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STEPHEN CRANE'S AUTHENTIC VISION

by

Harry Filmore Dowling, Jr.

A Dissertation

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of Lehigh University

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Abstract

Stephen Crane's authentic vision of life is one of dual or dipolar reality. Even in the early Sullivan County writings, Crane's art does not insist (as most critics have believed) that humans free themselves from subjective "illusions" and embrace objective "truth" as the only reality. Instead, Crane finds real--and valuable--both man's subjective self-concern and his objective insignificance in the chance universe. This dipolar vision of reality is a thematic asset to Crane's fiction because it expresses life's complexity and ultimate inscrutability. In successful fictions like "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "The Monster," Crane's dipolar vision is artistically valuable as well, for it contributes the tension of ambivalence to Crane's neutrally-omniscient narrator point of view, his patterned language repetition and symbolism, and his tone.

To Crane, humans' subjective exaggerations of self-importance, foolish from the viewpoint of objective reality, are paradoxically a necessary force motivating humans to endure life's blows and hardships. Indeed, examining The Red Badge of Courage and Crane's most successful Civil War tales reveals the belief that total objectivity of vision goes against the grain of human nature. Though Henry Fleming in Red Badge learns to accept the truth that his death would be of no objective consequence to the universe, he retains the subjective vanity necessary to preserve a high enough self-image to perform battlefield actions of bravery and brotherhood.

When Crane abandons his dipolar vision of the value to man of

both subjective and objective realities, he produces thematically oversimplified and artistically inferior fiction, as seen in his later war writings with their panegyrics on unrealistically heroic conduct by Regular-army soldiers. In Maggie and his other New York City writings, Crane also deserts his dipolar vision, but here the cause is his attempt to write social realism. Though they contain a tension between the environmentalism of social reform and the insistence on individual moral responsibility found in Crane's best fictions, these New York writings, traced chronologically from 1893 to 1896, increasingly downplay the environmentalism and heighten their concern with moral bravery or "manhood."

A concern with both moral and physical bravery is much in evidence in Crane's Western tales. In these stories, the dipolar vision of reality is embodied in Crane's conception of his characters, when tested in the crucible of life's chance events, as "wise fools"--beings capable of absurd subjective self-aggrandizement (the Swede in "The Blue Hotel"), but also, through recognizing their environment's indifference toward them along with the necessity of a subjective egotism as a motivating force, capable of both physical bravery (Potter in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky") and moral bravery (the Swede).

Crane's authentic dipolar vision of reality--his life-view that there are two realities, subjective and objective, both conflicting but neither inauthentic or valueless--encompasses the significant psychological truth that humans do not and will not cease loving and valuing themselves despite their feeling that the universe cares nothing for them.

Crane in Embryo: The Sullivan County Sketches

Though Stephen Crane's Sullivan County Sketches have never been in danger of being considered skillful, successful works of art, they have still enjoyed considerable scholarly and critical attention in recent years.¹ The critical consensus that the Sullivan County writings are inferior art is reflected in Schoberlin's statement that "not one of the Sullivan County Sketches is a great story; at times they are inconsequential and juvenile" and in Holton's verdict that they are "largely derivative," not "richly imagined," and "of interest only to the serious student of Crane."² Still, critics investigate the Sullivan County works because they are considered the largest influence among Crane's early writings upon his later and greater fiction.³ James Colvert has gone so far as to call Sullivan County Sketches Crane's "experimental fiction of 1892, the

¹See Melvin Schoberlin, ed., The Sullivan County Sketches of Stephen Crane (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1949); Robert W. Stallman, Stephen Crane: Sullivan County Tales and Sketches (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1968); Fredson Bowers' and Edwin Cady's respective editorial and critical commentaries in The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. VIII (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1973); Donald B. Gibson, The Fiction of Stephen Crane (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 5-23; Marston LaFrance, A Reading of Stephen Crane (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 24-36; Milne Holton, Cylinder of Vision: The Fiction and Journalistic Writings of Stephen Crane (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 27-34; and Frank Bergon, Stephen Crane's Artistry (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 48-51, 104-107.

²Schoberlin, p. 2; Holton, p. 34.

radical origin of all his fiction"⁴ No doubt many readers would agree. But previous critical commentary on Crane's Sullivan County writings has oversimplified these works. The chief oversimplification is the general belief that the Sullivan County stories uniformly and completely ridicule, through irony, all pretensions of the little man to pride, courage, and merited fear of nature's elements, and that the journalistic pieces with equal firmness expose all of the Sullivan County hunters' and dwellers' tales as legends or, more bluntly, lies.⁵ This consensus that these stories and reports unequivocally puncture romantic illusions and advocate their replacement by the real truth oversimplifies the Sullivan County writings because it misses their rich ambivalence of vision. This ambiguity or range of meaning that I find in Sullivan County Sketches has, in turn, great relevance to the entire body of Crane's fiction. For in truth, instead of simply rejecting romantic "illusions" and embracing realistic "truths," Crane's writings frequently waver between the

³Donald Pizer, "Stephen Crane," in Robert A. Rees and Earl N. Harbert, eds., Fifteen American Authors Before 1900: Bibliographic Essays on Research and Criticism (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1971), p. 119, suggests that Crane's other early work should be studied too, not just the Sullivan County writings in isolation. LaFrance and Holton, in their 1971 and 1972 books cited above, do just what Pizer advocates, yet still reach the conclusion that the Sullivan County works remain Crane's most significant early writing. Edwin Cady even finds the Sullivan County tales more successful than Crane's better known 1892-1896 New York City stories and sketches (Works, VIII, pp. xxii-xxxv, especially xxxiv-xxxv).

⁴James B. Colvert, in The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. VI, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1970), p. xvi.

⁵For this consensus of the stories, see Schoberlin, p. 16; Holton,

romantic and the realistic attitudes, resulting, in many early Crane fictions, in the presence of a spectrum of views arrayed between the "romantic" and "realistic" poles.⁶ This chapter seeks to demonstrate the rich array of ambiguity in the ostensibly monochromatic Sullivan County Sketches, while reaching out toward a more precise description of the two polar-extreme views than is suggested by the terms "romantic" and "realistic."

The first published of the journalistic Sullivan County writings, "The Last of the Mohicans," immediately establishes the romantic-realistic dichotomy in observing that the romantic Uncas of Cooper's fiction was, in real life, a degenerate, rum-imbibing, "demoralized, dilapidated inhabitant of Sullivan County."⁷ The piece's tone, though, seems serious rather than ironic when it reflects that upon discovering the truth, "the lover of the noble and fictional Uncas is overcome with great sadness. . . . The pathos lies in the contrast between the noble savage of fiction and the sworn-to claimant of Sullivan County"

p. 28; LaFrance, pp. 34-35; Colvert, Works, VI, pp. xvi, xix; and Eric Solomon, Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 1-2. The usual view of the journalistic pieces may be represented by Holton, p. 27; Stallman, Sullivan County Tales and Sketches, p. 9; and Robert W. Stallman, Stephen Crane: A Biography (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1968), p. 40. (All subsequent references to Stallman's biography will use the short title Stephen Crane.)

⁶Cady has expressed a similar view in Works, VIII, p. xxviii: "among [Crane's] ambivalences was the tension between his love for the neoromantic and the realistic . . . he finally repudiated neither The 'Sullivan County Sketches,' through their irony, are almost always ambivalent." See also Bergon, p. 46: "To Crane truth was pluralistic, and he depended upon multiple points of view and paradoxical configurations to present its complexity."

(VIII,200).⁸ Earlier in this sketch, Crane notes that the "historical traditions" or "legends" of the Sullivan County region provoke skepticism among modern historians, yet are often "verified by books written by learned men, who have . . . establish~~ed~~ their facts" (VIII,199). Thus, from this writing alone the reader is alerted to an ambivalence in Crane's view toward the legendary material of Sullivan County. That view is no simple equating of romance with falsity and "realism" with truth.

In like manner, the hunting sketch "Sullivan County Bears" is a mixture of myth-debunking truths about bears and acknowledgment that bears are fearsome creatures. The fact that bears prefer to run and hide rather than fight, writes Crane, makes "it difficult to reconcile the bear of fiction and the bear of reality. The black bear of the hunter's tale was a fighter" (VIII,217,219). But this debunking view coexists with another view: "The black bear of today is not a fighter. Of course, when cornered he will make a fight for his life In this case, it is advisable ~~for humans~~ to retire, if convenient" (VIII,220). Similarly, while the pursuit of the little man by a bear

⁷Works, VIII, pp. 199-200. Further reference to the tales, sketches, and reports of Crane contained in this volume will be identified by volume number and page within the text. All of the Sullivan County works published in Crane's lifetime appeared in 1892; Cady feels that most likely they were written during the winter and spring of 1891-92 (Works, VIII,xxx).

⁸Bergon, p. 107; likewise emphasizes the mixed tone of pathos and irony in this sketch's seeming deflation of Cooper's romantic Indian. Compare the reaction of the correspondent in "The Open Boat" when he learns the ironic truth of nature's indifference to his egotistical self-love: "Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation" (The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. V, ed. Fredson Bowers ~~Charlottesville~~: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1970/, p. 85).

in the Sullivan County story "A Tent in Agony" is presented in comic terms and the excessiveness of the little man's fear is made apparent (VIII,252-254), it remains true that a bear's pursuit of a man does pose a genuine threat to the man. As Bergon says, though Crane in his Sullivan County writings treats hunting with irony, "it [the hunt] still maintains ties to something he found attractive and elemental, a ritualistic confrontation between man and beast, a test of man's skill and nerve--indeed, his manhood--to overcome a worthy adversary."⁹ Early in "Sullivan County Bears," the reason why more bears inhabit the country at present than formerly is explained:

Long ago the forests thronged with a race of brawny hunters who shouldered deadly rifles and were keen-eyed for the chase. . . . Youths grew up with a desire for fame and . . . [sought] it in the woods. A hardy race of huntsmen made terrible war on the game. With the vanishing of the great forests these men disappeared from the face of the earth. (VIII,215)

Such a romantic view of the American frontiersman's hunting prowess is modified--but, I suggest, not cancelled out--by the far more skeptical view of the Sullivan County hunter presented in other journalistic pieces, such as "The Way in Sullivan County":

In a shooting country, no man should tell just exactly what he did. He should tell what he would have liked to do or what he expected to do, just as if he accomplished it. . . . [by doing so he will add] little legends to the hunting lore of the region, which will undoubtedly go down the ages and impress coming generations with the fact that the Sullivan County bushwhackers were very great men indeed. (VIII,221)

A similar mingling of a dominant ironic, realistic skepticism

⁹ Bergon, pp. 104-105.

and a secondary or recessive romantic-heroic attitude can be found in several early Crane sketches on war and fighting. The Sullivan County report "Not Much of a Hero" demolishes the myth of Tom Quick, a celebrated "Indian slayer" of the French and Indian Wars, who is exposed by the "unsentimental" historian as a cruel murderer with utterly no patriotic or noble motives for his Indian massacres. Tom Quick is also disparaged as "a boy's hero" (VIII,211-212). The last paragraph of this journalistic piece suggests three possible "views" to be taken of Tom Quick: he was either "one of those sturdy and bronze woodsmen who clears the paths of civilization," or a "monomaniac upon the subject of Indians," or "purely and simply a murderer" (VIII,215). Though the reader is expected to reject the first of these three possible views, the mention of it implies that some frontiersmen, though not Tom Quick, were in reality heroic figures.

Another Sullivan County work, "A Reminiscence of Indian War," vigorously ridicules the foolish courage shown by a group of militiamen who insist, against their leaders' advice, upon pursuing the Indians despite being greatly outnumbered, and who subsequently are slaughtered for their silliness. Another ironic touch is that the chief target of this journalistic piece's scorn, "the man who made the valorous oration at the council of war," and his particular group of militiamen are "cut off from the main body by [the Indians'] sudden attack" and as a result "took no part in the battle at all" (VIII,223-225). However, there is true (romantic or heroic) bravery as well as false (because, to realistic eyes, foolish) bravery in "A Reminiscence of

Indian War"; for, once the outnumbered Americans are surrounded by the Indians following the militiamen's foolish decision to pursue, the Americans put up "a stout-hearted fight." The Indians "could not make the patriots yield an inch . . ."; instead, "the Indians were repelled at every point. The band of Americans on the plateau had grown to manhood with rifles in their hands. They were of that bronzed and sturdy race who were . . . making homes in the dense jungles of an American wilderness. . . . Each man felt his responsibility as a link in the chain of defense, and yielded not an inch" (VIII, 223-224, my emphasis). Here again is an ambivalent attitude toward the nature of man: is he a grand romantic hero or a foolishly egotistical insignificant?¹⁰

Was Crane similarly ambivalent toward man as hunter of animals? Edith Crane, Stephen Crane's niece, said that he enjoyed hunting but was less keen on it than his brother Edmund. Crane's recent biographer R. W. Stallman has presented evidence of Crane's hunting experience and of his reputation as a good marksman, but feels that in Crane's hunting sketches he often sympathized with the hunted animals and "expose/d the cowardice of the hunter."¹¹ Such a view of hunting is

¹⁰ Later Crane stories and reports of wars and fights reflect a similar spectrum of opinion, from debunking to admiring, on the nature of man as a fighter. These range from the totally ironic picture presented in "The Duel That Was Not Fought" (1894) of Patsey Tulligan, a New York City tough who foolishly asserts his vainglorious valor in proposing to duel an expert Cuban swordsman, through the ambivalent, multistranded attitudes toward Henry Fleming as soldier and the New York Kid in "The Five White Mice" as fighter, to the virtually unalloyed admiration of the common soldiers' bravery in "The Price of the Harness" and of weaponless Sheriff Potter's facing down of Scratchy Wilson in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky."

¹¹ Stallman, Stephen Crane, pp. 37-39; Edith Crane's views are quoted on pp. 38-39.

indeed present in Crane's Whilomville story "Lynx-Hunting" (1899), which may be associated with the earlier-written Sullivan County hunting sketches because it is based "on an incident of Stephen Crane's childhood" and on his recollection of his boyhood memories of "the Port Jervis landscape."¹² In "Lynx-Hunting," animal-hunting Jimmie Trescott and his boy companions are shown up as liars, as pompous egotists, as ridiculously fearful hunters--"They all lied carefully about their courage"--and as the victims of unwarranted self-inflation: "They lived there, in season, lives of ringing adventure--by dint of imagination." As the boy Willie Dalzel kills a bird, the pride and the insensitivity of the youthful hunters are evidenced. When they "came upon an innocent bird . . . After a great deal of manoeuvring [sic] and big words, Willie Dalzel reared his fowling-piece and blew this poor thing into a mere rag of wet feathers. Of which he was proud." Similarly, when Jimmie shoots at a chipmunk--the first time he has ever pulled a trigger--"He was not too dazed to instantly adopt a becoming egotism."¹³

Thus in "Lynx-Hunting," the hunting instinct in humans is traced to an egotism that has its roots in hypocritical courage and foolish fears (since these boys are in no danger from the imaginary lynxes and the real birds and cows that they shoot). The Sullivan County report "The Last Panther" presents a similar view of hunting, skeptically reviewing the tall tales told about the supposed ferocity of

¹²J. C. Levenson, in The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. VII, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1969), p. xliii.

¹³Works, VII, pp. 139-142.

panthers and waxing ironic toward excessive human fear of panthers, as when an "army" of men who have trapped and wounded a panther in a cave keeps running away in utter terror every time the animal growls (VIII,207-211).

Yet Crane's attitude toward animal-hunters is not this simple. "Hunting Wild Hogs," another Sullivan County journalistic work, reveals a characteristic mixture of skepticism and admiration toward the hunters of wild hogs. Again Crane suggests that the "mythology" that has accreted around the wild hogs has exaggerated their wiliness and cunning. Still, they are later depicted as "evad[ing] the army [of hunters] with astonishing ease" and leading those hunters on a seven-day, 200-mile chase (VIII,201-203). As for the hunters themselves, the majority of them are shown, like those in "The Last Panther," to be possessed of ridiculous fears caused by overactive imaginations. In contrast, though, is "the famous bear hunter" Lew Boyd, who lacks such fears, chides the other men for coming out to hunt a beast of which they are fearful, discounts the local citizenry's exaggeration of the hog's prowess ("They told him he would never catch it, and if he did it would kill him"), and ultimately makes a relatively easy kill (VIII,203-207). The point here is not that the sketch portrays Boyd as an incredibly glamorous hero, but that heroism in hunting consists of not overemphasizing the prowess of the animal and thus not creating excessive fears of imaginary doom.

A similar situation exists in "Killing His Bear," a Sullivan County story in which the protagonist, the little man, contains within himself both sides of Crane's attitude toward the hunter. As was the

case with the majority of hunters in "Hunting Wild Hogs," the little man's fancy in "Killing His Bear" exaggerates the thrill of hunting, its danger, and his own lust for renown as a great bear-killer. And his pride after he has killed the bear, his acting "as if he were leading the cheering of thousands," is surely excessive (VIII,249-251). Still, there is a real element of danger in hunting bears, and real courage is necessary for success at the task. Like Jim Boyd and like the trapped soldiers in "A Reminiscence of Indian War," the little man in "Killing His Bear," once directly faced by the bear, must fight down his fear and summon his courage: "Slowly the little man changed his aim . . . with steady nerves . . . Mad emotions, powerful to rock worlds, hurled through the little man, but did not shake his tiniest nerve" (VIII,251).¹⁴

This view that the little man of the Sullivan County stories is partly hero, despite being mostly foolish egotist, receives little support from previous criticism.¹⁵ The usual position is that the

¹⁴Previous critical discussions of "Killing His Bear" have usually stressed either the negative or the positive qualities of its protagonist at the expense of the other. See LaFrance, p. 32, and Gibson, pp. 11-13. Closer to my own reading of this tale as ambivalent is the conception of it in Edwin Cady, Stephen Crane (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 99-100, as a romantic-serious treatment of the traumatic experience of hunting, with its serious impact mitigated but not cancelled out by the "slightly unfocused irony" of the undercutting ending. Similar is Bergon, p. 51: Crane in "Killing His Bear" "is on the edge of letting a subjective response maintain its splendor despite contradictory prosaic facts and after-the-fact emotions which are deflationary."

¹⁵The only real advocate of the little man as hero seems to be Gibson, who optimistically reads the Sullivan County stories as case studies of the little man's learning to "exercis[e] control over his environment, [to] manipul[at]e the environment through the assertion of

little man never shows true courage--as Colvert puts it, "his swagger, noble oratory, and outrageous self-esteem are merely hopeful shams . . ."--and that, in LaFrance's words, he "learns nothing from experience and remains the prisoner of his own limitations."¹⁶ Such views need qualification, as my reading of "Killing His Bear" has implied. Actually, a considerable range from bravery to the lack of it exists in these Sullivan County stories. All four protagonists seem equally guilty of cowardice in "Four Men in a Cave" and "The Octopush," but several other tales picture the little man as at times braver than the others, especially the pudgy man (the only other individualized figure of the quartet). In "An Explosion of Seven Babies," the little man, though his fears of being "eaten" by the enraged "avenger"-woman are obviously spoofed as excessive, does summon up the courage to combat this infuriated woman who appears as a "giantess" and "tigress," whereas the best that the pudgy man can do is to fall off a wall in his haste to run away (VIII,265-266). "A Tent in Agony" presents the little man as the only one of the four companions willing to stay behind and guard the tent while the others go off for supplies; and subsequent to his own ridiculously exaggerated fear of the bear that comes to the tent, he is able to triumph over the even more excessive fear of the other men when they return (VIII,252-254). In "The Holler

will" (p. 5). Gibson's Jungian readings have not had wide acceptance, and Gibson himself recognizes a problematical ambivalence in the Sullivan County tales between an ironic debunking of fear as groundless and an implication that fear must and can be overcome by an exercise of the human will (p. 23).

¹⁶Colvert, Works, VI, p. xix; LaFrance, p. 34.

Tree," the little man traps himself into a foolish display of bravery when he accepts the pudgy man's dare first to climb the tree and then to slide down within it. Still, by his foolish behavior he does expose himself to true danger (of falling out of the tree). And despite the obvious implication that the behavior of both little man and pudgy man in this story is stupid, there is a hint that the little man may have learned something from the incident. As in his triumph he is about to "deliver an oration" (invariably a sign of foolishness in Crane's works) to the deflated pudgy man, he instead desists and adopts a more understated approach to his display of relative courage vis-a-vis the pudgy man (VIII,264).

It is true that the little man often takes an excessive, unwarranted pride in having met danger's challenge, as at the end of the last two stories discussed. But this fact should be balanced against his intermittent relative bravery in comparison to his comrades. The clearest example of such relative bravery comes in "The Black Dog." As this story begins, the four men are lost, but while the pudgy man can only moan self-pityingly that "We shall never find our way out of this wilderness' . . . The little man had determination in his legs. . . . he fought the thickets between him and the cabin. . . . [and] boldly confronted the weird glances from . . . the cabin and rapped on the door" (VIII,242-243). When informed by the cabin's owner that his aging uncle will die when a "sperrit" in the form of a black dog appears, the little man, though "nervous," asserts that he does not believe in spirits; and when the pudgy man disagrees, the former cries, "'All right, pudgkins, bring on your phantom'" The "sperrit"

dog does indeed appear, frightening all four men to a ridiculous extent, but also leading the pudgy man to feel "conceit for an approaching triumph over the little man . . ." (VIII,244-245). However, the little man is the only one of the four with enough courage to go to the window for a sight of the dog and to "throw various articles at the spectre," as the narrator comments significantly that "in the final struggle, terror will fight the invincible." Ultimately, the dog's fearsome howls cease, for it has merely been hungry and readily substitutes eating for whining when the little man throws a "bowl of beef-tea" out the window. This truth about the dog is discovered because of the little man's comparative bravery: "The little man felt his nerves vibrate. Destruction was better than another wait. He . . . went to the window, . . . looked out" and saw the dog eating. Further, at the end of this story, the little man's triumph over the pudgy man ("'There's your phantom,' said the little man to the pudgy man") is decidedly a quiet triumph, which, like the ending of "The Holler Tree," implies that the little man may have benefited a bit from his experience (VIII,246-247).¹⁷

"The Black Dog" is not the only Sullivan County tale to suggest that man, despite his fears of nature's unknown dangers, ought to summon up enough true courage to avoid exaggerating those fears.

¹⁷Gibson concurs that the little man in this story overcomes his fear more than do the others and thereby has "learned something about the world" (p. 10). The usual view, though, is that expressed by LaFrance, who insists that the little man has displayed no real courage and that his final triumph over the pudgy man is "illusory" (p. 31).

Though frightened by the howls of the dyspeptic little man in "The Cry of a Huckleberry Pudding," his three companions eventually reach "the cellar of fear. They were now resolved to use weapons on the great destruction. They would combat the inevitable" (VIII,252). A section of "An Explosion of Seven Babies" puts the same idea in terms that could apply as well to the protagonist in a number of Crane's major works--The Red Badge, "The Blue Hotel," and "The Five White Mice" among them--as it does to the little man of this story: "He arrived at the critical stage of degradation. He would resist. He touched some hidden spring in his being and went off like a firework. The man became a tumult" (VIII,266).

Crane's Sullivan County Sketches allow humans the possibility of courage--indeed, insist on the necessity for real courage--because, though they show that man's imagination tends to exaggerate danger to the point of self-paralysis, they also show that real danger does exist in nature. Considered as a group, the Sullivan County Sketches and other Crane writings that pit man against nature (such as "The Open Boat," "The Snake," and "Across the Covered Pit") contain a variety of natural "dangers," some real, some imaginary. In the Sullivan County stories, the dangers most typically are real, but also grossly over-estimated by the protagonists through cowardly fear. This generalization would apply to "Killing His Bear," "A Tent in Agony," and "The Holler Tree," as already discussed. Likewise, in "An Explosion of Seven Babies," the woman who attacks the little man must be considered somewhat dangerous, since she is wielding a hoe (VIII,265). The cave-exploring quartet in "Four Men in a Cave" cer-

tainly exaggerate their feeling that they are "pitching to death," yet the fact remains that the slip of a foot while spelunking is a potential disaster. As this story's narrator puts it when the little man's foot does slip, "It is not well to quarrel upon a slippery incline, when the unknown is below" (VIII,227).

Comparing "Four Men in a Cave" with Crane's journalistic piece "Across the Covered Pit," written between 1890 and 1892 and thus perhaps furnishing the factual impetus for Crane's fictional tale of spelunking, makes it quite clear that Crane was alert to the perils of cave exploration.¹⁸ In "Pit," one Reverend H. C. Hovey is depicted as eager to explore the "unknown" or "interrogation point" of a cave that has been "trod by no man before" The scheme is further dangerous because, since no one will know that Hovey has entered the cave, rescue in case of trouble will be impossible. Though Crane's ambivalence of attitude reveals itself occasionally even in "Pit" (the doctor's exploration fever is assigned to "his boyish spirit of adventure," and the story ends in a mildly ironic anti-climax when "the doctor remarked that he guessed he wouldn't explore any more caves for a while . . ."), it is apparent that actual danger exists; for instance, at one point, "The doctor's life depended on the grip of his fingers" (VIII,584-587).

At one extreme from the slight-to-considerable ambiguity of the writings just discussed are those in which man's fears of nature are

¹⁸See Bowers, Works, VIII, pp. 920-922, on the dating of "Across the Covered Pit."

totally illusory. Among the Sullivan County stories, this category would include "The Octopush," in which tree-stumps are misconstrued by a drunken man as octopuses, and "The Cry of a Huckleberry Pudding," in which the pathetic shrieks of the little man, caused by an upset stomach, are mistaken by his three companions for the roars of a dangerous beast. In both of these tales, imagination is the villain that causes the men's illusory fears. The latter story contains a paragraph that puts succinctly the role of the imagination:

The cry of the unknown instantly awoke them to terror. It is mightier than the war-yell of the dreadful, because the dreadful may be definite. But this whoop strikes still greater fear from hearts because it tells of formidable mouths and great, grasping claws that live in impossibility. It is the chant of a phantom force which imagination declares invincible, and awful to the sight. (VIII,256)

At first glance, this passage might seem to justify LaFrance's view that in Crane man's fears are always illusory and Colvert's similar assertion that in the Sullivan County stories, the countryside is transformed by "the hero's distraught fancy" into "a dream-like symbolic evocation of the world of nature" ¹⁹ But this passage from "Huckleberry Pudding" must be read with care. It does not assert that the imagination creates an always unwarranted fear of danger. Rather, it implies that real danger may exist ("the war-yell of the dreadful

¹⁹LaFrance, p. 35; James Colvert, "Stephen Crane: Style as Invention," in Joseph Katz, ed., Stephen Crane in Transition (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1972), p. 132. Also compare Bergon, p. 46: "The contrast between a character's delusions and Crane's 'ruthlessly revealing' vision is present . . . particularly in the early Sullivan County tales."

. . . the dreadful may be definite"), but says that the mistake made by human imagination is to declare that danger to be "invincible." In Crane, the threat posed by nature is never an invincible threat. After all, even in "The Open Boat," three of the four shipwrecked men do survive their ordeal at sea.

The other end of the spectrum of viewpoints concerning the dangers posed to man by nature, namely the view that the dangers are totally real and not at all exaggerated by humans, is not found in the Sullivan County tales. Yet this attitude does exist in early Crane writings, far earlier than "The Open Boat"; it can be found in such works as "The Wreck of the New Era" (c. 1891), "Across the Covered Pit" (c. 1890-92), "The Snake" (probably 1892 or 1894), and "The Fire" (1894).²⁰ "The Fire" and "The Snake" are good samples of this side of Crane's view of nature. The former, a report of a real or imaginary fire in a tenement building in New York City, clearly associates fire with nature and expresses fire's real danger to human beings.²¹ For example:

The scream [of a woman in the burning building] contained that ominous quality . . . which denotes fear of imminent death. . . . the crowd dully moaned, their eyes fascinated by this exhibition of the strength of nature, their master after all, that ate them and their devices at will They felt the human helplessness that comes when nature breaks forth in passion (VIII, 340,341)

²⁰For the problems involved in accurately dating the first and third of these works, see Bowers, Works, VIII, pp. 920, 786-788. "The Wreck of the New Era" is one of several early journalistic pieces showing that Crane's recognition of the fearsome power of the sea against man did not originate with "The Open Boat."

²¹This generalization would apply equally well to the fire in the later Crane story "The Monster."

Like the flames in "The Fire," the "rattle" of the reptile in "The Snake," coming "from some unknown and yet near place," grips the human present (in this case a solitary man with a dog) "like the fingers of a sudden death" The instinctive response to this death-threat by the man and the dog includes horror, terror, hatred, rage, and an impulse to defend self against the snake in "an extraordinarily muscular trial":

The man and the snake confronted each other. In the man's eyes was hatred and fear. . . . In the man was all the wild strength of the terror of his ancestors, of his race, of his kind. . . . This was another detail of a war that had begun evidently when first there were men and snakes. . . . Once there was a man and a snake who were friends, and at the end, the man lay dead In the formation of devices hideous and horrible, nature reached her supreme point in the making of the snake (VIII,65,66)²²

Thus we may conclude that in Crane's early writings as a whole, the threat to man represented by the forces of nature, though sometimes illusory and almost always exaggerated by man's unbecomingly excessive fears, is nonetheless often quite real.

Another common attitude toward nature found in Crane's writings is that though its "meaning" is ultimately inscrutable, man must and will continually search for that meaning. The protagonists in the Sullivan County stories are constantly exploring the "unknown" of nature, whether in the form of a cave in "Four Men in a Cave," the forest at the start of "The Black Dog" and "A Tent in Agony," a tree in "The Holler Tree," or a mountain in "The Mesmeric Mountain." The

²²Both Stallman, Sullivan County Tales and Sketches, p. 19, and Holton, p. 34, have expressed a view similar to mine on "The Snake," namely that the story is a non-ironic rendering of a terrifying confrontation of a man with actual danger.

philosophical implications of this human urge to explore nature are most clearly expressed in the Whilomville story "Lynx-Hunting." That story contrasts the adult prosaic or realistic view of the country setting as "merely so much distance between one place and another place . . ." with the boys' view of it as "that freeland of hills and woods in which they lived in some part their romance of the moment--whether it was of Indians, miners, smugglers, soldiers or outlaws." Further, "each boy had, I am sure, a conviction that some day the wilderness was to give forth to them a marvellous secret. They felt that the hills and the forest knew much It was vague, thrilling, fearful and altogether fabulous. . . . to the boys [the wilderness] spoke some great inspiriting word which they knew even as those who pace the shore know the enigmatic speech of the surf."²³

Crane is ambivalent about whether nature actually communicates the truth about itself to man or whether man is foolish when he hopes to penetrate nature's mystery. "Lynx-Hunting" does not definitely label the boys' view of nature an illusion, though words such as "romance" and ironic exaggerations like "marvellous secret" suggest that it may be. Often, though not invariably, Crane is skeptical of the childhood tendency to idealize, as can be seen in the talky, indeed windy, sketch "Coney Island's Failing Days" (1894), whose protagonist characterizes himself as a "'philosopher.'" This wordy observer, seeing the empty buildings of the summer resort in wintertime, compares them, with their "'extraordinarily optimistic architects,'" to

²³Works, VII, p. 139.

the "huge castles" of his own "youthful dreams." He sees "a mighty pathos in these gaunt and hollow buildings, impassively and stolidly suffering . . . ," in the same way that his own childhood ideals have suffered from a collision with reality, especially the reality of human smallness in relation to nature and nature's indifference to man: "the unchangeable, even imperturbable sea . . . has no thought for . . . man nor maid! . . . a man . . . always feels important when he is indulging in his favorite pastime, but the sea always makes me feel that I am a trivial object" Still the philosopher half believes that it would be better if man could retain his youthful dreams and ideals: "It is a mystery to me why some man does not provide a large number of wooden rocking horses and let the people sit and dreamfully rock themselves into temporary forgetfulness" (VIII,322-324).

At times, as in Crane's journalistic description of San Antonio titled "Stephen Crane in Texas," nature's secrets are presented as impenetrable: "The wind blows because it is the wind, the rain beats because it is the rain Who can fathom the ways of nature?" (VIII,470). More commonly, however, Crane's protagonist can come to understand something of the meaning of nature, as in "The Open Boat." An earlier story, "Mr. Binks' Day Off " (1894), presents its protagonists, Mr. and Mrs. Binks, as listening to "the mighty and mystic hymn of nature, whose melody is in each landscape. It appealed to their elemental selves. It was as if the earth had called recreant and heedless children and the mother word, of vast might and significance, brought them to sudden meekness" (VIII,309). As in "The Open

Boat," perceiving nature's greatness makes people meekly realize their own smallness and insignificance. A further similarity is that in "Mr. Binks' Day Off" nature's main message to man--conveyed by "the pines [that] were beginning to croon in a mournful key . . ." and illustrated symbolically by the sunset watched by the Binks couple until "the sun was dead"--is the inevitability of human death. The "song of the trees . . . was filled with an infinite sorrow--a sorrow for birth, slavery, death. . . . It celebrated all suffering. Each man finds in this sound the expression of his own grief." Likewise, "the mighty and indefinable changes" of the sunset "spoke to [the Binkses] of the final thing--the inevitable end"--i.e., death (VIII, 312-313).²⁴ In this poor story, Crane makes a mistake avoided in "The Open Boat": he indulges in the pathetic fallacy, in the process violating his own dictum that overt "preaching is fatal to art in literature."²⁵ Still, a final similarity to "The Open Boat" exists in that, though in both stories the what of nature's meaning becomes clear to man, the why of it, the why of death, remains

²⁴ Similar imagery of mournfully singing trees and shadowy sunsets is common in the Sullivan County tales, though in them Crane wisely lets the images carry their own meaning rather than ponderously explaining everything directly as he does in "Mr. Binks' Day Off." See the opening paragraph of "Killing His Bear": "In a field of snow some green pines huddled together and sang in quavers On the ridge-top a dismal choir of hemlocks crooned over one that had fallen. The dying sun created a dim purple As the red rays retreated, armies of shadows stole forward" (VIII, 249). The implications of death in these images are relevant to the plot of "Killing His Bear," which deals with the threat of death to the little man and the actual death of the bear.

²⁵ R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes, Stephen Crane: Letters (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1960), p. 158.

shrouded in mystery. At the end of nature's "sermon" to the Binkses, after the sun has set, Mr. Binks voices what the narrator terms "the unformulated question of the centuries": "'I wonder why,' he said; 'I wonder why the dickens it--why it--why--'" (VIII,313). There is no answer.

An understanding of the complex attitude toward nature and toward man's attempt to understand it in the works we have been considering is an aid in interpreting one of the best Sullivan County stories, "The Mesmeric Mountain," whose import is less simple than often thought. Although Gibson takes the lonely position that the little man at the end of this tale has "earn[ed] the right to swagger 'with valor' as he does [for] he has conquered the mountain . . . ," the usual reading of the tale is that represented by LaFrance, who describes the danger posed by the mountain to the little man as a mere mental illusion and who comments on the tale's ending that "Once the unknown summit is experienced, his illusion of the mountain's attempt to kill him collapses, and he shifts instantly from absurd terror to a sense of triumph just as absurd, as illusory, as his terror had been" ²⁶ But, as has already been shown, nature in many Crane stories does communicate or represent the eventual inevitability of death for every man. Colvert's view of the Sullivan County stories, though a partial corrective to the standard position on "The Mesmeric Mountain," still does not express fully Crane's ambiguity:

²⁶Gibson, p. 21; LaFrance, pp. 33, 34.

The recurrent motif . . . is vain human delusion in ironic contrast with a vast, remote, somber nature
. . . The little man is fond of melodramatic, self-assertive postures and resounding oratory celebrating his courage and other virtues, a demeanor which masks an almost hysterical fear and dread of what he takes to be the dark powers of the alien landscape. What makes it particularly sinister is its bewildering ambiguity,²⁷ for it sometimes seems benign and sympathetic

In point of fact, the attitude toward nature and toward the human protagonist in "The Mesmeric Mountain" is considerably closer to that found in "The Open Boat" than has been realized. The main difference between the two stories is that in the former the protagonist deliberately chooses to "confront" nature and discover its meaning--and is ridiculed by his friends for thinking that he will thus discover any romantic truths, for in the prosaic sense the road he wishes to explore merely "'leads to ol' Jim Boyd's over on the Lumberland Pike'" (VIII, 270, 269), whereas in "The Open Boat" the men have no choice but to confront nature and discover its meaning. In both stories, however, the protagonists share views of nature that are the extreme possibilities: that either it is beneficent toward man or it is antagonistic.

The little man in "Mesmeric Mountain" generally associates nature with "A grey, fat rabbit," "portals" (on two different occasions), "a lazy lake," and the "hush of evening, as if something were going to sing a hymn" In other words, he optimistically associates nature with positive images containing religious overtones--suggesting nature as the creation of a benign God. He discovers, though, that it

²⁷Colvert, Works, VI, pp. xvii-xviii.

is difficult, if not dangerous, to come to know nature truly, for he gets lost in the woods, is hindered by "obstructing branches," becomes soaked in water and mud, cut by rocks and "opposed by thickets," and ultimately sees the road "disappear from his feet" before he reaches the base of Jones's Mountain (VIII,268-270).

Next, he thinks he discovers that nature, which had seemed benevolent, actually is out to get him, like a malevolent God, for he sees "eyes" in the mountain, then feels the mountain approaching and following him, with its "heel . . . about to crush his head," its "peak . . . ever about to smite with a granite arm." In this situation, whereas the correspondent in "The Open Boat" merely longs to throw stones at the temple of this seemingly hostile God, the little man actually does so: "He grasped a handful of small stones and hurled them . . . against the face of the mountain" (VIII,271). But the truth is that man cannot alter nature or its meaning, cannot conquer the too-powerful forces of nature. The further truth is that nature, which seems alternately kind and antagonistic in this story, is in an objective view (as in "The Open Boat") indifferent, unconcerned. This fact is indicated by the story's final sentence, "The mountain under his feet was motionless," which has been anticipated in an earlier phrase in the story, "the pines stood motionless . . ." (VIII,271, 269). The vainglory of the little man at the end of "Mesmeric Mountain," which without doubt is treated ironically, is caused by his inaccurate impression that he has accomplished a victory over the mountain, over nature. It is not likely that he is being condemned for his desire to explore and understand nature, for as this story, along with several

other works by Crane discussed in this chapter, suggests, the urge to explore and understand the unknown is to Crane an irresistible human urge that is an integral part of human nature. James Colvert has often pointed out that the metaphor "of the little man in conflict with the hostile mountain" is "expressive of [Crane's] deepest sense of the meaning of life" and that "when we trace the metaphor of the mountain through [Crane's] poems, . . . we get further indication of its meaning."²⁸ Anyone familiar with Crane's poems pitting man against the mountain is not likely to accept the deflating irony directed against the little man in "Mesmeric Mountain" as evidence that Crane does not take the confrontation of man by nature and its companion, death, in deadly earnest.

In this chapter, I have suggested that the chief importance of Crane's early writings lies in their embodying his deeply ambivalent attitudes on several subjects that anticipate similar ambivalent views in his later, better fiction. These attitudes I have described as lying along the spectrum between the two extreme positions of romanticism and realism. In sum, the opposing attitudes between which Crane moves in these early writings may be listed as follows:

<u>Extreme Romantic Position</u>	<u>Extreme Realistic Position</u>
1. Genuine heroes and heroic actions exist in past and present rural America.	1. Purported heroes are creatures of "legends," i.e., lies.
2. Animals such as bears, panthers, hogs, snakes, etc., are a genuine	2. Animal prowess and danger to humans from animals have been

²⁸James Colvert, "Stephen Crane's Magic Mountain," in Maurice Bassan, ed., Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 95, 101.

