

STEPHEN CRANE: IMPRESSIONIST

By

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Introduction

The brief writing career of Stephen Crane placed him among the leading figures in American literature. His fiction was bold and evocative, and though it was overlooked at first, actually derided by conservative publishers, it nonetheless forced its way into the American and British literary scene. Published in 1895, his novel *The Red Badge of Courage* was for the most part responsible for this breakthrough. It was a novel of the American Civil War, but considering the impact it made on the public, such a description is hardly adequate. There was something special, even extraordinary, about the novel something that had little to do with its subject matter. It was extraordinary because *The Red Badge of Courage*, like Crane's others good literary works, drew elements from at least four different schools of literature: realism, naturalism, symbolism, and impressionism. Though Crane's readers were fascinated by his style, his critics discovered that a critical interpretation of his art was next to impossible because the distinctions between the literary terms (realism, naturalism, symbolism, impressionism), were not clearly defined at the time. In terms of influences on Crane a further complication was that three of the schools, realism, naturalism, and impressionism, were born in America at about the same period in which Crane began to write (the latter part of the nineteenth century).

The task of describing Crane's art did not cease to be one when critical terminology became more exact; scholars to this day still argue over which literary term, or school, best describes his work. Joseph Katz (*The Portable Stephen Crane*, 1969) wrote:

Crane is difficult to label. In his own time he was called either an impressionist or a decadent; but as later criticism sought a perspective in the literary nineties he was variously considered a realist, a naturalist, a symbolist, a parodist, and even a romantic.¹

In his *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus* (1952), R. W. Stallman wrote that he saw a sociological realism in Crane's work², but was assured that Crane was above all "a symbolic artist."³ Some scholars, looking primarily at Crane's *Bowery Tales*, concluded with some justification that Crane's works were of the naturalist tradition. Charles Child Walcott, for example, wrote in 1956 that "the works of Stephen Crane ... are an early and unique flowering of pure naturalism."⁴ Four years later Richard Chase, in his "Introduction" to *The Red Badge of Courage*, also argued that "like the other significant new writers of his generation — Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser — Crane is, generally speaking, of the naturalist school."⁵ In an essay published in 1976, Bert Bender labelled Crane as a realist, a "psychological realist";⁶ and the works of Rodney O. Rogers (1969), Benjamin Giorgio (1969), and James Nagel (1980), have declared that Crane is essentially an impressionist.

The predominant trend over the last thirty years, however, was to avoid any grappling with the task of trying to identify Crane's art.

Thomas Gullason (*The Complete Short Stories and Sketches of Stephen*

Crane, 1963), was one of many who maintained that “though he is still called a realist, naturalist, symbolist, impressionist, and existentialist, Crane cannot truly be labelled.”⁷

This thesis, however, proposes to assert that Crane's fiction can be labelled. Though there are characteristics of naturalism, realism, symbolism, and impressionism in his work, not all schools are equally important. Only one school of literature, apparent in all of his best stories, can adequately describe the artistry of Stephen Crane, and that is the school of impressionism. The elements of impressionism, its tenets, form a more consistent pattern in Crane's work than do the other schools. The problem of knowing and understanding the world (epistemology) is a problem that faces most of Crane's characters and is a characteristic of impressionism. Third-person limited as a narrative mode, the mode typical of Crane's work, is the narrative device that best suits impressionistic fiction. And Crane's method of conciliating objective reality with his characters' subjective vision is probably the most fundamental quality of the school.

