food. They finally settle upon a likely animal and attempt to kill it. Their first efforts are unsuccessful, and the screams of the animal threaten to call attention to their position. At length Chouteau is seen "casting himself prone on the animal's

---

[24] _Ibid._

[25] _Ibid._, p. 118.

body and passing an arm about its neck began to hack away at the live flesh, cutting away great morsels, until he found and severed the artery. . . blood spurted forth in a torrent, as when the plug is removed from a fountain. . . ."[26]

In the modern war story war itself is pictured as a brutalizing force. Crane did not treat it in this manner. It is not reasonable to assume that in a regiment of men gathered from everywhere there would not be a few of the brute type. Such persons do not appear in The Red Badge of Courage.

The brute is often revealed through his language. In a company of men, profanity, often obscene profanity, becomes more or less the order of the day. In the absence of any of the refining influences of home and family the sex drive is in the forefront of their minds and hence in their speech. There is no evidence of this in The Red Badge. The characters speak ungrammatically, but never obscenely. Their language is as "pure" in this regard as that of Howell's characters. It is not only not naturalistic; it is not even realistic. This is probably an outgrowth of the inhibitions of the time in which Crane lived. In Zola's great story of war there is this same characteristic of speech. His story contains the brute character, it is true, but the language does not reveal him. The same inhibitions are no doubt directly responsible for this.

---

[26]Emile Zola, Le Debacle, p. 437.

The complete absence of any emphasis on sex in The Red Badge is immediately apparent on one searching for evidences of naturalism in Crane's story. Woman plays a minor role in most of Crane's stories, and in this particular one she is almost non-existent. Henry's mother is introduced, and a slight mention is made of two girls, but there is nothing of the camp-follower and brothel in this narrative. The men do not talk about their wives or their love affairs.

In contrast to those who write of war today, Crane does not show officers as being cruel to the men under their command. Indeed, they are pictured as rather sympathetic and humane. Crane recounts one instance of a soldier running away and coming upon his lieutenant. The lieutenant grasps him by the shoulders, cuffs him about a bit, and sends him back to the fight. The soldier is so dazed that he is unable to load his rifle, and the lieutenant assists him to do so. The officers are often as bewildered as the men, and they are never shown as venting their feeling of insecurity in brutality to the men.

The absence of the brute in Crane's story might be attributed to his trait of dwelling on one character almost to the exclusion of any other. Henry is seen as the central figure of every action. Crane simply does not take the trouble to fill in an authentic background of other characters. Zola has characters of almost every sort in his background, as does Mailer. Crane does not individualize Henry;

he simply spotlights him. Crane's characters are perhaps symbols. Whatever the purpose, the effect in this story is to reject the brute in man.

Crane always allows one to see that he is not deluded by his intense interest in man into a false conception of his place in the scheme of nature. Nature is utterly indifferent to man and his war games. Man is engaged in a bitter, devastating struggle to the death, but in a stone's throw of the field of battle there is a "place where the high arching boughs made a chapel. . . . Pine needles were a gentle brown carpet. There was a religious half light."[27] It is in this place that Henry sees the dreadful corpse. Henry is terrified, but "the trees about the portal of the chapel moved soughingly in a soft wind."[28] Even Henry is surprised that nature is so little changed by what is happening.

> 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.[29]

Crane's finest piece of work regarding war was written before he had ever had any actual experience with war. It is interesting to compare this work with those stories and sketches which came as a result of real experience with war

---

[27]Crane, op. cit., p. 83.

[28]Ibid., p. 84.

[29]Ibid., p. 70.

and to ascertain whether his answers to the questions regarding the nature of man and the nature of war are in any way changed by these experiences.

Crane had made one attempt to get to Cuba in the very beginning of the trouble there. He was sent by the Bacheller Syndicate in 1896. This attempt was a failure, for his ship was sunk just off the coast of Florida, and his sponsors decided against sending him a second time. He had gone to England, to Greece, and back to England before the sinking of the _Maine_, an incident which was to change his life, for it brought him to America again and then to Cuba where his experiences resulted in the broken health which shortened his life.

Actually it might be said that Crane was goaded into going to war. He had written so brilliantly of war without ever having seen it that people continually gibed at him for writing about something about which he knew nothing. He wrote to someone, "I am going to Greece for the _Journal_, and if the Red Badge is not all right I shall sell out my claim on literature and take up orange growing."[30] This lightness was merely a cloak for Crane's inner conviction that in order to tell the truth he must see the truth for himself. He was satisfied with his original picture of war, for he later

---

[30]Berryman, _op. cit._, p. 174.

admitted that The Red Badge was "all right," but from these war experiences came slight correctives on his former work.

In these short stories Crane shows again his theory that man's actions come as the result of circumstances; they cannot be explained. As he expresses it, "The fine thing about 'the men' is that you can't explain them. I mean when you take them collectively. They do a thing and afterward you find they have done it because they have done it."[31] If this "thing" is a brave act it might just as well, but for a certain twist of circumstances, have been a cowardly one. This cowardice which arises from circumstance might be termed a physical cowardice, a product of fear for personal safety. Crane did not feel contempt for this type of cowardice. He felt that one man was as likely to run as another if others of his comrades were running. He did feel contempt, however, for the moral coward, the man without the intestinal fortitude to face the realities of life. Crane faced the fact that war did not always make a fellow a "man," that a confrontation with the "great death" was not always followed by a cleansing from cowardice, and he expresses this idea with great clarity in "The Second Generation," the story of a pampered son of a Senator. Caspar Cadogan was inspired to go to war; the fever ran high in the great state of Skowmulligan. He felt very confident; his father had never denied him anything, and this

---

[31]Crane, op. cit., IX, pp. 211-212.

time all he wanted was a simple little captaincy in the Army, a mere trifle. His father, the Senator, is hesitant. He feels that the army is not exactly in need of polo players and dancing masters.

Later when he has obtained a captaincy in the commissary corps for Caspar, he convinces himself that his son can probably acquit himself in a creditable manner. Caspar goes to war and becomes well known for his selfishness and cowardice. He steals off to eat by himself when he has more than others. He refuses his canteen to a feverish soldier. The men feel a large contempt for him. He returns home and allows his father to believe his own assumption of his son's bravery. This moral weakling, however, cannot accept his father's suggestion that he make the army his career. He admits his inability to get along with the men. "They're peculiar, somehow; odd. . . . We didn't hitch somehow. They're a queer lot. They've got funny ideas. They're good fellows enough, I know, but --." In a flash his father gets the picture and his supreme contempt is expressed in the reply, "Oh well, Caspar, . . . I guess --." He lit a small brown cigar. "I guess you are no damn good."[32]

From his experiences in Greece comes another story of the failure of war to burn away the dross and leave the gold of manhood. Crane's predominant theme of fear is the keynote

---

[32]Crane, op. cit., II, p. 259.

of this story, "Death and the Child." He gives a graphic picture of Grecian peasants streaming down the mountainside like a river, scarcely noticing when possessions drop by the wayside. It is as if they have lost the ability to count.