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| <p>threat to human life.</p> <p>3. Soldiers, fighters, hunters, and other humans need, and can summon up, a true courage to subdue their fears and "be men."</p> <p>4. Human imagination is an aid in discovering the true meaning of the "unknowns" of nature and life.</p> <p>5. Nature is a powerful, dangerous antagonist, against which man is helpless, or, alternatively, a benevolent helper of man that it is foolish to fear.</p> | <p>vastly exaggerated by hunters.</p> <p>3. The courage shown by soldiers, fighters, hunters, and other humans is usually phony and/or foolish.</p> <p>4. Human imagination is the source of many illusions about life and fears about the "unknown" that need debunking.</p> <p>5. Nature is a force indifferent to man (and therefore sometimes hurtful to him) that must at times be confronted and that is powerful, but not <u>all</u>-powerful.</p> |
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I now wish to re-christen these two groups of extreme positions, which I have been calling "romantic" and "realistic," with the more precise and useful names subjective and objective.²⁹ Crane's writings, from the beginning of his career to its too early end, present a dipolar vision of man, nature, and life, constantly moving back and forth between the two poles of subjectivity and objectivity.³⁰ Further, it needs to be recognized that Crane's writings do not present the "subjective" view as being false to reality and the "objective" view as being reality itself.³¹ Rather, Crane's vision of reality itself is

²⁹These terms have had little vogue in previous Crane criticism, though Bergon's recent study of Crane does at times employ the word "subjective" and does discern some positive value in the subjective aspect of Crane's view of life; see, e.g., pp. 49, 51.

³⁰My physics is rusty, but I have used the word "dipolar" because its electrical and magnetic contexts seem to me to connote opposing poles or positions that continually hearken toward or communicate with each other, as in the "spectrum" effect of Crane's attitudes to which I have referred in this chapter.

³¹Bergon, p. 41, states that "To speak of Crane's 'double vision'

dipolar, one pole consisting of reality as seen, hoped for, or imagined by the subjective consciousness of man and the other pole of reality as it is or seems to be when looked at from the "out-there" or "not-me" of the cosmos rather than from the ego of the little man. Much Crane criticism has overstressed the objective half of Crane's dipolar vision, suggesting that Crane's works unambiguously imply that man can and should free himself from his subjective or romantic illusions and see the world "as it really is." But the very strength of Crane's work derives from its understanding that two realities exist, and that both must and will continue to exist in some sort of tension or uneasy accomodation. The realization that Crane's writings are deeply ambivalent between these two visions of reality, the subjective and the objective, is a necessity in order to achieve an adequate understanding not only of Crane's early works, with which this chapter has been concerned, but of his entire literary output. It is to the latter task that my subsequent chapters will be devoted.

is almost to indulge in a critical cliché," but accurately adds that "the problem with most discussions about Crane's 'double vision' is their emphasis upon the deflationary, negative, or ironic aspects of his imagination." In spite of Bergon's own attempts, here and elsewhere in his book, to give the subjective half of Crane's vision its due, even he tends to fall into the traditional way of misconstruing Crane's subjective insights into reality as illusion ("things are not what they seem to be . . .") and of disparaging the egocentric, idealizing tendencies of Crane's subjective vision as flaws that "consistently appear and sometimes betray the more serious concerns of his art" (pp. 41-42, 42).

Crane's Vision and Crane's Art:
 "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "The Monster"

Back in 1962, Edwin Cady did Crane criticism a service in noting that Crane was a "multivalent" personality with "an ideal of realism which had supplanted but not suppressed a boyish ideal of romance. And he had at last immitigably a self which could not be contained in either camp" ¹ Crane's ambivalence between romance and realism is clear in his brief appreciation of Ouida's sentimental novel Under Two Flags, titled "Ouida's Masterpiece" and published in January, 1897 --about the time Crane was writing "The Open Boat." Here Crane writes that "childhood's different ideal is often required to make us rise properly to [Ouida's] height of sentiment." He "had concluded that [he] had outgrown Ouida," but upon re-reading her novel he discovers that he is refreshed by the book's commitment to "nobility of character," to "virtue and heroism" Though Crane complains that Ouida's characters tend to be so noble or ideal that the reader who has experienced life's realities and his own imperfections feels their perfection of character not to be human, he balances this cynical observation with the thought that "perhaps it is rather a common habit [for the experienced man] to mistake a sort of a worldly complacence for knowledge." In its conclusion, Crane's Ouida article again shows the magnetic pull of both ideals and realism upon Crane:

¹Cady, Stephen Crane, p. 98.

Nevertheless, with all the cavilling of our modern literary class, it is good to hear at times the song of the brave, as in Under Two Flags . . . it is, of course, a thing of imperfect creation, but it voices nevertheless the spirit of dauntless deed and sacrifice which is the soul of literature in every age, and we are not growing too tired to listen, although we try to believe so. (VIII,677-678)

The idealistic-romantic side of Crane's dipolar vision might be called "sentimental tenderness" and the realistic-cynical side "irony of soul."² These terms are quoted from Crane's Cuban War story "This Majestic Lie" (1899), wherein Crane's description of the protagonist's duality sounds like a description of Crane's own ambivalent personality and artistic method.³ The protagonist, Johnnie, is called a "typical American" with a "spirit of contempt" for all of life's obstacles, a contempt stemming from his realistic and ironic view of life.⁴ What follows is a most significant passage for understanding both Crane's authentic dipolar vision and his aesthetic technique:

This irony was directed first at himself [Johnnie]; then at you; then at the nation and the flag; then at God. It was a midnight in which you searched for the little elusive ashamed spark of tender sentiment. Sometimes you thought this [irony] was all pretext . . . ; sometimes you thought he [the ironist] was a hardened savage; usually you did not think but waited in the cheerful certainty that in time the little flare of light [sentiment] would appear in the gloom.⁵

²Works, VI, p. 206.

³Cady, Stephen Crane, p. 91, and Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 353, make a similar identification of character with author in this story. However, it is not necessary to insist on this identification to realize that Johnnie's divided character in "This Majestic Lie" is a paradigm of Crane's ambivalence in point of view and theme in much of his best fiction.

⁴Works, VI, p. 205.

⁵Ibid., pp. 205-206, my emphasis.

The reader of Crane must resist the temptation to ignore or underestimate the idealistic, subjective side of his dipolar view or, more subtly, to recognize the existence of this subjective side but argue that its artistic effect is to flaw Crane's fictions by obscuring the "truths" about nature and life expressed by the realistic-objective side of his vision. James Colvert makes just such an argument to explain the artistic failure--as he sees it--of The Red Badge: "Crane's biography makes it clear that for all his cool skepticism and irony he was an imperfectly suppressed sentimentalist laboring under the spell of a naive heroic ideal."⁶ My own view, to the contrary, is that Crane's dipolar vision is an asset to his fiction. It contributes thematic strength because it recognizes the complexity and ultimately the inscrutability of man's life and his cosmos. It often contributes artistic strength as well, by adding the tension of ambivalence to the point of view, the metaphors and symbolism, and the tone. This chapter proposes to demonstrate the thematic and artistic strength contributed by Crane's dipolar vision to three of his best stories: "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "The Monster."

Before launching "The Open Boat," we must survey the complex issue of point of view use in Crane's writing, since point of view is one of Crane's chief vehicles for transmuting his ambivalent vision of life into aesthetically satisfying fiction. As long ago as 1950, John Berryman recognized that a Crane story directs both pathos and irony at its characters, for "a Crane creation, or character, normally

⁶Colvert, in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, p. 98.

is both pretentious and scared--the human condition; fitted by the second for pathos, by the first for irony."⁷ Stallman concurs that a Crane story contains "a double point of view" because Crane "felt pity for his characters, but he also recognized the irony of their plight." But, underestimating the ambivalence of Crane's vision, Stallman adds that in Crane's "unique combination of irony and pity--the ironic voice undercut S the sentiment" ⁸ LaFrance, stressing irony as Crane's quintessential characteristic, is constrained to argue that a Crane story does not express pity for the characters' "fear, vanity, desire, incompetence," because these are products of a false view of reality "wrought by the characters' excited imagination" and thus are subjective illusions. Thus, though LaFrance does recognize in Crane the "double vision of the ironist," he is, like Stallman, too quick to conclude that Crane's ironic fictions unambiguously seek "the piercing or deflation of appearance to bring about an awareness of reality."⁹

Holton comes to a fuller understanding of Crane's ambivalence of vision than do LaFrance and Stallman. To Holton, Crane always "was

⁷John Berryman, Stephen Crane (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962 [first published 1950]), p. 280.

⁸Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 102.

⁹LaFrance, pp. 247, 24, 251-252. Although LaFrance cites Andrew Wright's article on irony (p. 4), he overlooks Wright's cogent assertion that the ironist himself may have a divided vision and that his irony may thus express simultaneously "pity and laughter, sympathy and derision," because the ironist perceives "the contradictions in human experience," leading to "an ambivalence of attitude to one side and to the other." Thus, between reality and appearance, "the ironist /himself/ is not sure which is and which merely seems," (Andrew H. Wright, "Irony and Fiction," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 12 [Sept., 1953], 112-113, my emphasis).

aware of a dichotomy . . . between human apprehension of reality and reality itself," for "man and his subjective awareness are separated from objective reality" However, though Crane's protagonists make an attempt to apprehend reality objectively, man has an "essential incapacity to tolerate such an apprehensional engagement [with] essential reality" Thus there is always a "quality of uncertainty" or unsureness about "the nature of the reality which Crane's characters confront. Ultimately . . . the reality . . . is unknowable because it is too alien to be known."¹⁰ Because Holton senses the genuine uncertainty in Crane's fiction about what "reality" is, he can detect oversimplifications concerning the point of view in Crane's stories. For example, when Colvert states that "the narrative design of Crane's best fiction is defined by the tension between two ironically divergent points of view: the deluding point of view of the actors and the . . . ruthlessly revealing point of view of the observer-narrator," Holton objects that "it is not clear to me that Crane was really sure that his [observer-narrator's] vision was 'ruthlessly revealing.'"¹¹

Max Westbrook, in an illuminating recent essay, goes beyond Holton in discerning the duality within the point of view of Crane's characteristic fictions: "Crane's most characteristic . . . imagery . . . is written from a dualistic viewpoint and . . . neither viewpoint, by itself, represents the authorial voice." Though, adds

¹⁰Holton, pp. 273, 277-278, 280-281.

¹¹James B. Colvert, "Structure and Theme in Stephen Crane's Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Autumn, 1959), 200; Holton, p. 302, n. 20.

Westbrook, most critics believe "that the authorial voice is represented by the [ironic] language used to admonish characters for their improper reactions to events," actually "neither the bare content of a character's response nor the ironic expression of that response is representative of Crane's [total] viewpoint"; for "Crane's characteristic stance is neither 'the view from the balcony' (that of the removed and ironic observer) nor the 'view from the boat' (that of the intimate and sympathetic observer). . . . essential to the Crane style is the use of both at once"12

Several attempts have been made to describe the typical point of view employed by Crane in his works. LaFrance feels that the Crane of The Red Badge and George's Mother uses the third-person limited point of view,¹³ but insofar as this term implies the absence of a separate narrator in these works, it is inaccurate; for in The Red Badge, Crane slips "into and out of free indirect discourse," or in other words, into Henry Fleming's consciousness and out of it into a narrator's consciousness.¹⁴ The term used by Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate to describe this method of telling a story is "concealed narrator." A concealed narrator knows all there is to know about the characters, and he readily may "shift from one character to another, either backing off at varying distances or moving into their point of view." In "The

¹²Max Westbrook, "Whilomville: the Coherence of Radical Language," in Katz, Crane in Transition (1972), pp. 88, 89, 91.

¹³LaFrance, p. 172.

¹⁴W. M. Frohock, "The Red Badge and the Limits of Parody," Southern Review, 6 n.s. (Winter, 1970), 146, 145.

Open Boat," say Gordon and Tate, "Crane [as narrator] is in the boat with his shipwrecked men," especially with the correspondent, who "sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches for us"; this is the "Concealed Narrator . . . method."¹⁵

Unfortunately for the usefulness of this term, however, the narrator in "The Open Boat" and in many other Crane stories is scarcely very "concealed," since he often addresses the reader directly in his own voice, as in the well-known sentence "Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque."¹⁶ Orm Øverland, who views Crane as an impressionist, tries at first to force on Crane's work a point of view that eliminates "an explaining and describing narrator who stands between the reader and the world of the novel." But Øverland soon admits that in The Red Badge Crane as narrator does not really withdraw, but instead "comment[s] on his characters, albeit somewhat more subtly than in the traditional 19th century novel." Øverland calls Crane's chief technique for narrational interpretation of characters' actions "substitutionary speech." Substitutionary speech is a "way of representing what a character says or thinks" by means of a narrative in which "the author speaks on his own behalf giving information of the content of a character's speech without [sic] pretending to reproduce the words of the character" Thus the narrator

¹⁵Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, eds., The House of Fiction, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 442, 213.

¹⁶Works, V, p. 69. Further references to the stories contained in this volume will be identified by volume number and page in the body of the text.

speaks through the character, and conversely the character speaks through the narrator.¹⁷ Perhaps the best term to fit Øverland's accurate description of Crane's usual point-of-view practice is "neutral omniscience." As defined by Norman Friedman, neutral omniscience "differs from Editorial Omniscience only in the absence of direct authorial intrusions (the author speaks impersonally in the third person) Regarding characterization, although an" author using the neutral omniscience point of view "may allow his people to speak and act for themselves, his predominant tendency is to describe and explain them to the reader in his own voice."¹⁸

Gordon and Tate have said that Crane's "chief [literary] strength is his masterly handling of [point of view, of] the fundamental problem: on whose authority . . . is the story told?"¹⁹ Crane, though, does not employ different points of view in different stories in the way that Henry James, James Joyce, and other modern masters of the art of fiction do. Crane rarely uses any method of narration except that of omniscience. Crane's success lies in having discovered and employed a point of view, neutral omniscience, that is superbly suited to his bipolar vision of life. For in Crane's version of neutral omniscience,

¹⁷Orm Øverland, "The Impressionism of Stephen Crane," in Sigmund Skard and Henry H. Wasser, eds., *Americana Norvegica*, I (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), pp. 250, 264, 262. Frohock, in his article on *The Red Badge*, p. 145, makes the similar observation that in describing a character's thoughts, Crane's narrative "does not persistently use language similar to that of the character's quoted discourse."

¹⁸Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction" (1955), in Robert Murray Davis, ed., *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 156, my emphasis.

¹⁹Gordon and Tate, p. 211.

the thoughts and beliefs of the two "poles," the characters and the narrator, tend to move toward and merge with each other, producing an ambiguity that often makes interpretation difficult but that is supremely true to Crane's vision of the ambiguity of reality.²⁰

This merging process has been best described by Joseph Brennan, who holds critics such as Colvert to be in error when they hypothesize in Crane's writings "a clear line of demarcation between the limited viewpoint of the involved character and the cosmic viewpoint of the detached, ironic narrator." Actually, says Brennan, Crane as narrator often fuses "the two perspectives into one and directly intrudes his ironic perspectives into the very thoughts and words of his characters." This fusing process is sometimes reversed, so that we may find either an "outright intrusion of the narrator's attitude into the characters' . . . thoughts and words, or the transposition, conversely, of the subjective perspective of the character into the objective narrative statement" Brennan attacks this fusing process as a "defect of Crane's style and technique."²¹ On the contrary, I find it a strength, for the ambivalence created by this technique mirrors Crane's dipolar view of reality: thus point of view embodies theme. Robert Albrecht has excellently summarized the way in which Crane's neutrally-omniscient point of view can, at its best, parallel and

²⁰Bergon, p. 18, shows good insight into the ambiguity produced by Crane's characteristic point of view use.

²¹Joseph X. Brennan, "Stephen Crane and the Limits of Irony," Criticism, 11 (Spring, 1969), 183, 184.

reflect his private vision of reality's ambiguity. Crane's characters and his "narrator can be used to suggest different views of reality while neither can speak with final authority. The device frees Crane from explaining his own views . . . in some didactic fashion and from using one character to present his views. . . . The characters, the narrator, the audience and even the author share the problem of perceiving reality."²²

If The Red Badge, "The Five White Mice," and "The Open Boat" are the pinnacles of Crane's fiction, as I believe they are, "The Open Boat," by widespread critical agreement, is the highest of the high. I feel "The Open Boat" is a thematic success because it excellently projects Crane's vision of the ambiguity of reality: its subjective and its objective "versions" and its ultimate mysteriousness. It is an aesthetic success largely because its point of view and its network of image and symbol excellently link up with and reinforce its thematic content.

Considerable ink has been spilt over the theme of "The Open Boat," especially upon the attitude toward nature that it expresses. Superficially, the story seems to suggest that nature's indifference is the reality and that the protagonists' subjective view of nature as hostile is mere illusion, but this hasty generalization is inadequate. Mordecai Marcus has often been praised (justly) for tracing in "The

²²Robert C. Albrecht, "Content and Style in The Red Badge of Courage," College English, 27 (Jan., 1966), 492. Compare the earlier quotation from Westbrook (n. 12) and Bergon's trenchant warning against "the tendency to stress the narrator's 'true' vision as opposed to a character's 'false' vision . . ." (p. 48).

Open Boat" the characters' "three-fold view of nature . . . first as malevolently hostile, then as thoughtlessly hostile, and finally as wholly indifferent."²³ Still, the story's movement is less programmatic, more ambiguous, than Marcus' analysis suggests. Colvert believes that though most critics (like Marcus) read the story's wind-tower section, wherein the correspondent deduces nature's indifference, "as an expression of not only the correspondent's conclusion, but of Crane's as well," it would be more accurate to say "that Crane's irony extends beyond the correspondent's final conviction about the relation of man to nature" Solomon goes a step farther, seeing the relativity of reality pictured in "The Open Boat": "The sea . . . is both splendid and treacherous"; thus "nature's benignity or malevolence is not absolute; it all depends on the viewpoint."²⁴

That the view of nature as actively antagonistic toward man is not, to Crane, sheer illusion is well seen in two of his best journalistic pieces, "In the Depths of a Coal Mine" (1894) and "Nebraska's Bitter Fight for Life" (1895). In the former, the roof of the coal mine symbolizes "a superlative might that regarded with the supreme calmness of almighty power the little men at its mercy." Later, "the meaning of it all [the mining process] . . . is war. . . the endless battle between man and nature," and nature is the miners' "enemy" Still later, "man is in the implacable grip of nature. It

²³Mordecai Marcus, "The Three-Fold View of Nature in 'The Open Boat,'" Philological Quarterly, 41 (April, 1962), p. 512.

²⁴Colvert, "Style and Meaning in Stephen Crane: The Open Boat," Texas Studies in English, 37 (1958), 44; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 164.

has only to tighten slightly and he is crushed like a bug" (VIII,594, 596,599). In the same vein, nature in "Nebraska's Bitter Fight for Life" is "the pitiless enemy" and the farmers, because of nature's drought, are fighting "a long war with cold and hunger"; "it was as if upon the massive altar of the earth, their homes were being offered in sacrifice to the wrath of some blind and pitiless deity" (VIII,412,411, 410). In this Western journalistic piece, Crane writes also that nature's punishment of the men is "strange" and nature's wrath "in-scrutable . . ." (VIII,411,410). Clearly, the view of nature in Crane's works is one of dual realities--to the subjective human ego, nature is hostile toward man (or, sometimes, favorable to him), while from the point of view of the objective cosmos, nature is indifferent or blind toward man--and beyond these opposing twin realities, nature is in-scrutable, a mystery. Significantly, "Nebraska's Bitter Fight for Life" projects not only the view of nature as Crane sees it, but also the human response to nature as he would wish it and as "The Open Boat" portrays it. The drought-plagued farmers are praised as "sturdy and dauntless" men who possess "the profound and dogged courage of the American peoples who have come into the West"; "they depend upon their endurance, their capacity to help each other, and their steadfast and unyielding courage" (VIII,412,411,420).

The point of view of neutral omniscience is a major medium through which the central theme of "The Open Boat"--the ambiguous reality of nature--is conveyed. To see this, consider some samples of the use of point of view early in this story. Its second paragraph reads:

Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most

wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each
froth-top was a problem in small boat navigation. (V,68)

Are these thoughts the narrator's or the characters'? The first sentence, though presumably the narrator's, contains thoughts that could equally well fit the characters; already, ambiguity creeps in. The second sentence's thoughts again seem appropriate for both characters and narrator, though the language is evidently that of the narrator, especially the ironic ring of "most wrongfully and barbarously." Four paragraphs later comes a clear example of the omniscient narrator interpreting in his language the captain's feelings, in the passage beginning with "The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her" Two paragraphs farther on, as an extended simile compares the boat to a "bucking broncho," the thoughts are apparently those of the characters presented in the language of the narrator; yet again, the narrator might well share these thoughts (V, 68-69).²⁵

The following paragraph, the longest in section I of the story, will serve well as an exemplar of the way in which the subjective vision of the characters and the objective vision of the narrator alternately counterpoint, move toward, and at times even mesh with each other throughout "The Open Boat":

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact
that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover
that there is another behind it just as important
and just as nervously anxious to do something effective

²⁵Compare Bergon, p. 18: "Sometimes . . . it is difficult to know exactly who is talking in a Crane sentence, whose observations are being recorded. Are they the author's, the narrator's, a character's, or those of an impersonal but all-seeing eye?"

in the way of swamping boats. In a ten-foot dingey one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience, which is never at sea in a dingey. As each slaty wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests. (V,69)

The use of "you" in the first sentence and "one" in the second suggests that it is the narrator speaking here, and the second sentence has the clear after-the-fact ring of the retrospective narrator. Yet nothing in these thoughts is unavailable to the men in the boat, either, and in fact the implication in the first sentence that the sea is consciously or intentionally out to swamp the boat is more plausibly the characters' than the narrator's. The third sentence expresses a clearer division, through the word "imagine," between the limited and subjective viewpoint of the characters and the wider insight of the narrator, who is free of the impression that each wave rolling in on the boat is the last and most grimly malevolent effort of the sea to overturn it. The final sentence beautifully compresses the ambivalence between subjective and objective views into the oxymoron "terrible grace" used to describe the waves. Seen from an external or objective point of view, as "from a balcony," like the narrator's, the sea's "grace" and "picturesque" beauty can be observed; yet from the internal or subjective view of the men in the boat, nature seems "terrible" in its impulse to drown them. In the oxymoronic "terrible grace," the two dipolar views of reality are coalesced, which implies that the narrator is capable

of empathizing with the characters' subjective view of nature and the characters of understanding the narrator's objective view. The former is certainly true, as seen, for instance, in the third and fourth sentences of section II's opening paragraph: "It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild" The ironic "probablys" mark this as the narrator's thought, yet the very irony of "probably" (rather than saying "certainly") implies that the narrator deeply comprehends the characters' opposing attitude toward the sea. Similarly, the men in the boat, at least the correspondent, are capable at times of sharing the narrator's objective attitude toward nature. That this is so is evidenced in the correspondent's view of "the tall wind-tower" as a symbol of nature's feeling toward man: "not . . . cruel . . . , nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent" (V,69,70,88).²⁶

It is through the fluctuating relationship between the narrator's and the characters' viewpoints that the significant themes of "The Open Boat" become clear. Because of their subjectivity, the shipwrecked men, the reader comes to realize, alternate between egotistical inflation of their importance in the universe and consequent preposterous certainty that nature cannot drown them and the equally self-centered feeling that they are mice whom nature is consciously, actively out to pulverize. The objective point of view of the narrator helps

²⁶Not only the point of view of "The Open Boat," but also its structure, parallels and reinforces the story's subjective/objective ambivalence of theme. See Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 161, who calls the story "paradoxical in form . . . man is helpless, yet the individual ego is all-engrossing; nature is indifferent, yet its opposition is overwhelming; the shore (safety, life) is within sight, yet the sea (danger, death) makes the land seem far away."

the reader perceive that the crew of the boat exaggerate nature's beneficence or malevolence toward them. However, it is also because the view of the men is subjective that they are able to establish "the subtle brotherhood of men" described in section III; for that brotherhood was not occasioned by a pragmatic, objective "recognition [that it] was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. . . . this comradeship . . . the correspondent; . . . who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew . . . was the best experience of his life" (V,73, my emphasis).²⁷

The passages of philosophical speculation in "The Open Boat" likewise reveal their meaning through the modulations of the neutrally omniscient point of view. In the "If I am going to be drowned . . ." passage in section IV, the narrator's "perchance" formulation of the men's reflections on their peril indicates again that they are exaggerating their own importance to nature; they feel that nature is either absurdly determined to drown them or kindly determined not to drown them. The narrator adds that one of the men "might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds. 'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!'" (V,77). Later, early in section VI, we discover that a similar futile human gesture of challenging nature may still occur even when humans see more objectively that nature is not purposefully antagonistic toward man, for "When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she

²⁷Compare the passage cited earlier from "This Majestic Lie" in which Johnnie's "sentimental tenderness" flashes through his "irony of soul."

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" (V,84-85). Of course, shaking fists or throwing things at nature is not a praiseworthy response to the human condition (it is in fact always presented as foolish behavior in Crane, as in "The Mesmeric Mountain," discussed in Chapter One, or in Henry Fleming's fist-shaking rage at the wafer-like sun in The Red Badge). But the important point here is that even after his exposure to the objective reality of nature's indifference, the correspondent continues to feel supremely important to himself and to let his response to nature be colored by that subjective reality.

A parallel situation occurs early in section VII, just after the "tall wind-tower" passage in which the correspondent has again objectively recognized nature's indifference toward man:

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 and have them taste wickedly in his mind and wish for another chance. A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction, or at a tea. (V,88)

Brennan objects to the second sentence of this passage as one of Crane's "most flagrant intrusions into the minds of his characters," because "the ironic narrator . . . subverts the psychological plausibility and the supposed value of the experience which he is reporting" ²⁸ But the whole point of this section of the story is

²⁸Brennan, "Stephen Crane and the Limits of Irony," p. 196.

the ambivalence of the impact of his sea experience on the correspondent. On the one hand, as the narrator's first sentence above states, a man who objectively recognizes nature's unconcern for him is thrown back on a human moral code for something of value to adhere to, and sincerely desires to do right and avoid wrong according to such a code. But the second sentence, returning to the subjective half of Crane's dipolar vision, makes it clear that it is not easy for self-centered human beings either to discern what right moral action is, or if they could discern it, to apply it to the important actions of their lives, as opposed to trivial matters of social ritual and conformity, such as "an introduction, or . . . a tea" (V,88).²⁹

Just as the point of view of "The Open Boat" reinforces aspects of its theme, so also do patterns of repeated words, phrases, and images. Since much has been written by other commentators on the domestic, animal, and color imagery in "The Open Boat," I shall discuss instead two other less remarked on but significant language patterns in the story. The first of these is revealed in the following passages:

The oiler was steering with one of the two oars in the boat . . . It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

Even as the light-house was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper.

The coast was of dunes topped with dark vegetation A tiny house was blocked out black upon the

²⁹Marcus, p. 514, concurs that the correspondent's belief here that he "will easily improve himself" morally in the future is an "illusion" But LaFrance, p. 203, misses completely the ambivalence and irony of this section (as well as other sections) of "The Open Boat," with disastrous results, I feel, for his overall interpretation of the story.

sky. Southward, the slim lighthouse lifted its little
grey length.

(V,68,74,76, my emphasis)

The land represents safety and life to the men, and the boat's oar represents a means--human effort--of achieving that safety. But the patterned language repetitions suggest that human safety, indeed human existence, is a slim thing and that human effort is a thin reed on which to rely for safety. The land itself is no sure refuge; it offers no safety to the oiler's body at the end of the story. The land in "The Open Boat" also is commonly depicted, as in the above passages, as a dark, shadowy presence, the implication being that human life is dark and gloomy and human existence even on land an insubstantial, ephemeral thing, like a shadow.³⁰

Because human life, under the conditions of the indifferent/antagonistic cosmos, is often melancholy, life sometimes, especially under extreme conditions like exposure to the sea's fury in a small boat, seems a more unhappy state than death. "The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end" (V,83, my emphasis). This fact suggests how the water of the sea, representing nature's constant threat to extinguish human life, can ambiguously be both "cold" and "comfortable" to the correspondent.³¹ When man "suf-

³⁰Compare George Monteiro, "The Logic Beneath 'The Open Boat,'" Georgia Review, 26, (Fall, 1972), 327: In "The Open Boat," "Crane makes convincingly real . . . just how precarious and tentative man's hold upon life actually is. What wastes away in the course of events is the unexamining man's sense of his own self-assurance, comfort, and safety."

³¹Philip Rahv, "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction" (1955), in Davis, p. 110, attempts to prove, contra Stallman, that this "cold, comfortable" phrase is not paradoxical at all but, considered in con-

fer^s a bodily depression" from lying in the "cold sea-water" conditions of his existence, he may come to feel that to be tossed into the ocean water would be like being "tumbled comfortably out upon . . . a great soft mattress." And when in the event the correspondent does go overboard, his response is paradoxical: "The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic," yet "he reflected that when one gets properly wearied, drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief" That this condition of human weariness of the war ("hostilities") against the indifferent/antagonistic cosmos is not intended by Crane as another foolish human response, like shaking fists or throwing things at nature, but rather as a transitory feeling that comes at times to men who for the most part courageously struggle to live (as, of course, do all four of the men in the boat), is indicated by a sentence early in the story that describes the captain as "at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down" (V, 86, 78, 90-91, 68, my emphasis).

A second, previously unobserved pattern of repeated words in "The Open Boat" has to do with the results suffered or feared by the men from the sea's activity. When it appears as if it will succeed in drowning them, they blame the "old ninny-woman, Fate, who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she

text, realistic, because it refers to the water "in the boat [[]], which[]] feels 'comfortable' as against the waves beating at the boat" Unfortunately for Rahv's argument, the paradoxical attitude toward the sea-water in "The Open Boat" is not limited to the water within the boat, as I shall show.

not do it in the beginning . . ." (V,77). At other times, when it seems as if they may escape the sea's clutches, the men often ascribe their salvation to miracle:

The little boat, splashed viciously by the crests, made progress She seemed just a wee thing wallowing, miraculously, top-up

[The] oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf and took her to sea again.

. . . suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat, and it was a wonder that it did not set the cook afloat in his life-belt.

A large wave caught [the correspondent] and flung him with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck him . . . as . . . a true miracle of the sea.

(V,73,77,83,91, my emphasis)

If "Fate" connotes a malevolent force in this story, "miracle," with its Christian context, implies a beneficent force. These two, though opposite, are both subjective views of the men; actually, in the objective view, the happenings in the story that the men see, depending on the situation, as either fated or miraculous are simply operations of the chance universe in which humans dwell. In this symbolism once more is mirrored the story's balance between subjective and objective views of reality.³²

An intriguing symbol in "The Open Boat" is the "idiot with the

³²Note the combination of "miracles" (chance) and "fast and steady oarsmanship" (courageous human effort) that saves the boat from overturning in the second of the four passages quoted here. Implied is Crane's attitude toward human bravery in the face of the indifferent cosmos: because of the operations of chance, it may or may not succeed in its goal (the oiler does eventually die), but it is nonetheless a good thing and always a positive value in Crane. Compare Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Unmistakable Stephen Crane," PMLA, 73 (Dec., 1958), 565.

coat" who, as one of a resort-hotel group on the shore, waves cheerfully at the men in the boat. The men try to find "some reason" in his wave--to make it out to be a signal "to go north" where "a life-saving station" may be, or something of that sort; but they are forced to conclude that his waving "don't mean anything." This waving man, as a member of a group on land, symbolizes society's indifference to or incapacity to help other men, who essentially must depend on their own effort and on chance in their troubles of life. It is also possible that the waving man suggests a God-figure, cheerfully ignorant of or unconcerned about the melancholy human condition, since in castigating the man on the shore for his unhelpful, meaningless waving, one of the boatsmen "allow/s/ his voice to express his impious mood . . ." (V,80, my emphasis). In any case, the men's subjective reactions of frustration, hatred, and fury at the waving man who does nothing to help them are, to the reader, both inane self-projections and quite empathetic complaints against the absurdity of the indifferent universe. Ambivalence reigns again.

If the insights developed in the foregoing analysis of point of view and of language and symbol in "The Open Boat" are applied to the story's two concluding sections, it is possible to correct the widespread critical impression that the correspondent by this time has largely or totally discarded his subjective or "illusory" view of matters in favor of an objective "realism." Confusion on this matter is considerable, as is reflected in the following flawed interpretations: the correspondent's "rebirth after immersion in the sea" has made him cast off the last vestiges of his crippling ego"; the corre-

spondent "has . . . learned to look with detachment" and has achieved "freedom from self and sentimentality . . ."; "the self-absorbed, questioning, and even raging correspondent becomes a calm, depersonalized observer"; "the correspondent is the only one of Crane's heroes who is allowed to see beyond the curtain of his conceit."³³ The first three of these interpretations are clearly erroneous, and the fourth, is, as Huck Finn would say, a considerable "stretcher." On the other hand, Clark Griffith goes too far in the opposite direction when he claims that man as Crane views him is incapable of any significant learning from his experiences and, accordingly, that the three survivors of the shipwreck in "The Open Boat" are going to reject totally "the scientific view of their ordeal" for one more "sentimental" and ego-flattering.³⁴ Not so: actually, Crane's characters in this story (specifically the correspondent) come to hold the two dipolar views of reality simultaneously, rather than to discard either one of them for the other.

Far from becoming a paragon of objectivity as a result of his new insights into the nature of the universe, the correspondent retains considerable subjectivity. When he objectively recognizes nature's indifference toward man early in section VI, he reacts to that recognition emotionally, feeling "the pathos of his situation"; and it is "to chime the notes of his emotion" that the poem about the soldier dying in Algiers "mysteriously entered [his] head." He recalls that,

³³Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 172; Levenson, Works, V, p. lxvii; Bergon, p. 91; Colvert, in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, p. 105.

³⁴Clark Griffith, "Stephen Crane and the Ironic Last Word," Philological Quarterly, 47 (Jan. 1968), 83, 86-87.

as a child, he had lacked sympathy for others faced with the human condition, such as the dying soldier. But now that he has personally experienced the indifference of nature and the "thinness" of human safety and life, the soldier's death strikes him as an emblem of human reality, "a human, living thing. . . . stern, mournful, and fine." The paradoxical language used here by the omniscient narrator to describe the correspondent's feelings suggests not so much a retreat from subjective emotions to objective reason as an attempt to purify the natural, self-centered human emotions by extending them to include a brotherly love for others: "The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the dying soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier . . . who lay dying in Algiers." The implications of the word "dreaming" in this passage are important. Earlier in the tale, the cook was excoriated by the oiler and the correspondent for murmuring "dreamfully" about his desire to eat pie and ham sandwiches (V, 85-86, 81-82). Whether dreaming about pie or a dying soldier, the cook and the correspondent are equally indulging in the unavoidable human tendency to subjectify reality, which--in Crane's characteristically ambivalent view--is both comically ridiculous and tragically understandable, even valuable. In fact, the central theme of "The Open Boat," the ambiguous nature of reality, is well served by the mixed objectivity and subjectivity of the correspondent's feeling of brotherhood: it is an impersonal love for others that originates in and grows out of his egotistical and self-pitying love for himself.

Just before the men are overturned into the sea, the correspondent "knew that the others were not afraid," which indicates the shipwrecked men's continued courage and endurance under the indifferent/hostile conditions of life. Yet the correspondent continues to view the sea and his own possibly imminent death in a largely subjective manner: "It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame." "The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic." "It the shore, life seemed . . . very attractive . . ." "He thought: 'I am going to drown? Can it be possible?'" (V,89-91). This last question is followed by the narrator's succinct statement of the necessary subjectivity in humans' view of reality: "perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature" (V, 91). The key word here is "must," for it signifies that even after they have become aware of the objective realities of the cosmos, humans, because they are human, must and will continue to see reality subjectively. In fact, in these late sections of "The Open Boat," the omniscient narrator's view at times appears to coalesce with the correspondent's subjective one, as in the sentence just quoted and the following two: "The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable." "The correspondent remained in the grip of this strange new enemy--a current" (V,89-91,my emphasis). Who can separate here, with any real confidence, the narrator's vision from the protagonist's vision?

Similarly ambiguous--as some, though hardly all, commentators on "The Open Boat" have been aware--is the story's final sentence: "When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and

the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters" (V,92). Marcus, wrongly I think, detects a contrast (rather than a congruity) of the pacing waves here and the threatening waves earlier in the story which, he claims, "reveal[s a] change of the men's vision of the sea. [It] no longer seems hostile to them" Westbrook and Holton under-rate the irony of the word "felt" in claiming respectively that here "the values of the authorial voice are directly sympathetic with those of the characters . . ." and that the correspondent now "can complete his return to [society] by communication of the fruit of his vision to his fellows." Certainly it is true that the men have acquired a better objective comprehension of nature's power and its indifference toward humans from their experiences in the open boat. But the ironic word "felt" insists on an element of unvanquished egocentric vanity in the men's final "understanding" of the sea. After all, who are they to think that they have totally comprehended the natural universe-- particularly since, as has been shown, they have continued to think of their own possible deaths as sad and tragic even while ostensibly recognizing nature's lack of concern for them? Holton does make a perceptive remark on the ambiguity of this final sentence, which, he says, "suggests that Crane, far from accepting a view of an objectively real world, . . . has here moved to a more qualified, subjective, and even existential understanding of reality" Equally valuable is Colvert's statement that "in the reverberating ironies of the [story's] last word [interpreters] . . . the final meaning of the

men's experience escapes at last into mystery."³⁵ Just so: in the ambivalent world of Stephen Crane, wherein man is forever dangling between subjective and objective conceptions of reality, any human interpretations of the meaning of it all are bound to be incapable of much illuminating its shadowy mystery.

In my view, "The Five White Mice" is, with "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge, Crane's most aesthetically satisfying and thematically intense exploration of his master-theme, the dipolar nature of reality and the ultimate inscrutability of the universe. But to turn from "The Open Boat" to "Five White Mice" is, according to most past criticism, to take a giant tumble downward. It is hard to believe that "Five White Mice" has been so undervalued by Crane scholars. Berryman fails to include it in his list of Crane's twenty-plus best fictions; Gibson finds it "inferior . . . aesthetically" to the less than gem-like Western tale "A Man and Some Others"; and Stallman, dutifully recording Ford Madox Ford's idiosyncratic view that "Five White Mice" is one of the world's great stories, rejoins that it is not even "one of Crane's major stories," let alone one of the world's best.³⁶ Holton considers "The Open Boat" (1897) to be chronologically "the first of Crane's major short stories," a judgment that again slights "Five White Mice" (1896), while LaFrance barely acknowledges the latter work's

³⁵Marcus, p. 515; Westbrook, in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 91; Holton, pp. 168, 167n.; Colvert, "The Open Boat," p. 45. Greenfield, p. 565, parallels Colvert's view, and James Nagel, "The Narrative Method of 'The Open Boat,'" Revue des Langues Vivantes, 39 (Sept-Oct. 1973), 416-417, also warns against exaggerating the degree of insight into life that the surviving men have achieved.

³⁶Berryman, p. 265; Gibson, p. 120; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 331.

existence, lumping it (in a chapter titled "Any Sort of Stuff that Would Sell") among those writings "distinguished by the absence of Crane's psychological pattern" and asserting that the story's protagonist exhibits no real courage but "merely the appearance of . . . courage" ³⁷

Those few scholars who have been kinder to "Five White Mice" have not convincingly justified their view. Gullason lists it among Crane's thirteen best short stories, but then damns it with faint praise indeed by labelling it and "The Wise Men" "good yarns, told with directness and vigor, [which] touch upon deeper philosophical issues like chance and fate." Cady includes "Five White Mice" with "The Monster," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Blue Hotel," and "Death and the Child" as "a series of [Crane's] finest short pieces," but offers nary a clue to why he rates "Five White Mice" so high. ³⁸

If we seek a reason for the widespread disparagement of "Five White Mice," we find that critics have usually impugned the story's structure. The earliest such attack is Berryman's--the story "is imperfectly united, halves fall apart . . ."--and his opinion is echoed and expanded by Gibson: "structurally the tale falls into two parts The first part is . . . too long. It overbalances the second; it is less interesting and relevant to the main concern of the story." LaFrance compounds the felony by adding to previous complaints that

³⁷Holton, p. 159; LaFrance, pp. 190, 180n., my emphasis.