Joseph Conrad, a friend of Crane's while Crane lived in England, stated that Crane was “an impressionist, and only an impressionist.”⁸ Crane was not “only an impressionist” however, at least not in the exclusive sense that Conrad implies. Elements from other schools, as mentioned, are evident in his work. But Crane never followed the mainstream tenets of the other schools as he did those of impressionism. Indeed, though there were other writers who were described as impressionists, Ford Madox Ford, a major figure in the development of literary impressionism in Britain, stated that “it was perhaps Crane of all

that school or gang — and not excepting Maupassant — who most observed the canon of impressionism.”⁹

Thus drawing from Crane's best and most anthologized prose works I will show that to various degrees his prose is influenced by the schools of realism, naturalism, and symbolism. But I will conclude in the final chapter that Crane's works cannot be considered in the mainstream of any of these schools, and that his writing is essentially impressionistic.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

- ¹ Joseph Katz, *The Portable Stephen Crane* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 4.
- ² R. W. Stallman, Introduction to *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, Ed. R. W. Stallman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. xix.
- ³ R. W. Stallman, Introduction to "War Tales" in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus* Ed. R. W. Stallman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 190.
- ⁴ Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 22.
- ⁵ Richard Chase, Introduction to *The Red Badge of Courage*, Ed. Richard Chase (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. vi.
- ⁶ Bert Bender, "Hanging Stephen Crane In the Impressionist Museum", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35 (1976-77), p. 113.
- ⁷ Thomas Gullason Introduction to *The Complete Short Stories and Sketches of Stephen Crane*, Ed. Thomas Gullason (New York: Doubleday, 1963) p. 45.
- ⁸ R. W. Stallman & Lillian Gilkes, in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, Ed. R. W. Stallman and L. Gilkes (New York: New York University Press, 1960) p. 8.
- ⁹ James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), p. 20.

CHAPTER ONE

Crane and Literary Realism

Realism had its aesthetic origin in France where the term was first applied to the paintings of Gustave Courbet. Courbet's art though appreciated for its technical merit, was of note mainly for its realistic depiction of everyday life. In literature the movement's first writer became Honore de Balzac (1799-1850). But it was the publication of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), a work that inspired no hope and contained no moral,¹ that proved to be the masterpiece of the movement in France. Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863-69) held the same distinction in Russia as did George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) in Britain. All contributed greatly to the fundamental concept of what realistic literature was intended to be: an honest and true interpretation of life without favouring specific social classes or environments. The artist of realism was to present life not as he imagined or wished it to be, but as he saw and experienced it as being.

Though the works of these great novelists were known and influential in America, the literary transition from romanticism to realism nevertheless remained largely indigenous. Economic, social, and political changes in America at the time (latter quarter of the nineteenth century), were creating kinds of attitudes and behaviour patterns that no longer suited the transcendentalism of previous literature. To the new generation life was a hard, everyday struggle for existence.² Thus in the intellectual climate of the 1880's and '90's realism became a more congenial form of literature, and leading the way William Dean Howells (1837-1920) became the movement's central voice.

Originally a journalist, then an editor, Howells gained public attention mostly as a writer and supporter of realistic fiction. His most

enduring work is his realistic novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885); however, American anthologists seem more interested in Howells the critic and supporter of realism than Howells the fiction writer.

As a critic and supporter of realism Howells developed certain ideas of what elements constituted good literature. He spent the last quarter of his professional life voicing these ideas and hoped to expand and solidify them as a school through the fiction of young and aspiring writers. Good writing, he preached, represented life truthfully: "If I do not find that it (literature) is like life", he said, "then it does not exist for me as art."³ Art, for Howells, was unpretentious. It was without the "graces of style," the "feats of invention", and the "cunning of construction".⁴ In his essay "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading", a work published in 1899 though built largely on the ideas expressed eight years earlier in his essay "Criticism and Fiction" (1891), Howells laid down the specifics that not only distinguished realism from its romantic predecessors, but constituted the school's aesthetic superiority. Using "the novel" as a synonym for realism he says:

The novel I take to be the sincere and conscientious endeavor to picture life just as it is, to deal with character as we witness it in living people, and to record the incidents that grow out of character. This is the supreme form of fiction...⁵

Romanticism, on the other hand, is "false to nature"⁶ and in direct opposition to realism. Though it professes to portray life, as does realism, romanticism fails because of its "excess of drawing and colouring"⁷:

It [the “romanticistic novel”] attributes motives to people which do not govern real people, and its characters are of the quality of types; they are heroic, for good or for bad. It seeks effect rather than truth ... it revels in the extravagant, the unusual and the bizarre.⁸