> It was as if fear was a river, and this horde had simply been caught in the torrent, man tumbling over beast, beast over man, as helpless in it as the logs that fall and shoulder grindingly through the gorges of a lumber country. It was a freshet that might sear 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.[33]

Into this caldron of fear comes Peza, a young Greek who has come from Italy to report the war. He is caught up in this current and is urged by some inner voice to take up arms for his country. This young man is hysterical, incoherent, dramatic. He desires to give all for the sake of the country of his fathers.

On a mountain-top a child is playing. He is quite alone except for a cow. His parents have been caught up by the terror of the war.

> It was evident that fear had swept the parents away from their home in a manner that could make them forget this child, the first-born. . . . Terror had operated on these runaway people in its sinister fashion--elevating details to enormous heights, causing a man to remember a button while he forgot a coat, overpowering everyone with recollections of a broken coffee-cup, deluging them with fears for the safety of an old pipe, and causing them to forget their first-born.[34]

---

[33]*Ibid.*, XII, p. 241.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 251.

Peza is taken out of himself by this spectacle of war. It is as if he is a corpse "walking on the bottom of the sea, and finding there fields of grain, groves, weeds, the faces of men, voices."[35] He is no longer rent by sorrow at the sight of wounded men. He has found that emotion has a numerical limit, and now as he looks at them he merely feels himself to be very lucky and prays that his great good fortune may continue. Every time Peza confronts a different company, he reiterates his desire to fight, but he never realizes his desire. The officers seem to sense a withdrawal in him, for they always show a fine bit of contempt for him when they tell him they are not sure whether or not they can provide him with suitable action. Finally he confronts an officer who takes a step toward letting him fight. He directs Peza to take some cartridges from a dead soldier. Peza is filled with terror. He feels the clinging arms of the corpse around his neck. He looks down and sees the uncovered eyes of another corpse staring at him. Peza feels himself being drawn by these dead men "slowly, firmly down, as to some mystic chamber under the earth, where they could walk, dreadful figures, swollen and blood-marked. He was bidden; they had commanded him; he was going, going, going."[36] Peza bolts to the rear. The soldiers hurl curses after him,

---

[35] _Ibid._, p. 252.

[36] _Ibid._, p. 266.

but in this exhibition of his cowardice they see a fine comment upon their own bravery. Peza never knows just how he manages to climb the mountain, but he finally arrives at the top, torn, bloody, disheveled, only to be confronted by the child, symbol of primitive courage, who asks him the question, "Are you a man?"

As an afterthought Crane must have realized that an act of bravery may as often as not result in death rather than in rehabilitation. There is a little-known sequel to The Red Badge which he called "The Veteran." In this story Henry has grown to be an old man. The neighbors are firmly convinced of his bravery, and they often ask him questions about his campaigns. His grandson is hurt when Henry intimates that he might have "run" from danger. Wasn't his grandfather known to be a very brave man? In the midst of one of these languorous afternoons of reminiscence there comes the dread call of "Fire!" Henry proves his absolute bravery as with no thought for himself he gives his life in saving the animals in the stable from the terrible fire. Perhaps Crane remembered the spectre which haunted the young Henry, the spectre of his false badge of courage. It seems to me that he wished to prove that Henry had really faced the great death and come out a man, and having once done this, he would face it again and again, even though it might result in his own death.

"War is death, a plague of small things and toil."[37]

---

[37]Crane, op. cit., II, p. 259.

Thus in one terse sentence does Crane give his idea of war. In his stories, however, he does not relate much of the "plague of small things" or even of the "toil." Most of it is the "death." The fatalities of war were to Crane its most dramatic element. He does not tell so much of the soldier in his stories. He does not tell about troop movements, maneuvers, or even battles. He leaves those things to people more concerned with them. He portrays men, not filled with hate, but caught up in a maelstrom from which they are powerless to escape, urged onward with the idea of victory whatever the cost.

> When men go into actual battle not one in a thousand concerns himself with an animus against the men who face him. The great desire is to beat them--beat them; whoever they are as a matter first, of personal safety; second of personal glory.[38]

Crane's soldiers are always moving forward, not always steadily, often wavering, even halting, but always struggling toward some objective ahead. Only the dead stop. He shows again and again the effect upon man of actual combat.

> The fierce elation in the terrors of war, catching a man's heart and making it burn with such ardour that he becomes capable of dying, flashed in the faces of men like coloured lights, and made them resemble leashed animals, eager, ferocious, daunting at nothing.[39]

Under this type of stress Crane always shows the animal side of man, fierce and savage. "The greed for close quarters

---

[38]*Ibid.*, IX, p. 213.

[39]*Ibid.*, II, p. 47.

which is the emotion of a bayonet charge came then into the minds of the men and developed until it was a madness."[40]

The same madness of fear that was present in <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u> is found in these shorter sketches as well. In "The Sergeant's Private Madhouse" there are two distinct types of fear. In the first place there is the fear-crazed sentry. He is obsessed by a fear for his personal safety. He sees the enemy where the enemy is not. He has escaped into a temporary madness. "He was in such a terror of the phantom skirmish line that his voice never went above a whisper, whereas his delusion might have expressed itself in hyena yells."[41] The sergeant is possessed by another fear, the fear for the safety of others as well as himself. His fear is an unselfish one, whereas the fear of the soldier is a madness. The enemy is lying all around, alert for the slightest sound to betray the position of this opposing force. Crane gives a flick of his ironical lash when the enemy is routed by this mad soldier's rendition of "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night." The sergeant thereafter called the soldier the "most useful goddam crazy man in the service of the United States."[42]

Crane reveals the relative unimportance of man himself in the overall scheme of war. Whether the man be an

---

[40]<u>Ibid</u>.

[41]<u>Ibid</u>., IX, p. 107.

[42]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 112.