³⁸Thomas A. Gullason, "Stephen Crane's Short Stories: The True Road," in Thomas A. Gullason, ed., Stephen Crane's Career (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 471, 478; Cady, Stephen Crane, p. 60.

"Five White Mice" is "structurally broken in the middle" and has a "sluggish first part" the additional lament that there is "an awkward shift in tone" from the humor and horseplay of the first part "to the tense confrontation in the second part."³⁹ I believe that these findings of structural and tonal failure in "Five White Mice" are merely results of a failure to analyze the story carefully and in detail. In reality, "Five White Mice" is a well-structured story, tightly unified by one of Crane's more common methods, one also found in "The Open Boat" --patterned language repetitions and symbols--and its tone does not lack consistency either, for considerable dramatic tension is involved in the dice-playing of its first part and much humor is mixed with the dramatic confrontation of its final section.

Looked at closely, "Five White Mice" is seen to have a three-part structure rather than the two-part one suggested by Berryman, Gibson, and LaFrance. The story's first part depicts a gambling scene in a Mexico City bar; the second part, slightly shorter than either of the other two, follows the protagonist, the New York Kid, out onto the streets to a circus and back to the streets to meet two drunken companions; the final part details a weapon-wielding street confrontation between the three North American men and three Mexicans. The tale's first part focuses on the "five white mice of chance," the dice with which the men in the bar are gambling, while the second part centers around "the comic, foolish, wise clown" that the New York Kid sees at the circus (V,42,44). These two images--the mice of chance and the

³⁹Berryman, p. 109; Gibson, p. 120; LaFrance, p. 180n.

both wise and foolish clown--become central symbols in the story, the focus of a network of related words and elements that effectively unites all three of the story's sections and conveys Crane's vision of the mysterious character of the universe and the deeprooted ambivalence of human nature.

In the initial scene in the bar, gambling with dice is presented, with Crane's usual ambivalence of tone, both ironically and seriously. Crane's universe is a universe of chance, and in such a universe gambling, which by its very nature is chancy, is both a metaphor of that chance universe and a ridiculous yet appropriate response by weak humanity to the power of the chance universe and its indifference toward men. Seen ironically, gambling in "Five White Mice" is a comic activity, one whose chances of success are grossly exaggerated by human vanity. Gambling is described as a "craving" that "went along the line [of men] like an epidemic In a moment they had arranged a carnival of dice-shaking with money penalties and liquid prizes." When the gamblers run out of things to gamble for, "A man called out in the exuberance of creation. 'I know! Let's gamble for a box tonight at the circus!' The group was profoundly edified" (V,39-40). Most ridiculous of all to Crane is man's clown-like propensity to feel personal vanity when the chance universe awards him dicing success:

The tall man . . . flung the two other dice [and] . . . extracted one more pink king. . . . He began to swagger in a sort of provisional way.

. . . a man was afflicted with a stroke of dice-shaking.
. . . Occasionally he made great combinations. "Look at that, would you?" he cried proudly. (V,40,39,my emphasis)

This foolish self-pride is paralleled in the story's final section by the "rage made by vanity" and the smirk of "eager cruelty [and] satisfaction" of the knife-wielding Mexican desperado, who, like the gamblers, does not realize that chance may not always favor him--in fact, he soon learns that his knife may not win the day, for his opponents too are armed (V,47).

"Five White Mice," however, also recognizes a serious side to the fact that the mice of chance ultimately control human destiny, a serious side in which man's reaction to the reign of chance is not comic vanity but a show of courage. The New York Kid has had "flaming ill-luck" in gambling, having "'had no luck for two days.'" He gets involved in a dice-shaking contest, wagering a box seat at the circus, in which contest "fate presented [the Kid's opponent] with five queens."⁴⁰ Faced with losing to the five queens, the Kid responds by directing "a gambler's slogan" to his dice to "'let [him] come in--/ Into the house of chance,'" whereupon he "sardonically" throws the dice "out upon the bar" and then, with four aces showing, covers his final throw with his hand and runs a bluff: "'I'll bet fifty dollars it is an ace,' he said." Symbolically, what is happening here is that the Kid is responding to the chance universe and the danger that it represents for man--in this case the danger that he will lose his bet--not

⁴⁰It is significant that in this story the word "fate" is used synonymously with "luck" and "chance." As I pointed out in discussing "The Open Boat," "fate" in a Crane story is a subjective human term for describing what, objectively seen, is a universe of random chance. Failure by critics to realize this fact can cause (and has caused) confusion over whether Crane believes in "fate" or in "free will." In a chance universe, obviously, free will is eminently possible.

with vanity (the egotistical side of human nature), but with a show or bluff of courage (the opposite, stoic potentiality in human nature): recognizing that chance may well defeat him, he still summons up the bravery to gamble that it may favor him. In the event, the Kid both wins and loses: the fifth die is not an ace, so he loses his bet and has to treat the winners to the circus; yet in another way chance has favored him, for his fifty-dollar bet is not covered, and thus his courage has won out: "In the roar which arose could be heard each man ridiculing the cowardice of his neighbor and above all . . . the voice of Freddie 'That was the greatest cold bluff I ever saw worked'" (V,41-43,my emphasis).

This dice-throwing incident also has its symbolic parallel in the story's conclusion, for as the Kid stands in the street expecting to die at the hands of the Mexicans and "wait^{ing} for pain and a sight of the unknown," he suddenly realizes that if he can summon the courage to run a bluff, he may be able to draw his revolver fast enough to "be victor. If any hitch occurred in the draw he would undoubtedly be dead with his friends." The Kid recognizes that this "was a new game" with the chance universe. Just as in the earlier dice game, the Kid says a prayer to the five white mice of chance that they will grant him success in his bluff of bravery; and the bluff, again as in the dice game, does succeed (V,49-50).⁴¹ In these ways, then, the symbol of the

⁴¹As far as I know, Berryman (p. 110) is the only previous commentator to realize that the Kid's dice-shaking gamble results in winning as well as losing and thus foreshadows the story's climax. Other commentators (e.g., Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 250; Holton, p. 129) have missed the symbolic parallel because they have not seen the ambivalent nature of the Kid's "defeat" at dice.

dice, the mice of chance, suggests a central theme in the story: that man is foolish when he proudly exaggerates his own importance, but wise when he recognizes his insignificance in the chance cosmos yet accepts the randomness of that cosmos with stoic bravery, as does the Kid when he expresses "his belief in the fidelity and wisdom [i.e., the accuracy or truth to reality] of the five white mice [the chance universe]" (V, 43).

The second section of "Five White Mice" centers on an emblem of ambivalent--both foolish and wise--human nature, the circus clown. The neutrally omniscient point of view in the story assumes importance here, for it is the narrator who says that "in the City of Mexico, a man goes to the circus without descending in any way to infant amusements because the Circo Teatro Orrin is one of the best in the world and too easily surpasses anything of the kind in the United States where it [the circus] is merely . . . a great professional agreement to lie to the public." This narrational comment underlines the importance of the circus incident in the story, as does the narrator's following remarks about the circus's "American clown": he "is the clown to whom writers refer as the delight of their childhood and lament that he is dead. At this circus the Kid was not debased He sat in his box until late and laughed and swore when past laughing at the comic, foolish, wise clown" (V,44,my emphasis). This clown is a paradigm of Crane's ambivalent vision of human beings: they are often comic creatures because of their propensity for foolish behavior, yet they have the capacity to be more wise.⁴² The New York Kid's observation of the

⁴²Just as the clown's nature (human nature) is ambivalent, both

circus clown is followed by the scene in which he meets his two friends, Benson and the San Francisco Kid, who are exhibiting characteristic human foolishness by wandering falling-down drunk along a Mexico City street at night (a foolishness that the New York Kid has avoided by chance: because he lost his dice and had to go to the circus, he is sober). The comic and foolish side of human nature is further emphasized by the language in this middle section of the story: "The sober Kid spoke abruptly to his friend from San Francisco. 'Kid, pull yourself together, now. Don't fool. We've got to brace this ass of a Benson all the way home. . . . come along, you idiot,' said the New York Kid [to Benson]." Thus "the three of them lurched out into the street [like] tumbling chimneys" and "toppled on their way like three comedians playing . . . on the stage" (V,44-46,my emphasis).

Like the symbol of the dice, representing the chancy nature of human activity in an indifferent environment, this symbol of humans as clowns, both foolish and wise, carries over into the final section of "Five White Mice." When chance confronts the three men with three Mexicans and "Benson's shoulder [by chance] jostled one of them," the San Francisco Kid commits the most foolish human act of all by answering the Mexicans' challenge to a fight with an inebriated "'Yes!'" And later, after the danger of death has passed because the Mexicans prove to be just as frightened of dying as is the New York Kid himself, the Kid feels that "the whole thing had been an absurd imposition" (V,47,49). The comic absurdity of human nature (represented by

foolish and wise, so the Kid's (humans') response to the ambivalence of human nature is ambivalent: he both laughs at and swears at the clown.

the clown) thus has its broader parallel in the comic absurdity of the chance universe itself (represented by the dice). Yet the story's climax continues to reflect the ambivalence of human nature--comic, but potentially wise. The New York Kid "suddenly knew that it was possible to draw his own revolver and by a swift maneuver face down all three Mexicans." And, despite his exaggerated subjective fears that the revolver "would be as unwieldy as a sewing-machine" and so forth, he summons up the bravery to draw and chance does indeed favor him this time. Moreover, he becomes wiser as a result of his bluff of bravery and reliance on chance, learning "something of great importance," namely the existence of an equality of fear in human beings: all men, despite their vain, clown-like postures of "splendor of manner" and "cynical bravado" (here referring to the Mexicans), in truth fear death as much as he does (V,50-51,my emphasis).

The showdown in the third and final section of "Five White Mice" between the New York Kid and the Mexicans has scarcely been given its due appreciation by critics. Levenson justly praises the psychological realism of Crane's depiction of the Kid's complex mental processes before he draws his gun, but simultaneously dismisses the Kid's thoughts as ones generated solely by self-pity. Solomon deprecates these same thoughts as "the clichés of melodrama" and considers the story's ending a simple parody of "the staple of Western fiction, two strong men face to face . . .": "Whatever the grim potentialities of the scene, Crane plays it for laughs" Likewise, Holton considers the Kid's thoughts in this scene as deluding him, through false vanity, into "fantasies concerning the significance [i.e., importance] of his

own death."⁴³

What these commentaries overlook is the subjective/objective ambivalence of the New York Kid's actions and thoughts on this occasion. First of all, reflecting the dual facets of human nature, it is "a combination of honorable manhood and inability [that] prevented [the New York Kid] from running away" from the confrontation with the Mexicans (V,49). Faced with possible death in the impending chance outcome, the Kid subjectively is afraid and cravenly blames fate or God for dooming him ("his fate was . . . impregnable . . ."; "He imagined . . . that some singular providence might cause him to lose his grip as he raised his weapon"). But if a man can recognize the objective reality of the chance universe (its indifference toward him) and still run a bluff of courage that chance will be on his side, he may succeed--as the Kid does here (V,49-50). Secondly, though human life looked at from the objective stance of the indifferent cosmos is a ridiculous and absurd thing, the Kid realizes that life viewed subjectively nonetheless is, and will remain, a desirable ideal to humans:

And now here is the unreal real: into this Kid's nostrils, at the expectant moment of slaughter, had come the scent of new-mown hay, a fragrance from a field of prostrate grass, a fragrance which contained the sunshine, the bees, the peace of meadows and the wonder of a distant crooning stream. It had no right to be supreme but it was supreme and he breathed it, as he waited for pain and a sight of the unknown. (V,49)⁴⁴

⁴³Levenson, Works, V, pp. xlvii-xlviii; Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 250-251, 255; Holton, p. 130.

⁴⁴The similarity of this passage and the nature descriptions in the last chapter of The Red Badge is considerable, and that similarity should suggest that Henry Fleming's final dreams of idyllic nature are not to be dismissed as total "illusion" and self-indulgence, but in-

In this passage, the story's neutrally-omniscient point of view is valuable in clarifying the meaning. Since these thoughts of the Kid are expressed in the voice and language of the neutrally-omniscient narrator, the reader discerns that the thoughts are no illusion on the Kid's part, but rather a subjective reality of life's goodness balancing the objective reality of life's absurdity. The narrator's phrasing makes this fact apparent: "here is the unreal real"; "It life had no right to be supreme but it was supreme"

Third and finally, the critics who have (rightly) seen a wave of sentimental self-pity in the Kid's maanderings about how news of his death would be received by his family have not noticed the opposite quality of brotherhood, love for others, that is mixed with the Kid's self-love:

The Kid pitied his old financing father, unyielding and millioned, a man who commonly spoke twenty-two words a year to his beloved son. The Kid understood it at this time. If his fate was not impregnable, he might have turned out to be a man and have been liked by his father.
(V,49)

Here is ambivalence a-plenty. The father as he is described scarcely seems to deserve any pity, and the Kid is using "fate" as an excuse for his not "turning out to be a man." Yet this pity for his father is not solely comic self-indulgence, but also an incipient concern for others. It is followed in the next paragraph by the thought that if he should die the San Francisco Kid will "mourn his dead comrade," which leads two paragraphs later to his transfer of concern from himself "to the 'Frisco Kid The New York Kid became

stead should be seen as the expression of an irradicable subjective reality in human beings' view of life.

convinced that his friend was lost. There was going to be a screaming murder." Significantly, it is immediately after this onset of brotherly concern for his comrade that the New York Kid conceives his plan of drawing his own weapon, the plan that ultimately saves them all. Thus, if the Kid is not immune to subjective self-pity (foolishness), he is simultaneously open to objective discovery of the brotherhood of all men in their common vulnerability to the chance universe (wisdom); for after the Mexicans have backed away from his drawn gun, "the Kid was able to understand swiftly that they were all human beings. They were unanimous in not wishing for too bloody combat. There was a sudden expression of the equality" (V,49,50).

As has been shown, "Five White Mice" is a first-rate story structurally and aesthetically, while thematically, like "The Open Boat," it explores several aspects of Crane's dipolar vision of reality. Thematic parallels between the two stories include the tragicomic absurdity of humanity and its often ridiculous egotism in a chance universe in which ultimate death is sure; the necessity for courage to endure in that uncaring universe; the modulations between self-pity and brotherhood and between fear and courage; and the dipolar vision of life as simultaneously gloomy or "absurd" and desirable.⁴⁵ Crane's skill in handling his usual omniscient-narrator point of view in "Five White Mice" enables him to achieve his characteristic mixture of pity

⁴⁵To my knowledge, only Daniel G. Hoffman has connected any of these themes in "Five White Mice" to "The Open Boat." Hoffman links up the brotherhood theme in his The Poetry of Stephen Crane (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957), p. 269. In general, the best (though brief) reading of "Five White Mice," one which parallels mine in some respects, is Berryman's (pp. 109-110).

and irony and forms, as it did in "The Open Boat," an aesthetic analogue to his theme of the dipolarity of reality.

What happens when Crane less skillfully manipulates his omniscient narration can be sampled in the New York City story "The Duel That Was Not Fought" (1894), which resembles in plot "Five White Mice" in that it deals with an American protagonist, Patsey Tulligan, who is challenged to a duel by a Cuban. The main thematic difference in the stories is the lack of ambivalence in "The Duel," for while the New York Kid's bravery is a composite of foolishness (excessive fear) and inner strength, "a combination of honorable manhood and inability . . ." (V,49), Patsey's bravery is solely a product of his vanity and thus totally foolish. Similarly, while the Mexicans in the former story prove to be compounded of the same foolishness and strength as the New York Kid, the Cuban in the latter story is one-sidedly pictured as an expert swordsman against whom "'it would be sure death [for Patsey] to fight a sword duel . . .'" (VIII,355,357). This lack of thematic ambivalence in "The Duel" is accompanied by a lack of ambivalence in the story's point of view, for Crane here tampers in ineffective ways, as he often does in his lesser stories, with the neutrality of his omniscient narration. For instance, he makes clear the Cuban's invincibility through two all-knowing character-spokesmen ("The two well-dressed men grinned. 'Why, look here,' they said to Patsey, 'he'd punch you full of holes. Why, he's a fencer. . . . He'd kill you in 'bout a minute.'") and needlessly underlines Patsey's foolish courage and his unwisdom with an authorial statement at the story's start and again at its conclusion: "For Patsey was not as wise as seven owls,

but his courage could throw a shadow as long as the steeple of a cathedral" (VIII,357; 353 and 359).

It is apparent from the above comparison that for a Crane story to succeed artistically, Crane must (among other things) manipulate his neutrally-omniscient point of view in such a manner that his theme or themes spring naturally out of the story's art, rather than being obtruded on the reader in some overt or didactic manner. This he succeeds in doing in "The Open Boat" and "Five White Mice," and also in his Whilomville novelette of 1897, "The Monster."⁴⁶ "The Monster" deals primarily with the uneasy relationship between individual and society in a small town,⁴⁷ and the neutrally omniscient narrator's choice of language in describing events often helps alert the reader to this theme. For example, in section IV the narrator describes a band and its audience at a summer concert in Whilomville, the small American town in which the story's action takes place: "The leader of

⁴⁶Previous criticism has said little about point of view in the technical sense in "The Monster." Solomon's brief description of it squares with my view that "The Monster" uses an omniscient narrator: "Although Crane alternates his narrative view [between characters] seemingly at will, it is the author's voice that controls the narration . . ." (Parody to Realism, p. 181).

⁴⁷That "The Monster" attacks society or community and its values and probes the ostracism of individuals who stand against the conventional social values has been well established by previous criticism. Also common is the view that society, rather than the physically disfigured Henry Johnson, is the true morally disfigured "monster." Representative views may be sampled in Thomas Gullason, "The Symbolic Unity of 'The Monster,'" Modern Language Notes, 75 (Dec. 1960), 664-665; James Hafley, "'The Monster' and the Art of Stephen Crane" (1959), in Gullason, Crane's Career, p. 441; Holton, p. 278; Gibson, p. 138; Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp.190,195; LaFrance, p. 206; and Sy Kahn, "Stephen Crane and the Giant Voice in the Night: An Explication of 'The Monster,'" in Richard E. Langford, Guy Owen, and William E. Taylor, eds., Essays in Modern American Literature (Deland, Florida: Stetson Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 37,44.

the band had some of the mannerisms of the great musicians . . . [the crowd] saw him raise his hand to his brow, strike it sentimentally, and glance upward with a look of poetic anguish." Here the narrator suggests to us the aping of conventional conduct that is characteristic of Whilomville social life. In like manner, one of the onlookers cracks jokes at the expense of the band not "because he [really] disliked the band's playing. . . . [but] because it was fashionable to say that manner of thing concerning the band." "Most of the young men of the town affected to be superior to the band" The narrational language also implies that members of this society are lacking in the ability to rely on their own individual value systems: "the girls were sure to attend this concert, . . . linked closely in pairs, or preferably in threes, in the curious public dependence upon one another which was their inheritance."⁴⁸

Similar irony at the expense of social convention and lack of self-reliance is disclosed in the narrator's description in section III of the Negro Henry Johnson's reception at the house of his lady friend, Bella Farragut:

After a great deal of kowtow, [Henry and Bella's mother] were planted in two chairs opposite each other in the living-room. Here they exchanged the most tremendous civilities, until Miss Bella swept into the room, when there was more kowtow on all sides They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys.
(VII, 16, my emphasis)

An additional ironic touch here is that the society's bottom dogs, the

⁴⁸Works, VII, pp. 16-17, my emphasis. Subsequent references to "The Monster" and other Crane stories contained in this volume will be acknowledged by volume and page number within the text.

Negroes, are being corrupted by parodying the social conventions of the majority white society around them. Further, in Solomon's words, "the portrayal of the [Negro] inhabitants of Watermelon Alley provides an internal parody of the social activities of Whilomville's white people." What is being satirized is not the Negroes but the conventions themselves.⁴⁹

When the omniscient narrator describes Henry Johnson in section III, his language makes us aware that Henry, though he too can ape the mannerisms of society as well as anyone, does stand from the beginning apart from and above the other townspeople because he possesses an inner individual strength. While the males of the town are busy gathering in groups--the youths on the street corners and the older ones in Reifsnnyder's barber shop--Henry strides out alone in his courting clothes. The barber-shop gossipers are fooled by Henry's clothing, his appearance, into momentary confusion about his real identity. And when they do perceive that he is Henry Johnson, they still focus only on his externals: "he always dresses like that when he wants to make

⁴⁹Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 185. Holton (pp. 207-209) implies and Stallman, in his edition The Stephen Crane Reader (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), p. 440, directly states that Crane in "The Monster" is attacking white men's treatment of the Negro. Certainly Whilomville's Negroes are presented as readily falling under the sway of the social conventions of the dominant whites, a view suggested by Hafley in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 441-442, and put forth again in Charles W. Meyer, "Social Forms Versus Human Brotherhood in Crane's The Monster," Ball State Univ. Forum, 14 (Summer 1973), 32: Henry Johnson in his courting behavior "becomes the parody of a white gentleman Henry's roles have been forced upon him by a dominant culture. Since he cannot be a gentleman he must imitate one." Still, I find that Crane's depiction of Negroes in "The Monster" and elsewhere in his writings does not really escape the stereotypes of the black man common to Crane's time, place, and race.

a front! He's the biggest dude in town" However, the narrator's point of view has already made clear to the reader that Henry's fineness is not just a surface appearance as his society believes: "It was not altogether a matter of the lavender trousers, nor yet the straw hat with its bright silk band. The change was somewhere far in the interior of Henry." And when Henry is chaffed by the street-corner youths for his dudish appearance, the narrator comments that Henry merely "laughed a supremely good-natured, chuckling laugh, which nevertheless expressed an underground complacency of superior metal" (VII,13-15,my emphasis).⁵⁰

A contrasting Negro character to Henry is Alek Williams, who provides room and board for Henry after the latter has taken on the appearance of a monster by losing his face in the fire. Williams shares the conventional values of his society, black or white, mistaking appearance for reality (Henry with his face missing, says Alek, "looks like er devil"), being terrified of Henry because others--those whom Dr. Trescott calls "a lot of foolish people"--are afraid of him, and elevating material values over moral ones (he agrees readily to continue boarding Henry despite his terror if the Doctor will raise his pay for doing so by one dollar a week). The objective narrator clarifies Williams' inane vanity and subservience to society by presenting Williams' thoughts in his, the narrator's, ironic language: Williams "had emerged . . . laurelled and proud. He was the unconquerable Alexander Williams. Nothing could exceed the bold self-reliance

⁵⁰Since Hafley's 1959 article it has been recognized that appearance versus reality is a central theme in "The Monster."

of his manner" (VII,35-39,42). The truly self-reliant Negro, as has been seen, is Henry Johnson, not Alek Williams. Significantly, when Henry runs toward the burning house to save the sleeping child Jimmie Trescott, his straw hat, an image of his social or external appearance, is "held half crumpled in his hand" (VII,21,my emphasis).

Dr. Trescott, even more than Henry Johnson, is the morally strong individual in "The Monster" who opposes the foolish conduct of conventionalized social man and the foolish social code that judges matters only by external appearances and not by internal reality. In choosing to preserve the life of the physically maimed Henry Johnson, Trescott goes against the "fools" of society and as a result is "destroyed by the operation of the social code. . . . But . . . becomes a man in Crane's conception of the term."⁵¹ The narrator's view of Trescott is succinctly expressed when he describes Trescott's first reaction to the news that Henry Johnson's face has been destroyed by the fire: "In the sudden glance [Trescott] threw from one to another he impressed them as being both leonine and impracticable." Dr. Trescott is "leonine" in his consistent moral courage in bucking the will and the ways of foolish society; and--in a typical Cranean ironic ambivalence--he is "impracticable" (a word that Crane seems to have fused in his mind with "impractical"⁵²) for the same reason, since society will never accept his

⁵¹Robert W. Schneider, Five Novelists of the Progressive Era (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), p. 91. Hafley, in Gullason, Crane's Career, p. 446, expresses a similar view. Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 183, 189, 192-193, presents (unconvincingly, as I hope to show) Trescott's decision to preserve Henry's life as less than wise and based on intellectual pride as much as on humanity, and (again unconvincingly) sides with Judge Hagenthorpe's description of Trescott's action as "one of the blunders of virtue" (VII,31).

moral individualism. Thus, what Judge Hagenthorpe calls a "blunder of virtue" on Trescott's part is not in fact a moral blunder, but rather a social blunder. The Judge claims that if Trescott preserves Henry's life, "'He will be your creation Nature has very evidently given him up. He is dead. You are restoring him to life.'" But in truth it is the subjective society, not the objective natural cosmos, that has given Henry up for dead: "they told [Trescott] that Johnson was doomed." Trescott is the only one in the story who realizes that it is society's subjective refusal to see the disfigured Henry from the standpoint of his individual moral worth, its insistence on responding to his facelessness in terms of exterior social convention and status, that really turns Henry into a monster: "'He will be what you like, judge,' cried Trescott, in sudden . . . fury, 'He will be anything, but, by God! He saved my boy'" (VII, 31-32, 29, 32, my emphasis).

Judge Hagenthorpe is described by the narrator as treating moral considerations with the "cold manner" and "propriety" of the legalist ("'I think that poor fellow ought to die. . . . you [Trescott] are performing a questionable charity in preserving this negro's life'") and being well versed in society's practice of obscuring reality by appearance (he had "successfully dissembled for more than a quarter of a century" that he considered his sister less than intelligent, "only risking the truth at the times when his cane was lost"). This cane of the Judge symbolizes his reliance on the conventional ideas of his society: "He could never think at his best until he was leaning . . .

⁵²Bowers, Works, VII, pp. 69, 244.

on this stick It was to him a kind of narcotic. If by any chance he mislaid it, he grew at once very irritable . . ." (VII,30-31). The ironic ambivalence of the Judge's final comment on the problem of deciding whether to let Henry live or die is evident: "'It is hard for a man to know what to do'" (VII,33). On the one hand, this statement suggests the difficulty for mere men of achieving moral courage, while simultaneously implying that, if he wishes to "be a man" in Crane's sense of the word, a human must show moral strength.

A puzzling minor character in "The Monster" is Martha Goodwin, a Whilomville spinster who at times seems to be ridiculed as a repressed old maid scolding the town's "social misdemeanors" and at other times to be admired for speaking up for Dr. Trescott against the opinions of the rest of the townspeople.⁵³ Perhaps the key to her character lies in the neutral narrator's somewhat ambiguous description of her as "a weak, innocent, and pig-headed creature, who alone would defy the universe if she thought the universe merited this proceeding." Like Dr. Trescott, Martha (who significantly is described as "the only pillar of the domestic edifice" in which she lives with her married sister) is strong enough to oppose her individual will to society's when she sees a valid reason for doing so. She labels the townspeople who are scared of Henry as "'silly'" and refuses to believe that she herself

⁵³Commentators usually consider her a hypocrite and typical small-town narrow-minded gossip or assert that her support of Trescott is for the wrong reasons (see Gullason, "Symbolic Unity of 'The Monster,'" pp. 666-667; Gibson, pp. 138-139; Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 196-197; LaFrance, p. 209; and Kahn, in Langford et al, pp. 41-43), but most would probably agree with Gibson (p. 139) that "It is hard to know Martha, for the ambivalence of Crane's attitude toward her makes evaluation difficult."

would be scared of Henry simply because other people claim that "Everybody that's seen him say they were frightened almost to death" (VII,51,60-61). On the other hand, unlike Dr. Trescott, whose social and professional vanity over his medical skill at curing people (VII, 25) is permanently erased by the chance universe's fire that endangers his son and disfigures Henry Johnson, Martha Godwin's courage stems too much from vanity and not enough from the wisdom of an objective understanding of life. Thus, though she asserts that "I'd try not to be afraid of him [Henry]," she does not in fact, as Dr. Trescott does, lift a finger in any literal way to help Henry. Instead, she "defies the universe" with oratory and meaningless gestures, in the same way as do other foolishly "brave" characters in Crane's writings like Patsey Tulligan in "The Duel That Was Not Fought," the Mexicans in "The Five White Mice," the little man in "The Mesmeric Mountain," and a host of others (VII,61,51,my emphasis).

Turning from the narrational point of view to language use in "The Monster," one finds that the central symbolism in this story is the face/no face motif centered around Henry's physical loss of face and its impact on the townspeople. James Hafley first pointed out the significance of this symbolic image pattern, but his interpretation of it in which "Henry . . . becomes . . . a norm according to which it is not he but the whole town that has lost face Henry and the others who lose face in the story ultimately save face; and those who try to save face . . . finally lose face . . ." seems a bit overcomplicated.⁵⁴ More helpful is Solomon's comment that "the town is con-

⁵⁴Hafley, in Gullason, Crane's Career, p. 441.

vinced . . . that no one can live without . . . an appearance, a face, as Eliot puts it, to meet the faces that one meets."⁵⁵ The chance universe of nature--in the form of the fire--is ultimately responsible for the fact that Henry "now had no face. His face had simply been burned away," but the society is responsible for concluding that Henry is "a monster, a perfect monster," because his surface appearance has been lost (VII,29,31). In a scene in Reifsnnyder's barber shop, the townspeople agree that "what makes Henry so terrible" is that "he hasn't got any face," and they concur that none of them "would . . . like to be with no face"--"I'd rather keep mine, if you don't mind," they chorus. For these men, as for Judge Hagenthorpe, moral considerations take second place to social ones, because they feel that if a man has no external appearance, he is symbolically dead and therefore might as well be literally dead (VII,40-41).

When Henry breaks loose from Alek Williams' shack and visits first a children's party and then the home of his lady love Bella Farragut, he is not accepted (even though, ironically, he plays the conventional courting game with Bella just as efficiently now as he did before he lost his face) because his appearance (face) is missing, even though in reality (inner moral nature) he is the same as always. When he looks through the window at the children's party, "one little girl turned to face it. Instantly she screamed and sprang away, covering her face with her hands. . . . the weeping and shuddering child informed the company that she had been frightened by an appearance at the window"

⁵⁵Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 192.

(VII,45-47,my emphasis). The imagery here strongly implies that most humans cannot bear to face reality and must protect their own faces from it--they can perceive only appearance.

The final ironic touch in this face/no face imagery comes after the chief of police informs Trescott that the escaped Henry has been captured and can be picked up at the town jail. The policeman advises Trescott that, in order to avoid his irate fellow citizens, he "'come to the jail pretty late at night, . . . and I'd bring a-er-mask, or some kind of veil, anyhow'" (VII,48-49). If Trescott would only consent to wear a social mask that would veil his personal convictions and values, the town would accept him! But since he insists on following his individual moral sense and on reminding the townspeople that it is they who are making Henry a monster, the inevitable outcome is the social ostracism of Trescott and his family that is accomplished by the end of "The Monster." So the story's face/no face imagery leads back to the central ironic paradox of "The Monster": that by doing the humane thing morally, Trescott ruins himself socially (VII,62-63).⁵⁶

The fact that "in The Monster true courage appears as moral

⁵⁶Hafley, in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 443, 445, suggests that "The Monster" reveals Crane's despair of reconciling social values and moral values. Crane's writings in defense of his decision to testify for Dora Clark at her trial on a prostitution charge certainly imply such a despair. See the following Crane statement in "Notes about Prostitution" (1896) as quoted in Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 230: "a man who possessed a sense of justice was a dolt, a simpleton, and a double-dyed idiot for finally his sense of justice would get him into a corner and, if he obeyed it, make him infamous. There is such a thing as a moral obligation arriving inopportunately. The inopportune arrival of a moral obligation can bring just as much personal humiliation as can the sudden impulse to steal"

strength"⁵⁷ relates "The Monster" thematically to "The Open Boat" and "The Five White Mice." Morally akin are the varieties of brotherhood shown by the men in the boat to each other, by the New York Kid to the San Francisco Kid, and by Dr. Trescott to Henry Johnson. Yet, though "The Monster" is certainly one of Crane's artistically successful stories, it is not in the same class with these other two Crane masterpieces, primarily because "man in his relationship to society was not one of Crane's major themes"⁵⁸ Although the chance cosmos is not absent from "The Monster," as I have suggested, it is distinctly in the background in comparison with "The Open Boat" and "The Five White Mice."⁵⁹ Further, while Crane's dipolar vision of reality is omnipresent in the latter two stories, it is somewhat less important in "The Monster," manifesting itself primarily in the ambivalence of Dr. Trescott's ability both to perceive objectively Henry's worth as a human being and to comprehend the townspeople's subjective view that judges only on appearances. When the Judge opines that the disfigured Henry really ought to be dead, "there was in Trescott's face . . . a look of recognition, as if in this . . . he saw an old problem. He merely sighed and answered, 'Who knows?' The words were spoken in a deep

⁵⁷Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 12.

⁵⁸Schneider, p. 78.

⁵⁹Meyer's article explicates well the role played by nature in "The Monster": "Trescott is defenseless before the gathering clans of 'fire imps' . . . that destroy his house," but "prescribed social games played under Whilomville lights condition its citizens badly for confronting hard truths" such as this one, for "when men are so insulated from reality, a sudden intrusion of nature may produce an initial horror and panic followed by a monstrous return to a world of self-deception and safe forms" (p. 32). See also pp. 30-31.

tone that gave them an elusive kind of significance" (VII,31). Here is a trace of the view that pervades "The Open Boat" and "The Five White Mice" that ambivalent, dipolar reality is ultimately a mystery. But all three stories are alike in manifesting a skillful use of point of view and of patterns of language repetition and symbol to embody their respective themes. They are also alike in reflecting another of Crane's ambivalences, the "tension resulting from his belief in the essential weakness of man as opposed to his insistence on the importance of the human struggle,"⁶⁰ whether that struggle be physical, moral, or both. Above all, "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "The Monster" are examples of Crane's skillful art and of the informing strength that his dipolar vision of reality lends to that art.

⁶⁰Schneider, p. 62.

Objectivity versus Human Nature: Crane's Earlier War Fiction

According to Stephen Crane's dipolar vision of reality, it is next to impossible for mere human beings to maintain consistently an objective understanding of life's phenomena. Nor would it, ironically enough, necessarily be beneficial to them if they could. As Crane's narrator in "The Blue Hotel" puts it, "the conceit of man was . . . the very engine of life" (V,165), or, in other words, man's subjective exaggeration of his own importance, though ridiculous from the viewpoint of objective reality, is often (in Crane's eyes) a necessary motivating force for his capacity to stand up and be a man, to endure bravely life's blows and travails. This particular aspect of Crane's dipolar view of reality--the belief that total objectivity of viewpoint goes against the grain of human nature--can be found in Crane's writings from first to last; but tracing its presence in the earlier war tales of Crane, in particular The Red Badge, is an effective way to demonstrate what has but infrequently been recognized: that Red Badge is a successful novel largely because of, not despite, the undeniable ambivalence of its concluding chapters.

Some of Crane's short stories of war written prior to late 1897, when the author first experienced war in person, are worth considering only for the light that they shed on Red Badge. Others valuable for the same purpose are also interesting and sometimes even successful

works of art in their own right. Into this latter category fall "An Episode of War," "A Mystery of Heroism," and perhaps "The Veteran." The first of these, probably written in 1896,¹ is frequently included in collections of Crane stories but has not received much critical attention, probably because of its extreme brevity. Still, it may be Crane's most successful short story about war and certainly is, I feel, his finest evocation of war's absurd nature, which mirrors the absurdity of the larger universe that incorporates war. As has been recognized, the lieutenant-protagonist of "Episode of War" acquires a new vision or understanding of war as a result of being wounded.² Specifically, he discovers war's absurdities, some of which are comic, some tragic, and some ironic.

"As the wounded officer passed from the line of battle, he was enabled to see many things which as a participant in the fight were unknown to him."³ Now a spectator of rather than a participant in battle, the lieutenant can be a more objective observer of war's characteris-

¹Not published until 1899, "Episode of War" was traditionally considered a Spanish-American War story, though its vague setting and lack of precise military details made it seem incongruous among Crane's other stories of war in Cuba. Recent criticism has shown, convincingly, that "Episode of War" existed at least as early as the summer of 1897 and that it should be counted one of Crane's stories about the Civil War, presumably one produced too late to be included in his collection of Civil War tales, The Little Regiment. See Bowers, Works, VI, pp. lxxx-lxxxii.

²Holton, p. 145, and Berryman, p. 256, make this point. Neither specifically traces the nature of what the lieutenant learns about war, as I do here.

³Works, VI, p. 90. Further references to "Episode of War" and other war stories in this volume will be acknowledged by volume number and page in the body of the text.

tics; yet, since he is human, his observations are bound to be partly colored by his natural subjectivity. He first views a scene that is "for a wonder, precisely like an historical painting," in which an aide gallops madly up to a general to present him with a paper. The comic absurdity of this historical-scene aspect of war is reflected in the great difficulty experienced by the mounted soldiers accompanying the general in "hold[ing] their ground, preserv[ing] their respectful interval, while the shells bloomed in the air about them, and caused their chargers to make furious quivering leaps." Next the lieutenant sees a gun battery that "swept in curves that stirred the heart; it made halts as dramatic as the crash of a wave on the rocks, and . . . had a beautiful unity, as if it were a missile. The sound of it was a war-chorus that reached into the depths of man's emotion" (VI, 90-91). The irony of this passage stems from the lieutenant's dipolar vision of the gun battery. Subjectively, the beauty of such a weapon can stir the human heart; but one also realizes objectively that a gun (like the universe at large) is a "missile" dangerous to human life, that the sound of it screams of war ("war-chorus") and symbolically parallels the sound of the life-threatening sea ("the crash of a wave on the rocks").⁴

⁴Solomon's comment on this incident in Parody to Realism, p. 124, that "the sheer beauty of war [here] moves Crane" misses the ambivalence of the passage's attitude toward war. A similar description of the sound of gunfire in Crane's Greek War dispatch "Crane at Velestino (I)" makes the dual points of view more overt: the gunfire "was the most beautiful sound of my experience . . . because it had the wonder of human tragedy in it," but the observer's feeling that "the crash of it was ideal" is only "one point of view. Another might be taken from the men who died there." The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. IX, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1971), p. 20.

Soon the lieutenant comes upon a group of soldiers who, "no longer having part in the battle, knew more of it than others. They told the performance of every corps, every division, the opinion of every general." Here again is both an objective truth (those actually engaging in battle often comprehend less of it than those behind the lines) and a subjective exaggeration by the human ego (surely these soldiers do not know all they claim to know about the fighting). Next the lieutenant reaches a "brigade [that] was making coffee and buzzing with talk like a girls' boarding-school" (another comic absurdity of war, like its historical-painting aspect), where he suffers the ironic incongruity of being told by one of the officers "that he did not know how to be correctly wounded." Here perhaps is a hit at the military belief in the necessity of doing things by the book, which proves to be impossible in the actuality of war's chaos (the lieutenant was wounded not while fighting but while dividing up portions of coffee for his camped company of soldiers). Finally the lieutenant reaches the field hospital that he has been searching for, only to encounter more absurdities of war: ambulance drivers arguing over which one was to blame for their interlocked wheels "while from the ambulances, both crammed with wounded, there came an occasional groan," and a surgeon who views the lieutenant's wound as "plac[ing him] on a very low social plane" and who insists that he will not amputate the lieutenant's arm while having every intention--because it is necessary--of doing so (VI,91-92,89,92).