One of the aspiring writers affected by Howells' literary ideas was the young Stephen Crane. Crane at the time was a newspaper reporter working out of New York City and had already completed his first serious endeavour in fiction-writing: his *Sullivan County Sketches* (1892). He referred to these stories as “eight little grotesque tales of the woods which I wrote when I was clever.”⁹ His reference to himself as “clever” is meant as a disparagement, for it represents the times he spent at Claverack College and Syracuse University, times he felt were wasteful; however, “clever” also represents the style he incorporated in his fiction-writing. It was a style he attributed to his conscious imitation of Rudyard Kipling. It was only when he renounced his “clever, Rudyard-Kipling style” that he began to produce the kind of literature that was deserving of his enormous talent. According to Crane, in a letter of 1894, this change in his writing occurred as a natural result of his own artistic development:

It seemed to me that there must be something more in life than to sit and cudgel one's brains for clever and witty expedients. So I developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one.¹⁰

Further in the letter Crane describes his “little creed”: “we (as writers) are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to

nature and truth".¹¹ This description seems quite similar to the one Howells used in his "Criticism and Fiction": "if the book is true" wrote Howells, true "of life ... of human nature ... it will be great and beautiful."¹² Crane takes full responsibility for his change in writing, but the date of the letter (1894: after Howells' essay and his meeting with Howells) seems to suggest that the influence of Howells was more important than Crane wished to admit.

The birth of Stephen Crane as a writer of skill and power seems nevertheless to be the result of his transition from clever and witty expedients to this concept of realism or, from Rudyard Kipling and the *Sullivan County Sketches* to *Maggie*, a work intended "to show people to people"¹³ without moralising or teaching. This intention, of course, is in accord with realism. The proponents of Crane as a realist also feel that he did little to alter this transition in his subsequent years of writing. The following will be an examination of Crane's work as it corresponds to the principles of the realism of his day.

As a school of literature realism is represented by certain characteristics. One characteristic is its narrative methodology. According to Janet Holmgren McKay (*Narration and Discourse in American Realistic Fiction*) the school allows for a wide range of modes:

The author might narrate the story in his own first-person voice or in the third-person voice of the traditional story-teller, or he might allow his characters to speak for themselves, even to the point of yielding primary responsibility for narration to one or more characters.¹⁴

Echoing McKay, James Nagel points out that in narrative methodology “realism demonstrates a great deal of variation”¹⁵ and that its access to information is great.¹⁶

Also, while the story is being told, realistic fiction demands complete objectivity and/or distance from the author. It requires that the author never intrude between the reader and the reader's perception of the story and characters. The author must be invisible, or suppressed, just as the playwright is suppressed in his play.¹⁷ Howells likewise regards complete objectivity as important, and he states that if there is a lesson to be learned it must come from the novel and not from the author. The author, writes Howells, “had better not aim to please, and he had still better not aim to instruct ... (only) the novel can teach ... (and) only by painting life truly.”¹⁸

What realists write about in their fiction represents another characteristic of the school. Jacob Kolb writes,

The realists write about the common, the average, the unextreme, the representative ... They concern themselves with ordinary human lives seen in the context of normal social relationships.¹⁹

However, according to James Nagel, the ordinary characters that realists write about are also individualized by “unique crises of intense moments.”²⁰ As a result realism cannot help but focus a great deal of attention on its protagonist.

Reportorial and photographical detail is yet another feature. The picture the artist is painting, so to speak, must be as vividly descriptive as

possible in order to sustain the presentation of life as it is. A realist, says Howells, must report life in his fiction as it is in reality: "he will not rest till he has made his story as like life as he can."²¹ This means that detail, descriptive or otherwise, is essential. The realist must have, according to Howells, a "devoted fidelity to particulars."²² The use of colloquial expression by the characters is such a particular in that it allows the story to be true to a realistic depiction of people.