"important person" or not, he is expendable. One of his stories, "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen" concerns itself with the adventures of four newspaper correspondents. One morning they are chagrined to find that "nothing emotional had happened during the night, save the killing of two Cubans who were so secure in ignorance that they could not understand the challenge of two American sentries."[43] In a somewhat longer story, "War Memories," a narrative of some of Crane's actual experiences, he gives his longest account of death. The surgeon, Gibbs, of whom he writes, was evidently his friend. Just as the surgeon breathes his last, someone asks where he is. The brisk answer, "Just died this minute, sir,"[44] is spoken in the same manner in which one might say, "Just gone out for coffee, sir."

A common characteristic between the short stories and The Red Badge is the evidence of nature's indifference to man and to war. Crane takes peculiar delight in picturing the beauty of a landscape in direct contrast to the grisly aspects of war.

> A gate appeared in a barbed wire fence. Within there were billowy fields of luxuriant mango-trees. It was Elysian - a place for lovers, fair as Eden in its radiance of sun, under the blue sky. One might have expected to see white robed figures welking slowly in the shadows. A dead man with a bloody face lay twisted in a curious contortion at the waist.[45]

---

[43] Ibid., p. 63.

[44] Ibid., p. 208.

[45] Ibid., p. 72.

Only once is there found in these studies any apparent indication of the softening of nature's indifference to man and his suffering: "After the red round eye of the sun had stared long at the little plain and its burden, darkness, a sable mercy, came heavily upon it, and the wan hands of the dead were no longer seen in strange frozen gestures."[46] To the uninitiated this might appear to be a point against nature's indifference to man, but to one familiar with Crane it is all too evident that it is merely a figure of speech, simply his way of saying it became dark.

The element of fatalism is much more apparent in these stories than in the earlier work. Perhaps it was because Crane was actually with these men and observed their preoccupation with death. "War provides for those it loves. It provides sometimes death and sometimes a singular and incredible safety."[47] At one time he had occasion to observe this "incredible safety." He writes about his experience with a group of signalmen in "Marines Signalling Under Fire at Guantanamo."

> I could lie near and watch the face of the signalman illumed as it was by the yellow shine of lantern-light, and the absence of excitement, fright or any emotion at all on his countenance was something to astonish all theories out of one's mind.[48]

In the story mentioned earlier of the adventures of the four correspondents there is a contrast in the fates of two

---

[46] _Ibid._, II, p. 51. [47] _Ibid._, IX, p. 49.

[48] _Ibid._, p. 119.

officers. One is a grizzled old captain, thirty-five years in the army; the other is a young lieutenant with the ink hardly dry on his commission. These two are together in the charge of San Juan Hill. For the captain the war has come too late. He has spent his life doing army police duty. "All he could do now was to die at the head of his men. . . . his sole honour was a new invitation to face death."[49] For the young lieutenant the war has come too soon. He is untried, unsure. Fate deals a hand.

> The captain, after thirty five years of waiting for this chance, took his Mauser bullet through the brain at the foot of San Juan Hill in the very beginning of the battle, and the boy arrived on the crest panting, sweating, but unscratched, and not sure whether he commanded one company or a whole battalion.[50]

These are not shown as having any particular foreknowledge of their destiny. Crane, however, makes his treatment of the element of fatalism stronger by recounting in "The Clan of No Name" the thoughts of a young lieutenant who feels his destiny upon him. He knows if he falls into the hands of the guerillas he will be shown no quarter. These black men were fond of the machete, and all soldiers dreaded the thought of death at their hands. A clean bullet was much to be desired.

> He knew that he was thrusting himself into a trap whose door, once closed, opened only when the black

---

[49]*Ibid.*, p. 67.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 68.

> hand knocked and every part of him seemed to be in panic-stricken revolt. But something controlled him, something moved him inexorably in one direction; . . . The battle was hurrying, hurrying, hurrying, but he was in no haste.[51]

He anticipates his fate and it arrives. The black face peers over the edge of the little ditch, and the soldier closes his eye so that he will not see the gleaming fall of the machete.

One may gather from these stories that Crane sees fate (or chance) ordering the death of one man and the survival of another and says there is no particular logic in it and not much that one can do about it. It is in the cards; that's all. There is a certain grim humor to be observed in its frequent ironies. Occasionally, as in the last-mentioned story, Crane impresses the idea of the inevitability of Fate's decrees by allowing the victim a premonition of his end. Fatalism, a viewpoint not uncommon to the soldier, is Crane's viewpoint also. Whatever its source, whether from personal inclination, reading, or his experiences on the battlefield, this fatalism further allies him with the naturalists.

The futility of war is carried on a more sustained note in these stories coming out of Crane's actual observations of war than has been observed before. This same idea of war's futility is seen in Zola's work also. Zola, however, carries the idea through page after page of detail relating to aimless movements of troops, whereas Crane sums up his

---

[51] _Ibid._, II, pp. 167-168.

whole idea in a vivid picture of a red-headed Spanish corpse. Crane has seen this corpse many times. He had no special relation to any particular story or battle; he was just there. Each time Crane had to cross the terrain where the corpse lay he prayed that it would be buried. This corpse represented to Crane the ultimate "why" of war. Why war?

> This strong simple countenance was a malignant sneer at the system which was forever killing the credulous peasants in a sort of black night of politics, where the peasants merely followed whatever somebody told them was lofty and good. . . . He was irrevocably dead. And to what purpose? The honor of Spain? Surely the honor of Spain could have existed without the death of this poor red-headed peasant. Ah, well, he was buried. . . . The trench was turned over on top of him. It was a fine, honourable, soldierly fate - to be buried in a trench, the trench of fight and death.[52]

It would not be fitting to leave these studies of war without some mention of a characteristic which is not naturalistic. This characteristic is that thread of irony in Crane's work which is not in the fabric of the typical naturalist. One of the best examples of this irony is found in the story dealing with the war correspondents. These men are blithely going into the forest unaware of what the beautiful wood-music portends. They are following the troops into the forest from which comes the sound of the Cuban wood-dove.

> If they were going into battle, they either did not know it or they concealed it well. . . . Their laughter rang through the Cuban woods, and in the meantime, soft, mellow, sweet, sang the voice of the Cuban wood-dove, the Spanish guerilla calling to his mate--forest music; on the flanks, deep back on both

---

[52]*Ibid*., IX, p. 239.