A final absurdity of war that occurs while the lieutenant is at the field hospital, this time a tragic one, relates to a second con-

cern of this story and of Crane's writings in general: man's fear of death and his response to that fear. The lieutenant sees a "man with a face as grey as a new army blanket . . . serenely smoking a corn-cob pipe." The lieutenant is amazed that a man who obviously is dying can bear up so calmly; the fact is at once comically absurd and tragically dignifying (VI,92). Earlier in "Episode of War," the narrator has commented on the significance of the lieutenant's wound: it gives him a "strange dignity," because this brush with death places his "hand . . . upon the curtain which hangs before the revelations of all existence, the meaning of" all things, and because it reveals the precariousness of human life and thus, objectively perceived, human insignificance--it "makes the other men understand sometimes that they are little." Finally, the wound precipitates man's fear of death; the onlookers are afraid that the lieutenant is just a finger's weight away from "the tragedy" of being "hurl[ed] . . . into the dim grey unknown" (VI,90). As a result of his wound, then, the lieutenant is able to perceive more objectively than before not only the character of war but also his own insignificance and susceptibility to death. "He wore the look of one who knows he is the victim of a terrible disease and understands his helplessness," and he is able at the tale's end to counter his relatives' anguish at his loss of an arm with a statement redolent of an increased understanding of his status in the universe: "'I don't suppose it matters so much as all that'" (VI,90,93). Yet the lieutenant never totally gives up his subjective vision of reality, as I suggested in discussing his new understanding of the nature of war. Thus his final deprecation of his loss of an arm is to be balanced

against the high self-esteem implied in his almost hysterical insistence in the passage immediately preceding the story's final paragraph that he will not let his arm be amputated (VI,92-93). Being human, the lieutenant is not capable of maintaining a wholly objective attitude toward life and death.⁵

Fear, especially fear of death, has been called a central theme of Crane's writings by innumerable commentators.⁶ Some recent criticism has challenged this belief: Pizer berates it as a "myth introduced by Beer . . . which . . . suggested . . . a Freudian reading of Crane's life and work," and LaFrance in his book on Crane takes the constant position that since "reality never measures up to the imagination," human fears of death are unwarranted.⁷ However, such revisionist views are belied not only by Crane's fiction but also by the evidence of his poetry and of incidents from his life. Crane's Poem 66 states succinctly the reason why man does, and should, fear death in an enigmatic universe: "If I should cast off this tattered coat,/ And go free into the mighty sky;/ If I should find nothing there/ But a vast blue,/ Echoless, ignorant,--/ What then?"⁸ Crane's personal view of his

⁵Gibson, who tends to read Crane too optimistically, finds the lieutenant developing a completely undistorted picture of his relationship to the world (pp. 94,96); LaFrance, who tends to read Crane as solely an ironist, greatly underestimates the objective understanding of reality that the lieutenant achieves as a result of his wounding (pp. 238-239). The truth lies in the dipolar middleground between these two polar extremes.

⁶See, e.g., Berryman, p. 297, quoting Beer and concurring with him that "'the mistress of Crane's mind was fear.'"

⁷Pizer, in Rees and Harbert, p. 106; LaFrance, p. 35.

⁸Joseph Katz, ed., The Poems of Stephen Crane (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), p. 70.

life as a struggle to overcome his various fears (not only of death) and act like a man is well seen in the Dora Clark affair. A reporter interviewing Crane after he had braved public censure by testifying at Dora Clark's trial on charges of prostitution asked whether Crane on this occasion had felt like Henry Fleming before his first battle. Crane answered yes: "'I was badly frightened, I admit, and would gladly have run away, could I have done so with honor.'" Crane added-- in an important statement, since it shows that he thought of Fleming as having achieved heroism at the end of The Red Badge--that despite his bravery in facing up to the trial, "'I differ from my own hero [Fleming], for I would be just as frightened the next time!'"⁹

Justifiably, therefore, one may consider that fear, especially fear of death, is a key subject in Crane and may recognize that much of the impact of his war fiction (as in "An Episode of War" as just analyzed) stems from war's function as a testing ground of human fear and human bravery in direct confrontation with possible death.¹⁰ For instance, in "A Mystery of Heroism," another of Crane's most successful explorations in fiction of human conduct in war, the protagonist,

⁹This interview is recounted in Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 224, from which these quoted passages are drawn.

¹⁰Compare Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 113, Crane "was deeply disturbed by the problem of courage and fear in battle"; Tony Tanner, "Stephen Crane's Long Dream of War," London Magazine, 8 n.s. (Dec. 1968), 8, "so much of Crane's work is concerned with running away, or not running away, from volcanic eruptions of violence, that [Crane had to develop] a new metaphoric vocabulary of fear"; and Jean Cazemajou, Stephen Crane (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 24, "Primarily concerned with war as a personal test, Crane . . . [felt that] war, in its various manifestations, was the alpha and omega of human life, essentially a testing ground"

Fred Collins, has his pride provoked by his fellow soldiers' taunts that he is afraid to cross a shell-battered meadow to get water from a well and as a result puts himself "under an obligation to walk squarely up to the face of death" (VI,51,53). Beginning his dash through the meadow, Collins feels that "he was not a hero" but rather "an intruder in the land of fine deeds" because he does not possess the ideal perfection of a traditional hero. Such a hero, he feels, never acts other than morally and never feels fear, whereas he, Collins, has been immoral in not always repaying money he has borrowed and also soon begins to feel plenty of fear: "When he came to the well he flung himself face downward and . . . as he lay . . . he was suddenly smitten with the terror. . . . All the power faded from his muscles" (VI,53-54).¹¹ As the story develops, Collins does become a hero, but not in the mistaken sense of idealized perfection that Crane feels is a faulty concept of heroism. While returning from the well with his bucket of water, Collins is "staring white with anticipation of a blow that would whirl him around and down. . . . [with] the life knocked out of [him]. . . ." When an artillery officer who is dying on the battlefield asks Collins for a drink of water, Collins at first screams "'I can't,' . . . and in this reply was a full description of his quaking apprehension." But a few moments later, "Collins turned. He came dashing back. His face had now turned grey and in his eyes was all terror. 'Here it is!

¹¹LaFrance, p. 194, dismisses Collins' fear of death as foolish: "his fear has been proved an unnecessary encumbrance because nothing happened to him" Such reasoning is specious; it is like saying that soldiers who are going to be wounded or killed in a battle have a right to feel afraid, but those who are destined to escape unwounded are fools if they feel fear.

. . . . Here's your drink.' . . . Collins tried to hold the bucket steadily, but his shaking hands caused the water to splash all over the face of the dying man" (VI,56).¹² Here Collins displays real courage, both physical and moral: to give what aid he can to a dying man (showing brotherhood),¹³ he exposes himself for added unnecessary minutes to the danger of death from the shells exploding all around him.¹⁴

Some critical commentary on "Mystery of Heroism" mistakenly separates Collins' physical courage in going for the water from his moral courage in giving the lieutenant a drink and argue that to Crane the former is false courage and only the latter true courage. But, as the passages quoted above indicate, Collins' gift of water to the dying man displayed physical as well as moral courage; for Crane, the two are closely related and usually exist together.¹⁵ A second common but mistaken notion about "Mystery of Heroism" is that Collins' show of heroism proves only that, in Crane's world, heroism is valueless or

¹²Tanner, p. 12, shows good insight into the nature of heroism as seen in this story: "The fact that in his panic and flight [Collins] does pause to give a dying man a drink of water justifies the title of the story. Heroism is a mystery; it is one of the things that can happen to a man undergoing the test. The fact that, marvellously, it can happen did not blind Crane to the fact that man is basically panic-prone--particularly when faced by the fact of death."

¹³James W. Gargano, "Crane's 'A Mystery of Heroism': A Possible Source," Modern Language Notes, 74 (Jan. 1959), 23, was perhaps the first critic to stress the brotherhood in Collins' heroism: Crane "offers an alternate and nobler concept of heroism in Collins' responsible ministrations to the dying officer who rewards him with 'the faintest shadow of a smile.' Crane . . . identifies heroism with the ideal of brotherhood"

¹⁴Notable parallels exist between Collins and Henry Fleming considered as heroes. Fleming in The Red Badge is often quakingly fearful

meaningless, for does not the artillery officer die even though Collins gives him water and does not Collins' dangerous dash for water prove equally meaningless to the soldiers of his company because all the water is spilled (VI,56)?¹⁶ To the contrary, far sounder in the light of the above analysis of the story is Gibson's view, expressed while comparing "Mystery of Heroism" to "The Veteran": "The death of old Henry Fleming, in that he falls victim to circumstances over which he has no control, actually is structurally analogous to the dropping of the bucket at the end of the other story," for "even in a world where nature herself does not recognize the meaning and value of heroism, it is a significant [human] value . . . ," and "the exercise of courage [is] worthwhile [even] if the courageous actor is killed . . . ," as in "The Veteran," or if the brave act does not achieve the goal the actor intended, as in "Mystery of Heroism."¹⁷

We have seen that "An Episode of War" and "A Mystery of Heroism," both artistically effective stories, achieve a good part of their suc-

of battle and commits several immoralities during the course of his two days of war, such as deserting his beleaguered battle comrades, running from the dying tattered man, and lying that he was wounded in battle. Fleming, like Collins, is no hero in the ideal sense, but like Collins he becomes very much a hero in the Crane sense of learning to be courageous and selfless (brotherly) despite his justifiable fears of death.

¹⁵E.g., brotherhood and brave facing of physical danger coexist in the protagonists of "The Open Boat" and "The Five White Mice." Gargano, p. 23, LaFrance, p. 193, and Paul Witherington, "Stephen Crane's 'A Mystery of Heroism': Some Redefinitions," English Journal, 58 (Feb. 1969), 201-202, are among those critics who insist that Crane believes only moral, not physical, courage makes a man a hero. However, the true distinction made in "Mystery of Heroism" is not between physical courage and moral courage but between selfish courage (Collins' pride motivating him to go for the water) and selfless courage (Collins' humanity motivating him to brave death in order to offer water to the dying officer).

cess from tensions between the subjective and objective halves of Crane's dipolar vision. Just as the lieutenant in the former story fluctuates between subjectively exaggerating the importance of his wound and objectively realizing that in an indifferent cosmos no human wound or death matters much, Collins in the latter story varies between the subjective view that heroes are perfect men, and thus that he himself can be no hero, and an acting-out of the objective fact, as Crane sees it, that heroes are flawed, fearful men who despite their fears and weaknesses act courageously and humanely. "The Veteran," a lesser story than the two previously discussed, is so largely because it contains a surplus of the aged Henry's hard-won objective view of life, a view that in this story completely dominates the egocentric or subjective view, here represented by the "stout boyish idealism" of Henry's grandson Jimmie.

In his old age, the Henry of "The Veteran" is able to admit openly and readily, as he never could even at the end of The Red Badge, that he was very frightened during his battle experiences and that he actually ran away from his first battle. He coolly recognizes that he had been comically and absurdly egotistical at Chancellorsville: "The trouble was . . . I thought they were all shooting at me. . . . aiming

¹⁶Proponents of this view that heroism is shown in "Mystery of Heroism" to be valueless or meaningless are Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 105-106, and Holton, p. 141.

¹⁷Gibson, pp. 93,92. Compare Greenfield, p. 572: "It is this duality of view [that human courage may not win out in an indifferent universe (objective view), but that man still should endeavor to display such courage (subjective view)] . . . that is the secret of . . . Crane's art."

at me in particular and only me.'" The secondary characters in this story (except the childish Jimmie) are uncharacteristically objective themselves, for their reaction to Henry's admitting his battle scaredness contains "probably more admiration than if old Fleming had declared that he had always been a lion" (VI,82-83). In due course, Henry proves that he remains in his old age a true hero of Crane's type--one who braves danger and death despite a natural human fear of it--when he darts into the flame-filled barn that is "laden with tones of hate and death" to try to save the livestock, finally losing his life in the attempt (VI,85-86). The flaw in this story is that Crane makes human objectivity and heroic human behavior seem all too easy. Collins' initial refusal of water to the dying officer and the frantic determination of the protagonist of "An Episode of War" not to permit amputation of his arm are replaced by the larger-than-life heroics of a Henry moving with unmixed emotions from danger to danger. The excessive praise in the final paragraph of "The Veteran" of the dead "old man's mighty spirit, released from its body . . . perhaps the unutterable midnights of the universe will have no power to daunt the color of this soul" (VI,86) reveals that in this appendage-tale to The Red Badge, Crane fell victim, as he did not in the novel, to aggrandizing his hero and thus, ironically enough, made him seem precisely the kind of ideal or perfect hero that Henry in the earlier part of "The Veteran" had insisted that he was not.¹⁸ Here (to use again the terms from

¹⁸Holton, p. 117, suggests that the conclusion of "The Veteran" "has an ironically hollow ring," which (to Holton) implies that Henry's courage in this story is silly because useless. But, contrary to Holton, Crane's consistent viewpoint, in this story as elsewhere, is that

Crane's 1899 war story "This Majestic Lie") Crane's "tender sentiment" half of his vision of life has momentarily vanquished his "irony of soul," with unfortunate results for the story's artistic success.¹⁹

Disagreement exists over whether "The Veteran" can properly be used as a gloss upon the ending of The Red Badge and, if it can, whether, as Solomon believes, it "provides [as] the author's own comment on the value of Henry's war ordeal" evidence that in The Red Badge "Fleming . . . has . . . learned honesty and self-abnegation."²⁰ Holton feels that though "The Veteran" is only external evidence for interpreting The Red Badge, it is still relevant evidence: "if an author reintroduces a character into a later work, we can, I believe, reasonably assume that--there being no evidence to the contrary--the author remains true to his original conception of that character."²¹ Even if one agrees with Holton here, it does not necessarily follow, as LaFrance and Solomon think, that "The Veteran" proves a growth to moral

men--to be truly men--must conduct themselves with physical and moral courage even though such courage may be ineffective against the indifferent universe. Thus the final paragraph of "The Veteran" is not ironic; it is simply, as happens frequently in Crane's lesser fiction, a momentary domination of his idealistic view of life over his ironic one. Unlike "The Veteran," in the best of Crane's stories, works like "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," "A Mystery of Heroism," and The Red Badge, the protagonists' displays of courage are not placed beyond the ambivalences of irony.

¹⁹In fact, the absence in a Crane story or journalistic piece of a tension between the two poles of Crane's vision, the ironic-cynical one and the idealistic-sentimental one, usually goes hand in hand with a greater or lesser degree of artistic failure, for it is this tension between subjective and objective views of life that is the thematic binder for the point of view modulations, the ironies, and the patterns of imagery and symbolism that shape the artistic brilliances of the successful Crane work of art.

²⁰Eric Solomon, "A Gloss on The Red Badge of Courage," Modern Language Notes, 75 (Feb. 1960), 112, 113.

manhood by Henry Fleming during the battle of Chancellorsville; for it is equally possible to assert, with Cazemajou, that it is not until his old-age confession of his battlefield lack of courage that Henry achieves real moral selflessness.²² The most that can be said for "The Veteran" as a gloss upon The Red Badge is that it precludes a totally negative-ironic reading of Henry at the end of the novel. In other words, while Henry at the conclusion of The Red Badge cannot necessarily be equated with Henry in "The Veteran," the former must have at least developed the germ or potential for becoming the latter, for otherwise "The Veteran" would deviate from Crane's earlier conception of Henry's character, which seems unlikely.

As has been suggested in discussing "The Veteran," not all of Crane's war writings avoid implicitly or explicitly aggrandizing heroic actions in battle. A long line of Crane's late war stories, of which "The Price of the Harness" is the best known, falls victim to such panegyrics on human heroism, as will be shown in a forthcoming chapter. Here it will suffice to illustrate from two of Crane's non-fiction war pieces, "The Spirit of the Greek People" (1897) and "The Gratitude of a Nation" (1894), what happens when Crane takes a wholly idealistic attitude toward war. The former piece exalts the heroic martial spirit of the Greek people as Crane saw it while reporting the Greco-Turkish War. No shade of irony intrudes on this idealized picture of the Greeks' passionate moral fervor to vanquish the infidel Turks; in fact,

²¹Holton, p. 310, n. 61.

²²LaFrance, p. 179; Solomon, "A Gloss on Red Badge," pp. 112-113; Cazemajou, Stephen Crane, p. 20.

writes Crane, "this heroic Greek talk sounds like four glasses of cognac on the shady side-walk before a cafe but it is not that kind strictly. It may be said truly to represent the attitude of the Grecian people."²³ Similarly, Crane's Decoration-Day article "The Gratitude of a Nation," written a few months before The Red Badge was published, idealizes highly the heroic patriotism of the Civil War soldiers. These soldiers are "our heroes," with "their deeds and privations, their wondrous patience and endurance, their grim, abiding faith and fortitude . . ."; having done "their duty to their God, their homes and their country," "they know the meaning of patriotism, and stars shot from guns would not hinder their devotion to the flag which they rescued from dust and oblivion" (VIII, 589-590).

The conventional sentimentality and lack of irony in "Gratitude of a Nation" have been noted by LaFrance, Daniel Hoffman, and Stallman, and the last named opines that because of the non-ironic nature of "Crane's patriotic tribute to these aged Civil War veterans . . . no one would guess that he wrote the Decoration Day invocation . . ." if its manuscript were not extant.²⁴ What this view forgets is that Crane's vision of life, being dipolar, encompasses both sentimental tenderness and irony of soul rather than only the latter. In truth, the parallels between the final battle scenes of The Red Badge and the

²³Works, IX, pp. 13-14. Probably because they and their cause (Christian Greeks bravely defending their homeland against invading non-Christian Turks) seemed morally right to him, Crane consistently idealized the Greeks' patriotism and bravery in writing about the Greco-Turkish War. See Stallman, Stephen Crane, pp. 272, 288.

²⁴LaFrance, p. 73n.; Hoffman, p. 150; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 109.

above passage from "Gratitude of a Nation" (which was written after The Red Badge, though published before), including "devotion to the flag" (Fleming, in a key scene late in The Red Badge, becomes the flag-bearer), should alert us not to dismiss the heroism displayed by Henry and his regiment in the novel as necessarily undercut by irony. Crane could be idealistic about battle heroics, and human nature (whether Crane's own or his characters') is never relentlessly objective for long; its innate tendency to subjectify and idealize can be resisted but never overcome.

"A Mystery of Heroism" and "The Veteran" are not the only earlier war stories to embody Crane's view that though human beings, objectively considered, are insignificant, incapable creatures, they nonetheless should maintain enough subjective self-esteem to stand up and be men. Two aesthetically inferior Civil War stories from The Little Regiment, the title story and "Three Miraculous Soldiers," both written in 1895, are worth notice here because--as has not been noted by previous criticism--the way in which their protagonists manifest Crane's dipolar, subjective/objective view of reality is similar to the way in which Henry Fleming comes to exhibit it. These two stories have been branded sentimental, conventional, and lacking in artistic detachment because in them Crane preaches too overtly about the fraternal feeling of brother for brother and of soldiers for their regiment ("The Little Regiment") or of a Southern girl for a wounded Northern soldier (ending of "Three Miraculous Soldiers").²⁵ These charges are true. Still,

²⁵See, e.g., LaFrance, pp. 75, 181; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 101; and Gullason, "Crane's Short Stories," in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 474-475.

both tales are useful to throw light on The Red Badge because in both of them, the protagonists are shown as bravely doing their military and moral duty despite the fact that they are seen to be insignificant beings impotent against the great fact of Death.

"The Little Regiment," though written in 1895, already reflects an attitude toward the common veteran soldier that is sometimes mistakenly regarded as a new development in Crane's war fiction of 1897 and later. The soldiers of the Little Regiment wish only to do their duty, which they see as being "to grab sleep and food when occasion permitted, and cheerfully fight wherever their feet were planted, until more orders came." Further, "of their own corps they spoke with a deep veneration, an idolatry, a supreme confidence They could prove that their division was the best in the corps, and that their regiment . . . was . . . the proud keystone of the defending arch" (VI,10,11). This subjective or egotistical view by the men of their own high capacities exists despite a more objective recognition that they are powerless to prevent their own dying: "The terrible voices [sound of guns] from the hills told him [Billie, the story's protagonist] that in this wide conflict his life was an insignificant fact, and that his death would be an insignificant fact. They portended the whirlwind to which he would be as necessary as a waved butterfly's wing" (VI,7). When the veteran soldiers encounter the enemy, "the greed for close quarters which is the emotion of a bayonet charge came then into the minds of the men and developed until it was a madness" (like the battle-madness of Henry Fleming's and his regiment's heroics in The Red Badge): "that fierce elation in the

terrors of war, catching a man's heart and making it burn with such ardor that he becomes capable of dying, flashed in the faces of the men . . . and made them resemble . . . animals . . ." (VI,16-17,16).

The particular charge in which the regiment is engaged on this occasion proves a failure, but that fact "could not make the veterans forget their business. With a last throe, the band of maniacs drew itself up and blazed a volley at the hill, insignificant to those iron entrenchments, but nevertheless expressing that singular final despair which enables men to coolly defy the walls of a city of death." When this encounter was over, "the men renamed their command. They called it the Little Regiment" (VI,17-18, my emphasis). This passage encapsulates virtually Crane's entire view of war and soldiers during his Red Badge period: the businesslike devotion to duty of the veteran soldier; the mad, instinctive quality of actual combat; and the paradoxical way in which (objectively) insignificant man can mysteriously summon up the (subjective) self-esteem to defy a death that he is powerless to prevent. The Little Regiment, then, like Crane's archetypal little man, is potentially capable of grand action despite its or his seeming littleness. From his early Sullivan County Sketches to his late Western tales, Crane often presents this dipolar view of man.

Not the least interesting fact about "Three Miraculous Soldiers" is that, for virtually the only time in Crane's fiction, a potential for heroic deeds despite human inadequacy is attributed to a woman. Mary, this story's protagonist, is a Southern girl whose mother's

barn is commandeered by a group of Northern troopers unaware that three Southern soldiers are hiding in the barn's feedbox. In this situation, "it seemed to Mary that . . . it was her duty to be a heroine. In all the stories she had read . . . the girl characters, confronted with such difficulties, invariably did hair breadth things. . . . Plainly a heroine would take measures to rescue the trapped men. If she did not at least make the attempt, she would be false to those carefully constructed ideals which were the accumulation of years of dreaming." But Mary's youthful ideals or fictions of heroic perfection fade "before the plain, homely difficulties of this situation" (VI,33); its realities are such that she can not think of any plan or method by which she can succeed in rescuing the Confederate soldiers.

To this point, Holton's judgment that the story proves Mary to be no heroine but instead exposes her conceptions of fine deeds to be just as false as Henry Fleming's before his first battle²⁶ seems valid; but it is not, for it overlooks the dipolarity of Crane's vision. The heroine of "Three Miraculous Soldiers" is a female counterpart of Fred Collins of "A Mystery of Heroism" rather than of the pre-battle Henry Fleming. Just as Collins is capable of prideful braggadocio over a basically foolish action (going for the water), Mary exhibits a "smile . . . of gleeful satisfaction at her daring" in unlocking the door of her home and venturing outside despite the possibility of enemy soldiers lurking about (VI,26). And as Collins (wrongly, as events

²⁶Holton, p. 142. Solomon's reading is essentially the same in Parody to Realism, p. 101.

prove) feels himself too deficient to be a hero in any sense, a mere "intruder in the land of fine deeds," Mary feels that "she was not . . . made of that fine stuff, that mental satin, which enabled some other beings to be of such mighty service to the distressed" (VI,53, 34). But just as Collins ultimately takes brave and moral action in lingering on the shelled meadow to offer a dying man a drink, Mary finally braves the dangers of getting caught and attempts the moral action of helping the three trapped Southern soldiers to escape: though "innumerable possibilities of danger . . . assailed her mind," Mary "at last went swiftly to the door, opened it and slid noiselessly into the darkness." Despite her fears, which are several times stressed, she lingers near the back of the barn, and, when it develops that the three soldiers are attempting to escape under the floor, she is able to play a role in their escape by "describ[ing] to them" the situation in the barn. . . . [and telling them] of the importance of absolute stillness" (VI,36,37-43,40). Thus Mary, again like Collins, demonstrates that one does not have to be a perfect person to act heroically, for all humans, though weak vessels, have the potentiality for fine behavior. This dual, subjective/objective view of humanity's position within the indifferent cosmos is well summed up in this passage from "Three Miraculous Soldiers": "High in the tree branches [Mary] could hear the voice of the wind, a melody of the night, low and sad, the plaint of an endless incommunicable sorrow. . . . At first she felt like weeping. This sound told her of human impotency and doom. Then later the trees and the wind breathed strength to her,

sang of sacrifice, of dauntless effort, of hard carven faces that did not blanch when Duty came at midnight or at noon" (VI,36). This message of the dual reality or truth about man is precisely the message that Henry Fleming must learn to comprehend in The Red Badge.

The Red Badge, like most other first-rate novels, is many-stranded and multi-thematic. In the course of treating in detail the way in which this novel reflects Crane's dipolar vision of reality, and in particular the ambivalence between objectivity and innately subjective human nature that pervades its final chapters, various other aspects and cruxes of Red Badge will be treated as they are relevant to my major purpose. First of all, which version of this novel should be used by the critic is in dispute, since Red Badge is known to have existed in a number of different textual states. Joseph Katz has briefly surveyed the several textual stages of the novel. Crane probably began writing it in March of 1893, producing (in ten days, according to Crane) a version of which no manuscript survives. In the summer and fall of 1893, perhaps after a visit to the site of the battle of Chancellorsville, Crane wrote first a shorter and then a longer manuscript version of Red Badge (to be abbreviated here as SV and LV), of which part of SV (through Chapter XII of the novel) and nearly all of LV are extant. The second of these versions, LV, was revised by Crane at least twice, perhaps more; by far the most important aspect of these revisions involved a trimming in which Crane "cut much of the explicit philosophizing that had been a chief feature of the novel" The next stage was the first published

version, a Bachelier newspapers syndication in December, 1894, for which Crane produced a much shorter and revised version of LV that altered the story into a pure action-suspense narrative.²⁷ Finally, when Appleton published Red Badge in book form in September of 1895, the text of the novel, though close to that of LV, incorporated "revisions in the syndication [text] not present in [any of] the surviving manuscripts . . .," which fact, Katz speculates, suggests "that Crane had prepared for [the Appleton book] still another script, now missing." Though close to that of the LV manuscript, the text of the Appleton novel excluded a few uncanceled passages and many cancelled ones from LV, as well as differing from it in numerous other, though minor, ways.²⁸

The recent scholarship of Fredson Bowers that produced in 1975 the Red Badge text for the University of Virginia edition of Crane's works has altered in certain respects Katz's generally accurate picture of the novel's stages of development. The earliest extant version of Red Badge remains the incomplete SV manuscript (Bowers' label for it is MS_(d)), consisting of fifty-seven assorted pages (but none after Chapter XII) that survived because Crane used the reverse sides of these SV pages to write portions of LV (called MS in Bowers'

²⁷Joseph Katz, intro. to Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the Civil War (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1969), pp. viii-xii.

²⁸Joseph Katz, "Afterword: Resources for the Study of Stephen Crane," in Katz, Crane in Transition, pp. 222-223.

terminology). SV and LV were written during the fall of 1893 and spring of 1894, and Bowers thinks it probable that SV never did extend beyond Chapter XII, but that Crane abandoned it at that point for LV. Crane made several separate revisions of LV, rather than just two as Katz thought. In the earliest of these revisions, Crane replaced most proper-name references to the characters with phrases like "the youth," "the tall soldier," and "the loud soldier," presumably with an eye toward universalizing his battle story. A second change, occurring after Garland had read the LV manuscript of the novel in April, 1894, effected Garland's suggestion to reduce or eliminate dialect in the speeches of Conklin, Wilson, and Fleming's mother. Also subsequent to Garland's reading of the manuscript, Crane deleted the novel's original Chapter XII and cut from several chapter endings passages of philosophic meditation by Fleming, probably in an attempt to let the narrative carry more and overt philosophical statement less of the novel's meaning. A final revision of the LV manuscript involved only a few superficial changes. After these revisions, Bowers' best reconstruction is that two separate but identical typescripts of the LV manuscript were given by Crane to Bachelier's and Appleton's respectively. The Bachelier editors on their own made heavy cuts, condensations, and rewritings of their typescript in order to fit it to the needs of newspaper syndication (thus rendering this version of the text obviously inauthentic in terms of Crane's own intention). Crane himself made a few revisions in the typescript used by Bachelier, and he also had a hand in revisions made in the Appleton typescript, revisions reproduced in the novel as published by Appleton in September,

1895. In these Appleton typescript revisions, Crane continued to reduce the bulk of Fleming's introspective meditation and philosophic commentary and furthered his earlier changes of characters' dialect and of labelling characters rather than using their proper names. Also at this late stage of revision, Crane lengthened Chapter XXIV, the novel's final chapter, by adding to it various reflections by Fleming and by expanding its ending to include the last few sentences with their references to Henry's idyllic picture of his future, presented in terms of rural-nature imagery.²⁹

Given this textual situation, the main debate is what use should be made by scholars of the philosophical material that Crane cancelled from the final version of his novel, as well as of the earlier SV manuscript, which contains an additional helping of philosophical pie. Katz in his 1969 edition of Red Badge excluded everything not found in the published Appleton text of the novel, while Stallman in his 1973 The Stephen Crane Reader included many of the subsequently-revised-out LV passages, placing those uncanceled in the LV manuscript in brackets within his main Red Badge text and those clearly crossed out or cancelled in LV, plus those found in SV, in his end-notes.³⁰ Certainly today's reader must respect Crane's obvious desire to delete much philosophical material from the reading text of Red Badge. Not

²⁹Fredson Bowers, ed., The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. II (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1975), textual analysis by Bowers, pp. 183-244.

³⁰Katz defends his editorial choice in "Afterword," in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 223; Stallman explains his in Stephen Crane Reader, pp. 176-178.

only does the revised LV, corrected by those changes in the Appleton typescript of LV that are deemed authorial rather than editorial, represent Crane's final intention in his novel, but it is also more aesthetically pleasing than the unrevised LV manuscript, with its excess of heavy, overt philosophizing. The most likely motive for Crane's pruning of LV was a desire to avoid preaching at his readers and to allow the novel's meaning to emerge implicitly rather than explicitly.³¹ Still, for the scholar, it is useful and perhaps essential to have the important LV and SV variants from the revised Red Badge text at hand, for with their more open philosophizing, they often can throw valuable light upon the meaning of the novel. Levenson argues acutely that despite Crane's cuts in Fleming's meditative-philosophical ruminations, Crane "took seriously his ironic perception of homo cogitans and loved The Red Badge less for its leaving out such matters." Stallman's Red Badge text in his Stephen Crane Reader includes in convenient form all of the significant philosophical material that Crane later cut from the novel, and for this reason I shall use his text throughout this chapter. True, Bowers' edition of Red Badge for the Crane University of Virginia Edition is more definitive than Stallman's, since his use of the revised LV rather than the published Appleton text as his copy-text enables him to eliminate non-authorial

³¹As Crane wrote in 1897, "I try to give readers a slice out of life; and if there is any moral or lesson in it, I do not try to point it out. I let the reader find it for himself" (Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 158-159). In practice, Crane did not always heed his own advice, but surely the revised version of Red Badge is far closer to it than is the original LV version.

(i.e., editorial) changes in the Red Badge text. But because in Bowers' text the philosophical passages excised from the final version of Red Badge are scattered among four different parts of the textual apparatus, it will be easier for the reader to follow my use of the SV and LV material if I quote from the Stallman text.³²

Little if any evidence exists that Crane's deletions in Fleming's philosophic meditations were intended to alter the meaning of Red Badge. If anything, they make our view of Henry less ironic,³³ but since Henry in the revised version of LV is still no paragon of perfection, Crane's dual (sympathetic and ironic) view of Henry is evident enough whether one is reading SV, original LV, or revised LV. And some aspects of the novel's meaning can be seen more clearly if one makes use of all stages of the Red Badge text rather than limiting oneself to one.

For instance, it is much easier to trace and to understand the significance of Henry Fleming's "revolt against the universe" if, like Fryckstedt in his seminal 1961 article on Red Badge, one makes use of the manuscript versions of the novel. Fryckstedt states that

³²Levenson, Works, II, p. lxxx; see also p. lvii. In his Red Badge text, Stallman, as he explains on p. 178, places uncanceled LV passages in square brackets at their appropriate places within the Appleton text and includes in an appendix and in notes "the critically interesting variants" from the Appleton text that are found among the cancelled passages in LV and in SV. All of my references to this novel will be from this Stallman text and will be acknowledged in the body of the text by the abbreviation RB and the page number(s). See Works, II, pp. 234-237, for Bowers' explanation of his choice of copy-text. To avoid any possibility of inauthentic readings, I have checked all of my quotations from Stallman's Red Badge text against the readings in Bowers' text and have found that no substantive variations of any significance exist.

³³See, e.g., Bergon, p. 82.

when Crane excised parts of the earlier manuscripts en route to producing the Appleton version of the novel, "he only retained one instance which could be termed a revolt against the universe on Fleming's part . . . ," that being Fleming's shaking of his fist at the sun immediately after Jim Conklin's death. Fryckstedt errs here, since he overlooks a passage in Chapter VII, after Henry learns that the Union soldiers he has deserted have won a victory, in which Henry "felt that he had been wronged" and "a dull, animal-like rebellion against his fellows, war in the abstract, and fate grew within him" (RB,217-218). Fryckstedt is nevertheless correct that most of the material dealing with this revolt against the universe by Henry was dropped by Crane in the Appleton version of the novel.³⁴ At the end of Chapter X, when Henry deserts the tattered man because he believes the latter is about to discover Henry's "crime" of having run away from battle, the Appleton text does make clear to the reader what is not clear to Henry, that only "chance persistency" by the tattered man, not fate, has threatened exposure of Henry's secret (RB,233,my emphasis). But only in a cancelled LV passage is Henry's deluded view spelled out: "He thought the powers of fate had combined to heap misfortune upon him." Henry feels that he has been "an innocent victim" of fate, blithely ignoring the fact that he chose to desert the army when most other soldiers did not. Next, recognizing that

³⁴Olov W. Fryckstedt, "Henry Fleming's Tupenny Fury: Cosmic Pessimism in Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage," Studia Neophilologica, 33 (1961), 273, 265-266.

war and its concomitant death are part of nature's processes, Henry mistakenly views nature as, like fate, consciously out to get man rather than, as an objective observer would realize, indifferently embracing both life and death: "He rebelled against the source of things War, he said bitterly to the sky, was a make-shift created because ordinary processes didn't furnish deaths enough." And in the SV version of this part of Chapter X--which was longer still than the cancelled LV version just quoted from--we read that Henry "regarded the armies as Nature's dupes, who were killing each other to carry out some great scheme of life." It is because of such mistaken, subjective beliefs that man's future is fated and the universe actively antagonistic toward man that Henry (in the same SV passage in Chapter X) "turned in tupenny fury upon the high, tranquil sky. . . . [and] would . . . like to have splashed it with a derisive paint" (RB,556-557).

Henry's obsession with fatalism has two negative effects upon him: to his mind it relieves him from responsibility for willed action, but it also paradoxically sets him to trying to avoid what "fate" has in store for him. The latter attempt is seen clearly in LV Chapter XII (a chapter subsequently dropped entirely in the Appleton novel): "Admitting that he was powerless and at the will of the law, he yet planned to escape; menaced by fatality he schemed to avoid it. . . . He saw himself living in watchfulness, frustrating the plans of the unchangeable, making of fate a fool" (RB,302-303). The still earlier written SV version of this later-expunged Chapter XII ascribes Henry's

confidence that he can escape his fate to foolish pride: "it was not his duty to bow [to . . .] the inevitable. On the contrary, it was his business to kick and scratch and bite And he would be saved according to the importance of his strength. His egotism made him feel [. . . secure . . .] for a time from the iron hands" (RB,559). The truth of the matter, unperceived by Henry at this time, is that what he calls fate is merely the operation of the chance universe, and that any actions taken by himself within such a universe may succeed--or they may not. Henry comprehends this fact later, in an LV passage cancelled from Chapter XIV of the novel: "He thought with deep contempt of all his grapplings and tuggings with fate and the universe. It was now evident that a large proportion of the regiment had been, if they chose, . . . capable of the same quality of condemnation of the world . . ." (RB,561); i.e., they could have fled, as Henry had, from the battle and rationalized their cowardly actions as fated rather than personally willed. And by the novel's final chapter, Henry "found that he could look back upon . . . his earlier gospels and see them truly. He . . . now despised them" (RB,296). Here an uncanceled LV passage not in the Appleton novel makes it clear what those gospels are: "He would no more stand upon places high and false, and denounce the distant planets" (RB,296). Though Henry has scarcely become a paragon of objectivity--as other parts of this final chapter show--he has learned to see the cosmos objectively enough to accept its chance operations rather than shaking his fist at and cursing them.

Obviously, the LV and SV manuscripts are quite useful in clarifying thematic patterns in the Appleton Red Badge, even though the long-winded philosophizing in the manuscripts is sometimes sophomoric and occasionally self-contradictory—as if Crane was thinking out loud on issues about which he himself was considerably less than clear—as well as eminently disposable aesthetically. Bearing the value of the manuscripts in mind, and remembering (as the previous paragraphs have shown) Henry's development from total self-centeredness to a more objective understanding of the universe, we are in a position to detect flaws in some of the scholarly objections to the ending of Red Badge. Fryckstedt, for example, finds that Henry's new "guarded cosmic optimism" in Chapter XXIV is unwarranted because Henry has forgotten what he had learned earlier, "that fate was hard and its purposes were obscure" ³⁵ But the real reason Henry has abandoned his pessimism in Chapter XXIV is not that he has forgotten fate, but that he has realized, at least intermittently, that its operations spring from indifference, not conscious malignity. In an uncancelled LV passage, Henry is momentarily afraid that his cowardice in fleeing from his first battle will sully him forever, but he soon realizes that "the sky would forget. . . . The imperturbable sun shines on insult and worship" (RB,294). And later in the final chapter, Henry is able to smile, "for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many

³⁵Fryckstedt, "Henry Fleming's Tupenny Fury," p. 272.

discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks" (RB,296).

This is not unwarranted optimism; it does not imply that the world guarantees success for any human, but simply that the world is not a deliberately hostile place in which man is reduced to cursing it or to relying on religious creeds and other conventional ideas to survive in it, like a man leaning on a walking stick.³⁶

Another view of the latter part of Red Badge that seems mistaken is James Colvert's indictment that it "evades [the] central dramatic issue" of man's relation to nature, shifting rather "to another problem, Henry's commitment to his fellow soldiers, to the regiment as a community for man," and Holton's similar charge that "Crane . . . seems incapable of . . . [deciding] which of these [two] concerns is the more important" ³⁷ Actually, these two central themes of Red Badge--the apprehension of the truth about nature and Henry's modulation between self-centeredness and community--are intimately related. Henry's self-concern and his self-pity at his harsh "fate" are twin products of his misapprehension of his own importance to the universe (either in the positive sense that it cares for and coddles him or in the negative sense that it is out to squash him). It is only after he arrives at a more (though never totally) objective comprehension of the indifferences of the universe and his own

³⁶Compare Judge Hagenthorpe's reliance on his walking stick (conventional ideas) in his response to Dr. Trescott's having saved the "monster" Henry Johnson's life, as discussed in my previous chapter.

³⁷Colvert, intro. to Works, VI, p. xxiii; Holton, pp. 117-118.

insignificance in it that he is capable of brotherly commitment to his fellow soldiers in battle, instead of running away as he had done earlier.³⁸

Another misapprehension about Red Badge related to the one just discussed is that expressed by Solomon: "Henry's growth, since it is one of casting off egocentricity and reliance on his own intellect and replacing them with group loyalty and reliance on group values like obedience to orders, etc., is a military rather than moral . . .

. [Henry] has not become a 'good' man [morally]" in Red Badge.³⁹ Other critics have carried to extremes this view that moral improvement is not to be found in the Henry Fleming of Red Badge, arguing that Henry eventually discards his feelings of guilt (feelings derived from his Christian education) over his "sins" or weaknesses, abandons the belief that "the act of fighting is . . . some kind of ultimate moral testing of the self . . . ," and "reject[s] the claims on him for a renewed sense of guilt that could be crippling" ⁴⁰

³⁸Levenson, intro. to Works, II, p. liii, recognizes the importance that Henry places on loyalty and states that Henry does develop a "sense of comradeship" in the latter stages of the novel.