In Crane's best prose a number of these characteristics are present. Colloquial expression, as in *Clemens*, is a hallmark in the fiction of Stephen Crane. The much noted incident in which Crane's first prospective publisher asked him to omit the "swear words" in *Maggie*, and to which Crane responded: "that is the way they talk ... to leave such things out ... I am not giving the things as I know it"²³ is an example of his fidelity to truth. Colloquial expression remained in his prose and the variety of its forms ranged from the "yehs" of the Bowery tales to the "Gawds" of *The Red Badge*, and to the "aints" of the Western tales.

Crane's use of colloquial expression not only helps the reader distinguish the different cultural backgrounds of the characters (as the Swede and the Easterner are distinguishable from the Scullys and the cowboy in "The Blue Hotel"), but it also helps the reader focus on time and place with greater insight.

In *Maggie* the identification of the Johnson family, and Pete, as Irish is made easier by their distinctive accents. In their pronunciation of words the 'th' consonant is replaced by a 'd' or 't' depending upon the hardness or softness of the 'th' sound: and the soft vowel 'o' is given a soft vowel 'a' pronunciation: "When I comes from behind dis bar. I trows

yehs bote inteh d' street", says the angered Pete, emphasizing the former characteristics. Emphasizing the latter, Jimmy and his companion respond: "Ah, go ahn!".²⁴

Though Crane never introduces Maggie's boss the accent he displays in her mind reveals him to be a New York Jew: "What do you sink I pie fife dolla a week for? Play? No, py tamn!".²⁵ "It is the voice of the slums", wrote Hamlin Garland in his review of the work, "It is not written by a dilettante; it is written by one who has lived the life ... it gives the dialect of the slums as I have never before seen it written".²⁶

Colloquial expression in *Maggie* also includes the use of slang phrases that help distinguish socio-economic and cultural groups. In the New York Bowery, the slum of New York, and the setting for *Maggie*, Crane capitalizes on the references to Italians as "dago's",²⁷ and on the references to unfavourable characters as "mugs".²⁸ He shows that to people like Jimmy and Pete finely dressed men who care for their appearance are "jays".²⁹ A fist-fight, highly revered in the Bowery, is proudly labelled a "scrap";³⁰ fists are "dukes",³¹ and a fighter is reverently called a "scrapper".³² *Maggie* assures us that in the Bowery it is infinitely better to be a scrapper than a jay.

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, though the setting and time are different from the Bowery of the eighteen-nineties, the dialect is handled just as well. In this story a great many spoken words remain open at the end when they should be closed by consonants or vowels. The pronunciation of the soft or hard vowel 'u' is often replaced by the soft

vowel 'e'. The following passage, in which the corporal is attending to the youth, displays evidence of both characteristics:

“Jest as I thought ... Yeh've been grazed
by a ball. It raised a queer lump jest as
if some feller had lammed yeh on th' head
with a club ... th' most about it is that in
th' mornin' yeh'll feel that a number ten
hat wouldn't fit yeh ... it's just a damn'
good belt on th' head, an' nothin'
more.”³³

By labelling his characters with descriptive epithets Crane seems to go to the extreme in presenting representative people in his fiction. “The youth”, “the tall soldier”, “the loud soldier”, “the correspondent”, “the cook”, “the oiler”, “the captain,” “the bride”, “the gambler”, “the Swede”, all define to a certain degree the groups represented by their names. These characters, in accord with Nagel's observation, are also individualized by experiences of intense crisis; however, not noted by Nagel is that these characters are also individualized in other ways in Crane's works. Nagel's observation on realistic characters relates well to Henry Fleming (*The Red Badge*) and to “the correspondent” (“The Open Boat”), whose experiences contain crisis situations, but it falls short in describing George Kelcey (*George's Mother*) and Maggie (*Maggie*) who are individualized more by their thought processes, dreams, and visions.

George Kelcey is a daydreamer, an escapist, who succumbs easily to the lure of drunkards and undesirables. Maggie is raised in a world “composed of hardships and insults”.³⁴ Yet each is individualized by the personal visions of a better life. For George, “the world was obliged to turn gold in time”.³⁵ His life and future, he believes, held significance as

an integral part of the "Universe's" grand design. For Maggie, her vision of a better life depends upon Pete. She thinks of him when her grim life begins to oppress her. The result is that we come to understand the personalities of Kelcey and Maggie as realistic through their ways of thinking.