> flanks, the adorable wood-dove, singing only of love. . . . It was beautiful. The Spanish guerilla calling to his mate.[53]

At the conclusion of the battle which followed, Crane portrays the picture of death, "one young captain dying, with great gasps, his body pale blue, and glistening, like the inside of a rabbit's skin."[54] He notes also that the "voice of the Cuban wood-dove, soft, mellow, sweet, singing only of love, was no longer heard from the wealth of foliage."[55]

In Crane's story of war written before he had actually witnessed war a search was made for evidences of war as a brutalizing force, and none were found. This same conclusion must be reached after a thorough scrutiny of the stories written after he had been through the red flame of war with the troops in Cuba and in Greece. The conclusion must be reached that in his reporting of the conversations between soldiers he departs from his credo of realism, for it does not seem logical that men drawn from every walk of life and thrown together in the whirlpool of war would never speak in profanity of the more lurid type. Crane's soldiers do not. In this one thing, at least, Crane bowed to the manners and inhibitions of his day.

There is no mention of the sex element either in the language or in his reporting of the practice of the soldiers.

---

[53]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

[54]*Ibid.*, p. 74.

[55]*Ibid.*

One of Crane's personal characteristics was a respect for virtue. One of his literary characteristics is the omission of obscene passages about woman. He pays tribute to womanhood and the gentleness which woman puts into the life of man in two of these war sketches. In "Three Miraculous Soldiers" he tells the story of a young girl, terrified by northern soldiers, because she knows three southern soldiers are hidden in the barn. As the story progresses, one of the northern soldiers is wounded. He is the "enemy" to this girl, yet she falls to her knees beside him, weeping. In answer to the question put by one of the soldiers as to why she should weep over an enemy, the lieutenant "shrugged his shoulders. After reflection he shrugged his shoulders again. He said, 'War changes many things; but it doesn't change everything, thank God.'"[56] In "War Memories" Crane draws vividly the picture of returning troops. As the ship filled with ragged, dirty returning soldiers and war correspondents sits in the harbor a small boat puts out from shore. In this boat is a small woman who eagerly searches the faces lined up at the rail. Crane is filled with anxiety that she may not find the face for which she searches so earnestly, and he is moved by the intense emotion shown by her single swift motion of covering her face, "as if blinded by a flash of white fire" upon seeing her husband. He says, "It told us. It told us the other

---

[56] _Ibid._, II, p. 92.

part. And in a vision we all saw our own harbour lights. That is to say, those of us who had harbour lights."[57] This respect for womanly virtue is not present in modern books about war. Many of the inhibitions present in Crane's day have now disappeared. This same respect may be present in the hearts of men today, but it is overshadowed by the frankness of the speech with which they cover their real feelings.

These soldiers are not pictured as brutes. The northern soldier is thankful that war has not brutalized woman so that she is incapable of weeping over a wounded man. Had he been of the brute type her tears would not have moved him. These returning soldiers, ragged, weary and worn, are not brutish. They are men worn out with "death, a plague of small things and toil."

Whether Crane was blind to any acts of cruelty between officers and men or whether such acts were absent, we do not know. My own idea is that Crane was so impressed with the cruelty and futility of war itself that he judged such things unimportant. Crane would not take the time to enumerate separate acts of cruelty; his vision was too all-encompassing. He was concerned with humanity, not humans.

I cannot agree with Crane's last statement in "War Memories" when he said, "I have told you nothing, nothing,

---

[57]_Ibid._, IX, p. 256.

nothing at all." He has told much. He has laid bare man's soul. He has shown us bravery under fire and the human side of the soldier. He has pictured the beauty of the country-side with its utter indifference to these ants who crawl about engaging in battle. He has given us man at war, not concerned with large maneuvers, but giving unto each day and to each duty the attention which they demand. Man is not filled with hate, but in the stress and strain of battle he is filled with a madness which may be reflected in bravery or cowardice according to the circumstances surrounding him at that particular time. He fights or runs away because he must. Man is but the pawn of fate. She moves him as she will toward his inevitable end. War does not always try a man's soul and make him brave. If fate has so arranged the circumstances, he may well be tried and found wanting, for bravery and cowardice are but products of fear, and a twist of circumstance may turn a man into the path of one or the other. He is moved by forces beyond his power to understand or command. Crane has shown us war as he always imagined it to be: cruel, savage, and futile.

## CHAPTER V

## SHORT STORIES: AFFIRMATIONS AND REAFFIRMATIONS

Crane was possessed of a roving spirit, and it led him to spend much of his life in travels of one sort or another. He wanted to see more of his own country and its people, and his curiosity led him throughout the southwest and down into Mexico. He took with him on this journey three ambitions: to see the Mississippi, to watch a cowboy ride, and to be in a blizzard on the plains. His desire to see war as it really was sent him to Greece and Cuba, and repudiation by his own country sent him finally to finish his life in England. Through all of these travels Crane was motivated by his desire to seek the truth. He felt that only by observing man in every way possible for him to do so could he know man as he really was.

One of Crane's finest short stories, "The Blue Hotel," was born of his western travels. The scene of the story is laid in Nebraska, and the blizzard Crane sought was raging. Six men are concerned in a tragedy which takes place in a hotel "painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron. . . ."[1] Pat Scully, the proprietor, has braved the storm to bring in three passengers from the train.

---

[1]Crane, _op. cit._, X, p. 93.

One of these passengers is the Swede, and it is with his entrance that one becomes immediately confronted with Crane's tall spectre, fear. The Swede is a man obsessed with fear, the fear of his own death. The first evidence of this appears during a card game. He intimates that many men have been killed in the room where they are playing. This is hotly denied by Johnnie, the son of Pat Scully. The Swede, far from being convinced, immediately conceives the idea that his own life is in danger. He accuses these men, all strangers to him, of meaning to kill him. The abnormality of this fear is confusing to his companions. Scully invites him upstairs for a drink. The Swede at first suspects that Scully has in mind to poison him, but gradually as he becomes more intoxicated, he loses his fear and is persuaded once more to join the card game. He is noticeably more aggressive. The climax of this action occurs when the Swede suddenly accuses Johnnie of cheating, and the two men are allowed to fight it out. The Swede, at first fearful that the others mean to make the odds uneven, finally is convinced that Johnnie means to fight him alone. In the ensuing struggle Johnnie is defeated. The Swede lurches off through a blinding blizzard and at length comes to a saloon in the town. He is constrained to brag about his victory, but no one seems interested. It is rather quiet and peaceful inside the tavern. Four men are drinking at one table; the bartender leans on the bar listening to their conversation. The Swede is possessed by a common