³⁹Eric Solomon, "The Structure of 'The Red Badge of Courage,'" Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Autumn 1959), 228, 234. Robert Rechnitz, "Depersonalization and the Dream in The Red Badge of Courage," Studies in the Novel, 6 (Spring, 1974), 76, 85, plunges the same mistaken point to farcical depths by equating Henry's (supposedly) final objective vision in the novel with the "socially derived and sanctioned vision" (p. 76) of the military.

⁴⁰James Trammell Cox, "The Imagery of 'The Red Badge of Courage,'" Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Autumn 1959), 214, 217; Marvin Klotz, "Romance or Realism?: Plot, Theme, and Character in The Red Badge of Courage," CLA Journal, 6 (Dec. 1962), p. 103; John Fraser, "Crime and Forgiveness: 'The Red Badge' in Time of War," Criticism, 9 (Summer, 1967), 250, 246. (The direct quotations are from Fraser.) Other

Actually, however, Red Badge is full of Henry's moral wrestlings throughout, and his mother's admonition to him before he goes off to battle specifically connects fellow-feeling (as opposed to egotism) under battle conditions with right moral behavior: "'Don't go a-thinkin' you can lick the hull rebel army . . . , because yeh can't. Yeh jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others yeh must never do no shirking, child If so be a time comes when yeh have to be kilt or kill the enemy, why, Henry, don't think of anything 'cept what's right . . .'" (RB,182-183). Henry fears that he will shirk his moral duty to his fellow soldiers by deserting the battlefield, as he soon indeed does, and he even goes so far, after he has fled the battle, as selfishly to tell "his conscience . . . that a defeat for the army . . . might mean many favorable things for him" (RB,236). But at the novel's end, after he has abandoned such selfishness in favor of brotherly aid to his fellow soldiers, he again views his "public deeds" on the battlefield in moral as well as military terms: "He saw that he was good" (RB,293,294).

True, in Chapter XXIV Henry remains ashamed of two past non-moral actions, his initial battlefield desertion of his fellow soldiers and his desertion of the dying tattered man (the latter act is specifically termed a "sin": RB,295). But he correctly realizes that when he fled from the battlefield, he had been (according to an uncanceled

critics have opposed views such as these with the accurate (in my opinion) finding that moral issues are central in Red Badge from start to finish and that Henry does improve morally in the novel; see, e.g., LaFrance, pp. 141, 152, 120, 123; Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane: The Pattern of Affirmation," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 14 (Dec. 1959), 224; and Greenfield, p. 568.

LV passage) "a novice who did not comprehend" objectively the nature of the universe, whereas now he has developed (in another uncanceled LV passage) "a large sympathy for the machinery of the universe" and "beheld that he was tiny but not inconsequent to the sun" (RB,294, 296).⁴¹ Even more telling is Henry's "plan for the utilization of the sin" of deserting the tattered man, expressed in yet another uncanceled LV passage in Chapter XXIV: "its importance in the aftertime would be great to him if it even succeeded in hindering the workings of his egotism. . . . It would become a good part of him. He would have upon him often the consciousness of a great mistake. And he would be taught to deal gently and with care. He would be a man" (RB,296, my emphasis). Evident from this passage is the moral context in which Henry views his excesses of egotism and his determination to be a man morally as well as physically or militarily.

Henry's basically balanced picture of himself in the final chapter as "tiny but not inconsequent," i.e., as weak and inadequate from the objective standpoint of the universe, but still capable of brave and moral actions and thus not void of value from the subjective standpoint of himself and other human beings, is the final result of the tension throughout Red Badge between the opposed positive and negative charges of Crane's dipolar vision. Earlier, Henry either

⁴¹Henry has by no means totally sloughed off his subjective egotism in this final chapter, as his belief here that he is "not inconsequent to the sun" demonstrates. Also egotistical is his subsequent conclusion that "the great death the . . . was for others," not for himself (RB,296; the bracketed phrase is an uncanceled LV passage not present in the Appleton Red Badge). But as I shall later argue, this continuing egotism of Henry should not be taken as vitiating the moral progress that he has made during the course of the novel.

had imagined himself as a perfect battle hero, with the other soldiers "secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess," a hero who, after his momentary success in his first battle, was possessed "even with those ideals which he had considered as far beyond him," or else he had wallowed in an agony of self-loathing, concluding "in despair . . . it to be impossible that he should ever become a hero" (RB,180-181,212,236). Opposed to Henry from the start in that he already possesses a balanced view of himself and of other human beings is Jim Conklin. In the opening chapter of Red Badge, Conklin says "in a tolerant way" that some of the new recruits inevitably will lack courage in their first battle and will desert the army, but that most of them will not. Conklin's view of his own character is similarly balanced. He lacks excessive egotism, acknowledging that "'if a whole lot of boys started and run, why, I s'pose I'd start and run. And if I once started to run, I'd run like the devil, and no mistake"; but at the same time he maintains a quiet confidence in himself that it takes Henry two days of battle experience to develop: "'But if everybody was a-standing and a-fighting, why, I'd stand and fight. Be jiminey, I would, I'll bet on it'" (RB,187,188, my emphasis).

Conklin's thoughts in the above passage demonstrate that he is brave not through mere dumb loyalty to conventional values, but rather is capable of analyzing with skill and accuracy his own and others' battlefield conduct. Like Henry, Conklin is mentally active (he is referred to by the narrator as "the philosophical tall soldier"--RB, 200); but he is not, as Henry is, excessively egotistic. The

(qualified) confidence that he has from the beginning in his battle bravery stems from his ability to endure, rather than to rebel against and complain of, whatever happens in the chance environment of war in the random universe. It takes Henry the full course of the novel to learn what Conklin is capable of from the start, his "accept[ing] new environment and circumstance with great coolness . . ." (RB, 201). As Thomas Lorch puts it, Conklin's "true soundness and stability emerge when he talks quietly to Henry and during the marches. He is the first to point out the importance of being a member of the group, he answers Henry's criticism of the generals 'with calm faith' [He] represents . . . the virtues of discipline, dedication to duty, and concern for the group" ⁴²

Conklin's manner of death is also evidence against scholarly views like LaFrance's which, despite Crane's own statement that he "intended Red Badge to be a psychological portrayal of fear," deny

⁴²Thomas M. Lorch, "The Cyclical Structure of The Red Badge of Courage," CLA Journal, 10 (March 1967), 235-236. Obviously, I see no merit in the recent trend by a minority of Crane commentators, such as John J. McDermott, "Symbolism and Psychological Realism in The Red Badge of Courage," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23 (Dec. 1968), 324-325, LaFrance, pp. 100-101, and Rechnitz, pp. 76, 80, to paint Conklin as some sort of villain rather than as a hero. These and other critics who convict Conklin of being a bad hombre because he devotes himself to the military values of war like duty and unthinking obedience to his superiors, such as Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane and the Personal Universal," Modern Fiction Studies, 8 (Winter 1962-63), 358-359, and Neal J. Osborn, "William Ellery Channing and The Red Badge of Courage," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 69 (March 1965), 183, 196, do not understand Crane's own conception that military duty and battle brotherhood are high moral virtues. In evaluating Conklin's character, see also the mature Henry Fleming's praise in "The Veteran" (VI, 83) of Conklin's battle bravery in contrast to Henry's own "'unreasonable'" fear.

that Henry's fear of death in the novel is warranted.⁴³ Man's encounter with death, that ultimate, inevitable process of indifferent nature, is the most intensely realized theme in Crane's writings from the Sullivan County Sketches on, and Red Badge is no exception. Further, it is, as Holton suggests, through Henry's experience of Conklin's death, along with his encounter with the corpse in the forest "chapel" and his rambles with the dying tattered man, that Henry begins to grasp the objective realities of man's unimportance to nature and his inability to save either himself or others from their natural end of death.⁴⁴ Henry, then, must develop two qualities: a courageous ability to face the unknown, death, despite his fears of it and a concern, or brotherly feeling, for others who are faced with the likelihood of death, rather than an exclusive self-concern.⁴⁵

Conklin is an exemplar of both of these traits, as his conduct during his dying moments indicates. Conklin at this time is a "reproach" to Henry because the former has suffered his mortal wound, and thus must "stare into the unknown" of death, because he loyally

⁴³Stallman and Gilkes, p. 158; LaFrance, p. 118. Solomon, who does recognize Conklin's genuine "terror of death" in his dying moments, nonetheless claims that the theme of fear is not the central theme of Red Badge, for "the standards by which Henry's development is measured are those of group loyalty rather than fear and courage" ("Structure of 'Red Badge,'" p. 226). But actually, physical courage and moral courage, which includes brotherhood, go hand in hand throughout Crane's writings. Henry must develop the physical bravery not to fear excessively death in battle at the hands of the indifferent universe in order to display the moral courage of loyalty to his fellow soldiers in battle. Compare Fred Collins in "A Mystery of Heroism."

⁴⁴Holton, pp. 100-103.

⁴⁵Levenson concurs. See Works, II, pp. xxix, lxxii-lxxiii.

remained with his battle-engaged fellow soldiers, whereas Henry permitted his fear of dying to overcome his moral duty to his fellows and fled the battlefield. While dying, Conklin is "overcome by a terror" of death to the extent that "his face turned to a semblance of gray paste," yet he is able ultimately "to forget all those fears" and to wait with "curious and profound dignity" and "with patience for something [the unknown, Death] that he had come to meet." In this manner, Conklin exhibits the highest bravery that a man can display, the courage to face an inevitable death, and the onlooking Henry and tattered soldier can only wonder "'Where th' blazes does he git his stren'th from?'" and exclaim "'Well, he was reg'lar jim-dandy for nerve, wa'n't he . . .'" (RB,225-230). Finally, Conklin's physical bravery during his death scene is moral bravery as well, for despite his mortal wound he has not relinquished his brotherly concern for others: upon recognizing Henry, he asks him "'Where yeh been . . .?' . . . 'I thought mebbe yeh got keeled over. . . . I was worryin' about it a good deal'" (RB,226). That Henry (along with his companion Wilson) does later develop a courage similar to Conklin's in the face of seemingly inevitable death is evidenced at the end of Chapter XVIII of Red Badge, where Henry and Wilson sally into battle with "no hesitation in each other's faces" despite their feeling that certainly "'We'll git swallowed,'" a feeling based on statements by the commanding general about Henry's regiment that the two soldiers have just overheard: "'Mule drivers--hell to pay--don't believe many will get

back'" (RB,269).⁴⁶

We may now trace more closely Henry Fleming's fluctuations between subjective and objective visions of reality and his resultant alternations between pride (self-concern) on the one hand and stoic endurance and concern for his fellow man on the other. It is not accurate to label Henry's subjective vision "illusion" and his objective vision "reality," as some critics do,⁴⁷ for Crane's vision of reality in Red Badge, as in his writings as a whole, is dipolar. As Robert Albrecht says, "The doubleness [in Red Badge] is not between the real and the unreal but between one reality and another. Crane is . . . attempting to . . . reveal the deceptiveness of reality."⁴⁸ Since for Crane both the subjective and the objective visions of life are real, it follows that, though he may chastise Henry for his subjective excesses of self-centeredness and vanity, he is too much of a realist about human nature, as will be seen, to condemn Henry for not adopting at the end of the novel a totally selfless, objective attitude

⁴⁶Bergon overlooks the fellow-concern expressed in Henry's leadership in the second day's battle encounters in Red Badge when he objects (p. 82) that "Fleming, unlike Wilson or the cheery soldier, nowhere demonstrates that generosity toward others which apparently comes to one who can 'perceive himself as a very wee thing'"

⁴⁷E.g., Holton, pp. 88-89; Joseph Katz, "'The Blue Battalions' and the Uses of Experience," Studia Neophilologica, 38 (1966), 109; and Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "Judging Henry Judging: Point of View in The Red Badge of Courage," Ball State University Forum, 15 (Spring 1974), 48.

⁴⁸Albrecht, p. 490. John W. Rathbun, in what is probably the most insightful recent article on Red Badge, "Structure and Meaning in The Red Badge of Courage," Ball State University Forum, 10 (Winter, 1969), 15, also admonishes critics who differentiate between "Fleming's illusions and 'reality,'" for, to Crane, "'reality' . . . is . . . essentially unreadable."

toward everything.⁴⁹ In his own life Crane was highly susceptible to pride, so much so that Corwin K. Linson, one of Crane's closest friends, could write in a letter after Crane's death that "Steve was perhaps the most complete example of a self-absorbed ego that was ever carried on two feet" Linson's view is supported by a glance through Crane's own letters, in which he frequently exhibits or admits his own vanity. Typical is this passage displaying his reaction to an honorary dinner arranged for him in late 1895: "The dinner scheme overwhelms me in pride and arrogance to think I have such friends. . . . you ought to see the effect . . . upon my family. Aint [sic] they swelled up, though! . . . It's great. I am no longer a black sheep but a star." Crane was aware of his own propensity to vanity, though, and battled against it. In fact, the following passage from an 1896 Crane letter could well serve as a gloss on Henry Fleming's accomplishments as regards pride during the course of Red Badge: "it is a very comfortable and manful occupation to trample upon one's own egotism. When I reached twenty-one years and first really scanned my personal egotism I was fairly dazzled by the size of it. . . . Perhaps I have

⁴⁹Critics endlessly debate whether Crane was harshly ironic toward his protagonist Henry, denying him any psychological or moral growth and showing him in the end "essentially the same old Henry, after all" (Burhans, pp. 46-47,45) or whether Crane empathized too much with his protagonist Henry and therefore allowed him an unwarranted idealistic-sentimental triumph at the book's end (Colvert, in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 96-98). Both views mislead. Crane's feeling toward his protagonist was genuinely ambivalent, caused by the ambivalence of his own dipolar vision. "Crane's attitude toward Henry Fleming is a mixture of detachment and involvement . . . ," Crane viewing Henry with pity and some empathy as well as with irony (Fryckstedt, "Henry Fleming's Tupenny Fury," pp. 271,281).

succeeded in lowering it a trifle."⁵⁰

In the initial chapter of Red Badge, Henry Fleming, ignoring his mother's objective observation that a soldier is "jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others . . . ," prefers the egotistical, subjective view that "his province [as a soldier] was to look out, as far as he could, for his own personal comfort" (RB,182,184). Henry feels himself "separated from the others," the other soldiers, because he wrongly finds "radical differences between himself and those men . . ." (RB,191,193). At times these differences between himself and others imagined by Henry derive from a sense of his superiority to the other soldiers, as when he feels that he "had fled [from his first battle] because of his superior perceptions and knowledge," whereas "his comrades . . . had been fools" in staying (RB,218). More commonly Henry's feeling of dissimilarity to others stems from intimations of inferiority: "Sometimes he inclined to believing [his fellow soldiers] all heroes. In fact, he usually admitted in secret the superior development of the higher qualities in others" (RB,189). Holding such a view, Henry is buffaloed by Wilson's apparent "sprightly, vigorous, fiery . . . belief in [his own] success," failing to see that Wilson in reality is as terrified of battle as is Henry: both, unlike Jim Conklin, are burdened with the excessive self-concern of the egotist. But Henry, unaware that Wilson and in fact

⁵⁰Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 328, 73, 98. Among the more interesting other mentions or reflections in his letters of Crane's pride are those found in Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 11, n. 11, 76, and 95.

most of the other soldiers are like himself in viewing reality subjectively, "fail^[S] to discover any mite of resemblance in their view points No one ^[else] seemed to be wrestling with such a terrific personal problem. He was a mental outcast" (RB,194-195).

Thus the early chapters of Red Badge present us with a Henry who is unduly self-concerned and who deliberately tries to separate himself from the other men, both physically and morally, through his failure to perceive that they are not different from but rather are similar to himself in both their subjective self-concern and in their capacity to cast off that subjectivism at times to aid others and further a worthy battle cause. That Henry does in fact have this ability to transcend egotism becomes evident as early as his first battle experience in Chapter V: "He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part--a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country--was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. . . . He felt the subtle battle brotherhood a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death" (RB,207-208). Thus, as in "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and numerous Crane war stories, the danger of imminent death (an objective fact of the universe) can transmute man's natural subjective egotism into brotherhood, and this process is presented in moral terms: Henry is concerned for his fellow soldiers and for the "cause" for which they fight.

Still, at this point Henry fears death unduly because he

subjectively rates his own importance in the universe too high, and therefore he is unable to maintain his momentary sense of brotherhood but instead flees the battle with his "face [showing] all the horror of those things [death at the hands of the enemy] which he imagined." Henry's rediscovered self-concern "wondrously magnified" his fears of death--and also conceals the fact that even in running away from battle he is scarcely unique or alone, as he later feels, because several other soldiers have deserted the battlefield before Henry does (RB,214). (Thus even in his desertion, Henry is not different from but instead similar to other humans. Even Jim Conklin had said that he would probably run away if a number of other soldiers were doing so--RB,188.) That Henry's retreat from battle is essentially motivated by excessive self-concern, by a too exclusively subjective vision of life, is reflected in his later thought concerning that retreat: "He had considered the time, he said, to be one in which it was the duty of every little piece to rescue itself if possible" (RB, 217).⁵¹

Between the time he flees the battlefield in Chapter VI and the time he rejoins his regiment in Chapter XIII, Henry encounters two men, Jim Conklin and the tattered soldier, who exhibit brotherly

⁵¹A pioneer article on Red Badge, John E. Hart, "The Red Badge of Courage as Myth and Symbol," University of Kansas City Review, 19 (Summer 1953), 249-256, perceptively traces Henry's "isolation/ from the group," his failure "to identify himself with his comrades . . . and thus to give up his individual self . . . (252)," through the early chapters of Red Badge. Hart's Jungian-mythical reading of the novel, however, leads him to assume wrongly that Henry's individual egotism has vanished by the time he rejoins his regiment in Chapter XIII and to overestimate the degree of objective unselfishness achieved by Henry in the novel's final chapters (254-256).

concern for others despite the danger of their own imminent death-- this being the very thing that Henry himself has been unable to do (except fleetingly) during his first battle. Conklin's concern for Henry's welfare despite his own dying condition has already been cited. In similar fashion, the first reaction to Henry by the tattered soldier, who has been wounded in both head and arm, is "to sidle near to the youth, and . . . try to make him a friend." Since Henry is walking among the group of wounded men, the tattered man naturally assumes that Henry too has been wounded: "'Where yeh hit, ol' boy?' he asked in a brotherly tone." Henry's selfish reaction to this query (guilt and shame at his own cowardice, caused by his exaggerated sense of his own importance and symbolized by his lack of a wound or badge of courage) contrasts sharply with the other-concerned tone in which the tattered one has asked the question (RB,224-225). Although the tattered soldier is terribly afraid that he himself will soon die ("'I'm commencin' t' feel pretty bad' 'There too much dependin' on me fer me t' die yit. . . . Ye'd oughta see th' swad a' chil'ren I've got, an' all like that.'"), he still thinks of Henry: "'Yeh look pretty peek-ed yerself' 'I bet yeh 've got a worsen [wound] than yeh think. . . . It might be inside mostly, an' them plays thunder'" (RB,231). The tattered man is righter than he knows: Henry's wound is "inside," a moral defeat rather than a physical one, and it manifests itself almost immediately when Henry selfishly abandons his near-dead companion in order to avoid "witness[ing] . . . another grim encounter" with death and to preserve the shameful secret of his

battlefield desertion of his comrades. In violent contrast to the tattered soldier's fraternal tone, Henry's voice is "hard" and he "cast B glances of hatred and contempt at the tattered man" when he bids him "'Good-by.'" Astonished, the tattered one can only stutter "'Why--why, pardner, where yeh goin'?" and add that "'It ain't--right--it ain't--fer yeh t' go--trompin' off--with a bad hurt . . .'" (RB,231-232).

The manner in which Henry soon thereafter receives his own red badge of courage is much less ironic than most criticism has discerned. Henry sees a group of Union soldiers running away from the battle and is "horrorstricken" by their flight because he thinks it means that his side has lost the battle. His reaction is quite similar to his brief battle brotherhood in his initial battle experience: "He forgot that he was engaged in combating the universe. He threw aside his mental pamphlets on the philosophy of the retreated and rules for the guidance of the damned. He lost concern for himself, He had the impulse to make a rallying speech, to sing a battle hymn, but he could only get his tongue to call into the air: 'Why--why--what--what's th' matter?'" It is while he is thus incoherently trying to rouse renewed courage and patriotism in the fleeing men, thus showing a concern for people and for a cause rather than for himself, that he receives a rifle blow to his head from one of the deserting soldiers (RB,239-240).⁵²

⁵²The bracketed passage in this quotation is an uncanceled LV sentence that (one surmises) Crane omitted from the Appleton novel because it pointed the moral of this episode too overtly. Solomon

Having thus displayed a capacity for courage and concern for others that had been sadly lacking in his dealings with the tattered man, Henry is now ripe for a re-integration into the group, and this act of rejoining is accomplished through the brotherly help of the cheery man, "he who . . . so befriended" Henry and leads Henry to his regiment (RB,242-243). However, Henry's rejoining of his regiment at this time is more involuntary than voluntary, as indicated by his need for the cheery man to guide him there. Once back, Henry "submit[s] passively to the . . . directing strength" (RB,245, my emphasis) of a changed Wilson, who now (like the cheery and tattered men and like Conklin) shows genuine concern for the apparently wounded Henry and who takes care of him while Henry, symbolically as well as literally, "leaned heavily upon his friend" (RB,245). Wilson similarly cares for the regiment as a whole, attempting to make peace when the men bicker among themselves and thinking of them as a group: "'I hate t' see th' boys fightin' 'mong themselves.' . . . 'We'll be at th' rebs in less'n an hour. What's th' good fightin' 'mong ourselves?'" (RB,252,251). Wilson's change from his former excessive self-pride and "tinsel courage" is attributed to his new, objective vision of himself: "Apparently, Wilson had now climbed a peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing."⁵³

("Structure of 'Red Badge,'" p. 230) has been the chief advocate of the minority view that Henry's wound is received "in the performance of an act of courage" and therefore should not be read ironically. Lorch, p. 231, concurs, as does Levenson, Works, II, p. lxviii; the latter calls Fleming's wound "a moral act which should not be undervalued."

⁵³Perhaps the first critic to perceive this point in its con-

Bolstered by this objective view, Wilson no longer needs to be "furious at small words that pricked his conceits." Paradoxically (but typically in Crane's works), Wilson's new sense of his unimportance in the universe is the linchpin of a valid courage and self-confidence, "a fine reliance" and "quiet belief in his . . . abilities. And this inward confidence evidently enabled him to be indifferent to little words of other men aimed at him" (RB,250)--something that Henry is as yet by no means able to do. A new humility (Wilson no longer makes boasts that he can mop up the whole rebel army all by himself--RB,251), a new merited self-confidence and bravery, and a new concern for others are all results of the objective realization that man is "a very wee thing."⁵⁴

Unfortunately, Henry at this point believes himself superior to Wilson (because the latter admitted his fear of death when he left his packet of letters with Henry, whereas Henry has never openly confessed his fear). Thus the result of these scenes with Wilson is only that Henry's "self-pride was not entirely restored. . . . He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man. . . . He had license

siderable importance for the novel was William P. Safranek, "Crane's The Red Badge of Courage," Explicator, 26 (Nov. 1967), item 21. Safranek finds that Henry's character later develops in a manner parallel to Wilson's, especially in Henry's reaction after overhearing the officers who refer to his regiment's soldiers as mule drivers in Chapter XVIII.

⁵⁴In a cancelled LV passage that immediately follows these revelations about Wilson in Chapter XIV, Henry realizes for the first time that he is not "a unique man" but that there exists a "universal resemblance" among men, and also that all men face the same choice he had faced between (subjectively) blaming fate for what happens to them or (objectively) accepting the indifferent cosmos for what it is and acknowledging responsibility for their own actions (RB,561).

to be pompous and veteranlike." He swings from one manifestation of excessive subjective concern for himself, self-pity, to another, self-aggrandizement; as an uncanceled LV passage puts it, he now conceives of nature as benign, "smil[ing] tenderly, full of encouragement, upon him," and "he return[s] to his old belief in the ultimate, astounding success of his life."⁵⁵ Further, these continuing failures of Henry, as contrasted to Wilson, are moral failures. Henry feels "that many obligations of a life were easily avoided. The lessons of yesterday had been that retribution was a laggard and blind" (RB, 253-255). Henry at this stage of the novel has not achieved any real understanding of the dipolar nature of reality; he is still too entranced by its subjective half.

Even so, now that he has viewed the inevitability of human death in Chapters VII-X and has received in Chapter XII his own wound of courage derived from concern for others rather than for himself, Henry in Chapters XV-XVII, which deal with the preliminaries to his second day of battle, is capable at times of less self-centered behavior. When he sees another Union regiment retreating from the "shrill and exultant" enemy, Henry "forgot many personal matters and became greatly enraged" that his fellows are suffering defeat. But he blames others (the generals) for that defeat, instead of blaming himself and

⁵⁵Rathbun, p. 13, finds that in the contrast between Henry and Wilson in Chapters XIII-XVI of the novel, "Fleming's [continuing] self-deceit, adolescent arrogance, and self-pride are all laid out for the reader," while concurrently there are some hints of impending change in Henry.' I agree.

his fellow soldiers for lacking the courage to stand and fight (RB, 258). Henry, like the still green and not-fully-tested regiment of which he is a member,⁵⁶ lacks the "calm confidence" of Wilson that things will "'turn out all right in th' end'"; Henry is still preyed on by an exaggerated fear and consequent pessimism about his personal chance of succeeding in battle. Further, though Henry no longer "imagine[s] the universe to be against him," he has transferred his imaginary fears from the seeming vindictiveness of the universe to the apparent invincibility of the enemy soldiers, who "seemed never to grow weary . . ." (RB, 260, 261).

It is in Chapter XVII that the process by which personal egotism can lead to selfless courage begins in Henry.⁵⁷ The feeling "that he and his companions were being taunted and derided from sincere convictions that they were poor and puny" (which, from the objective standpoint of the universe, they indeed are) paradoxically motivates

⁵⁶Solomon, "Structure of 'Red Badge,'" pp. 231-233, points out and develops the important structural and thematic fact that in the second half of Red Badge--from Chapter XIII on--both Henry and the rookie regiment of which he is a member are tested in battle and simultaneously mature. Both the young soldier and his group discover their respective personal insignificance, and both achieve the same transmutations of selfishness to selflessness and of excessive fear for self to stoic courage and endurance of war conditions.

⁵⁷Cox, p. 219, was one of the earliest of the few previous commentators who have suggested that Henry's ultimate "selfless behavior of heroism paradoxically emerges . . . from . . . animalistic, fiery hatred born of the vanity of egocentrism." Cox, however, argues that because Henry's selfless heroism is derived from egocentrism it cannot be construed as moral improvement. I disagree. In Crane's works, a mixture of subjective (self-concerned) and objective (other-concerned) views of life is the best achievable human condition and is responsible for whatever improvement in conduct, moral or otherwise, man is capable of.

Henry to participate in his regiment's "sudden and valiant retort": "He had taken up a first position behind a little tree, with a direct determination to hold it against the world. He had not deemed it possible that his army could that day succeed, and from this he felt the ability to fight harder." His earlier undue fears of death are forgotten in this instinctive, subjective desire to demonstrate that he can "hold his position against the indifferent world." And his attempt is successful; his regiment temporarily beats off the enemy, and Lieutenant Hasbrouck gives Henry his first battle praise of the novel: "'if I had ten thousand wild cats like you I could tear th' stomach outa this war in less'n a week!'" At the end of this chapter Henry, like Fred Collins at the end of his story, has achieved for the first time the "mystery" of heroism: "He had been a tremendous figure who had overcome obstacles and he was now what he called a hero" (RB, 262-264).

The following Chapter, XVIII, specifically relates Henry's newly-developing stoic endurance of war's/the universe's harsh and dangerous conditions to an increased objective understanding of his own insignificance in that battle or that universe.⁵⁸ Henry and Wilson overhear

⁵⁸Obviously, I am in disagreement with Holton's view (p. 105) that when Henry "regained his place in the community of his regiment" in the second half of Red Badge, he "by that very return . . . lost something of his newly and privately earned awareness of reality." The textual evidence seems clear that Henry's new success in his community is the product of his newly-acquired more complete awareness of reality. See Rathbun's view (p. 13) that Henry's acceptance of the red god of war (instead of running from it as he had done earlier) is a result of his now having accepted the universe (of which war is a part) as it is rather than shaking his fist at it and rebelling. Henry has achieved an "awareness that nature, war, and men's collective actions all testify to a grotesque, incredible world in which death,

the general and another officer saying that the soldiers of their regiment "'fight like a lot of mule drivers'" and opining that not "'many of your mule drivers will get back'" from the upcoming charge at the enemy. The effect on Henry is this:

New eyes were given to him. And the most startling thing was to learn suddenly that he was very insignificant. The officer spoke of the regiment as if he referred to a broom. Some part of the woods needed sweeping, perhaps, and he merely indicated a broom in a tone properly indifferent to its fate. (RB,267)

The officer here, like whatever "God" does or does not exist beyond the forces of nature, is seen in the newly-objective vision of Henry ("new eyes") to be quite indifferent to the fate of any individual human being, or any group of humans (Henry's "regiment had its small affair to itself," for "the world was fully interested in other matters"--RB,269). Faced with this knowledge and the additional understanding that death is an omnipresent danger ("'don't believe many will get back'"), Henry and Wilson accept these facts of human insignificance and proneness to death ("they saw no hesitation in each other's faces . . ."), which acceptance is what in Crane's view constitutes true bravery (RB,269). This true courage, one achieved through a more objective vision of life, is described in Chapter XIX as "the delirium that encounters despair and death, and is heedless and blind to the odds. . . . a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness" (RB,270).

There is nothing ironic about this selfless courage achieved by

striking at random and without meaning, is the one constant" (Rathbun, p. 9).

Henry in his final battle experiences, as its identity with the selfless courage achieved or exhibited by the protagonists of "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "The Little Regiment" should make clear.⁵⁹ As a result of this newly developed courage, Henry in the last battle scenes of the novel (Chapters XIX-XXIII) backslides no more into craven fear caused by a self-concern generated by grandiose conceptions of his own importance. Instead, he and Wilson, through their own battle bravery, prevent the regiment as a group from so backsliding. When "it [the regiment] began to falter and hesitate" and the "spectacle [of their comrades being shot and falling] seemed to paralyze them . . . ," it is Wilson who "fired an angry shot at the persistent woods" that "awakened the men. They huddled no more like sheep." Similarly, when the men stand "crouching and cowering behind some trees," it is Henry, yelling "'Come on yourself, then'" with "a bitter challenge in his voice," who leads the charge and thereby rouses the temporarily fearful regiment (RB, 271-273). Whereas earlier in the novel Henry had run from battle and had mentally

⁵⁹Some previous criticism has claimed that since the battle scenes of Red Badge portray fighting as mad, barbarian, instinctive, and animalistic, Crane must necessarily view ironically the courage needed for successful fighting. William B. Dillingham, "Insensibility in The Red Badge of Courage," College English, 25 (Dec. 1963), 194, takes such a position: to Crane, "human courage is by its nature subhuman; in order to be courageous, a man . . . must abandon the highest of his human facilities, reason and imagination, and act instinctively, even animalistically." But Crane simply does not share Dillingham's value judgments about the relative value of thought and feeling, of rationalization and instinctive action. To Dillingham (p. 196), Henry "escapes his essential humanity" by his display of battle courage, but to Crane, this display of courage is an achievement of man's essential humanity, i.e., of his mixture of selfishness and selflessness, vanity and fraternity, consciousness and unconsciousness.

belabored those who stayed for a lack of due concern for their own safety, he is now concerned not for himself but for the group; a temporary "retreat of the mule drivers was a march of shame . . . ," and he even "felt a subtle fellowship and equality" with his superior officer, Lieutenant Hasbrouck (RB,275).

A bit later occurs a scene (similar to one in Henry's first battle) in which some of his fellow soldiers "suddenly sank down . . . with an air of bowing to a doom" and "men ran hither and thither, seeking with their eyes roads of escape." Though Henry's earlier reaction to these excessive fears of others was to fear unduly himself and flee, his reaction now is one of troop-rallying stoic endurance of war's dangers: he "walked stolidly into the midst of the mob, and . . . unconsciously assumed the attitude of the color bearer in the fight of the preceding day" (RB,276). In the novel's final two battle chapters, Henry "felt serene self-confidence" and "resolved not to budge whatever should happen." Through the unselfish leadership of Henry, Wilson, and Hasbrouck, the regiment too has finally developed the highest degree of battle bravery, for its members "were in a state of frenzy, perhaps because of forgotten vanities [and were] grown suddenly wild with an enthusiasm of unselfishness" (RB, 283,286,288). It is thus that Henry and his fellow soldiers become "men" in Crane's sense of the word, both physically and morally.

Because men are, because basic human nature is, both subjective and objective, Henry in becoming a "man" does not lose his earlier subjective view of reality, with its corollary sense of his own

self-importance, but rather merges it with his acquired objective view into a dipolar view of reality.⁶⁰ In other words, Henry, being human, does not become a constant paragon of selflessness, but retains his vanity along with his new concern for others. His pride is periodically present throughout the final battle scenes: "He presently wrapped his heart in the cloak of his pride and kept the flag erect"; Wilson and Henry "exchanged a secret glance of joy and congratulation"; Henry determines to capture the enemy flag, whose "possession would be high pride," and after Wilson and he do capture it, Wilson, "holding his treasure with vanity, came to [Henry] . . . and [they] congratulated each other" (RB, 275, 283, 289, 291). Crane's view of Henry's vanity is his most common view of such pride throughout his writings, namely that it is both (1) foolish and therefore comic, because (objectively) humans are too insignificant to exhibit such self-pride, and (2) understandable and even necessary, because (subjectively) humans do care for their own self-preservation and can develop from such self-concern despite human insignificance the despairing courage and endurance against high odds that to Crane is

⁶⁰Those critics who view Henry as having improved, morally and otherwise, during the course of the novel--a view with which I agree--sometimes weaken their case by overestimating the degree to which Henry relinquishes his personal vanity in acquiring group identification and fraternal feelings; see, e.g., Hart, pp. 252, 256, and Rathbun, p. 9. The latter says that Henry in Red Badge progresses from "a state of enervating self-analysis and into a state of unreflecting group participation." But (as I shall be showing in the rest of this chapter) Henry's group participation in the final battle scenes is intermittently reflective and self-laudatory, and the novel's final chapter amply demonstrates that the "new" Henry has by no means given up subjective self-concern and self-analysis.

true bravery.⁶¹

The positive value of human vanity despite its simultaneous comic foolishness is an aspect of Red Badge overlooked by most Crane scholars,⁶² yet it is in evidence not only in the final chapters but throughout the novel. For example, after the success of Henry's regiment in its first encounter with the enemy, Henry reflects:

he saw a sort of a humor in the point of view of himself and his fellows during the late encounter. They had taken themselves and the enemy very seriously and had imagined that they were deciding the war. Individuals must have supposed that they were cutting the letters of their names deep into everlasting tablets of brass while, as to fact, the affair would appear in printed reports under a meek and immaterial title. But he saw that it was good, else, he said, in battle every one would surely run (RB,221, my emphasis).

This passage neatly capsulizes Crane's dipolar vision of reality as it relates to war. Individual soldiers are foolishly proud in their subjective view of their own immense importance to the war effort; but, although from the factual or objective view the insignificance of

⁶¹Though he does not discover its source (Crane's subjective-objective dipolarity), Marvin Klotz (pp. 102,104) soundly perceives that Henry and his companions, despite their exaggerated pride, are not presented by Crane as "despicable They are, in short, nothing but men," unremarkable, average men, and Crane empathizes with them, "display/ing/ . . . a great sympathy with humanity . . . /and its/ foibles" See also Bergon, p. 81: in Red Badge, Crane "unflinchingly examines the enigma of a hero who is also a fool."

⁶²Representative samples of the widespread critical focus only on the negative side of human pride in Red Badge are Holton, p. 108; Dillingham, "Insensibility in The Red Badge," pp. 196-197; Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 81-82; Griffith, pp. 89-90; and Carol B. Hafer, "The Red Badge of Absurdity: Irony in The Red Badge of Courage," CLA Journal, 14 (June 1971), 441-442. At the opposite extreme, a few critics like Fraser, p. 247, miss Crane's ambivalence

themselves and their particular encounter with the enemy could hardly be greater, still the subjective side of humans' view of themselves is a necessary one for the human ego to maintain in order to accomplish anything in life: "he saw that it was good, else . . . in battle every one would surely run" It is significant that all of the admirable characters in Red Badge have or develop a degree of self-confidence and pride in self. The list includes not only Conklin and Wilson, as previously discussed, but also Lieutenant Hasbrouck; the tattered man (who "breathed a deep breath of humble admiration" when he recalls the brave way in which he and his fellow Union soldiers have fought: "'Well, they didn't run t'-day, did they, hey? No, sir! They fit, an' fit, an' fit'"); and even the cheery man, who "began to chuckle with glee and self-satisfaction" at his good fortune in locating Henry's regiment for him (RB, 224-225, 243).

Keeping in mind these earlier sections of the novel, one has less trouble recognizing the "humanness" and the necessity, as well as the foolishness, of Henry's and Wilson's pride in their final battle accomplishments. Henry is intermittently aware that the success of

toward human vanity from the other side and see no comedy or irony at all in the passages praising Henry and his fellow soldiers for their feelings of pride in their battle successes. Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 87, is somewhat closer to my own view when he asserts that Henry comes to realize that "the illusion of importance is necessary as a crutch for men in battle," but Solomon falls into the trap of considering the human sense of self-importance to be pure "illusion" rather than a subjective reality of man's dipolar vision. The most balanced and sound critical view of human pride in Red Badge that I have seen is that of Greenfield, p. 571, who concludes that the conceit and self-confidence of the various characters in the novel are both "held up to ironic scrutiny" and "shown to be the very engine of life."

his regiment is small and relatively insignificant: "He discovered that the distances, as compared with the brilliant measurings of his mind, were trivial and ridiculous. . . . Elfin thoughts must have exaggerated and enlarged everything, he said." Yet this objective view is accompanied by the subjective one: "there was now much satisfaction in quietly thinking of his actions" (RB,280). Simply put, Crane's dipolar vision dictates that, though humans are weak, they can not and must not submit tamely to events, but can achieve a merited self-pride by braving the difficult but not impossible odds:

It had begun to seem to them [the regiment's soldiers] that events were trying to prove that they were impotent. . . . When on the verge of submission to these opinions, the small duel had showed them that the proportions were not impossible They gazed about them with looks of uplifted pride, feeling new trust in the grim, always confident weapons in their hands. And they were men. (RB,278, my emphasis)

The concluding chapter of Red Badge further underlines Henry's final fluctuation between the two dipolar extremes of subjectivity and objectivity. Recent criticism has accused the latter part of Red Badge, and particularly its final chapter, of failing to maintain the high quality of the rest of the novel: as Gullason puts it, "the general consensus . . . is that Stephen Crane's one major success in the novel form, The Red Badge, weakens at the close." Pizer neatly sums up the problem of interpretation in the final chapter that causes leading critics like Colvert and Holton to conclude that the novel's ending is unclear or contradictory in meaning: "Does Crane wish us to accept at face value Henry's estimate of himself as a 'man'; or is Crane once again ironically depicting Henry's capacity

for self-delusion; or is his characterization of Henry consciously or unconsciously ambivalent?"⁶³ On the textual evidence of the final chapter, as I shall illustrate, it seems to me that only the third of Pizer's three choices is possible, namely, that Henry has both achieved a firmer "manhood" through a more objective comprehension of reality and retained a capacity for self-delusion rooted in subjective self-centeredness. Few critics, unfortunately, have found a positive value in this clear ambivalence in Henry's view of life in Chapter XXIV: Gullason finds "the ending . . . unclear, contradictory, and poorly motivated . . . in relation to theme [and] character . . ."; Colvert thinks that because Henry at novel's end has not "cast off the crippling burden of . . . senseless subjectivism" but retains delusions that he holds a special place in the eyes of the universe, "the ending is confused and unconvincing" and reveals "the insecurity of the author's control over his point of view"; and Holton, finding that in the final chapter "whether there remains to Henry any of the understanding which might have been the result of his lonely and terrible visions is at best unclear," likewise judges the novel's ending a failure because of its "unsureness of authorial attitude which comes

⁶³Thomas A. Gullason, "Stephen Crane as Novelist: An Introduction," in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 313-314; Pizer, in Rees and Harbert, p. 123. Compare Bergon, p. 81: critics have reached "little agreement as to whether Crane was confused, serious, ironic, or ambivalent in his final assertions" in Red Badge.

with the failure to resolve the complexities of the author's points of view."⁶⁴

The truth is that there is no failure of point of view in the last chapter of Red Badge, either in the technical or the thematic sense of that term. The final ambivalence of Henry's vision of life simply reflects the dipolarity of Crane's own vision of life found in much of his fiction and journalism throughout his career. And because the subjective half of that dipolar vision of reality is both foolish and humanly necessary, as the foregoing analysis of the final battle scenes of Red Badge has indicated, it follows that the Henry of the final chapter of Red Badge is simultaneously both a fool and a "man."⁶⁵

Henry's ability in Chapter XXIV to look at his past "deeds, his failures, and his achievements" (Henry's objectivity of vision is implicit in the language here) "in spectator fashion and to criticize

⁶⁴Thomas A. Gullason, ed., The Complete Novels of Stephen Crane (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 71; Colvert, in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 97, 95, 96; Holton, pp. 115, 113. More recently (1975), both Levenson (Works, II, pp. lxxiv-lxxvi) and Bergon (p. 82) have found the ending of Red Badge ambivalent, and Bergon (p. 85) continues the recent tendency to condemn Chapter XXIV for a failure of point of view. Again, the previous position on Red Badge's ending closest to my own is that held by Greenfield, who finds irony directed at Henry's "philosophical self-confidence" in his importance within the universe and at his overconfidence concerning his future conduct, but no irony directed at Henry's past conduct (his recent battle heroics) or at his having arrived at a "'quiet manhood . . .'" (p. 571).