The individualization of Henry Fleming and "the correspondent" occur as a result of their responses to moments of intense crisis. Henry's experiences as a soldier, to fight, to run, to attempt a moral and rational justification of his running, to return spurred by guilt and circumstance, and to realize that his "grapplings and tuggings"³⁶ are not necessarily unique, but "born perhaps with the first of life",³⁷ all serve to distinguish the boy we know as "the youth".

Aboard a ten-foot dinghy with three other men, and surrounded by huge and implacable waves, the correspondent in "The Open Boat" finds himself in a near death situation. *His situation* is what individualizes him. The common desire of survival among the men in the boat, their ardent willingness to work for each other in the face of an unresponsive universe, leads the correspondent to deny his original attitude: "to be cynical of men,"³⁸ and place his trust in what he learns to see as a "brotherhood of men."³⁹

The realistic writer, as mentioned, must ensure that he does not intrude his presence upon the minds of the readers. Crane himself answers this by avoiding personal digressions. If moral judgments are made in the stories they are made by the faulty perceptions of the characters and not by Crane.

In *Maggie*, for instance, where Pete, Jimmy, and Maggie's mother all evoke contempt from the reader, none of the three are directly labelled or referred to as contemptible figures. Where Dickens smilingly refers to Tom Gradgrind (*Hard Times*) as the “whelp”, and where Hawthorne wastes no time in labelling Roger Chillingsworth as the “leech,” Crane's references remain completely objective. Nowhere does Crane venture to judge or defame a character. By using irony to manipulate characters and events Crane distances and even clouds his authorial presence. It is impossible to find a favored character in Crane's works. For example, though the characters of Pete, Jimmy, and Maggie's mother are ironically painted with numerous flaws, the victim of the story, Maggie, is ironically painted with just as many. Rather than treat Maggie as a total victim, a “blossom” who had to contend with the “mud-puddle”,⁴⁰ Crane makes us see that her judgments, manifested ironically, are as much to blame for her downfall as is everything else. Pete, the lover who eventually turns Maggie away, never hides or embellishes his crude “git off d'eat”⁴¹ personality. He is adept only at provoking fights and at maintaining order in his work-place, a bar. His lack of sophistication makes him typical of the Bowery area, yet Maggie ironically sees in Pete the makings of an “ideal man”.⁴²

Maggie also exhibits an astute respect for cleanliness and the idea of respectability. She tries hard to give her apartment a semblance of order and attractiveness. When, with Pete, she finds herself approaching a table with two “painted”⁴³ women, she respectfully “(draws) back her skirts”.⁴⁴ Maggie's attitude, however, is shown ironically in the face of her relationship with Pete. Pete is merely a bartender, a “doe-faced jude”⁴⁵ according to the mother, and Maggie's indecent relationship with

him succeeds only in separating her from her family. But more, this relationship leads the neighbors to gossip about the respectability of the Johnson girl and the household, a fact that ironically angers Jimmy and his mother, and a fact that leads the neighbors figuratively to draw back their skirts from Maggie. When the Johnsons kick Maggie out, Pete, thinking of his own respectability, draws back from her as well. Even a priest, thinking of his "respectability",⁴⁶ turns away from Maggie in her hour of need.

Though *The Red Badge* offers a commentary on the brutality and gloriousness of war, Crane as the author does not. The story is a portrayal of war filtered through the mind of Henry Fleming. Crane once again accomplishes a realistic picture by avoiding moral digressions and by using conflicting streams of irony.