trait of the fearful, the desire to be recognized, to hide his fear under the guise of good fellowship. He invites the men to drink with him. They refuse. When he insists to the point of violence, he is stabbed by one of the men, the gambler. In the Swede there is encountered a kind of fear that Crane has not dealt with before. This is a fear that is carried to the point of insanity and with no cause. This Swede is new to the west, and he has no doubt heard of the "wild west" where the six-gun is swung low and ready to the hand of the desperado. It would probably satisfy him to learn that men had indeed been killed in the room in which he finds himself. These imaginary things kindle the fire of his fear to the point of madness, whereas there is actually nothing to fear. These are just ordinary, everyday men. What would be more natural than for six men, thrown together by circumstance and held together by further circumstance, to engage in a friendly card game before the fire? Fear makes the Swede a very disagreeable companion. Johnnie Scully is at first bewildered by the accusation and then he becomes angry. The idea of violence has not occurred to the other men, and they all reject it. When the climax of this very tense card game is reached and the charge of cheating is thrown in Johnnie's face, one is quickly on his side. It is immediately thought that the fear of the Swede has made him see everything in an abnormal light. One wants Johnnie to fight and feels wronged when the Swede wins. This miserable creature plunges

into the night to meet his death at the hands of a stranger. According to his own lights the Swede was only being hospitable when he offered the gambler a drink. Ironically enough, the Swede was safe at the hotel and would have spent a very comfortable evening if he had not been afraid. It is not until the end of the story that it is learned that the whole thing was a mockery, for Johnnie actually was cheating; the Easterner saw him. This throws the whole story out of focus for the reader. He has been sympathetic with Johnnie, only to find that he was in the wrong all the time. Crane shows one in the words of the Easterner that all men contribute to the evil in the world, but there is no logical means for determining where the punishment will fall.

> Every sin is the result of a collaberation. We, the five of us, have collaberated in the murder of this Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women really involved in every murder, but in this case it seems to be only five men - you, I, Johnnie, old Scully; and that fool of an unfortunate gambler came merely as a culmination, the apex of a human movement, and gets all the punishment.[2]

Crane lingered in Texas. He fell in love with San Antonio and loitered there, dispatches forgotten, while he soaked up Texas sunshine and history. Through all of this, however, Crane did not lose sight of his favorite themes. Further depth was given to his treatment of fear by a trip down into Mexico, for it was on this journey that Crane came face to face with the actual fear for his own life. Another realization

---

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

came to him about this time: the fact that nature compels while standing apart. He decided that nature was not interested in man, even as an enemy. From Crane's Mexican experiences come two stories which hinge upon a new turn to his old theme--namely that man may be afraid and by not allowing his fear to be known he may survive. Richardson, the central figure in "Horses, One Dash," wakes in a tavern to hear a voice say that he will ask the American beast for his pistol and spurs and money and saddle, and if he fails to get them he will kill him. Richardson "felt the skin draw tight around his mouth and his knee joints turn to bread." Richardson's terror is such that it causes him to react in a way that causes the bandit to be dismayed. He cannot decide whether the American is brave or a fool. "To Richardson, whose nerves were tingling and twitching like live wires, and whose heart jolted inside him, this pause was a long horror; and for these men who could so frighten him there began to swell in him a fierce hatred."[3] By virtue of the interruption provided by some girls, Richardson and Jose are enabled to escape. They flee, pursued by the bandits, until they overtake a company of <u>rurales</u>. The rest of the story is unimportant. It was based, however, upon an incident in his own life, an incident which had meaning to him. If nature was simply indifferent to man and what happens to him, one was thrown upon his own

---

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., XII, p. 208.

resources; it became important to find out how one would act in a crisis. Crane found out through this experience that he was able to feel terror and to act as if he did not feel this terror and so survive. This same idea is brought forth in the story, "Five White Mice." The Frisco Kid and the New York Kid are supporting a drunken friend on the street when they are jostled against three Mexican gentlemen. A fight is provoked and the spectre of death is very evident. The New York Kid thinks perhaps he can draw his "virgin" revolver and face the Mexicans down. The Mexicans are thoroughly bluffed, and the Kid is filled with rage that they "had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable." Crane here derives humor out of this matter of fear. His character is angry because the other fellow didn't let him know he was afraid too. Crane concludes the story with the sentence, "Nothing had happened." On the surface this appears to be another of Crane's "apparently" pointless endings. Nothing has happened in the story except the fact that a boy has learned that he is not alone in fear. Everyone is afraid. The fact of his fear does not keep him from controlling his fear. The idea is not to appear to be afraid. The boy and Richardson are one and the same. To be afraid is part of the nature of man; it is possible, however, to rise above this fear by grasping it firmly and acting as though it does not exist.

A feeling of nostalgia is very near the surface in the group of children's stories called simply <u>Whilomville Stories</u>.

Crane was living at Brede in England when these stories were written. Harold Frederick's orphan children played and chattered in the big rooms and on the lawn, and Crane allowed his fancy to turn backward and wander where it would. The reader will revisit familiar places, hear familiar voices, see familiar faces as he reads these stories. From these musings came a group of stories poignant and true, never scathing, but at times showing with painful clarity a strain of cruelty and brutality in children. These children exhibit a fear, not for personal safety, but for loss of "face" or position in their group. The small boy feels constrained to "whip" any new boy in the neighborhood in order to retain his supremacy. They are not brutal in the sense of being bestial; the brutality of their cruelty is evident only in their unconcern for their friends if it is necessary to turn wrath toward these friends in order to save themselves.

The Trescotts and their son Jimmie are met in this volume, characters that are to be met again in other stories. The central figures in these stories, however, are Jimmie and his playmates. Crane objected to the type of romantic sentimentality portrayed in stories of the Little Lord Fauntleroy type, and with his customary zeal for the truth he wrote stories which portray children as they really are, and so universal is his truth that these children are as real to one today as they were to him.

One of the most definitive stories in this group is "The Angel Child." Mrs. Trescott's cousin, a painter, "quiet, slow, and misty," together with his beautiful wife and their little girl Cora, have come for an indefinite visit. This "CHILD," an unscrupulous tyrant, soon terrorizes the neighborhood. When she is faced with punishment for her wickedness, she calmly shifts the blame to the shoulders of her father.