⁶⁵Klotz's article, though it has some deficiencies, basically perceives this point: see especially pp. 102, 106. Compare Henry's condition at the end of Red Badge with Crane's own condition as he described it in an 1897 letter: "I have managed my success like a fool and a child but then it is difficult to succeed gracefully at 23.

them with some correctness . . ." is undeniable. As he reflects on and analyzes his conduct during these past events (thus showing that his battlefield abandonment of his reflective, philosophic bent was only temporary), he feels that "his public deeds [battlefield heroics] were paraded in great and shining prominence," and he evaluates them in terms with moral as well as military denotations: "He saw that he was good." But Henry also sees that his private deeds--his selfish, because self-serving, concealment of his original flight from the battlefield and of the manner in which he received his wound, and especially his desertion of the tattered man--have involved moral error (the word used is "sin") that tarnishes the glitter of his public heroics: "this vision [of his cruelty to the tattered man] clung near him always and darkened his view of these deeds in purple and gold." This is sensible thinking by Henry, and furthermore it reflects Crane's own view of man as a mixture of good and evil or selfless and selfish potentialities. Additionally, Henry's ability "to put the sin at a distance" (and, in an uncancelled LV passage, his plan to use his memory of it to help minimize "the workings of his egotism," through which process "he would be [note the tense] a man"), is not puerile rationalization but instead a necessary act for human survival: some degree of human subjectivity about one's own merits is essential, for a totally objective vision of one's self would be so self-belittling that only horror, disgust, and paralyzed

However I am learning every day. I am slowly becoming a man" (Stallman and Gilkes, p. 147, my emphasis).

inaction could result (RB,293-296).⁶⁶

A similar mixture of objective and subjective thinking by Henry⁶⁷ is found in some uncanceled LV passages in Chapter XXIV that deal with man's (Henry's) relationship with the universe. Subjectively, Henry cannot rid himself of the human tendency to regard the chance operations of nature as conscious productions of fate. He now feels that "Fate had . . . been kind to him; she had stabbed him with benign purpose and diligently cudgeled him for his own sake," and he subsequently refers to "a diety [sic] laying about him with the bludgeon of correction." This incurable human tendency in Henry to find conscious purpose in the universe where, objectively viewed, none exists should not blind the reader to the partial objectivity of Henry's thinking in these passages, for he has now discerned one important thing of which he was unaware earlier in the novel, namely that the ways of the universe, whatever causes them, must be accepted and endured by humans: "He would no more stand upon places high and false, and denounce the distant planets"; "he had been wrong not to

⁶⁶Rathbun perceptively elucidates Crane's point in Chapter XXIV: "Man . . . cannot abide by his sins alone, and too rigorously dwelling on them leads only to despair. It takes courage to acknowledge one's frailties and to incorporate them into a larger vision. In effect, Fleming follows the temperate theology of Crane's father in refusing to be paralyzed by the knowledge of sin. He looks to the future" (p. 15).

⁶⁷One of the flaws of Burhans' recent article on Red Badge is its failure to discern that Henry can be objective as well as subjective about himself. See Burhans, p. 48. Bergon, p. 48, acutely warns readers of the novel not to accept (as Burhans does) the narrator's objective vision as total truth and the character's vision as total falsehood, since to do so reduces Crane's "work to a treatise on how men should perceive, think, and act rather than . . . a presentation of how men do perceive, think, and act."

kiss the knife and bow to the cudgel." In addition, Henry's self-described "large sympathy for the machinery of the universe" should not be equated with a totally subjective delusion that nature favors him; for, despite the understandable, if foolish, self-inflation found in thoughts like Henry's "he beheld that he was tiny but not inconsequent to the sun," Henry at the same time holds the objective concept of nature's essential indifference toward man:

But the sky would forget. It was true, he admitted, that in the world it was the habit to cry devil at persons who refused to trust what they could not trust, but he thought that perhaps the stars dealt differently. The imperturbable sun shines on insult and worship. (RB,294)

Paraphrasing, the world counts among the damned those like Henry who are unable to put total trust in the supposed benevolence of the universe's operations, but Henry realizes that the universe itself does not care whether man worships or insults it; in its indifference to humanity, it "forgets" human misdeeds and human blasphemies, thus giving people like Henry a second chance to accept the universe the way it is and courageously endure its dangers (RB,294,296).

Keeping the whole of Chapter XXIV in mind, we may justifiably conclude that Henry has progressed considerably in both his mental vision of reality and in the morality of his actions during the course of the novel, and thus that he merits his final feeling of "quiet manhood, nonassertive but of sturdy and strong blood" (RB,296). The language here ("quiet," "nonassertive") clearly aligns Henry with the humble self-confidence displayed earlier by Jim Conklin, the tattered soldier, and the changed Wilson. And it is essential to see

that it is a dipolar view of reality that produces this final humble self-confidence: the self-confidence is the product of subjective human egotism, while the humility results from the objective half of Henry's present vision, the half that recognizes man's insignificance in relation to his universe.

The fact that in the final three paragraphs of Red Badge Henry "turn[s] . . . with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks--an existence of soft and eternal peace" (RB, 297) has led critics such as Stallman to the view that Crane must be mocking Henry's final stance in the novel as totally self-deluded.⁶⁸ But what Henry is in effect doing in these final paragraphs is acting on his new recognition that the universe is not a completely negative environment for man, but is instead composed of both dangerous (war) and enjoyable (rural nature) aspects. From the novel's beginning, the farm environment of Henry's boyhood has been contrasted to his present battle environment. The youthful Henry, "tired of the routine of farm life, . . . is . . . carried away by the war hysteria that sweeps the land . . . ," yet he continually "associates peace with images of youthful harmony,"⁶⁹ as in the following passage from Chapter II: "He wished, without reserve, that he was at home again making the endless rounds from the house to the barn, from the barn to the house. . . . from his present point of view, there was a halo of happiness about

⁶⁸See Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 171, and The Stephen Crane Reader, pp. 565, 567.

⁶⁹Jean Cazemajou, "The Red Badge of Courage: The 'Religion of Peace' and the War Archetype," in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 56.

each of their [the cows'] heads . . ." (RB,193). Though Frohock is rather rash in seeing no irony whatever in Crane's evoking of the rural ideal in passages like the above, Albrecht is surely right in pointing out that the way "in which the battlefield actions and scenes [of Red Badge] are [often] explained by home and farm images" indicates the novel's view that "neither life at home nor life on a battlefield is fantasy; both are real."⁷⁰ Although Henry errs at the end of Red Badge in his belief that by returning to farm life "as if hot plowshares were not [in existence]," he will achieve "eternal peace"--the plot events of "The Veteran" give the specific lie, if any is needed, to this over-optimistic hope--Henry's subjective idealism should not obscure the accuracy of his simultaneous objective perception that the universe contains rural peace as well as battlefield warfare: "the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks" (RB,296,297,296). And Henry is also correct when he reflects that, for the time being at least, "He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle" and "the sultry nightmare was in the past"; the latter phrase echoes a passage earlier in Chapter XXIV: "He [Henry] understood then that the existence of shot and counter-shot was in the past. . . . He had been where

⁷⁰Frohock, pp. 138, 148; Albrecht, p. 489, my emphasis. Also compare my discussion in Chapter 2 of the New York Kid's picture of rural nature as man's idealized view of cosmic conditions in "The Five White Mice," a picture that the narrator of that story terms "the unreal real . . ." (V,49). This use of country or rural living to represent the best possibilities or the most idealized potentialities of the human conditions of existence is fairly common in Crane, "Mr. Binks' Day Off" being one obvious instance.

there was red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped"
(RB,296,293).

It is clear that by the final pages of Red Badge, Henry Fleming has arrived at that balance, or tension, of subjective and objective views of reality that to Crane is the essence of what it means to be man-like, human. Because his vision of reality is subjective as well as objective, Henry is able to endure stoically life's hardships despite his inconsequence in the universe and to maintain a high enough self-image to enable him to perform moral actions of bravery and brotherhood. Thus Red Badge, far from being a product of its author's susceptibility to his own protagonist's "illusions," is instead a successful reflection of Crane's vision of the ambiguous nature of reality and of the value to humanity of both subjective and objective views of that reality. It is in large part because "An Episode of War" and "A Mystery of Heroism" on a small scale, and Red Badge on a larger scale, are effective embodiments of Crane's central vision of life that they remain his three most successful and effective stories of war.

Dipolarity Deserted: The Failure of Crane's Later War Stories

A hallmark of much of Stephen Crane's lesser fiction is the absence therein of his dipolar vision of reality. Whenever Crane's sentimental-idealistic view of reality or his ironic-realistic one, which in his best fiction form balanced halves of a whole, comes to dominate a Crane work of fiction, that work is sure to suffer. In the preceding chapter was seen how "The Veteran" displays a loss of dipolar vision. Crane's later war stories, beginning in 1897 with the Greek war tale "Death and the Child" and continuing with the Cuban war stories and the Spitzbergen tales, show Crane retreating from his earlier view, exemplified in The Red Badge, that since all humans are essentially alike, an author, by projecting his own imagined reactions to the dangers of war, can accurately reflect the reactions of others. In "Death and the Child" Crane displayed unalloyed contempt for the man who reacts to war with fear, whereas in The Red Badge he had shown that fear born of subjective self-concern was natural and understandable, though it had to be tempered with a courage born of the objective realization that the cosmos does not care about man. Next, from his experience as a war correspondent in Cuba, Crane drew the psychologically unsound conclusion that, unlike himself, most soldiers felt no fear at all under battle conditions. In consequence, in his Cuban writings, he aggrandized the heroic actions of the Regular-army

soldier out of all proportion to reality, deserting his truer vision--expressed in Jim Conklin, Fred Collins, and Henry Fleming in the latter part of The Red Badge--of heroes as fearful, flawed men who, despite their fear, learn to act courageously in the face of potential death. The nature of war (of reality itself), Crane concluded in the 1899 "War Memories," is a mystery--but by then he despaired of communicating to the reader anything about the nature of that mysterious reality, though in earlier successes such as "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge he had captured a sense of that mystery in the concept of reality's dipolarity, its subjective/objective twinness. Thus, an analysis of Crane's later war writings that focuses on their loss of his dipolar vision of reality will help illuminate why this later war writing (as well as other lesser writings of Crane undiscussed in this dissertation) is second-rate.

The change begins in Greece. Crane went there in the Spring of 1897 to cover the Greco-Turkish war for the New York Journal; but really he went to find out whether his imaginative projection of the nature of men at war in The Red Badge had been true to the real experience.¹ As in The Red Badge, what interested Crane in Greece was the psychological impact of war. He told fellow Greek war correspondent John Bass during the battle at Velestino that "'between two great armies battling each other the interesting thing is the attitude of the men.'"² However, Crane's thinking was undergoing a change:

¹Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 260.

²Ibid., p. 281.

though as a writer he still found it fascinating to imagine war's effect on the human psyche, he was becoming convinced that it was not good for the soldier to think too much about combat. In his May, 1897 war report "A Fragment of Velestino," Crane put it this way: "People imagine battle to be one long muscular contortion with a mental condition corresponding to it. But just as it is impossible for a man to have convulsions eternally without rest, so it is essential that when the other fellows are against the enemy the soldier should be superior to worrying too much about it. His turn [to fight] will come" ³ Worry during battle itself could cause a retreat, Crane thought, and to prevent this, the officers should not implant the possibility of a retreat in the soldiers' minds: "It is true that troops should not trouble themselves with a commander's business, but it is also true that a commander should remember that his men's brains are obliged to work, and he is careful, if he is a good soldier, of the kind of mental food with which he provides them. There had been . . . a conspiracy of general incompetency and stupidity to engrave the word retreat in the middle of the brain of the Greek soldier, and in his natural mental processes it occurs" (IX,38).

This changed view inevitably influenced Crane's fiction about the Greco-Turkish War. In the winter of 1897, Crane reworked in "Death and the Child" the substance of The Red Badge in the light of his actual battlefield experiences in Greece. In doing so, he did not

³Works, Vol. IX, p. 31. Further references to Crane's journalistic reports of war will be from this volume and will be acknowledged parenthetically by volume number and page in the body of the text.

permit his imaginative protagonist Peza, with his Fleming-like predilection for thinking too closely on the event, to develop as Fleming had a more objective understanding of his insignificance in the cosmos and from that knowledge to develop a bravery and humanitarianism under war conditions.⁴ Instead, "Death and the Child" depicts a chasm between those able to be objective and stoically-accepting about war and those, like Peza, who are burdened with a subjective, self-centered view. In The Red Badge, in contrast, Conklin (from the start) and Wilson and Fleming (later on) could embrace both objective and subjective views and thus emerge with increased understanding of the complexity of reality. Crane's separation of objective and subjective views in "Death and the Child" amounts to an oversimplification of human nature, since it denies it the potential for comprehending complex reality as a whole. It is this oversimplification, this abandoning of the thematic and aesthetic depth derived from the dipolar vision of reality, that has disastrous effects on Crane's war fiction set in Greece, Cuba, and Spitzbergen.

The many similarities between The Red Badge and "Death and the Child"⁵ only heighten the one dramatic difference between them suggested above. In "Death and the Child," as in The Red Badge,

⁴Compare Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 114: "In . . . his war fiction, . . . once Crane felt that he had really gained for himself the experience that his earlier heroes lacked, he lost the power of sympathetic projection that accounts for his earlier brilliant portraits of bewildered and discouraged soldiers."

⁵Colvert (Works, VI, xvi), writing in 1970, reflects the common view that there are many parallels between The Red Badge and "Death and the Child." Colvert calls the latter "a remarkable variation on the themes and imagery of The Red Badge of Courage."

nature is indifferent to the misery and death caused by war: "The sky was an arch of stolid sapphire. . . . The sea, the sky, and the hills combined in their grandeur to term this [human] misery inconsequent" (V,121). Peza, however, not observing the significance of nature's unconcern over war, pities the war refugees and burns to fight for his father's country, Greece. Peza is described as a sensitive, womanish recent student who believes in traditional concepts such as God's mercy and thus is appalled to find that the universe permits the miseries of war to exist.⁶ Contrasted to Peza is the lieutenant, who, "bronzed and steady," is able to respect fate--i.e., to accept whatever the universe has in store for him--while remaining quietly confident and enduring (V,122-123). As Solomon puts it, Crane's late war stories offer "a new type of war hero . . . a professional soldier similar to the officer who repudiates Peza" ⁷ Peza is different; he overdramatizes the horrors of war and his own impending "great encounter toward death," feeling that nature does (or should) care about man's fate. The lieutenant, who knows better, rebukes

⁶Most critics have concurred with Eric Solomon in "Stephen Crane's War Stories," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 3 (Spring 1961), 71, that "Death and the Child" is a story of "war's rejection of the sensitive observer and acceptance of the tough regular." Similarly finding that the story portrays Peza as too sensitive and romantic to succeed in war are Holton, pp. 189,191; LaFrance, pp. 217-218; and Bernard Weinstein, "Stephen Crane: Journalist," in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 29: "Unlike such earlier war fiction as The Red Badge of Courage, in which a thoughtful young recruit's initiation into the mysteries of warfare were treated sympathetically, 'Death and the Child' ridicules the journalist Peza's illusions and leaves him not much more enlightened than it found him."

⁷Solomon, "Crane's War Stories," p. 73.

Peza for his theatrical pity and despair over the wounded: "'If you are coming with me there is no time for this.' Peza obeyed . . . with a sudden meekness. In the moment some portion of egotism left him, and he modestly wondered if the universe took cognizance of him to an important degree" (V,126). Peza, it seems, shares with Henry Fleming the capacity to develop an understanding of the dipolar complexity of reality, but in the event he fails to do so. Because of his inability to learn, Peza becomes to the reader what Henry Fleming (rightly understood) does not, a contemptible figure, just as he is to the lieutenant. That officer's smile at Peza contains "pity and pride--the vanity of experience--and contempt in it" (V,124). This "vanity of experience" is like the quiet confidence of Jim Conklin and of Henry Fleming at the end of The Red Badge--foolish (objectively) to a degree, yet acceptable and even necessary (subjectively) in order to enable one to endure battle despite its terrors without bolting.⁸

Peza, unlike the confident lieutenant, can only play-act at

⁸Holton, p. 186, condemns the lieutenant for his "limits of vision," and Levenson, Works, V, lxxxii, claims that "the pity and pride that [the lieutenant] feels as he talks to [Peza] are undercut as 'the vanity of experience,' a term that the author of The Red Badge could not have conceived." But as I have suggested, Crane ascribes the lieutenant's "vanity of experience" not to deficiencies within him but to a confidence born of, among other things, his recognition of the power of the chance universe. Like the three survivors at the end of "The Open Boat," Fleming at the end of The Red Badge, and even the little man at the end of such Sullivan County tales as "Killing His Bear," the lieutenant possesses self-confidence as a result of his experience, a self-confidence that may be ridiculous in the objective view but is human and even valuable in the subjective view.

bravery: "Peza bowed to the officers. . . . [It was] a good and cool bow, and he wondered at it, for his breath was coming in gasps He felt like a tipsy man trying to conceal his muscular uncertainty from the people in the street" (V,133). Indeed, Peza is of two minds about the misery of the Greek soldiers and peasants; though he attempts to empathize with them, his pride and growing concern for himself keep getting in the way: "Peza was proud and ashamed that he was not of them, these stupid peasants . . . ," and "it had come to pass that he cared for the implacable misery of these soldiers only as he would have cared for the harms of broken dolls. His whole vision was focussed [sic] upon his own chance" (V,132,130). Peza also feels that foolish pride is forcing him toward the battlefield. This unwarranted, because unearned, pride contrasts to the justified self-satisfaction of the soldiers who have fought. Peza keeps questioning them for information about the course of the battle, but "they knew nothing save that war was hard work. If they talked at all it was in testimony of having fought well, savagely" (V,131, my emphasis). In contrast, Peza's bravery and sentiments of Greek nationalism are a sham, as even he occasionally glimpses: "Peza felt that he was wandering with his protestations of high patriotism through a desert of sensible men. These officers gave no heed to his exalted declamations. . . . Palaver of [Peza's] kind had subsided before their intense pre-occupation in war as a craft" (V,134-135).

Still Peza persists in seeing war not as a dreary though necessary business but as a high heroic thing--again demonstrating his inability

to grasp the objective truth of human smallness in the whole scheme of things. Likewise, overvaluing himself and his own importance, he views his own possible death as of great consequence in the universe. Feeling thus, he is unable, as Henry Fleming eventually learns to do, to "touch the great death" and by doing so become a man. When Peza sees a "soldier whose jaw had been half shot away . . ." and is asked to help carry him to safety, he refuses: "even Peza's fingers revolted; he was afraid of the spectre; he would not have dared to touch it. He was surely craven He was running away" (V,135). Later, when Peza is invited to touch a dead body in order to take some cartridges from the corpse for his own use, he cannot: his hand "hesitated, stuck, as if his arm had turned to plaster" (V,138). The last straw for Peza comes when he stares into the face of another corpse and feels that he is "being drawn and drawn by these dead men slowly, firmly down as to some mystic chamber under the earth He was bidden; . . . he was going, going, going" (V,139). Unable to accept stoically the existence of death and the possibility of dying himself, Peza gives in to his cowardice and runs from the battle, "bolt[ing] for the rear . . ." (V,139).

At this point, Peza is like the Henry Fleming who bolted from his first battle and later ran like a rabbit from the ghastly corpse he found in the "chapel" in the woods. However, Crane grants Peza no such second chance as he did Fleming. When Peza meets the child-- who has been weeping over the "mystery" of war and its devastation-- and is asked the always pregnant Crane question "'Are you a man?'"

Peza makes no "attempt to reply," for he knows his cowardly retreat from the battlefield has proven him a weakling.⁹ Faced by the child's question, Peza is indeed something less than human: "Peza gasped in the manner of a fish" (V,140,141).

Peza is given no second chance because Crane himself is beginning to fall victim to Henry Fleming's initial delusion in The Red Badge that there are two distinct types of people: those who are somehow naturally brave and those who are not. Henry eventually learns that the other men, including Conklin and Wilson, share his own self-doubts and fears. But in "Death and the Child," there is little indication that the lieutenant and the common soldiers who are successful at war share any of Peza's inward doubts. Peza's own feeling--"Peza felt dimly that there was a distinction between this man [a soldier] and a young student [Peza] who could write sonnets and play the piano

⁹Though Rodney O. Rogers, in "Stephen Crane and Impressionism," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 24 (Dec. 1969), pp. 302,303, and LaFrance, p. 220, feel that Peza at the end of "Death and the Child" is not without merit as a man, I can find no evidence in the story's conclusion to support such an interpretation. Holton, who has doubts (cited earlier) about the lieutenant's "vanity of experience" and regards Peza as Crane's "ideal of the apprehending hero," whose "very capacity to apprehend . . . has defeated and dehumanized him" (pp. 258,191), is also at odds with my view, developed in this chapter, that Peza's defeat is his ultimate failure to apprehend his own insignificance in the cosmos and thus to accept the "fact" of death bravely. Consequently, I disagree with Holton's conclusion (p. 183) that "Crane's first experience in battle [in Greece] produced for him an understanding of the sensitive individual in battle which took him well beyond that manifest in The Red Badge of Courage . . ." And Holton's belief that Crane is less sympathetic to Fleming in The Red Badge than to Peza in "Death and the Child" ("when he represents the innocence of Peza's uncompleted vision, Crane is restrained and sympathetic"--p. 156) is, as I hope this chapter and the last have shown, quite the reverse of the truth. The majority of previous critics concur with my view that finds Peza a negative figure in the story;

quite well" (V,139)--is not contradicted by the omniscient narrator and thus may be in accord with the author's own view.¹⁰ The two poles of Crane's dipolar vision of reality are losing their magnetic connection: whereas the soldiers have no fear of death and no doubt of their own battle abilities, the journalist Peza (like the journalist Crane?)¹¹ is fearful and cowardly and is accorded in the story no possibility of overcoming these deficiencies. As a result, one of Crane's major insights as a writer, that every human being has, like the "wise, foolish clown" of "The Five White Mice," the potential for both wise and foolish behavior, is being lost in his later war fiction.

Crane's new differentiation between what he now sees inside himself (a constant struggle to overcome base fear) and what he sees in most others, both soldiers and officers (an "easy" confidence in the

see, e.g., Solomon, Weinstein (both cited earlier), Gibson (p. 101), and Schneider (p. 98). Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 109, sums up this majority reading well: in "Death and the Child," "Crane is not interested in bringing his hero through the war trauma to a better manhood. . . . Peza is a completely mocked persona, a parody of the military hero."

¹⁰David Bergon, in a recent, complex reading of "Death and the Child" in his book Stephen Crane's Artistry, agrees that the story shows Crane's view that "too much sensitivity in battlefield situations . . . may render a man Peza incapable of functioning as his duty demands" (p. 60). But Bergon at times mistakes Peza's subjective vision of reality for the only "true" vision of reality and thus is constrained to see the veteran soldiers' objective vision as a "false" view: "In 'Death and the Child,' the correspondent Peza is in tune with what really is happening in battle i.e., the horror of death To a veteran's eye they are only a rifle and a cartridge belt, but Peza's hallucination reveals what they really are i.e., intimations of death . . ." (p. 37). Elsewhere, Bergon does realize that "the two modes of perception are equally valid. . . ." but adds that "one of them i.e., Peza's cannot survive in the world. Yet both can thrive in art. The real hero, the artist, can present the truthful complexity of experience as it registers on the exposed nerves of a recruit and through the 'realistic' eyes of a veteran.

face of death, easier even than it had been for Jim Conklin, who conceded that under certain conditions he himself might flee from battle), arguably weakens "Death and the Child" as a story and is certainly present in Crane's next war writings, the journalism and fiction stemming from his Cuban war experiences.¹² What happens in "Death and the Child" and in Crane's Cuban writings is that fear of death, which Crane's earlier ambivalent vision of reality had pictured as both ridiculous and humanly understandable, is no longer given any quarter: such fear is now almost invariably seen as contemptible. This view is found in the Cuban story "'God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen'" (1899), whose protagonist, the journalist, Little Nell, is, as several

Each tempers the other, but only the artist can share Peza's vision without succumbing to its limitations" (p. 60). This is an ingenious and even sensible theory, but unfortunately it tends to obscure the difference in quality between those successful works of Crane that show the protagonists as developing a dipolar vision of the complexity of reality and those less successful ones, like "Death and the Child," in which the protagonist fails to unite the subjective and objective halves of the dipolar vision and thus loses touch with reality as a whole.

¹¹One can of course have no certainty that Crane identifies himself with the cowardly Peza and thus that his contempt for Peza is also self-contempt at his own fear. However (as will be shown below), in his next experience of battle, in Cuba, Crane did expose himself several times to enemy rifle fire for no good reason, as if desperately trying to display the courage in the face of battle that was so lacking in Peza. He also freely accuses himself of fear under fire in "War Memories."

¹²Levenson, Works, V, lxxvii-lxxxv, finds "Death and the Child" an artistic improvement over The Red Badge because its plot is more sophisticated, its characterization more complex, and its characters more conscious of their mental processes and emotions. I disagree with this assessment on every point. A few other critics, such as Holton (cited earlier), Hagemann, and Gullason (as noted by Pizer, in Reese and Harbert, pp. 131-132; see also Gullason's introduction to his edition The Complete Short Stories and Sketches of Stephen Crane

commentators have agreed, a thin disguise for Crane himself.¹³ "God Rest Ye" swipes at sensation-seeking publishers and at "the unpromising asininity of managing editors" (VI,137), but it is primarily a picture of an effective war correspondent at work. Little Nell sifts through many self-serving stories to find the facts about which soldiers did what in the battles; he suffers hunger, bone-wearying marches, quarrels with other less experienced newspapermen, heat prostration, enemy fire, and finally the total exhaustion of illness in order to get the true story of the fighting (VI,142,144-154). The story invites our sympathy for Little Nell--and perhaps exudes the odor of Crane's self-pity over his own journalistic hardships. But unfortunately the story's praise of Little Nell rises to panegyric that reduces the story to bathos, especially in its last couple of pages. This tale's most significant feature is the short shrift

(Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1963), p. 41), have claimed that Crane's later war stories surpass The Red Badge and the best of his other earlier tales of war. Among the majority of critics who feel, as I do, that after his first-hand experiences of war Crane's war fiction actually deteriorated rather than improved are Solomon (see footnote 4); Gibson (p. 97); Tanner (pp. 14-15); Frederick G. Hyde (as cited in Stanley Wertheim, "Stephen Crane," part of "Guide to Dissertations on American Literary Figures, 1870-1910: Part One," ed. Noel Polk, American Literary Realism 1870-1910, 8 [Summer 1975], 240); and Olov W. Fryckstedt, Stephen Crane: Uncollected Writings (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Univ. Press, 1963). Fryckstedt (p. lx) seems to locate, as I do, the fatal flaw in Crane's late war writing in its loosened grip on the complexity of reality: "Those who come to Crane's Cuban war correspondence from a reading of The Red Badge of Courage will . . . be surprised to find none of the ambiguities and complexities that characterize the war novel."

¹³Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 378; Holton, p. 256; Weinstein, in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 29.

given by Nell and a fellow correspondent--and by the story's omniscient narrator--to a soldier who limps up looking for sympathy and explains that he has retreated from battle because of a knee injury. The soldier "was almost babyishly tearful in his attempt to make the two correspondents feel that he had not turned back because he was afraid. They gave him scant courtesy, tinctured with one drop of sympathetic yet cynical understanding" (VI,150). Here is quite a contrast to the brotherly solicitude of the tattered man, Conklin, and the cheery man toward the apparently wounded Henry Fleming in The Red Badge. Crane's life-ethos--to be brave, even though afraid--has hardened now into a rigid, inflexible code, lacking the tensions and ambiguities that gave it life and humanity in his better war fiction.

Again in "The Serjeant's Private Mad-House" no sympathy is given to the drunken marine Dryden for his fear of dying in a night attack by Spanish guerillas, despite the ironic facts that Dryden's visions of an enemy skirmish line prove accurate and that his drunken singing does cause the Spanish to cease firing, "perhaps from sheer amazement" (VI,175,178). Like the little-man protagonist in some of the Sullivan County tales, Dryden has "'too many nerves'" in the face of potential danger and thus, "livid with mad fright," exposes himself as a fool and a coward: he fires not a single shot at the enemy during the skirmish, instead offering up in song the drunken plea "'Please, oh, please, oh, do not let me fall . . .'" dead during the fighting (VI, 172,173,178). Dryden's sergeant, George Peasley, contrasts to the craven Dryden, as does the lieutenant to Peza in "Death and the

Child." At the moment of the enemy attack, Peasley momentarily fears defeat and death (VI,175-176), "but the exaggerating magnifying first thought subsides in the ordered mind of the soldier [like Peasley] and he knows, soon, what he is doing . . ."--which in this case is to grab the drunken Dryden by the neck and sensibly beat a retreat to the main marine outpost (VI,176).¹⁴ As in "Death and the Child" and "'God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen,'" Crane here totally separates the cowardly fearful and the stoically brave, whether they be soldiers or war correspondents, and in the process his stories lose credibility, since they no longer project the ambivalences of reality and the potential within each human being for both craven and courageous behavior, as had been reflected in Fleming and Wilson of The Red Badge.

While observing the fighting in Cuba, Crane seems to have been taken in by the very feeling that Fleming in The Red Badge learned to see as illusory, namely the feeling that most soldiers are automatically brave without a care for death, whereas he (Crane), because he does have fears of death, is somehow different from and inferior

¹⁴Holton, p. 258, comments on this story that Crane here "represented fantasy-perceptions of the imaginative man in battle, their inaccuracies and their dangers," and adds on p. 245 that Crane's Cuban stories praise "the stoic virtues, not the keen awarenesses . . ." Similarly, Bergon, p. 42, finds that Crane's worship of soldiers who had faced combat and could return to it "strongly influenced his later war stories--often . . . to the detriment of his earlier insights into the horrors that codes of honor block from view." Certainly Crane's despising of the imaginative or thinking man in war from "Death and the Child" on weakens his insight into human nature in these stories. Fleming is able to be a man in battle without more than temporarily abandoning his philosophical and imaginative side, as the concluding chapters of The Red Badge amply show, and Jim Conklin himself is called by the novel's narrator "the philosophical tall soldier" (Red Badge, 200).

to the soldiers. "Regulars Get No Glory" (1898), a Crane war dispatch recounting in brief the killing of Private Nolan (later to serve as hero of Crane's story "The Price of the Harness"), spares no rhetoric in eulogizing the Regular army soldier, with his unthinking bravery, endurance, devotion to duty, and acceptance of war as a business. This piece of journalism asserts that "the soldier of the regular army is the best man . . . on God's green earth" and makes the ridiculous claim that "nobody with the army is particularly conspicuous for bravery," for all the Regulars are equally brave. "Now, cowardice--that would make a man conspicuous" (IX,171). The American army Regular "knows his business"--fighting--and never thinks to fear death: "If there is heavy firing ahead he does not even ask a question about it" (IX,172). The praise becomes downright sickening on the last page of the dispatch, when a soldier's military orders are described as "his sacred thing, his fetish, his religion. Nothing now can stop him but a bullet," and sentimentality simpers throughout the piece's final paragraph, which begins "and shame, deep shame, on those who, because somebody once led a cotillion, can seem to forget . . . Private Nolan of the regulars--shot through, his half-bred terrier being masterless at Reno and his sister being chambermaid in a hotel in Omaha . . ." (IX,173).

In a similar vein, and even more instructive concerning Crane's new, less than insightful tendency to divide men into stouthearted angels and craven devils, is the Cuban story "Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo" (1898). This "story" is actually a pseudo-

fictional dramatization of a Spanish attack on Camp McCalla on June 11, 1898,¹⁵ told from the first-person point of view. The first-person reporter-narrator, who obviously represents Crane, pictures himself as suffering from a severe case of nerves throughout this battle: he constantly fears that the marine signalmen are all going to be killed by the Spanish marksmen (though in fact they all survive), and after the attack is over, "it . . . took me . . . some hours to get my nerves calmed down" (VI,195,197). In contrast to his own jumpiness, the narrator pictures the peppered signalmen as paragons of unconscious bravery, with "not a single trace of nervousness or haste" on their faces, and concludes chauvinistically with no hint of irony that "it seemed as if there was in this war a God of Battle who held his mighty hand before the Americans" (VI,200,199). Also noted is "the absence of excitement, fright, or any emotion at all, on [the signalman's] countenance, [which] was something to astonish all theories out of one's mind. The face was in every instance merely that of a man intent upon his business, the business of wig-wagging . . ." (VI,196, my emphasis). Crane should have held on to those now-abandoned "theories," which had complicated and humanized his soldiers in The Red Badge, for his robot-like soldierboy heroes in the Cuban tales and newspaper pieces are unbelievable as human beings.

Though "War Memories" (1899), Crane's thinly fictionalized retrospective survey of his Cuban war experiences, suffers from the same

¹⁵Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 364.

"I'm weak--they're strong" bifurcation as the writings I have been discussing, it is one of his more interesting Cuban writings, largely because it shows awareness of a certain complexity, or mystery, about war and men that Crane's own "angel-devil" characterization in "War Memories" ultimately cannot satisfactorily represent.¹⁶ Certainly Crane's definition of war in this sketch, "War is death, and a plague of the lack of small things, and toil" (VI,235), adds one perceptive insight (the second of the three here quoted) to those Crane had already imaginatively projected in The Red Badge. Crane's experience of the wearying, day-to-day trivial events, as well as the big highlights, during the Cuban war taught him that "the lack of small things" such as a comfortable resting place at night and palatable food was as much the essence of war as death and hard work. This seriocomic "lack of small things" is best indicated in "War Memories" by the correspondent Vernall-Crane's longing for an ice cream soda: "A hard campaign, full of wants and lacks and absences, brings a man speedily back to an appreciation of things long disregarded or forgotten. . . . I happened to think of ice-cream-soda. I had done very

¹⁶I would not go so far as does LaFrance, who considers "War Memories" a major Crane work: "Because it sets forth a moral reality through a careful use of the techniques of fiction in communicating an actual experience [of Crane's] "War Memories" is one of Crane's finest sketches . . ." (p. 232). For me, the heavily autobiographic progression of "War Memories" fails to take on the structural integrity of effective fiction. However, I would agree with both LaFrance (p. 234) and Stallman (Stephen Crane, p. 490) that "War Memories" is superior to any of Crane's other Cuban stories published in Wounds in the Rain; in my opinion the reason for this is the one that I gave in the sentence to which this footnote is attached. That Vernall, the first-person narrator in "War Memories," is "only the thinnest of disguises for Crane himself" (Holton, p. 250) is generally accepted (Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 490, concurs).

well without it for many years; in fact I think I loathe it; but I got to dreaming of ice-cream-soda, and I came near dying of longing for it" (VI,262). Crane's actual war experiences also gave him a new feel for war's incongruities, such as Crane's happening to miss the biggest ~~naval~~ battle of the war because he took a one-day trip to Jamaica (VI,250). "War Memories" contains some well-chosen metaphors that convey imaginatively this incongruity of war, such as a comparison of battle-fighting to quail shooting and the image of war, in its dangerous absurdity, as being like a bunch of bananas hanging in a ship's cabin that swung wildly with the ship's movement and knocked savagely against all men who approached it: "You see? War! A bunch of bananas rampant because the ship rolled" (VI,228,222). One must grant that if actual war experience lessened rather than deepened Crane's insight into man's complex psychological reaction to combat, it did give the author new understanding of war's trivial frustrations and its incongruities.

Still, in dealing with man's psychological condition in war, "War Memories," like the other Cuban tales and reports, oversimplifies reality by telling that Vernall-Crane has an unalloyed fear of and cowardice concerning battle (this fact is stated at least five times in "War Memories"--VI,228-237), while the soldiers are consistently unafraid. For instance, the night before one of the battles, Vernall-Crane "was afraid. Bitterly afraid. . . . I was certain that I could never sleep with the weight of a coming battle upon my mind, a battle in which the poor life of a war correspondent might easily be taken

by a careless enemy. . . . I wished for some mild attack of disease, something that would incapacitate me for the business of going out gratuitously to be bombed" (VI,228). And, two pages later, the contrast between the soldiers' fearlessness and Vernall-Crane's cowardice is succinctly presented: "I was afraid of being shot. . . . Most of the men as they lay flat, shooting, looked contented, almost happy. They were pleased, these men, at the situation. . . . I wasn't pleased. I was picturing defeat" (VI,230).

It is curious that Crane in "War Memories" so deprecated his own courage, because according to others' accounts of his Cuban war performance, he several times performed very brave deeds--deeds of which he makes no mention in "War Memories." For example, during the incident that Crane described in "Marines Signalling Under Fire at Guantanamo," Crane himself took part in the signalling while Spanish rifle-fire crackled all around--for which action he was officially commended to the Secretary of the Navy. During the encounter at Cuzco--the very battle during which Crane in the passage from "War Memories" just cited compared his fear so unfavorably to the soldiers' courage--Crane did heroic service by braving the firing-line to take bottles of water to the U.S. soldiers surrounded by Spaniards in the 108° heat. And on several occasions observed by other journalists, Crane unnecessarily exposed himself to enemy rifle-fire, as if deliberately putting his own bravery to the test. According to Richard Harding Davis--who is known to have disliked Crane personally and as a rival war correspondent--Crane in Cuba was "the coolest man, whether

army officer or civilian, that I saw under fire at any time during the war."¹⁷ Both Berryman and Stallman have speculated that Crane, weary of life, may actually have desired to be killed in Cuba.¹⁸ Less speculative is the presumption that Crane's brave war conduct was a deliberate self-test of his own courage. Fryckstedt expresses this attitude well:

During the Cuban campaign Crane focused almost exclusively on the behavior of individual soldiers under extremities of physical hardship and mortal danger. . . . The silent courage, the patient endurance and the wry humor which the U.S. regulars displayed . . . was to him a sublime and inspiring spectacle. His own behavior under enemy fire showed to what extent he felt the need to subject himself to the same test. A year before he had praised Ouida's Under Two Flags . . . because it was so simply and refreshingly a song of the brave.