Henry Fleming enters the war because he imagines it to be a glorious endeavour: "He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all."⁴⁷ When the battle appears before him, however, in all its stark grimness, and the bullets fly over and around him "bursting into fierce bloom,"⁴⁸ he runs from it and believes that those who have stayed to be nothing but "machine-like fools".⁴⁹ This, however, is not to be interpreted as the action of a man who, finding himself, realizes that he is not naturally violent, that he prefers peace over bloodshed. For Henry does return to the regiment and to the fighting, and when he decides to confront the "blood-swollen god"⁵⁰ of war he also decides to fight to the end. His actions on the battle field become increasingly crude and barbaric. He gains glory, and his new-found pride ironically leads him to revel in his brutishness:

It was revealed to him that he had been a barbarian, a beast. He had fought like a pagan who defends his religion. Regarding it he saw that it was fine, wild and in some ways easy.⁵¹

Henry's thoughts of the universe change as well. Up until his fleeing from battle he had always believed that nature had an interest in his well-being; but given the extreme danger he imagines he is facing he concludes, in isolation, that nature does not regard him as important. This makes Henry angry: "He turned with tupenny fury upon the high, tranquil sky. He would like to have splashed it with a derisive paint."⁵² When things eventually turn out for the better, however, Henry comes to regard nature as "a fine thing moving with a magnificent justice."⁵³

The youth learns very little about his experience and the story ends, as H. G. Wells points out, without trying to assert a moral philosophy or lesson: "Was ever a man before who wrote of battles so abundantly as he (Crane) had done, and never had a word, never a word from first to last, of the purpose and justification of the war (the Civil War)."⁵⁴

Authorial invisibility exists in all of his best works and it is not by accident. Crane is able to hide his presence by consciously aiming at what he feels to be the responsibility of a fiction writer. It is a responsibility that follows the precepts of Howells and of realism, and it is summed-up in a letter (1897) he wrote to John Northern Hilliard:

I have been careful not to let any theories or pet ideas of my own creep into my work. Preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give a slice of life: and if there is any moral or lesson in it. I do not try to point it out.⁵⁵

Echoing Howells quoting Emerson, he also adds: "As Emerson said, 'there shall be a long logic beneath the story, but it should be carefully kept out of sight.'"⁵⁶

Those who describe Crane as a realist look to this letter as significant support. Only a writer of realistic fiction would set out to write with this rule as the strengthening principle of his work. He was the "absolute slave of reality",⁵⁷ wrote Howells of Crane's fiction. It may not have been the realism of Howells, but the proponents of Crane as a realist saw him as a realist nonetheless. According to Bert Bender, Crane's fiction "was a subjective, psychological realism."⁵⁸

It is evident, however, regardless of those who have sought to describe Stephen Crane as a realist that a number of non-realistic elements still characterize his work. The result is that it is difficult to label Crane as a mainstream realist even though Howell's influence is present. Proponents of another literary school argue that though Crane adheres to certain realistic literary principles, he is first, and foremost, a writer of naturalistic fiction.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹Roland Stromberg, *Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 167.

²Lars Ahnebrink, *Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1961), p. 11.

³W. D. Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume II*, Ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), p. 298.

⁴Edwin H. Cady, *Critical Essays on W. D. Howells*, (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1983), p. 111.

⁵Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 300.

⁶Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 301.

⁷Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 300.

⁸Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 301.

⁹Stephen Crane, "Letter to Lily Brandon Munroe" (March, 1894) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, Ed. R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. 32.

¹⁰Stephen Crane, "Letter to Lily Brandon Munroe" (March, 1894) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, p. 31.

¹¹Stephen Crane, "Letter to Lily Brandon Monroe" (March, 1894) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, p. 31

¹²Edwin H. Cady, *Critical Essays on W. D. Howells*, p. 111.

¹³Stephen Crane, "Letter to Miss Catherine Harris" (November, 1896) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, p. 133.

¹⁴Janet Holmgren McKay, *Narration and Discourse in American Realistic Fiction*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) p. 3.

¹⁵James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, p. 34.

¹⁶James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, p. 166.