These stories are filled with a keen humor. Who could fail to be amused by the account of the boys' shooting the farmer's cow because they "thought she was a lynx?" These lynx hunters, however, are each for himself and quickly shift the blame. No one who has been closely associated with small boys can escape the pleasure to be derived from the account of the "rescue" of Jimmie by the "pirates." One joins with Trescott in his agony of mirth when the "pirates" declare that Jimmie will soon be free forever from his "excwable enemies and their vile plots."[4]

The children in Whilomville Stories are not brutes; their brutality and cruelty are not conscious things. They are so uninhibited that a cruelty which is more or less the nature of man in his struggle for survival is apparent here, whereas it is suppressed in adults until the actual issue of survival arises. These children are cruel to each other in order that

---

[4]Ibid., V, p. 101.

they may retain their place in the society to which they belong. When Jimmie is invited to a picnic, he is filled with shame because he is forced to take his lunch in a tin pail. In this story, "Shame," the children long to ridicule Jimmie. He is one of their best friends, yet they would topple him from his place with ridicule to make their own positions more secure. They are constrained from doing so merely because he is befriended by a beautiful lady. Jimmie runs true to form in attempting to shift the blame when he denies hiding the lunch under the blankets in the stable, saying, "I don't know, I didn't have nothin' to do with it."[5]

In the introduction to the volume of Whilomville Stories, William Lyon Phelps says that nothing saves the world from the small boy but his lack of force.[6] Fortunately for the world he can be outwitted by older people, and if that fails, he can be subdued by brute strength. Oddly enough, to the little savage it is the parent who assumes the guise of the beast. A new boy moves into the neighborhood, and several battles have been fought without a victory which remains a victory. Right in the midst of a great show of bravery the most recent victor collapses into a trembling heap as the boys saw

> . . . a dreadful woman with grey hair, with a sharp red nose, with bare arms, with spectacles of such

---

[5]Ibid., p. 86.

[6]Ibid., p. xi.

> magnifying quality that her eyes shone through them like two fierce white moons. She was Johnnie Hedge's mother.[7]

There is question of her supremacy; the question is never asked again; the uncontested victor is Mrs. Hedge.

One of Crane's finest short stories grew out of an actual experience which occurred during his first attempt to get to Cuba. The boat on which he sailed was sunk off the coast of Florida, and he tells the story of his subsequent experience in a story which he calls "The Open Boat." Berryman says in this connection that to consider "The Open Boat" merely as a report is to "misunderstand the nature of his work; it is an action of his art upon the remembered possibility of death."[8]

There is less concern with fear in this story than in most of Crane's work. Man's natural apprehension regarding death is apparent, but there is no analysis nor variation played upon the theme of fear. The real underlying theme of the whole story is the supreme indifference of nature to man, and man's feeling of impotence in the face of this indifference. Nature and whatever supreme power there is behind nature are both coldly indifferent to man, and all his resentment has no effect. The correspondent comes face to face with this realization when he finds himself in this ten-foot boat, tossed about upon an ocean empty of all else other than an occasional sea gull.

---

[7] _Ibid_., p. 180.

[8] Berryman, _op_. _cit_., p. 291.

> When it occurs to man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers. . . . A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of the situation.[9]

Crane is showing a certain grim humor in the situation. Just as a man would shake his fist at the sky, so this man would throw rocks if there were any to throw, and if there were anything at which to throw them. There isn't. There is only the empty, impersonal sky. He feels that there can't be anything beyond nature herself.

These four men, along in a ten-foot boat, are absolutely and completely alone. They have not the comfort of feeling that a supreme being has an eye on them. There is nothing but the color of the sea.

> The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the colour of the sea changed from slate to emerald green streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the colour of the waves that rolled toward them.[10]

The men are numbed by the condition in which they find themselves. All they can contemplate is the magnitude of the ocean and the all-encircling power of the particular portion

---

[9]Crane, _op. cit._, XII, p. 51.

[10]_Ibid._, p. 31.

in which they find themselves. They row and row, although they feel the futility of it.

> In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed. They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed.[11]

By its very repetition one is brought face to face with the futility of rowing against waves which pile upon towering waves. At night the world of men in an open boat on the sea is an empty world; so empty that the reflections of two lights are seen by these men as the "furniture of the world."

There is no cruelty in this story, no cruelty and no fear. There are other accounts of men cast adrift who become bestial in the battle for survival, but such is not the case in this story. There is no resentment on the part of the oiler and the correspondent because the cook and the captain do not row. These two work together as long as they can and then they spell each other so that a little rest may be obtained. Crane in his search for truth has revealed that adversity may bring out the best in man to a certain point. These men were not subjected to trial for a very long time. They suffered none of the starvation and privation which would have been present if their state had continued for several days. Suffice it to say that for this particular time

---

[11] _Ibid._, p. 34.

and place this was truth. These men portray the best that is in man.

The correspondent cannot believe that fate has led him so far only to let him drown. Is she being capricious? He cannot believe that she would have gone to the trouble to bring him within sight of land only to let him drown.

> If I am going to be drowned - if I am going to be drowned - if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees. Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? . . . If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? . . . But no; she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.[12]

One has the feeling that Crane with his grim humor wants to "throw rocks" again.

One is confronted with an ironical twist of fate at the close of the story when the oiler is the one who is killed. This cannot be laid at Crane's door, for it was a true experience. It simply bears out his theory that fate is illogical, often interfering blindly in the lives of men. The oiler is the very one that would have been judged most likely to survive. He was strong, experienced in the ways of the sea. The captain was injured; one would have expected him not to be able to take care of himself. Crane was not a strong man by any standards; the cook had a life preserver;

---

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

therefore it is taken for granted that he probably was not well versed in the ways of the sea. From these four fate chooses for her victim the one best equipped for saving his own life.

The cold impersonality and indifference of nature to man are the threads which weave this story into the fabric of naturalism. Man is but an incident in the universe, and his demand for survival brings only empty echoes. Any request for help on his part is useless, for there is no personality, no consciousness, to receive the appeal.

Crane's belief that man was the product of his heredity and environment led him to the realization that good was not always rewarded, nor was evil always punished. He believed in right for right's sake, therefore, with no regard for possible reward or punishment. His own experience revealed the fact that a good act often goes unrewarded, for he was the friend of the friendless, the protector of the weak, and for this he was criticized and even punished. He was once brought into court for his attempt to protect a young girl, Dora Clark, from the charge of soliciting. His rooms were searched for any bit of evidence which could have been used to prove his doubtful character, and he was literally driven from New York by the police.

Berryman thinks "The Monster" was written as Crane's protest against society's persecution of the innocent. He sees this story as a possible attempt at conciliation on

the part of Crane to the spirit of Reverend Townley Crane for the crime committed against the family by Stephen's attempt to rescue a "broken flower."[13]

Pursuing the theme of rescue and punishment there is found the first instance in the beginning of the story when little Jimmie breaks a flower while playing in the yard. He attempts to prop the flower but is unsuccessful. Jimmie confesses his crime to his father and is punished by being refused permission to play. As the story unfolds, Henry Johnson, the negro, rescues Jimmie from the terrible fire, and for his heroic effort is punished by idiocy and horrible disfigurement. Trescott, a thoroughly ethical man, feels a deep obligation to Henry for saving his son, gives him every care, and attempts to find a place in society for him, only to be punished by losing his practice as a doctor and being ostracized by his friends.