To face death without flinching became to Crane more and more the supreme value.¹⁹

In view of the way Crane denigrated his own valor in "War Memories," it seems likely that he never really convinced himself of his own bravery under fire, but rather that his valorous deeds must have been accomplished with a great deal of inner fear and trembling. Probably what he was displaying in incessantly exposing himself to battle-fire was not iron-nerved courage, but rather a bluff of

¹⁷Stallman, Stephen Crane, pp. 364, 605, 371, 393-394, 281, 368.

¹⁸Berryman, pp. 223-224; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 394. Levenson also takes this position (Works, V, cviii).

¹⁹Fryckstedt, Uncollected Writings, pp. lx-lxi. Gullason, Complete Novels of Crane, p. 76, finds that Crane views war as "a place where man tests himself and his values." Note also the comment of a friend of Crane's, cited in Berryman, p. 325: "'I think Steve [Crane] was born a coward . . . but he wouldn't stay one.'"

courage.²⁰ Unfortunately, in "War Memories" Crane reserved this inner ambiguity for himself alone, no longer realizing that other men undoubtedly conceal their own inner fears beneath a facade of courage. Instead Crane finds that in the midst of battle, "most of the men . . . were grimly satisfied with themselves" (VI,246). Crane's loss of ability to peer beneath the surface appearance of the soldiers leads him into romantic absurdities in "War Memories," such as describing the Cuban infantrymen that escorted Crane's group of reporters on a hazardous journey as "of the stuff of Fenimore Cooper's Indians, only they made no preposterous orations" (VI,238). Admiral Sampson is lauded as a flawless "great man," and Crane, overcome by the small kindnesses of the soldiers in slipping him food to supplement his own meager rations, even writes the idealistic absurdity "Men are always good men" (VI,239-240,261, my emphasis). In such manner, Crane, despite his evident attempt in "War Memories" to express the essence of war realistically ("I feel that things [in war] were often sublime. But they were differently sublime. They were not of our shallow and preposterous fictions. They stood out in a simple, majestic commonplace."--VI,249), too often ends up portraying angel (the soldiers)-devil (Vernall-Crane) unreality.

This deficiency is rooted in Crane's loss of confidence in his

²⁰Taking dares is a subject that interested Crane, as the plots of several of his Sullivan County stories attest. In "The Five White Mice," gambling--making a show or bluff of courage in a chance universe--is a key element. In my chapter on Crane's Western tales, I will suggest that this bluff of courage is a central motif in his fiction.

ability to communicate anything meaningful about reality beneath the surface. He had always acknowledged an element of unknowableness or mystery about the deeper reality, but through the dipolar vision of reality that he had employed in much of his fiction written prior to the Cuban war writings, he had been able to penetrate no little way into that mystery.²¹ But Vernall in "War Memories" despairs of the attempt as hopeless: "'To get the real thing seems impossible! It is because war is neither magnificent nor squalid; it is simply life, and an expression of life can always evade us'" (VI,222). Crane finds that he can no longer understand why men in war act the way they do: "The fine thing about 'the men' is that you can't explain them." He can see only the surface appearance, not the inner reality: "there were about me that day many men who did not seem to be afraid at all [though] they were not old soldiers; they were mainly recruits . . ." (VI,230,232, my emphasis). This is not the "seem" of much of Crane's earlier fiction, the ironic "seem" that reflects the narrator's deeper insight into the characters than the characters themselves have; for in "War Memories," the narrator Vernall has no deeper insight into the men, and thus is constrained, as I have been showing, to accept the surface representation as the whole reality, or at least all the reality he is capable of showing. Crane is here suffering a failure of imaginative or artistic insight: he cannot read the thoughts of these men,

²¹See, e.g., my analysis in Chapter 2 of "The Open Boat" as conveying much insight into the ambiguity of reality: its subjective and objective "versions" as well as its underlying mysteriousness.

as he did with the characters in The Red Badge and "The Open Boat" ("As they trudged slowly in single file they were reflecting upon-- what? I don't know"--VI,229), and he cannot understand how or why the soldiers seem unafraid of being killed: "I don't know. I cannot imagine" (VI,230). Thus, "War Memories," despite hints in it of a more complex view of reality than that exhibited in other of the Cuban reports and tales, ultimately exhibits the self-pitying frustrations of diminished insight; as Vernall-Crane bitterly puts it in the sketch's concluding sentence, "you can depend upon it that I have told you nothing at all, nothing at all, nothing at all" (VI,263).²²

If "War Memories" mixes fool's gold with the purer stuff, Crane's more fully fictionalized accounts of the Cuban war are almost entirely mined out of any aesthetic value. Because of his new despair of understanding reality in all its dipolar complexity, Crane's late "war tales shifted focus from the inner experience of the soldier . . . to the stoical conduct of men inured to combat," and in the process they became pure puffballs of patriotism and tiresome aggrandizements of soldierly heroism and devotion to duty.²³

This depressing truth is quite evident even in what is usually considered the best of these stories, "The Price of the Harness."²⁴

²²Compare Holton's statement (p. 244) that in his Cuban War journalism, Crane "acknowledg~~ed~~/ed/ man's inability to fully comprehend it /reality/."

²³The quote is from Levenson, Works, V, p. cxx. Fryckstedt, Uncollected Writings, lx, is good on the patriotic chauvinism that in the Cuban writings replaces the "agonizing ambiguities" of Crane's earlier, better writings.

²⁴Gullason overrates this story, considering it "of high quality"

The soldiers in this tedious epic of war bravery look "indifferent, almost stolid, despite the heat and the labor." Each of them is a "hard bronze profile," and, "being always like soldiers," they are "unable even to carry a spade save like United States regular soldiers." Differing from Crane himself as depicted in "War Memories," the men in "Price of the Harness" "betray no impatience" over their lack of rations or any of the other small omissions and inconveniences of war; the only soldier who fails to exhibit this inhuman patience, the inexperienced Grierson, is deprecated by the other soldiers with "a low chuckle full of ironical comment upon Grierson's lack of certain qualities which the other men felt themselves to possess" (VI,97,98,99). These soldiers are equally calm under battle conditions, and their officers are "cool gentlemen" Each soldier is depicted as carrying his rifle with "the grace of an old hunter" and as possessing "fore-arms of almost incredible brawn." Though battle is a "mystery" that the men "regarded . . . with

even though its ending is flawed ("Crane's Short Stories," in Gullason, ed., Crane's Career, p. 485). LaFrance finds it, along with Crane's other Cuban stories, missing greatness because it is propagandistic and lacking in artistic detachment, but rates it fairly decent work because it contains less "overt preaching" than other Cuban stories do (pp. 181,183). Solomon--whom I generally find the most perceptive interpreter of Crane's later war fiction--says that "Price of the Harness," to him the best Wounds in the Rain story, "is Crane's . . . ultimate idealization of the private soldier . . . the capable, professional workman who does his dangerous job without the slightest hint of heroics, accepts his wounds quietly, his death silently" ("Crane's War Stories," p. 76), but criticizes the story for its excessive sentimentalizing of the soldier, especially toward the end (Parody to Realism, p. 123). It is possibly significant that by Bowers' dating (intro. to Works, VI, p. lxxxvii), "Price of the Harness," in my own view the best of the bad lot of Cuban stories, was the first-written of those stories; as time went on, the stories went further downhill.

thoughtful awe," they exhibit none of Henry Fleming's human doubts and fears as they engage the enemy. The story reaches an early crescendo of romanticism in aggrandizing the courage and battle-fidelity, "the ideal of duty . . . which he has himself created . . . ," of a young staff officer, then immediately tops that with a bathetic picture of the equally battle-brave horses of the gun-battery, whose "eyes, . . . serene, mournful, generous . . . , lit heart-breakingly with something that was akin to a philosophy, a religion of self-sacrifice--oh, gallant, gallant horses!" (VI,100,101, 102).

Though the point of view used in "Price of the Harness" is the same one found in Crane's best fiction, that of the omniscient narrator, there is in this and the other Cuban war stories a difference in the way the all-seeing narrator is used. In successful writings like "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and The Red Badge, the narrator's comments and his renderings of the characters' thoughts in his, the narrator's, voice are used to set up an ironic interplay between the characters' largely subjective vision of reality and the narrator's largely objective one, thus underlining the dipolar complexity of reality.²⁵ However, in "Price of the Harness" the comments of the narrator and his reports of the characters' thoughts lack this dipolarity. Instead, the narrator had succumbed to the same omni-heroic vision of reality as have the characters, and thus the point

²⁵My Chapter 2 dwelt upon this particular use of point of view to harmonize with and convey Crane's dipolar vision.

of view no longer adds depth to the story, but merely adds to its monochronality. For instance, the narrator is in total sympathy with the views of Nolan, the tale's protagonist, in the latter's confident certainty of his own heroism (in contrast to Fleming's ambivalence about it in The Red Badge): "There came to Nolan a sense of exultation. Here, then, was one of those dread and lurid situations which in a nation's history stand out in crimson letters, becoming tales of blood to stir generation after generation. . . . If he lived through the battle, he would be a hero of the desperate fight" As the narrator reports the "pride of the marksman" in "doing the thing which they had been trained endlessly to do, and . . . knew they were doing . . . well. Nolan, for instance, was overjoyed," no iota of irony suggests any realization by the narrator that this is a one-sided view of soldiering. Nor does the metaphor used by the narrator to explain the nature of battle--"It reminds one always of a loom, . . . clinking, clanking, plunking, plinking, to weave a woof of thin red threads, the cloth of death"--add depth to the story, for the narrator is exhibiting the same subjective fatalism as the soldiers rather than bringing in (as does the narrator of "The Open Boat," for instance) the counterpointing objective idea of the chance universe. Similar one-sided narrational intrusions in "Price of the Harness" almost ruin one scene in the story that is effective, an understated, even ironic one in which the mortally wounded Nolan insists irritably that the ground he lies on is damp from rain, though in reality it is his own life's-blood in

which he is lying. The narrator's gratuitous comment at the end of this scene, "He did not know he was dying," by needlessly "clarifying" Nolan's thoughts, takes much of the edge off this otherwise affecting episode (VI,105,110,111,112).

Section VI, the concluding section of "Price of the Harness," is no improvement. Sentimentalizing Nolan's death, one of his comrades-in-arms says "'Aw, it's a damn shame.'" The mood of pathos here of course has its counterpart in "The Open Boat" and many another successful Crane story, but the difference is that here pathos is the only mood, whereas in Crane's better stories the "sentimental tenderness" of pathos is balanced by an "irony of soul." In "The Open Boat," the correspondent's subjective, egocentric feeling of "the pathos of his situation" is ironically a response to the realization that has just struck him of the cosmos' objective indifference toward him, reflected in the sentence immediately preceding: "A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she $\overline{\Delta}$ Nature says to him."²⁶ In contrast, the final episode of "The Price of the Harness," in which a wounded soldier, "a heroic, implacable comedian and patriot, of a humor that has bitterness and ferocity and love in it . . . ," is enthusiastically singing the Star-Spangled Banner, is

²⁶I again draw the key phrases "sentimental tenderness" and "irony of soul," which I first introduced at the start of Chapter 2, from the Cuban tale "This Majestic Lie" (VI,206). The quotations here from "The Open Boat" are from Works, V, 85. Notice the significance of the word "feels" in the sentence from "The Open Boat" quoted here; it emphasizes even more the ambivalence of reality and the uncertainty of human understanding of it, adding further depth to the story.

flawed by a too one-sided vision of reality. Though Crane does try to give this incident an ironic ditionality by describing the singing man as both "heroic" and comic (a "comedian"), the technique fails to work because the heroism completely dominates any possible comic effect in the scene, as for example in the story's final sentence: "Through the clouded odors of sickness and medicine rang the dauntless voice of the wounded man in the corner: ' . . . Long may it wave. . . .'" (VI,111,112; the ellipses in the last quotation are Crane's).

"Virtue in War" (1899) may stand as typical of the other Cuban war tales that are inferior even to "Price of the Harness." This is the saga of the incredibly "virtuous" (as in the story's title), i.e., patriotic, dutiful, and brave, Major Gates, a former Regular army officer now constrained to command a volunteer battalion, juxtaposed against the comfort-loving officers and discipline-hating privates (especially Lige Wigram) of the volunteer troops, which consist largely of non-career men often from socially prominent families. This story has flaws similar to those of "Price of the Harness," but even more omnipresent. Flaws here include sentimentality; overt, unironic explanations of the story's meaning by the narrator; and "angel-devil" eulogizing of the Regular army men combined with put-downs of the volunteers. On this last point it is again worth remarking the difference between these late war tales and The Red Badge. In the latter work, all of the featured characters are soldiers in the same regiment, but instead of displaying the faceless similarity

of either "regular" or "volunteer" soldiers in these late stories, the characters in The Red Badge are as different as Conklin from Wilson, as Fleming from the tattered man. In addition, some of the characters (Fleming and Wilson) are pictured as changing and growing during the course of the novel. The only "change" in "Virtue in War," Lige Wigram's sudden shift from resenting Major Gates' strict insistence on military discipline and duty to recognizing that these qualities in Gates make him a being superior to Wigram is, unlike the changes in Fleming in The Red Badge, psychologically unmotivated and thus unconvincing. Wigram is a stick figure used to help convey the author's moralizing sentiments on "virtue" in war. And these sentiments themselves--even in contrast to "Price of the Harness," where Nolan's comrades exhibited great brotherly concern over his mortal wound--have become almost anti-humanitarian: Lige (with the narrator's help) "perceived a certain hopeless gulf $\overline{\wedge}$ between himself and Gates $\overline{\wedge}$ Sometimes all men are equal; occasionally they are not" (VI,191). Again Crane's "angel-devil" theory, born of his despair of personally equaling the soldierly paragons of bravery that he thought he saw on Greek and Cuban battlefields, has caused him to lose sight of the ambivalent nature and the manifold potentialities of all human beings that illuminated his earlier, better war writings.²⁷

²⁷The only scholarly praise of "Virtue in War" that I have uncovered comes from Berryman, who rashly finds "undiminished power of conception and execution" in the story (p. 252). Much more characteristic of previous commentary on this story is that of LaFrance, who lambastes it for being far too explicit in its praise of the heroic Regulars and its attack on "the poltroons and the $\overline{\wedge}$ naive $\overline{\wedge}$ innocents . . ." (p. 184).

"The Clan of No-Name" is to my eyes a poor, thesis-ridden paean²⁸ to the veteran soldier Manolo Prat's adherence to a rigid code of duty and fraternity²⁹ vis-a-vis the lack of such moral qualities exhibited by civilians like the "commercially-excited" mother of Margharita, who wishes her daughter to marry a Mr. Smith because he is wealthy and socially prominent, and daughter Margharita herself, who callously burns a picture of her lover Manolo upon hearing the news of his death and immediately forgets him as soon as Mr. Smith proposes to her (VI,119,134-135). The problem with this story is not that in it Crane is proposing a life-ethic for humans, for almost all of his best stories and novels either show the protagonists developing or exhibiting a moral code or (as in Maggie) excoriate them for not possessing such a code. The trouble with "The Clan of

²⁸Gibson exhibits a certain amount of enthusiasm for this story, despite opining that there is "not one tale of outstanding merit" among Crane's Cuban war stories. Gibson is attracted by the relative structural complexity of "The Clan of No-Name," with its "framed" first and last sections dealing with actions that contrast with the main action of the story, its unsequential chronology, and "its broad spatial sweep . . ." (pp. 97,98,100). But structural "innovations" by themselves do not a story make--especially with Crane, whose best fictions, like "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge, are chronological and episodic. Solomon, here as elsewhere a more reliable commentator than Gibson, is severe with "Clan of No-Name," saying that, in its "trac/ing of/ the familiar pattern of a young soldier's introduction to war," it reads like "bad . . . Kipling": "The newspaperman Crane, like the civil servant Kipling, has succumbed to the glamour of the soldier" ("Crane's War Stories," pp. 75,76,77).

²⁹The nature of this code, which seems to be the "mystic tie" referred to in the poetic riddle that opens "The Clan of No-Name" (VI, 119), has been interpreted in ways similar or identical to mine by Berryman (p. 255), Hoffman (p. 152), Stallman (Stephen Crane, p. 387), and Neal J. Osborn, "The Riddle in 'The Clan': A Key to Crane's Major Fiction?" Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 69 (April 1965), p. 251. Osborn in particular stresses, rightly, that Manolo Prat is ex-

No-Name" is that Crane stereotypes his characters, implying that some of them are the kind who adhere to the law of duty and morality and others are not, whereas in his more insightful earlier stories even men culpable of foolish egotism and silly views about the universe (Fleming, the men in the open boat) have the potential to develop into courageous and brotherly men. Manolo Prat "was of a kind . . . and the men of his kind were governed by their gods, and each man knew the law . . . [and] he needs must obey the law . . ." (VI,131).³⁰ But Margharita and Mr. Smith are not of Manolo's "kind," as the narrator makes clear in the story's final paragraph immediately after Margharita has burned her tear-stained photograph of Manolo: "For the word [i.e., proper moral duty] is clear only to the kind [like Manolo] who . . . are governed by the unknown gods . . ." (VI, 136).

Holton, who does not discern the "angel-devil" flaw in the presentation of Manolo's moral code, finds that "The Clan of No-Name" "may . . . represent Crane's most serious attempt in Wounds in the

hibiting moral as well as physical courage when he dooms himself to certain death by going to the aid of five soldiers, two already dead and one wounded, trapped in a little hollow on the battlefield. In Osborn's words (p. 250), "Manolo smiles quietly at [the wounded soldier, a peasant] Manolo cannot desert his 'tattered man' . . . because the young officer has recognized a mystic tie uniting all men--'the law on fidelity was clear.'"

³⁰LaFrance--who feels "Clan of No-Name," though not a good story, is better than "The Price of the Harness"--compares Fleming unfavorably to Manolo Prat because, though the latter "is as young and untried as Fleming . . .," he immediately, unlike Fleming, "assumes the moral harness it [his military situation] implies." Surely LaFrance is confusing good moral sentiments with good art: Manolo's instant morality scarcely makes "Clan of No-Name" superior to The Red Badge, with its much more sophisticated understanding of the hard struggle necessary for humans to achieve right moral conduct.

Rain to articulate an ethic appropriate for the individual confronting such an absurdity as war." Holton also misreads the story's ending as ironic: to him, Manolo's code of brotherhood and duty is undercut by Margharita's and Mr. Smith's adherence to "other 'laws' . . . less heroic than the laws of courage. Here is a law of conversation and a proper way for men to propose marriage."³¹ Holton here is confusing oranges and lemons; the rules and conventions of polite society--such as Mr. Smith's concentration "upon the form of the proposal of marriage which he intended to make . . ." and his and Margharita's feeling that moments of silence in a conversation are "very incorrect indeed. Polite people always babbled at each other like two brooks" (VI,134)--are simply not to be equated with the moral laws of duty and fellow-feeling to which Manolo Prat adheres. Their difference is made clear by Margharita's socially correct but morally heinous acts of burning Manolo's photograph and accepting Mr. Smith's marriage proposal. Clearly, then, "Clan of No-Name," like Crane's other Cuban war stories, lacks the thematic depth and aesthetic strength brought to Crane's more successful stories by the dipolar vision of reality.

Crane's last war stories, written in 1899, are the five (four completed, one unfinished) known as the Spitzbergen tales because they deal with an imaginary war participated in by "the Spitzbergen army . . ." (VI,287). By far the best known and most highly

³¹Holton, pp. 263, 265.

esteemed of these Spitzbergen tales is "The Upturned Face," which is considered by at least four scholars to be one of Crane's premier stories.³² Holton suggests that "The Upturned Face" is "too often read" and interpreted in isolation, apart from the other Spitzbergen tales. But his interpretation of these tales as a group focusing on "the horror at the center of the experience of war . . ." and calling into question "the very purpose of the military action"³³ seems to me far-fetched, for these stories, like the Cuban ones, focus far more on the soldiers' developed code of bravery, brotherhood, and stoic endurance of war's and life's conditions than they do on the "absurd" nature of war itself. Solomon, the only other scholar who has considered at any length the Spitzbergen tales as a group, develops an equally dubious thesis: though admitting that there is "a great deal of Kipling" in these stories, he claims that they strike "a certain balance between the sympathetic understanding of The Red Badge of Courage and the stiff-upper-lip jingoism of Wounds in the Rain."³⁴ I would think rather that The Red Badge possesses the balanced view, since it contains both sympathy for and amused scorn at Henry Fleming's foolish-wise struggles to understand war and the cosmos in which he lives. In contrast, the Spitzbergen tales, even "The Upturned Face," are similar to the gung-ho jingoism of the Cuban war

³²Gibson, p. 103; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 486; Tanner, p. 12; Holton, p. 194n.

³³Holton, pp. 269, 268.

³⁴Solomon, "Crane's War Stories," p. 78.

stories in their canonizing of Timothy Lean and those other soldiers who are the fated "kind" able to do their proper duty under war conditions.³⁵

In truth, the four other Spitzbergen tales (counting the unfinished one) do little to clarify the success of "The Upturned Face," except by contrast. These four tales are sheer glorification of the soldiers of the "Kicking Twelfth," as the Twelfth Regiment of the Spitzbergen Regular army is nicknamed. These soldiers, and especially one of their lieutenants, Timothy Lean, are paragons of courage and moral virtue. They live up to the same military code of values presented in "The Clan of No-Name," and do so for the same simplistic reason: they are of the "kind" for whom such code behavior comes naturally (and thus, the reader wonders, how much credit do they deserve for it?). Some examples from these four Spitzbergen tales will illustrate my point.

In the story "The Kicking Twelfth," the Spitzbergen army is said to be "backed by traditions of centuries of victories," and its "occasional defeats . . . were likely to appear as glorious stands against overwhelming odds." Also, "probably no army had more self-confidence" (VI,287). At this point--the very first paragraph of the story--a moderately insightful reader can predict accurately the total plot-substance of these four tales: the Spitzbergen army will

³⁵Solomon's own perceptive comments ("Crane's War Stories," pp. 80,79) that Timothy Lean is the "ideal soldier" and "the officer Crane hoped to be" in effect undermine his position that the Spitzbergen tales present a balanced (rather than one-sided, idealized) picture of men in war.

win another great victory, and whatever few minor setbacks it has along the way will be "glorious stands against overwhelming odds." The Twelfth Regiment of the Spitzbergen army consists mostly of unbattletested recruits, including "young Timothy Lean . . . a second-lieutenant . . . [who] was very fond of soldiering--it had been the career of his father and of his grandfather . . ." (VI,288, 289).³⁶ When the Kicking Twelfth enters its first battle, the men are supremely, even inhumanly, confident; unlike Wilson in The Red Badge, "not a single soldier handed a token or left a comrade with a message to be delivered in case he should be killed. They did not seem to think of being killed" Quite overtly the battle is presented as a test of the men's courage: the "officers look gravely at their men, measuring them, feeling their temper . . . ," and at the first moment of combat the soldiers "begin their test of the very heart of a regiment" (VI,290,293). Little suspense exists about the outcome. The men of the Kicking Twelfth, "determined, almost relentless," merely exhibit "the heroism which comes to the chosen of the war-god" (VI,293,295). Chance operations in an unpredictable universe have been forgotten; now everything is fated,

³⁶It is tempting to posit here a parallel between Crane and his hero Lean. Crane was quite proud of his own grandfather and of the latter's brothers, all of whom fought in the Revolutionary War. See Crane's 1896 letters to the editor of the Newark Sunday Call and to John Northern Hilliard, especially the sentences "During the Revolution the Cranes were pretty hot people" and (after recounting how one of his grandfather's brothers refused to give information to Hessians who had captured him and was killed for so refusing) "In those old times the family did it's [sic] duty" (Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 124,94). Timothy Lean similarly knows and does his "duty." Compare Solomon, "Crane's War Stories," p. 79: "Timothy Lean . . . is the officer Crane hoped to be."

and the Kicking Twelfth is fated to do well. Timothy Lean in particular is heroic: "agile and strong, he was well in advance" and "the first officer to gain the top of the hill was Timothy Lean" Lean, "his face flaming, his eyes wild" exhibits the same battle-madness as did Fleming in The Red Badge (VI, 295,294,293),³⁷ but with no tincture of Fleming's complex response to the dangers of battle.

In "The Shrapnel of Their Friends," Lean's regiment is shelled by its own army's guns, and in "'And If He Wills, We Must Die,'" an outnumbered advance squadron of Kicking Twelfth men are all killed trying to defend an isolated house. But, contra Holton, these stories emphasize not the "absurdity" of these war happenings³⁸ but the stoic bravery of the fated soldiers in meeting these given "tests." "The Shrapnel of Their Friends" finds the Kicking Twelfth soldiers exhibiting an understated but still smirking complacency over their just completed battle triumph. Similarly, "the heart of Timothy Lean beat high with pride. He intended to be some day a general In him burned the usual fierce fire to make his company the best company in the regiment" (VI,301,302). In an ensuing battle, the Kicking Twelfth men are contrasted to "a rabble" of retreating soldiers from

³⁷This fact is an important clue to Crane's general attitude toward the madness, savage primitiveness, and animality that he consistently presents in his many war writings as being the nature of men in battle. If Lean is all-good, then this "battle-madness" itself is to be construed as no bad thing, no implied criticism of men's conduct in war; it is simply the necessary way for brave men to act in battle in order to be successful.

³⁸See Holton, p. 268.

the Eighty-eighth. The contempt of the former for the latter is made clear (again one contrasts the complexity of The Red Badge, which finds Henry Fleming progressing from abject cowardice to high courage; but in the Spitzbergen stories, one is either among the chosen or one is not). Naturally, the Twelfth Regiment triumphs, and its Colonel is "given a high decoration because he had been badly used by [General] Ritchie's gunners" on that day. Ritchie knew that it is hard for men to withstand the shrapnel of their friends" (VI,304,306)--a nice point, except that in the actual events of this story, such "withstanding" is shown to be supremely easy for the Kicking Twelfth!

"'And If He Wills, We Must Die'" quite explicitly concerns itself with whether the outnumbered squadron of Kicking Twelfth men can bravely meet the test of their certain doom. When the shooting starts, the squad's "serjeant leaped straight to his feet. 'Now,' he cried, 'let us see what you are made of!'" Only a single soldier shows any signs of flunking the test, a man named Johnston, who murmurs to the sergeant "'I can't stand this. I swear I can't. I think we should run away.'" And this one soldier, with help from his "good shepherd," Sergeant Morton (note the blatant Christ parallel), who says softly "'You are afraid, Johnston, you are afraid,'" swiftly reverses himself and earns at least a B+: "The man struggled to his feet, cast upon the serjeant a gaze full of admiration, reproach and despair, and returned to his post." Finally, after each of the sixteen men has bravely stuck to his post and all of them have

been killed, the enemy bursts into the house and its leader closes the story with a predictable eulogy to the squadron's stoic bravery and devotion to duty: "'God! I should have estimated them as at least one hundred strong'" (VI,309,311,312).

The unfinished "The Fire-Tribe and the White-Face" seems intended by Crane to be the concluding Spitzbergen tale,³⁹ for as it opens "the victorious Spitzbergen army lay at the capital of Rostina," the enemy nation, and Timothy Lean has been promoted to captain.⁴⁰ Lean's Colonel now picks him to go and police the activities of a tribe of primitive, cannibalistic fire-worshippers. Lean is chosen because of his bravery and intelligence; says the Colonel, "'I depend upon you to go with your company and dominate a tribe of embittered and war-like savages I thought you were the best man in the regiment for the thing.'" Here is another test, with death as its possible outcome, "the land of the fire-tribe" being "a place behind the heart of the unknown,"⁴¹ but as usual, the reader can be confident in advance that Lean will be up to the challenge. Lean "was deeply stirred by the news that he was only five miles

³⁹Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 605, agrees.

⁴⁰The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. X, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1975), p. 164. Further references to writings in this volume will be acknowledged parenthetically in the body of the text.

⁴¹Notice that Crane is still using in 1899 the term "the unknown" that peppered his 1892 stories of Sullivan County and many other stories in between. There should be little doubt that facing bravely the possibility of the great "unknown," death, is consistently the supreme test of a man for Crane.

from the place where he was to be tried in a new and strenuous way. His nerves were absolutely tranquil by this time before the prospect of a fight but they quivered at this prospect of a match of wits, a game of intelligence" (X,164,166,167,168). Lean makes the test more interesting when he commits an "initial blunder" by ordering a soldier to kill one of the fire-tribe warriors acting as an advance scout, but from then on he regains his usual sang-froid. Refusing to allow his men to slay any more of the enemy warriors, "Lean led his column [forward] with extraordinary caution . . ." (X,169,177). Despite the "cowering" of the interpreters on whom he is going to have to rely to communicate with the fire-tribe, Lean bravely insists on parlaying with them (X,179).

The last part of this incomplete story reflects anew Crane's late war stories' "angel-devil" or "chosen-not chosen" simplification of the complexity of human nature. It turns out that the fire-tribe will make peace with Lean for five or six hundred dollars. At first Lean cannot believe in such dishonorable conduct, and Lean's own soldiers rather incredibly gaze at the money being readied to be given to the fire-tribe "with the scorn of men who were on active service. Dollars were of no consequence to them." But Lean soon sees that, like Margharita and Mr. Smith of "The Clan of No-Name," the fire-tribe simply has no comprehension of Lean's code of moral conduct (X,183). Lean feels actually "degraded" to take part in the transaction, "'because they [the fire-tribe] sold their honor'"

And, as the narrator reports Lean's feelings on the occasion,

we find no hint that the narrator's attitude differs from Lean's simplistic one: "He [Lean] now despised the fire-tribe. For him, there was but one standard of conduct in the world. All its laws were very clear to him. And they named many unpardonable crimes. These unpardonable crimes could forever damn a man The fire-tribe's virtue was a failure. They were men of no character. He settled that point clearly in his mind and his . . . face took on an expression of contempt" (X,184,185, my emphasis). This incomplete story, then, is a failure not because it concerns itself with moral issues but because, due to Crane's desertion of his earlier bipolar view of reality, he now presents right moral behavior, like physical courage in battle, as too easy for some men to attain and absolutely impossible for others to grasp. We have tumbled a long way down from the ironic understanding of the ambivalences and difficulties of right moral conduct reflected in "The Open Boat": "a man . . . impressed with the unconcern of the universe . . . see[s] the innumerable flaws of his life and . . . wish[es] for another chance. A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction, or at a tea" (V,88).

Although it suffers from some of the same deficiencies as Crane's other war writings from the Greco-Turkish war on, "The Upturned Face" is an effective story because it (like "War Memories") contains some

glimpses of the dipolar view of reality found in Crane's earlier successful fictions. In this story, unlike the others that I have been discussing in this chapter, fear of death is not easily overcome even by those who do have the capacity for bravery, such as Timothy Lean. Lean's task in "The Upturned Face" is to bury a fallen comrade, an act of moral duty according to the soldierly code of honor. But Lean shows a great fear of touching the dead man's body (which fear, as several critics have suggested, is broadly symbolic of man's existential fear of death).⁴² Lean's "hands wavered over the buttons of the tunic. . . . he did not seem to dare to touch it," and even when he finally does so and finishes his task of collecting from the tunic the dead soldier's effects, "he arose with a ghastly face" (VI,297,298). However, this fear of death is not only a symbolic or existential fear, which might open Lean and his companions to a charge of excessive hysteria,⁴³ but also a quite practical and well warranted fear of their own death from the enemy's sniper fire while they are performing their burial duty--a fact that most commentators on the story have curiously downplayed.⁴⁴ The privates who are helping Lean and the adjutant by digging a grave for the corpse become

⁴²See Tanner, pp. 12-13, Gibson, p. 103, and Holton, pp. 269, 271. LaFrance, p. 242, is in the distinct minority in claiming that the successful completion of the men's burial task at this story's end "reveals their hysteria [i.e., fear of death]/ for the absurdity that it is." See my opposing view as expressed in note 41 above.

⁴³Lean and colleagues are accused of near or total hysteria by Tanner, p. 12, LaFrance, p. 240, Bergon, p. 37, and William B. Dillingham, "Crane's One-Act Farce: 'The Upturned Face,'" Research Studies of Washington State Univ., 35 (Dec. 1967), p. 324.

⁴⁴E.g., Tanner, pp. 12-13; Gibson, p. 103. Other critics leave totally unmentioned the actual physical danger to Lean and the others in the story.

"hurried and frightened" by the enemy bullets whining over their heads. Indeed, the two digging privates "were laboring for their lives. Ever overhead, the bullets were spitting" (VI,297,298). A bit later, "The fire of the Rostina sharpshooters was accurate and continuous," and the adjutant comments that "'the beasts have got our range exactly.'" Before the grave is finished, one of the privates is struck in the arm by a bullet and is ordered to the rear along with the other soldier by Lean, who says "'I'll finish this business.'" Now it is Lean's turn to shovel the earth "frantically like a man digging himself out of danger" (VI,299,300). Surely these men's fear of losing their lives is not to be branded, in the words of William Dillingham, "irrational," "laughable," and "farcical" ⁴⁵

Because they are face to face with death, both literal and symbolic (the corpse), Lean and the adjutant must endure a test not only of their physical bravery but also of their moral duty--the duty of doing the right thing for their dead companion by burying him. Though Lean, as has been seen, "wavers" in touching the corpse, he is constant in his determination to do his duty by it. The adjutant, in contrast, is not so constant. At the start of the story, he suggests to Lean that it might be better to postpone the burial until the next day, but Lean, knowing that his men must retreat and therefore that the burial must be performed now or never, replies "'I've got to fall

⁴⁵Dillingham, "'The Upturned Face,'" pp. 324, 324, 328.

back, and we've got to bury old Bill.'" Near the story's climax, the adjutant again shows his moral unsureness by saying "'It might have been better if we hadn't buried him just at this time.'"

Lean's response is a direct moral rebuke to the senior officer:

"'Damn you,' said Lean. 'Shut your mouth.'" Bravery, then, is not so easy for the military men in "Upturned Face" to achieve as it is throughout the other Spitzbergen tales and the Cuban tales and war reports; Crane has momentarily remustered a sense of the complexity of reality. And Lean's rebuke to his senior officer is emphatically not a breaking of the "code" of the military, as Solomon thinks,⁴⁶ for the code or "law" of soldierly behavior advocated by Crane in his Greek, Cuban, and Spitzbergen writings is not legalistic or hierarchical but preeminently moral,⁴⁷ and Lean is clearly following the moral code by silencing the adjutant's fear-induced waverings.

As has been seen, "Upturned Face" retains more of Crane's earlier sense of the complexity of reality than any of the author's other post-1896 war writings. It retreats somewhat from the "angel-devil" theory of human conduct to the sounder insight that most men are potentially capable of either right or wrong conduct. It is far less complacent in its treatment of humans' ability to face bravely the great unknown of death. It is concise and its message is understated

⁴⁶Solomon, "Crane's War Stories," p. 80.

⁴⁷This fact is readily seen in "The Clan of No-Name" and "The Fire-Tribe and the White-Face," as I have discussed them here.

--a vast improvement over the high rhetoric and sentimental silliness of the majority of the Cuban and Spitzbergen writings. And there is perhaps even a trace of human rage at God's absurd treatment of humanity (as opposed to the other stories' stoic acceptance of God's will, as mirrored in the Spitzbergen title "'If He Wills, We Must Die'") in Lean's sudden "violence of feeling" after the adjutant, helping Lean perform a burial service over the dead man, quotes the line "'O, God, have mercy----'"; Lean's "tigerishly" violent reaction may imply his feeling that God, if He exists, is anything but merciful toward mortals. Considering these plusses in "Upturned Face," it would be nice to be able to agree with Dillingham that Crane in this story "juxtapos[es] . . . the horrible and the comic. He delights in showing men being totally serious in their actions and thoughts while to the detached observer they are, at best, laughable,"⁴⁸ for if this were truly the case in "The Upturned Face," this story would be fully a projection of Crane's authentic vision, his dipolar view of reality, with humans seen as composites of wisdom and foolishness like the clown in "The Five White Mice."

But the catch is that I cannot accept Dillingham's finding that an external level of "farce" (or, better, irony) in this story is juxtaposed against the men's internal seriousness in facing death. Dillingham says that if the reader observes the story's action not only through the characters' eyes but also "through the eyes of the upturned face" of the dead man, he will see "the characters as they

⁴⁸Dillingham, "'The Upturned Face,'" p. 324.

really are and perhaps the farcical nature of our own reaction to death."⁴⁹ Unfortunately for this theory, we do not see the story through the eyes of the upturned face, but through those of an omniscient narrator who, as he has been throughout the Cuban and Spitzbergen tales, is thoroughly in sympathy with Lean's activities and the rigid code of physical and moral conduct that undergirds them. Ironic tensions between the narrator and the protagonist in this story do not exist; and for this reason more than any other, "The Upturned Face," though an effective piece of short fiction, is not in the same league with The Red Badge, "The Open Boat," "A Mystery of Heroism," "An Episode of War," "The Five White Mice," and the other highest fictional triumphs of Crane's dipolar vision of reality.

If war and the nature of men at war, like the nature of life itself, were ultimately to Crane mysteries,⁵⁰ then the reason for the relative or absolute failure of all of Crane's war writings written after 1896 was that in them he was unable to bear any light whatever into the darkness of that mystery. Crane acknowledged his inability to understand in "War Memories," and perhaps he pinpointed the chief cause of this new inability in a sentence from his tedious, third-rate war romance, Active Service: "Perhaps one of the first effects of war upon the mind is a new recognition and fear of the

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 328.

⁵⁰This idea has by now become a commonplace of Crane criticism. See, e.g., Rogers, p. 300; Colvert, in Works, VI, p. xxx; and Holton, p. 244.

circumscribed ability of the eye, making all . . . seem inscrutable."⁵¹ In The Red Badge, "The Open Boat," and their like, reality had been puzzling enough, but in those works Crane's dipolar vision, his artistic projection in fiction of the way in which reality could be viewed both objectively and subjectively, enabled him and his readers to peek under the tent of the unknown. In contrast, as this chapter has indicated, Crane's later war fiction is almost exclusively limited to a single vision of reality, an essentially subjective one in which man is elevated into an ideal and paragon of stoic adherence to a code of duty while in pursuit of a fated future. Those men who are unable to adhere to that code are treated with contempt; those who do adhere to it are treated with reverence. Conspicuous by its absence is the understanding--brought by Crane's dipolar vision of reality and by his use, to embody that dipolar vision in artistically successful fictional form, of the point of view contrast between a character's self-centered thoughts and the narrator's ironic reflections on those thoughts--that human nature has both comic-foolish and tragic-wise potential, mirroring the cosmic "absurdity" of man's (comic-foolish) egocentric caring for himself juxtaposed against the universe's (tragic-wise) indifference toward him. It is this failure of vision and correlative failure of artistic (narrational) technique that condemn Crane's later war writings to mediocrity.

⁵¹The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. III, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 173. Active Service (written 1898-1899) is not dealt with in this chapter because it is much more of a romance of adventure, love, and social class divisions than a war story and because everything that it does have to say about war is paralleled in the various Greek, Cuban, and Spitzbergen writings that have been discussed here.