- ¹⁷Edwin H. Cady, *The Light of the Common Day*, Indiana Univ. Press, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁸Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 305.
- ¹⁹James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, p. 34.
- ²⁰James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, p. 34.
- ²¹Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 312.
- ²²Howells in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 312.
- ²³Thomas Gullason, *Stephen Crane's Career*, (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p. 92.
- ²⁴Stephen Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, ed. R. W. Stallman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 81.
- ²⁵Stephen Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 69.
- ²⁶ Lars Ahnebrink, p. 90.
- ²⁷Stephen Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 68.
- ²⁸Stephen Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 61.
- ²⁹Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 317.
- ³⁰Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 317.
- ³¹Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 60.
- ³²Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 61.
- ³³Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 309.
- ³⁴Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 63.
- ³⁵Crane, "An Experiment in Misery" in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 31.
- ³⁶Crane. *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 317.
- ³⁷Crane. *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 317.
- ³⁸Crane. "The Open Boat" in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 427.

- ³⁹Crane, "The Open Boat" in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 426.
- ⁴⁰Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 58.
- ⁴¹Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 62.
- ⁴²Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 61.
- ⁴³Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 86.
- ⁴⁴Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 86.
- ⁴⁵Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 75.
- ⁴⁶Crane, *Maggie* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 100.
- ⁴⁷Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 229.
- ⁴⁸Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 266.
- ⁴⁹Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 270.
- ⁵⁰Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 250.
- ⁵¹Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 331.
- ⁵²Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 292.
- ⁵³Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, p. 319.
- ⁵⁴Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 44.
- ⁵⁵Crane, "Letter to John Northern Hilliard" (1897) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, p. 158.
- ⁵⁶Crane, "Letter to John Northern Hilliard" (1897) in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, p. 158-9.
- ⁵⁷W. D. Howells in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Dennis Ponder. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1953). p. 126.
- ⁵⁸Bert Bender. p. 111.

CHAPTER TWO

PART A:

Crane and Literary Naturalism

As with realism the school of naturalism originated in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It appeared after realism and because of its similarities to the school, naturalism was regarded as an offshoot of realism, often labelled extreme or pessimistic realism.

It emerged at a time when Europe seemed at a cross-roads socially and intellectually. Darwin's theory of evolution was leading many to re-evaluate their moral and religious postures. The influences of science and its challenge to traditional thought created new kinds of attitudes and perceptions. Facts, scientific observation, and experience were replacing all that was imaginative or super-natural. According to Lars Ahnebrink the era manifested itself as a repudiation of previously accepted propositions:

The century may be described as analytic, intellectual, and interrogative, in search of truth and exactness. Science ... [offered] a solution to the riddles of the universe. Nothing occult or transcendental existed ... Matter was entire reality.¹

In France class strife was greater than that of any other modern state at the time. Slums and squalid lifestyles were emerging with greater visibility than ever, and the belief that man was determined, shaped, by his environment found no greater evidence than in the slum areas of French cities. As a literary school, naturalism, with its attraction to squalid life, its belief in determinism, and its acceptance of scientism, emerged as a logical development of late nineteenth century France. It was led by the works of Emile Zola (1840-1902).

Considered the central voice of the movement, Zola believed in the claims made by Hippolyte Taine's determinism, that man was subject to the influences of external forces, and he also believed in Claude Bernard's philosophy of exact science. Upon their ideas Zola wrote *Le roman expérimental* (1880), a kind of guide-book to naturalistic writing which called for the novelist to research his work like a scientist and record his observations in an objective and impersonal language. Quoting from Bernard's "Introduction à L'Etude de la Médecine Expérimentale", Zola uses Bernard's definition of a scientist to describe what he expects from the naturalist writer:

The observer [writes Bernard] relates purely and simply the phenomena which he has under his eyes ... He should be the photographer of phenomena, his observation should be an exact representation of nature ... He listens to nature and he writes under its dictation.²

Elaborate detail is, as a result, necessary for the naturalist writer. In his own work Zola was exhaustive in his descriptive detail; streets, houses, rooms, furniture etc., were presented with enormous patience.