Whilomville is presented in this story: an average town filled with average people. Neighbors gossip about other neighbors; cooks exchange the choicest bits of gossip together with favorite recipes, but there is no real brutality evident in the beginning of the story. The characters are those one would see in any small town; they have not yet been called upon to protect themselves.

---

[13]Berryman, op. cit., p. 193.

The closest that Crane comes to a brutish description in this story is in the characterization he gives to Martha Goodwin. An early experience of Crane's had established in his mind a picture of a savage woman, and he felt constrained to introduce her now and again in his stories. This is contrary to his usual picture of woman. In a letter written from Port Jervis in his early years he had written of this woman

> There is a feminine mule up here who has roused all the bloodthirst in me and I don't know where it will end. She has no more brain than a pig and all she does is to sit in her kitchen and grunt. But 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. . . . No man is strong enough to attack this mummy because she is a nice woman. . . . But she is just like those hunks of women who squat on porches of hotels in summer and wherever their eye lights [sic] there blood rises. 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.[14]

One feels that Crane has this woman in mind in the person of Martha Goodwin, for he says of her, "In regard to social misdemeanors, she who was simply the mausoleum of a dead passion was probably the most savage critic in town."[15]

There is another interesting naturalistic touch in this story. Crane emits a glance at the latent savage in Henry as he is being overcome by fire. The atavistic nature of man

---

[14]Beer, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

[15]Crane, op. cit., III, p. 83.

is shown when Henry is found "submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration."[16] Henry "cried out in the negro wail that had in it the sadness of the swamps."[17]

In these later works Crane has reaffirmed his idea of the nature of man and his place in the universe. Man is seen as merely one cog in this great machine, not a very important link to be sure, for the loss of him would not destroy the balance in any way. To prove this he has placed man in all sorts of different situations so that his reactions to different stimuli may be observed. He is convinced that nature is completely indifferent to man. If there is a superior intelligence behind nature, it too is coldly impersonal and man may protest in vain. Man is drawn by forces beyond his control along a certain pathway. All men contribute in some way to the good or evil which is in the world, but man has no control over the direction it may take, or the final culmination of these forces. Certainly such a view of man and the universe deserves the term naturalistic.

In these stories Crane has broadened his thematic treatment of fear. He has faced the fact that all men are afraid. What may appear as bravery is simply the result of a man's hiding his fear, and by hiding it and pretending not to be

---

[16] _Ibid._, p. 44.

[17] _Ibid._, p. 45.

afraid, he is able to survive. Often the one who engenders fear is himself possessed by the greatest fear.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study has been to determine to what extent Stephen Crane may be considered a naturalistic writer. In order to proceed with this investigation it was necessary to explore the background of the naturalistic movement in literature, to determine its theory, and to ascertain its more obvious characteristics. It was then necessary to place Stephen Crane in the movement and compare and contrast his work with the work of other writers considered naturalistic. Crane's works which are considered naturalistic were then examined individually and tested according to the criteria which had been set up.

It was determined in the first chapter of this study that since Emile Zola originated and formulated the theory of literary naturalism, his theory and practice would serve as a basis for judging the relative naturalism of any writer. It was then determined that the more obvious characteristics of naturalism were a scientific method of gathering data, environmental and heredity determinism, detailed documentation, scientific objectivity, sordid description, characters chosen from the lower walks of life, emphasis on the animal appetites

of man, the denial of the supernatural, and the exclusion of moral responsibility.

In order to determine whether Crane himself fell into a pattern of determinism a study was made of his early environment. He was found to be the son of stern and uncompromising parents, and his life until the conclusion of his college days was planned by his mother with an eye to his moral development. Crane was found to be occupied even in his early years with the idea that life was not universally the same as it was in the narrow orbit in which he found himself. He began to explore diverse environments, and he became more and more possessed by a conviction that he must seek the truth and write about this truth as he saw it.

One of the important parts of Crane's life was spent in the Bowery slums of New York. The third chapter sets forth his reasons for going to the Bowery to live and examines the work which grew out of this experience. Crane went to the Bowery because he believed no sincere stories had been written about these people. Only by living with them could he find the truth about their lives. He knew there was more to life in this environment than had been written into stories which played up the "picturesque."

The work which came out of this period of his life asserts the idea that man is a helpless animal, driven by forces over which he has no control. These children of the

slums have no future other than to continue in their hereditary pathway, usually downward. The Darwinian theory of a natural selection which improves the species turns in the opposite direction and works to strengthen the worst in man. This is in line with Zola's theory and brings these works of Crane directly into the pattern of naturalism.

There is very little of the brute type so typical to naturalistic works in these stories. The nearest approach to the beast is seen in the characterization of Maggie's mother. It is interesting to note that whereas Crane's usual picture of woman is on a very virtuous level, two of his most powerful characterizations of the beast are both women, Maggie's mother and Martha Goodwin.

In these stories there are the flop-houses, the ragged poor, the squalid tenement, the influence of drink, the inevitability of prostitution, the noise and stench which come from overcrowded slum districts--all the things which are meat and drink for the naturalist.

A concern with the nature of bravery and cowardice and a preoccupation with fear were to be reoccurring themes throughout all of Crane's work. A bulk of this work was concerned with war. His greatest war story, The Red Badge of Courage, was written with no previous knowledge of war, but this did not prevent Crane from having a burning desire to see war. He wanted to see if he really had painted war as it really was.

Bravery and cowardice are viewed by Crane as being products of circumstance. The same circumstance may as well engender one as the other. A man may be constrained to acts of bravery or heroism merely because his comrades are staying with the battle, or he may in an identical situation be possessed with a mad desire for flight if others are running away. The Red Badge was compared with Zola's great work, The Debacle, for evidences of naturalism. Great contrasts are observed, most particularly in the detailed descriptions which are present in the Zola story and which are absent in that of Crane. The naturalistic elements of war are present, the madness of fear, the bravery and the cowardice, the horror and desolation of war, the blood and toil, and death.

War is not pictured as a brutalizing force in Crane's stories. There is no cruelty in the relationships between officers and men. The cruelty is in the indifference of nature to the suffering of man in war. Crane does not have the brute type in these stories. In this way they may not be truly realistic, for in any indiscriminate gathering of men it is logical to suppose there might be one or two of the brute type. There is no sex or mention of sex in these pictures of man at war. This is also outside the tradition of the naturalist, for one of his main themes is the emphasis on the representation of base love. These men do not speak in the language of the brute.

Another thing that Crane brings to the consciousness is the fact that war does not always bring out the best in man. He does not always face "the great death" and emerge a man. He may very conceivably run away and never return to prove his bravery. It may serve to emphasize his weakness rather than to build his strength.

The madness of fear or bravery, the indifference of nature to man and man's relative unimportance in the universe, the horror and futility of war--these are the themes which are predominant in Crane's stories of war.

The fifth chapter brings variety into the study, for the stories have different backgrounds, but here again Crane is pursuing his chosen course, the search for truth. Fear of an unknown origin and of an abnormal type is observed in "The Blue Hotel." This unusual and abnormal fear results in the death of the Swede, and Crane makes one conscious of the fact that all men contribute to whatever there is of good or evil in the world. One is not permitted to see what the results of one's actions will be, and there is no reasonable explanation for the culmination of any set of circumstances. A new quality of fear and bravery is revealed in the stories from his Mexican adventures. This is a realization that all men are afraid, and that this fear may be turned into bravery if the enemy is kept unaware of it. The enemy is most probably equally afraid, and it is possible to survive if the fear can be hidden.

The naturalistic concept of nature as the ultimate force is shown very clearly in "The Open Boat." Nature is coldly impersonal, indifferent, and there is no supernatural being behind nature. Man may protest, but it is in vain.

In these stories taken from different parts of Crane's experience there are affirmations and reaffirmations of his principal ideas. He portrays man as relatively unimportant. Nothing would be changed if he vanished from the earth. The sun would not change from its orbit, or the waves diminish in their power. Nature is indifferent to man; she suffers him, but she will not make any effort to help him. Man is the product of his heredity and environment, and his fate is the result of circumstance. He may be cleansed of weakness by war, or he may be merely shown for the weakling that he is. Circumstance is the determining factor. All men contribute to this fate in some measure, but there is no criterion for determining what it will be.

Crane was vitally interested in man. He spent his life in his search for the truth about man's nature and his relation to the universe. If one may judge from the implications in his fiction, the search resulted in a belief that there was no superior intelligence--or at least no moral intelligence--behind nature and that man himself was a product of heredity and environment. A man might seek to turn his life into new channels, but in the final analysis this would be a

futile gesture. Apparently Crane's work was not influenced by any of the naturalists who had preceded him; he wrote about life as he saw it, and his view of life was essentially naturalistic. Crane himself expresses his credo better than any one else.

> The one thing that deeply pleases me is the fact that men of sense invariably believe me to be sincere. I know 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 praise or blame. When I was the mark for every humorist in the country I went ahead; and now that I am the mark for only fifty percent of the humorists, I go ahead; for I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision - he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition.[1]

---

[1] Starrett, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Books


Baldwin, James Mark, Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1925.

Beach, Joseph Warren, The Twentieth Century Novel, New York, The Century Company, 1932.

Beer, Thomas, Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters, Garden City, Garden City Publishing Company, 1927.

Berryman, John, Stephen Crane (American Men of Letters Series), New York, William Sloane Associates, 1950.

Boynton, Percy H., America in Contemporary Fiction, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1940.

Burgess, Joseph B., Introduction to the History of Philosophy, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1939.

Crane, Stephen, The Work of Stephen Crane, edited by Wilson Follett, 12 vols., New York, A. A. Knopf, 1926.

Dreiser, Theodore, Jennie Gerhardt, New York, Harper Bros., 1911.

Dreiser, Theodore, Sister Carrie, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1917 (originally published 1901).

Dresser, Horatio W., "Philosophy in France Since 1850," A History of Modern Philosophy, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1928.

Hardy, Thomas, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, New York, Harper Bros., 1899.

Hartwick, Harry, The Foreground of American Fiction, New York, American Book Company, 1934.

Howells, William Dean, Criticism and Fiction, New York, Harper Bros., 1903.

Johnson, Lionel, "The Characters of Men and Women," The Art of Thomas Hardy, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1923.

Kazin, Alfred, On Native Grounds, New York, Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942.

Mailer, Norman, The Naked and the Dead, New York, Rinehart and Company, 1948.

Moore, George, Esther Waters, New York, Brentano's, 1917.

Mornet, Daniel, A Short History of French Literature, translated by C. A. Choquette and Christian Gauss, New York, F. S. Crofts and Company, 1951.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Thus Spake Zarathustra, New York, Tudor Publishing Company, 1936.

Nitze, W. A., and Dargan, E. P., A History of French Literature, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1938.

Norris, Frank, McTeague, New York, Doubleday and McClure Company, 1899.

Saintsbury, George, A Short History of French Literature, London, Clarendon Press, 1918.

Sherman, Stuart Pratt, On Contemporary Literature, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1917.

Smith, Maxwell A., Short History of French Literature, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1924.

Snell, George Dixon, The Shapers of American Fiction, New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1947.

Sorley, W. R., A History of English Philosophy, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921.

Van Doren, Carl, The American Novel, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1921.

Webster, Noah, Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, second edition unabridged, Springfield, Massachusetts, G. and C. Merriam Company, 1946.

Zola, Emile, The Experimental Novel and Other Essays, translated by Belle M. Sherman, New York, The Cassell Publishing Company, 1893.

Zola, Emile, Le Debacle, New York, P. F. Collier and Son, 1902.

Zola, Emile, Nana (Modern Library Series), New York, Random House, 1928.

Articles

Brunetiere, N. F., "Evolution of Naturalism," Critic, XXXVI (May, 1900), 410-414.

Dell, Floyd, "Stephen Crane and the Genius Myth," The Nation, CXIX (December 10, 1924), 637-638.

Lepetit, Charles R., "The Decline and Fall of the Naturalistic Novel in France," Living Age, CCXXIV (January 6, March 3, March 31, 1900), 57-58, 584-585, 837-839.

Lewisohn, Ludwig, "The Discipline of Naturalism," Nation LXXXIX (December 9, 1909), 568.

"Passing of Naturalism," Outlook, LXIV (March 10, 1900), 570-571.

Phelps, William Lyon, "Realism and Reality in Fiction," Century Magazine, LXXXV (April, 1913), 864-868.

"Redeeming the Red Badge," The Bookman, XXXV (May, 1912), 235-236.

Seitz, Don C., "Stephen Crane: War Correspondent," The Bookman, LXXVI (February, 1933), 137-140.

Wells, H. G., "Stephen Crane," The North American Review, CLXVI (August, 1900), 233-242.