The determinism of Taine taught that the individual was constantly affected by his environment;³ that the forces of environment shaped and determined human destinies. Zola accepted this notion, but qualified it to include heredity as an equal deterministic force:

There is an absolute determinism for all human phenomenon ... I consider that the question of heredity has a great influence on the intellectual and passionate manifestation of man. I also attach considerable importance on the surroundings [environment].⁴

In order to demonstrate his hypothesis Zola selected as fictional characters men and women whose destinies were easy to manipulate. Lars Ahnebrink states that “the characters preferred by the French novelists belonged to the lower classes. The heroes and heroines were workers, harlots, drunkards, servant-maids, forlorn creatures, and mass-individuals.”⁵ They were, in accord with naturalistic philosophy, denied the principle of free-will; they were mere “pawns” controlled by external and internal forces.⁶

The French naturalists were not the first to expose the ugliness of lower-class life. The Goncourt brothers, great influences on Zola, were the first to write novels of the “lower depths.”⁷ The Goncourts, however, looked for beauty in these quarters; they were attracted to the “riff-raff” as one would be attracted to a different culture.⁸ Zola's attraction to squalid life was merely the result of his desire to be truthful. It was a truth avoided by previous literary schools and if Zola wanted naturalism to be an experiment “pour voir” then slum life with all its sordidness, prostitution, free-love, and social misery, could not be overlooked.

In America, during the decades that followed the Civil War, extreme economic, social, and cultural changes took place.⁹ Three factors in particular, according to W. T. Taylor (*A History of American Letters*) were responsible for these changes. One was the growth of the city due to industrialization; another was the closing of the frontier; and the third was the acceptance of Darwinism as a new philosophy of life.¹⁰ In his book, *Social Darwinism in American Thought (1860-1915)*, Richard Hofstadter saw late-nineteenth century America as a distant cry from the mid-nineteenth century America of Howells, who wrote that he “had seldom seen a sky

without some kind of rainbow in it.”¹¹ Post-Civil-War America for Hofstadter was quite the opposite:

With its rapid expansion, its exploitive methods, its desperate competition, and its peremptory rejection of failure, post-bellum America was like a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.¹²

It was in the America perceived by Hofstadter, that the works of Zola and the school of naturalism found congenial ground. The writers of the 1890's rejected the implications of Emersonian idealism and the American dream. Society in their eyes was a closed rather than an open system. It created alienation among individuals, was oppressive, and gave the feeling that man was limited, shaped, and determined.¹³ The first novel in America that was described as naturalistic, a la Zola, was Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). The story depicted life in the slum area of New York city, and its protagonist was a woman who eventually turns to prostitution and then to suicide. These elements are notably Zolaesque. When Crane wrote that the story “tries to show that environment is a terrible thing and frequently shapes lives regardless,”¹⁴ he practically identified himself as a naturalistic writer. The following examination will reveal just how much Crane adheres to the principles of naturalism.

The works set in the Bowery of New York City are the ones that particularly distinguish Crane as a naturalist. According to Lars Ahnebrink, the New York Bowery was “one of the worst nests of crime and disease.”¹⁵ In each of these tales Crane characterizes his protagonists as trapped, and

victimized by an uncaring society. The environment they appeal to for help is represented by “pitiless” and “sternly high”¹⁶ buildings that offer no downward glances. As a deterministic force society is powerful in both *Maggie* and “An Experiment In Misery.” In most of Crane's other works, however, “nature” and “the Universe” are the terms that represent deterministic forces. He uses these terms interchangeably from work to work for they are meant to signify the same thing; however, in “The Open Boat,” both terms are used:

He could now perceive that the universe hated him. He sank to the most sublime depths of despair As he walked home he thought that he was a very grim figure ... The universe would regret its position when it saw him drunk.¹⁷

George's Mother

Nature was miraculously skilful in concocting excuses, he thought ... When he saw how she [Nature] had cozened him out of his home and hoodwinked him into wielding a rifle, he went into a rage.

He turned in tupenny fury upon the high, tranquil sky. He would have liked to have splashed it with a derisive paint.¹⁸

The Red Badge of Courage

This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual ... She [nature] did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. It is, perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life...¹⁹

“The Open Boat”