From Social Justice to Personal Morality:
Crane's New York City Novels, Stories, and Sketches

Like his later war writings, Stephen Crane's stories and journalism set in New York City do not center on his dipolar vision of reality. But whereas the war writings of the late 1890s represent a retreat from that vision, the early 1890s city writings merely signify a sidepath. Following the lead of his mentors William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland by writing about the social conditions and problems of American urban life--writing, in other words, social realism--led Crane temporarily away from what had been the main concern of his early Sullivan County tales and sketches: man's relationship to his universe and the twin modes, subjective and objective, by which the "truth" of that relationship could be perceived. Still, the New York City writings were valuable to Crane's artistic development. In them he was able to practice and refine his special use of the omniscient narrative technique by which he could present the egotistic views of a character through the ironic language of an all-seeing narrator. Equally important, he was able, despite working within the framework of social realism and criticism of society's unjust treatment of the poor, to retain much of the psychological and moral focus of the Sullivan County writings, with an emphasis on individual human cowardice as the deeper cause of human ills. Whereas physical courage was the issue in the Sullivan County tales, in Crane's New York City

writings it is moral courage--the ability to do right when one sees right--that is under study.

The influence of Howells and especially of Garland on Crane's writings of New York is clear. In August, 1891, Crane, as a reporter, wrote a piece for the New York Tribune on Garland's lecture at Asbury Park about Howellsian realism. Crane's story so impressed Garland that the latter asked to meet the young reporter, who undoubtedly absorbed much of the excitement as well as the substance of the new social realism from Garland during their several subsequent talks in Asbury Park during the month of August.¹ In the words of James Colvert, Crane at the time he met Garland "had no program, no viable conception of the art of fiction, and apparently no plan of action. Garland was in a position to supply everything the youth lacked," such as "the importance of a fiction dealing with important social problems of the times, including the problem of life in the big city slums."² When Crane published Maggie, the first fruit of his investigation of social problems in the New York City slums, both Howells and Garland approved and urged Crane to direct his talents to more of the same. "Howells and Garland . . . admired the note of social protest in Maggie, and . . . encouraged Crane to join bread lines and sleep in flophouses so as to be able to write about the lives of the

¹For the facts of this 1891 Crane-Garland meeting, see Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 34.

²Colvert, intro. to The Works of Stephen Crane. Vol. I, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1969), p. xxxvi.

poor in a way which would impress the society that was ignoring them," writes Larzer Ziff. "Both men hailed [Crane] as a brilliant recruit to realism, one who exposed social injustice, and at their urging he joined a breadline, slept in a flophouse, and reported on these incidents."³ Even critics who feel, as I do, that social realism was not Crane's métier and thus that the sway of Garland and Howells over Crane's New York writings was less than fortunate do agree that the influence was there. Holton's words express the consensus: "throughout 1893 and into 1894 Crane was to be involved in writing sketches, short stories, newspaper pieces, and at least two novels Maggie and George's Mother which . . . partly conformed to standards asserted in such manifestoes of realism as Howells' Criticism and Fiction."⁴

There is justification for Crane's having walked the sidepath of social realism in his city writings. He could bask in the approval of acknowledged leaders of the new realism like Howells and Garland, and through their intervention (as well as through the natural willingness of New York newspaper editors to purchase feature articles dealing with city conditions and problems) he could find a journalistic market that enabled him to scrape by financially--though barely--until he could make a saleable name for himself as a novelist by the success of The Red Badge in late 1894. Still, in writing of social

³Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), pp. 340, 187.

⁴Holton, p. 37.

injustice in the city, Crane was not about to give up his abiding concern with personal ethics, especially the necessity for moral courage and fraternity in human beings. The result is a tension in many of Crane's city writings between environmentalism and moralism. To use the language of Crane's famous (or notorious) 1893 and 1896 comments on his own Bowery writings, do they "show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless," or do they "make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice"?⁵ This ambivalence of view has been noted by many critics, of whom Max Westbrook, one of the earliest (1959), may stand as representative: Crane's Bowery characters "are not helpless victims of a cruel society, nor are they completely responsible for their own fate. They may have been 'knocked flat' by a force over which they have no control, but the failure to struggle against circumstances is a failure of the human will."⁶

The tension between environmentalism and ethical concerns in Crane's New York writings can at times lend a certain strength to these works, since Crane is above all a writer concerned with the ambiguities, dichotomies, and mysteries of life. But social journalism and fiction was not the best place for Crane to explore the ambiguity that interested him most of all: man's puzzling relationship to the larger universe and its dual realities, subjective and objective. This fact is in considerable measure, I believe, the

⁵Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 14, 133.

⁶Westbrook, "Stephen Crane: The Pattern of Affirmation," pp. 221-222.

reason why there are no masterpieces among Crane's New York writings to match those found among his fiction of war, of the West, and of the sea.⁷

One thing not done before with Crane's New York City writings is to trace carefully in them from 1893 to 1896 the tension between environmentalism and moralism and that between social realism (the "haves" versus the "have nots") and larger concerns (man's littleness before nature and his need for brotherhood, endurance and courage in spite of that fact). When one does so, as I shall do here, an interesting fact emerges: Even though ethical concerns are clearly present even in such early Crane environmental studies as Maggie, as time goes by they begin to play a more central role, and Crane's interest in social class relationships diminishes vis-a-vis his concern over man's position in relation to the natural universe, so that by late 1894--and certainly by 1896--Crane's explorations of big-city social conditions are quite firmly centered on individual moral responsibility for one's own conduct in an indifferent universe rather than on social causes for social inequalities. This change of focus is gradual, but it certainly occurs, and it is important because it shows Crane gradually getting out from under the influence of Garland and Howells and back to his central concern with the mysterious duality of reality--a movement necessary in order for Crane to produce masterpieces such as The Red Badge, "The Open Boat," and the

⁷Previous Crane criticism supports the view that Crane's city writings contain no masterpieces. See, e.g., Cady, in Works, VIII, pp. xxi, xxxiv-xxxv, and Holton, pp. 73, 83.

best of his Western tales. Tracing this gradual change of focus in Crane's 1893-1896 New York writings also clears up the puzzle of his contradictory statements, cited above, on his purpose in these works. In 1893, he thought that his purpose was to illustrate environmental determinism, though in fact environmentalism was only a part and not the whole of Maggie. By 1896, however, he knew that his truer purpose all along had been to expose moral cowardice, and thus he was able to describe the revised Maggie and "An Experiment in Misery" in these terms in his 1896 letter to Catherine Harris.

Though Maggie was the first written of Crane's important New York City works, I shall discuss it last, both to give it the climactic position its quality deserves and to show dramatically to how large an extent, even in that early tale of the slums, Crane's deeper interest lay in personal rather than environmental responsibility for social evils.⁸ Between March, 1893, when Maggie was published, and May of 1894, Crane wrote the Tommie stories, resuscitating the dead youngest brother of Maggie from the novel as a vehicle for further exploring relations between the "haves" and "have nots" in New York City, and also wrote and published several other sketches of similar social investigation, including "A Night at the

⁸This is a point still in some dispute among Crane critics. Jay Martin and Thomas Gullason, among others, have argued that Crane in his city writings is much concerned to show the exploitation of the poor by the rich and to demonstrate the need for social reform to change that situation; see Martin's Harvests of Change (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 60-62, and Gullason, Complete Short Stories, p. 22. Dissenting from this view, as do I, have been Robert Schneider (p. 85), Olov Fryckstedt (Uncollected Writings, pp. xxv-xxvi), and Eric Solomon (Parody to Realism, pp. 20-21).

Millionaire's Club," "An Experiment in Misery," and "An Experiment in Luxury." External evidence suggests that the social consciousness expressed by Crane in these writings was probably occasioned by the depression of 1893 and the resultant labor unrest of 1894: this was topical writing, writing that would sell because of the public's current concern with the "problem" of the poor, and Crane needed to sell to stay alive.⁹ In 1893-94, then, Crane was "very conscious of social problems. He requested his friend Linson to return the only copy of his tale, 'An Ominous Baby,' for 'during these labor troubles --is the best possible time to dispose of it.'"¹⁰ That word "dispose" is significant: he was writing and selling what the public wanted, not necessarily what he himself was most interested in. In Ziff's words, both Howells and Garland "hailed him as a brilliant recruit to realism, one who exposed social injustice But his mind was elsewhere."¹¹

The fact that Crane's mind was really elsewhere helps account for the indifferent quality of such 1893-94 "have-have not" sketches as "An Ominous Baby," "A Great Mistake," and "A Night at the Millionaire's Club." In delineating how Tommie, a child of the slums, steals a toy fire engine from a rich youth, "a pretty child in fine clothes . . . ," "An Ominous Baby" makes some rather obvious references to

⁹See Holton, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰Gullason, Complete Novels of Crane, p. 41.

¹¹Ziff, p. 187.

class warfare between the selfish rich and the wronged poor. The rich child, feeling "his property . . . menaced," asserts that the fire engine is his by property right: his mother bought it for him. But the slum baby is disinclined to acknowledge the merits of property rights: "He clenched his thin hands and advanced with a formidable gesture. He looked some wee battler in a war." The story suggests that in this class warfare, the poor, once aroused, will be victorious: Tommie "set off rapidly down the street, bearing the toy in his arms. He was weeping with the air of a wronged one who has at last succeeded in achieving his rights. The [rich] baby was squalling lustily. He seemed quite helpless" (VIII,48-50).¹² As Stallman says, "in this sketch of the slum child seizing the property of the rich child Crane epitomizes the social conflict between the poor and the rich during the hard times and labor troubles of 1893-1894."¹³ "A Great Mistake," another tale about the child Tommie, portrays the poor and hungry lad in the act of trying to steal a piece of fruit from an Italian vendor. Again the story, though superficially, explores matters of property rights--Tommie "was fascinated by the tranquility of the vendor, the majesty of power and possession"--and the possibility of lower-class revolt against them: "tumultuous desires began to shake [Tommie]. His

¹²LaFrance (p. 74), who is so fixated on proving that Crane's life-concerns are moral rather than social that he sometimes protests too much, denies any social-critical intent in "An Ominous Baby," but his position is not that of Gibson (p. 56) nor of Stallman (Stephen Crane, pp. 160-101).

¹³Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 101.

dreams were of conquest" (VIII,50-51). "A Night at the Millionaire's Club" is a heavy-handed effort at humorous social satire, picturing a group of rich men luxuriating in their expensive private club and "ecstatically admiring their isolation from the grimy vandals of the world." This tranquility of the affluent is interrupted by a deputation of poor people who, for a portentously symbolic prank, "'give their names as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton'" and "'beg the favor of an audience.'" The rich club members refuse to admit these pseudonymous poor to their presence because they "'Don't know 'em!'" and they (the poor) don't "'look like respectable people,'" even though they have told the doorman that "'they were from America!'" In fact, when the club members are told that the poor visitors do not look respectable, "there was a wild scramble for places of safety" among the membership (VIII,280-282). The social point of this piece of "have-have not" satire is as apparent as its artistic poverty.

"An Excursion Ticket" (published May, 1894) tells of a Bowery bum named Billie Atkins and his assorted adventures while riding the rails from Denver to Omaha during an earlier part of his sixteen-year career as a tramp. This story again exhibits the pathos of the poor's "have-not" condition: riding the rails, Billie is cold; is periodically left wet and shivering by the hose of "a very jocular fireman"; has his fingers trodden on by a brakeman; is laughed at by the paying passengers in the parlor cars because he has no money to pay for his ride; is thrown off numerous trains "on his head, on his left shoulder,

on his right shoulder, on his hands and knees"; gets weary tramping along the plains after being thrown off the trains; and finds, when he reaches a town, that "the police would not let him stand on a corner nor sit down anywhere." Obviously, this tale focuses on the discrimination of the rich against the poor: Billie "knew he would be arrested if he appeared in the streets of any well organized, respectable town in the worn trousers he was then obliged to wear." The poor's response to discrimination in this story, as in the Tommie stories, is to revolt and steal from the rich: Billie hooks a pair of overalls to replace his ragged trousers, and he sneaks free rides on the rich folks' trains throughout the story (VIII,58-64). LaFrance tries to deny a social theme in "An Excursion Ticket," claiming that our sympathy does not lie with Billie, the representative of the poor, for "Billie is, by his own choice, so completely worthless that he is even beneath contempt. His self-willed and pointless suffering deserves only laughter" ¹⁴ But David Bergon sees more clearly, contrasting the "dignity Billie maintains through comic self-derision" while recounting his unhappy fortunes with "those victims of the Bowery e.g., Mrs. Johnson in Maggie whose self-pity is as stifflingly claustrophobic as their environment" ¹⁵ On the whole, "An Excursion Ticket" is a mildly successful fictional description of the fate of the American 1890s poor in the class struggle, which is more than can be said for the Tommie stories and

¹⁴LaFrance, p. 72.

¹⁵Bergon, p. 104.

"A Night at the Millionaire's Club."

However, only when elements of Crane's interest in moral courage and cowardice enter into his New York City sketches of rich-poor contrast do these sketches rise above mediocrity. This is the case in "An Experiment in Luxury," "An Experiment in Misery" (both published April, 1894), and "The Men in the Storm" (published October, 1894). That these sketches were written a bit later than the Tommie stories could suggest that in them Crane was beginning to recover his true métier. Also, the fact that these three sketches were based on Crane's own experience rather than on second-hand observation helps to account for the partial return in them to the courage/cowardice theme central to the earlier Sullivan County tales. The two "Experiments" recognize the complexity and even mystery of the social issues at hand (i.e., are individuals themselves or society at large or simply the way of the world to blame for social inequality and deprivation?), another gain over the one-dimensional tales previously discussed. Also contributing to the relative success of these stories is an improvement of technique: in them, Crane generally succeeds in focusing his omniscient narrative closely on the limited thoughts of the central protagonists, thus causing us to "see" better or to grow in awareness of the complex issues involved as the protagonists themselves come to see better.¹⁶

¹⁶A good study of the effective structure and imagery in "An Experiment in Misery" is Maurice Bassan, "The Design of Stephen Crane's Bowery 'Experiment'" (1964), in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 118-122. "An Experiment in Luxury" is decidedly the least successful of these three sketches in artistic terms because in it

Before looking individually at the two "Experiment" sketches and "The Men in the Storm," one should note that little, if anything, is original to Crane in the social thought expressed in these works--including their concept of Bowery-bum cowardice. A 1963 article by Maurice Bassan surveying at some length other writings of the early 1890s with which Crane was or might have been familiar points to this conclusion.¹⁷ For instance, Jacob Riis spoke of habitual laziness by tramps as a type of cowardice; B. O. Flower (owner of the socially-conscious magazine Arena, which published "An Experiment in Misery" and "The Men in the Storm") stressed environmental causes of tramp behavior and advocated remedial social reform; both Flower and Garland in 1894 writings used the same image of the wheel of society crushing its underlings that Crane employs in "An Experiment in Misery"; Josiah Flynt, in 1891 writings on American and German tramps, had distinguished between those temporarily out of work and those who lazily avoided work in terms similar to those found in "The Men in the Storm" and had noted (as Crane does more than once in his slum writings) the possibility that the vagrant poor might ultimately

Crane allows his protagonist too much direct philosophical statement about the social life of the rich, rather than rendering his theme in dramatic terms as he does in "An Experiment in Misery" and "The Men in the Storm." On this point see Holton, p. 69, and Maurice Bassan, "Stephen Crane and 'The Eternal Mystery of Social Condition,'" Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 19 (March 1965), 389.

¹⁷Bassan, "Misery and Society: Some New Perspectives on Stephen Crane's Fiction," Studia Neophilologica, 35 (1963), 104-120. The conclusion about the unoriginality of Crane's thought is mine (not Bassan's), based on Bassan's evidence.

revolt violently against the existing social order; and so on.¹⁸

If Crane's social thinking in his best 1890s slum studies was derivative, however, he was still moving away from strict environmentalism,¹⁹ as in the Tommie stories, and was, as I suggested in the preceding paragraph, presenting his ideas with increased thematic density and heightened artistic skill.

The starting and concluding framework of "An Experiment in Misery" makes it clear that the story's protagonist assumed the rags of a Bowery bum in a deliberate experiment to "discern his [the bum's] point of view . . ." (VIII, 862). Thus in this sketch we find an attempt to discover the true nature of reality--one of Crane's master-themes--in the area of tramp behavior and "have-have not" relations. Though the opening and closing framework was dropped by Crane in reworking "An Experiment in Misery" for 1898 publication in the Heinemann collection The Open Boat, Bowers' opinion that the revision makes the protagonist a real rather than an "experimental" bum seems in error if one reads the first paragraph of the revised sketch

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 108, 110, 110, 112-113. In his introduction (pp. iii-viii) to Studies in Maggie and George's Mother (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Co., 1970), editor Stanley Wertheim also stresses the likely influence on Crane's slum writings of B. O. Flower and his stable of Arena writers and of Jacob Riis (Crane reported on an Asbury Park Riis lecture on Manhattan slum life in 1892, subsequently met Riis first-hand several times, and knew Riis' slum writings).

¹⁹Bassan, in "Misery and Society," pp. 119-120, overlooks the aspects of tramp cowardice present in "An Experiment in Misery" and thus reaches the erroneous conclusion that in this sketch Crane solely indicts not the tramp class but the larger "society which produces and tortures it. . . . Crane's often-quoted remark about 'cowardice' as the root of Bowery life is misleading" (p. 120).

carefully, especially the sentence "He was going forth to eat as the wanderer may eat, and sleep as the homeless sleep" (VIII,283).²⁰

What the experimenting youth discovers, in brief, is that an existence as one of society's downtrodden is misery (VIII,287, first paragraph, especially the end of the last sentence). The pervasive imagery of tombstones, marble slabs, corpses, cold snow, and other phenomena associated with death (VIII,287-288) effectively represents the youth's discovery that spending nights in a Bowery flophouse is a living death. The youth interprets the loud wails of a nightmare-troubled flophouse sleeper to represent the protest of the entire lower class at "the imperturbable granite wheels" that press them to the floor of society (VIII,288-289). And in the final three paragraphs of "An Experiment in Misery," the social theme is made explicit: past the Bowery bums the "haves" of society walk "in their good clothes as upon important missions, giving no gaze to the two wanderers seated upon the benches," and the tall buildings of the city are "emblematic" of the way in which society at large, pursuing its materialistic goals, "the clink of coin," "ignor[es] the wretches who may flounder at its feet" (VIII,293).²¹

²⁰Bowers prints the framework of the original tale, discusses Crane's 1898 revision, and expresses his theory that the masquerade bum has been transformed into a real bum in Works, VIII, pp. 861-864.

²¹For similar readings of "An Experiment in Misery's" social message to the experimenting youth, see Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 45; Gullason, Complete Short Stories, p. 22; Gibson, p. 53; and Bassan, "Crane's Bowery 'Experiment,'" in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 120-121. The Bassan article just cited finds a pattern of images in "Misery," centering around that of the "granite

But "An Experiment in Misery" is not an unambiguous condemnation of the "haves" for the plight of the "have nots," for its protagonist also discovers that at least some of the Bowery bums earn their own fate by their spineless (thus cowardly) acceptance of it and even glorification of it.²² Personifying this cowardly preference for bumming rather than working for a living is the "reeking man" met by the youth in "An Experiment in Misery," a man whose mouth is "cruel" and who looks "like an assassin steeped in crimes performed awkwardly." These "crimes" seem predominantly those of begging, since the "assassin" immediately peers at the youth and another Bowery dweller with wheedling eyes and began to sing a little melody for charity." When the youth promises to pay for a bed for the night for the "assassin" if the latter will locate a cheap flophouse for him, the "assassin" goes into an ecstasy of false love, grabbing "the young man's hand in a transport of delight and friendliness." Perceiving the phoniness of the bum's gratitude, the youth "drew back, looking at the assassin coldly" (VIII, 285-286). Later, after the pair have spent the night in the cheap, death-distilling lodging-house and are contemplating breakfast, the "assassin" again begs the youth for

wheels," which projects a picture of "the [Bowery] individual beneath, suffering; the society above, hostile or uncaring . . ." (p. 120).

²²Previous commentators recognizing this aspect of the sketch include LaFrance, pp. 44-47; Cady, intro. to Works, VIII, p. xxxv; and Crane himself, in 1896: "In . . . 'An Experiment in Misery' I tried to make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice. Perhaps I mean a lack of ambition or to willingly be knocked flat and accept the licking" (Stallman and Gilkes, p. 133).

eating money and the youth (showing fraternal concern) lends it to him, but at the same time says "'looka-here, you've got a get out an' hustle. I ain't goin' t' support yeh'" The "assassin" takes an oath that he will indeed find an honest day's work, but his breakfast monologue about his past work experiences ironically undercuts and belies his claim. He once had a "'great job out in Orange. Boss keep yeh hustlin', though, all time. I was there three days, and then I went an' ask'im t' lend me a dollar. 'G-g-goter the devil," he ses, an' I lose me job'" (VIII,291-292, my emphasis). And in our final view in "An Experiment in Misery" of the "assassin," he asserts that he and the youth have been living like royalty; ignores the youth's warning that they'll have to pay for it soon (by running out of money); and "refused to turn his gaze toward the future. He went with a limping step into which he injected a suggestion of lamb-like gambols. His mouth was wreathed in a red grin" (VIII,292-293). Crane, then, in this sketch is reflecting the ambiguity of reality in two ways: first, through the different manners in which the youth prior to his experiment, the youth after his experiment, and the professional bum (the "assassin") view life as Bowery denizens; and second, through the unresolved dichotomy between social-environmental causes and human-moral causes for the plight of the city poor.²³

²³LaFrance, pp. 45-47, is unconvincing in his view that "An Experiment in Misery" exonerates society and its "granite wheels" and blames only the conceit and cowardice of the Bowery bums themselves for their low estate. Bergon, p. 47, is wiser, seeing that the reader must take "a 'both-and' rather than an 'either-or' approach" in understanding this story's theme.

Like "An Experiment in Misery," "An Experiment in Luxury" affords its protagonist an ambivalent view of reality. On the one hand, the youth who in this sketch visits the millionaire family of a friend discovers the falsity of the cliché that "the millionaire is a very unhappy person."²⁴ To the contrary, the youth finds, "wealth in a certain sense is liberty," and therefore the theologians who have "for a long time told the poor man that riches did not bring happiness did this because they feared" the social revolution that might erupt should the poor learn to think differently (VIII, 294,301). The youth muses that, though for the most part "nature sends them [flowers--symbolizing beautiful, good people] forth in places both strange and proper . . . ," there are perhaps certain places, certain socioeconomic conditions, in which "one can say: 'Here no flower can flourish'" (VIII,300). In this aspect, then, "An Experiment in Luxury" is a protest against social class inequality and the rich's unmerited pride in themselves and indifference toward the less fortunate. On the other hand, the youthful protagonist in this tale also recognizes a certain lack of human responsibility for social conditions in that nature (as in the quotation just given), rather than man, causes the accident of social placing (birth). The youth insists that his rich friend Jack "'isn't criminal because . . . he is benefited by a condition which other men created,'" and the youth's pal replies "'I didn't say he was' 'Nobody is

²⁴For a similar reading, see Bassan, "Crane and 'The Eternal Mystery,'" p. 388.

responsible for anything" (VIII,294). By the end of the sketch, it is true, the youth has modified this view somewhat, feeling that even though nature may dictate social position, the rich still have a responsibility to perceive the plight of the poor and to aid them financially (VIII,300-301). Still, the view of the reality of social class relations in this story is multivalent rather than unipolar, for ultimately social condition, like reality in general for Crane, is an "eternal mystery . . ." (VIII,297).²⁵

On the surface, "Men in the Storm" can be read as a simple indictment of the larger society for not caring better for the city poor,²⁶ that lack of caring being personified in the stout, well-dressed man who "looked down . . . with a supreme complacence . . ." at the ragged mob standing in the snow outside a charitable institution waiting for a cheap meal and night's lodging. As the narrator ironically notes, "it seemed that the sight of the mob operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own environment, delightful relatively" (VIII,320). However, LaFrance has convincingly demonstrated that there are two classes of derelicts among the mob in "Men in the Storm," one consisting of men temporarily out of work through no lack of effort on their part who stoically endure the ravages of the storm from the necessity to have something

²⁵Compare Bassan, *Ibid.*, p. 390: in "An Experiment in Luxury" there exists "a powerful tension resulting from the juxtaposition of reasonable points of view, without a final resolution."

²⁶The sketch is thus interpreted by Gibson, p. 54.

to eat and someplace to sleep, the other constituted of professional bums who, like the "assassin" in "An Experiment in Misery," prefer charitable handouts to an honest day's work.²⁷ LaFrance feels that in "Men in the Storm," as the out-of-work laborers mix together with the true bums, the former lose their quality of stoic courage and become tainted by the bums' quarrelsome acceptance of their low estate.²⁸ But an equally strong argument could be made for the opposite case, that the mob as a whole takes on the characteristics of the enduring out-of-work laborers rather than the "assassin"-like cowardice of the professional strays, based on the following passage from "Men in the Storm": "the men huddled, and swore, not like dark assassins, but in a sort of American fashion . . . with a wondrous under-effect . . . as if there was some kind of humor in this catastrophe . . ." (VIII,319). Really, the story projects the same sort of ambivalent view of reality as do the two "Experiment" sketches. Thus, when the men finally are able to enter the house of charity and escape the storm, the fact that "they looked suddenly content and complacent. The fire had passed from their eyes and the snarl had vanished from their lips" (VIII,321) could be seen as indicating either a commendable patient endurance of their condition or, like Mrs. Johnson and Jimmie in Maggie, a cowardly propensity to accept spinelessly their poverty rather than to do something actively to change it. The truth of the matter is none too

²⁷LaFrance, p. 83.

²⁸Ibid., p. 84.

clear, and Crane's breadline vignette has not attempted to oversimplify the truth, but has instead presented it in all of its mysterious ambiguity.

The novel George's Mother may be considered next in this chronological survey of Crane's New York City writings. Though Crane began writing this novel shortly after publishing Maggie in March of 1893--about the time the environmentalist-oriented Tommie stories were written--he laid it aside to write The Red Badge, which focuses on the development of physical and moral courage or brotherhood in Henry Fleming, before he returned to George's Mother in the spring or summer of 1894 (the same period in which he wrote the two "Experiments" and "The Men in the Storm") and finished it in November of 1894.²⁹ It appears that, as Colvert suggests, Crane's original purpose in George's Mother was to write another slum study like Maggie while responding to Garland's feeling that Maggie leaned too heavily on the "'worst elements of the [slums]" and to his suggestion that Crane deal with the ordinary slum families, living "'lives of heroic purity and hopeless hardship . . .'" Garland expressed these ideas in his June, 1893, review of Maggie in the Arena (from which Colvert drew the above quotes), and Colvert thinks Garland may have given Crane the benefit of his wisdom in person before he wrote the review,

²⁹Until the last decade, the facts about exactly when George's Mother was written were unclear, but recent scholarly investigations substantially concur with the chronology I have given here. See Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 210; Colvert, intro. to George's Mother, in Works, I, p. 101; Wertheim, intro. to Maggie and George's Mother, p. v; and Holton, p. 55.

"since George's Mother, begun in the Spring [1893], fits the prescription."³⁰

Crane, then, in writing George's Mother was probably still attempting to work within the genre of social realism as defined by Garland and Howells. Yet even less than the "Experiments" and "The Men in the Storm" is George's Mother really a study in the influence of environment on human behavior; even more than they, it is a study in a character's lack of moral courage. Recent critics have analyzed George's Mother largely in three ways: as a psychological novel, as a study in illusion and reality, and as a depiction of moral deficiency and cowardice.³¹ Whereas in Maggie the slum environment does affect the fortunes of the Johnson family, few would argue that George Kelcey's and his mother's lower-class city environment has any significant effect on George's degeneration and his mother's death. In Holton's words, "George's Mother, with its intense psychological realism, . . . is much more concerned with . . . cowardice than the environment. . . . It is fear, not environment, which draws George

³⁰Colvert, intro. to Maggie, in Works, I, xxxix-xl. Wertheim, intro. to Maggie and George's Mother, v, follows and elaborates upon Colvert's view: "Garland agreed with Howells that realistic fiction should avoid the extremes or the bizarre and focus upon the relevance of the commonplace. Crane's awareness that the self-conscious style and overstated effects of Maggie violated the tenets of literary realism upheld by his mentors may have influenced the composition of George's Mother, which describes, in much more subdued tones, the struggles of a pathetic, ordinary woman to rescue her last surviving son from the corrosive influence of the slums."

³¹On the novel as psychological study, see Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 60; Gibson, pp. 41-42, 46, 50; and Holton, p. 56. On its illusion-reality theme, see Joseph X. Brennan, "The Imagery and Art

to his final and terrible isolation."³²

At the beginning of George's Mother, George Kelcey gives the illusion of "self-reliant poise" and of being a man whom life's mysteries did not confuse, since "evidently he understood its complications." But the narrator's irony makes quite clear that this is indeed illusion: George's "extensive acquaintance with bartenders aided him materially in [his] habitual expression of wisdom."³³ Like Henry Fleming, George has an inflated ego: "he began to believe that he was a most remarkably fine fellow . . ." (I,127). "He knew that he was capable of sublime things" (I,129). In George's dealings with his mother is found "an undertone of superiority in his voice, as if he were granting an astonishing suit" (I,132) whenever he accedes to one of her wishes. His mother, well aware of the "youthful vanity . . . of her son feared that he would get to think too much of himself, and she knew that nothing could do more harm" (I,134). Unfortunately her own great hopes and dreams for George emerge as a pride in him that only further fuels his flaming ego (I,134-135). George

of George's Mother" (1960), in Wertheim, Maggie and George's Mother, p. 132; Westbrook, "Stephen Crane: The Pattern of Affirmation," p. 227; and Wertheim's intro. to Maggie and George's Mother, p. viii. LaFrance (pp. 84-93) has well analyzed George's deficiency of moral courage; briefer treatments of it are found in Brennan, *Ibid.*, p. 132; Colvert, intro. to George's Mother, in Works, I, p. 104; and Holton, p. 63.

³²Holton, p. 63.

³³Stephen Crane, George's Mother, in Works, I, pp. 115-116. Further references to George's Mother will be from this volume and will be acknowledged in the body of the paper.

lives a life of romantic dreams and, again parallel to Fleming, believes that "his life was to be fine and heroic, else he would not have been born" (I,137). However, when he has an opportunity to approach a flesh-and-blood woman--Maggie Johnson--"his courage flew away at the supreme moment" (I,139)--quite naturally, since in reality George has made of himself no hero. When he finds that, unlike himself, Pete has the temerity to date Maggie (ironically, Pete's "courage" is as phony as George's, as we know from Maggie), "Kelcey suffered from his first gloomy conviction that the earth was not grateful to him for his presence upon it" (I,141).

At this point--since George has glimpsed an objective view of reality in which he is insignificant to the cosmos that contrasts with his habitual egotistic, subjective view in which he is the center of the universe--he is open to the sort of improvement in moral stature and courage that Fleming in The Red Badge ultimately achieved. But Kelcey is no Fleming. This fact is made clear in George's Mother's central Chapter 10, which relates how George felt on the morning after a large-scale drinking binge with his barroom friends. Daylight reveals the grim truth to George, and he must acknowledge his smallness (both physically and morally) to the universe. He regrets his conduct and loathes himself for having become falling-down drunk the night before. But his response is not a struggle to develop courage but instead a cynical fatalism. Being at heart a coward, he gives up the struggle to will himself to be a better person and to work toward that goal. He perceives life as a "red existence,"

and though he desires "to reform and live a white life. . . . his perception of his future was hopeless." He develops "a bitter philosophy" according to which "his life problems were confronting him like granite giants . . ." too big for him to face. Essentially, George is a passive accepter of the difficult conditions of his life rather than, like Henry Fleming and the men in the open boat, an active struggler against them, and this, his chief moral deficiency, is summed up with keen irony in the narrator's transcription of George's final thoughts on this occasion: "Upon reflection, he saw . . . that he was perfectly willing to be virtuous if someone would come and make it easy for him" (I,150-151).

Because of this passive, nihilistic attitude toward life's problems, George joins a street gang of young toughs who "were all too clever to work." To them, "Work was done by men who had not the courage to stand still and let the skies clap together if they willed." Holding such false views of courage as these, the gang is easily taken in by Kelcey's illusory bravery: "He recited a tale in which he allowed himself to appear prominent and redoubtable. They looked at him then as if they thought he might be quite a man." These men, like George, philosophize that contemporary life is full of despair and "futility"--so they, like he, adopt an attitude of passive acceptance and loaf and steal rather than work to improve themselves. What they really long to do is to "run through decorous streets with crash and roar of war, an army of revenge for pleasures long possessed by others" More overtly than in the Tommie stories, Crane

here hints at a possible revolution by America's city "have nots" to get a share of the country's material possessions--but now the context suggests a lack of approval of this behavior: "This thought [of class warfare] slumbered in them, as the image of Rome might have lain small in the hearts of the barbarians" (I,163,165,163).

George's moral deficiencies also color his behavior toward his mother, who throughout the novel has been ineffectively trying to get him to live up to her image of his high potential. George takes a perverse pleasure, especially after he has given up as hopeless all attempts to improve himself, in doing things that will offend and hurt his mother, for to him "her suffering was all a sort of compensation for his own dire pains," and he "felt a singular joy in it." The "critical battle" with his mother comes in Chapter 14 when George "swore a tangled mass of oaths . . ." and dares his disapproving mother, in "tones dark with dislike," to do anything about it. Defeated in her aims for her son, Mrs. Kelcey "threw out her hands in the gesture of an impotent one. He was acknowledged victor" (I,167). When a few days later George is fired from his job--presumably because he has imbibed the street gang's non-work ethic and has been dogging it at work--it is "the final blow" for his mother; though George claims "it was [not] my fault. I couldn't help it," both Mrs. Kelcey and the reader know better (I,168). The next day Mrs. Kelcey suffers the first of two attacks of illness, the second of which will prove fatal. George's moral cowardice is hounding his mother to her death-bed. Even here, George is the less courageous of the two. His

mother's face wears "a singular pallor, but the glance of her eyes was strong and the set of her lips was tranquil." In contrast, George, when he leaves the gang to run to his mother's bedside, "was glad that they could not see his face, his trembling lips, his eyes wavering in fear" (I,170,169). As LaFrance notes, George Kelcey is similar to the "assassin" in "An Experiment in Misery," since both cause their own degradation by lack of moral courage. "George's discontent with his situation is not suggested to his mind by the external situation intself--youth, health, a steady job under a lenient foreman . . . , a clean and orderly home kept by a parent who loves him and tends to his needs as best she can." Rather, George is responsible for his own downfall, since "his vanity rules his judgment and makes this comparatively decent situation seem undesirable."³⁴

George's mother is not without her flaws, but she does seem on the whole a more admirable figure than her son, though many critics have not thought so.³⁵ Brennan, though feeling that Mrs. Kelcey fails "to comprehend her son and his psychic needs . . ." because of "her naive, romantic idealism, her narrow religiosity, her shallow intelligence and vain-glorious pride," does find that "since her failure is one of intelligence rather than good will, the author spares her as

³⁴LaFrance, p. 88.

³⁵Judgments--mostly negative--on her character may be found in Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 53; Colvert, intro. to George's Mother, in Works, I, p. 107; Holton, p. 61; and LaFrance, p. 91.

generously as his special interest in such ironic disparities permits. In spite of her shortcomings, George's mother nevertheless emerges as one of the few really sympathetic portrayals, and possibly the most pathetic, in the whole range of Crane's fiction."³⁶ I feel that Mrs. Kelcey's possession of the strong will and courage lacking in George--in doing her housekeeping "she fought with a strong and relentless will," and "it was a picture of indomitable courage" (I, 121,120); she pursues her attempt to keep George on the straight and narrow with equal courage and perseverance--raises her above her son. True, her feeling that "she was a perfect mother, raising a perfect son" and the fact that "he often saw that she believed him to be the most marvellous young man on the earth" opens her to the charge of harboring illusions, of failing to perceive reality. But George "could see that his mother took pride in him in quite a different way from that in which he took pride in himself. She rejoiced at qualities in him that indicated that he was going to become a white and looming king among men" (I,134-135, my emphasis). In other words, Mrs. Kelcey takes pride in George's potential, whereas George is egotistical about what he already is. Only the latter egotism is totally unwarranted by the facts. Further sympathy for George's mother is created when she is spoken of as finding solace in her dreams about George for "her long days, her sorry labor. Upon the dead altars of her life she had builded the little fires of hope for another"

³⁶Brennan, in Wertheim, Maggie and George's Mother, p. 133.

(I,135). Though scarcely perfect, Mrs. Kelcey is a more positive character than most criticism has felt; despite her narrow church mentality, her moral qualities, in the broader sense of the word, are surely admirable as George's are not.

George's Mother is primarily interesting because it indicates that Crane tended, even in his studies of New York City environment, to focus on his characters' moral success or failure and on their own responsibility (rather than that of society) for what happens to them. Otherwise, the novel is second-rate Crane. Technically--in its more effective handling of point of view and its less heavy-handed use of the ironic mode--it does benefit, as the earlier-written Maggie did not, from what Crane learned in these areas while writing and revising The Red Badge.³⁷ But improved technique does not insure memorability, and somehow the characters in George's Mother fail to remain in the reader's mind as do Pete, Jimmie, and Mrs. Johnson of Maggie. Colvert, dissenting from the common though not universal view that George's Mother is a relatively successful study in psychological realism, holds that "George's Mother was not in Crane's true idiom the characterization of the principles is all surface; they have little . . . psychological depth" ³⁸ Since critics agree that

³⁷LaFrance, pp. 93, 86.

³⁸Colvert, intro. to George's Mother, in Works, I, p. 104. Higher praise than Colvert's for George's Mother--not necessarily convincing--may be sampled in Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 66; Pizer, in Rees and Harbert, p. 121; and Brennan, in Wertheim, Maggie and George's Mother, p. 125.

much of George's Mother's material is autobiographical, stemming from Crane's experiences with his own mother before her death in 1891,³⁹ it may be that, as Gullason suggests, Crane was too close to his autobiographical experiences to be able or willing to paint his psychological portraits of George and Mrs. Kelcey fully and convincingly.⁴⁰ Or it may be that with the innocent Maggie as a foil, the ironic portraits of Jimmie, Pete, and Mrs. Johnson carry more punch than do those of the characters in George's Mother. In any event, Brennan's conclusion that George's Mother "is eminently more satisfactory in its realism, more convincing in characterization, and less bizarre in style than Maggie" must be questioned.⁴¹ In presenting realistic detail of the New York slum environment, Maggie, though itself rather impressionistic, certainly exceeds George's Mother; it is also, as I have been suggesting, more memorable in its characterization; and if the earlier Maggie has more crudities of style and more overwriting, it also has more dazzling flashes of stylistic excellence. Even today, Maggie is gripping reading for students, as those who have taught it to college undergraduates can attest. Berryman's estimation of Maggie can serve as a summary of why it is, in my view, a stronger novel than George's Mother:

³⁹E.g., Colvert, intro. to George's Mother, in Works, I, pp. 107-108; Holton, p. 56; Gullason, "Stephen Crane: The Novelist at War with Himself," in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 398-399.

⁴⁰Gullason, Ibid.

⁴¹Brennan, in Wertheim, Maggie and George's Mother, p. 125.

"Crudity in stylistic detail Maggie sometimes shows, but in originality of conception, energy, instinct for exclusion and for the tacit, consistency of ironic execution, it . . . little solicits allowance on the score of its author's youth" ⁴²

If by mid-1894 Crane, partly from the impetus of the recently completed The Red Badge, was increasingly using his big-city writings to explore moral rather than environmental issues, he was at the same time (and again The Red Badge may play a part here) in the process of shifting his center of attention from the social struggle between society's "haves" and "have nots" to the cosmic struggle between man and the universe. Probably this shift was in part caused by Crane's visit in June, 1894, on assignment from McClure's Magazine, to a Scranton coal mine, resulting in his sketch "In the Depths of a Coal Mine" (published August, 1894). ⁴³ This work, like the "Experiments" and "The Men in the Storm," presents composite views. In this case, the dual views are (1) social criticism of the mine owners and management for utilizing child labor, condoning horrifying working conditions, underpaying the mine-workers, and generally exploiting them for their (the capitalists') materialistic benefit (VIII, 592, 600, 605-607) and (2) a feeling that the harsh conditions of coal mining are just one more aspect of "the endless battle between man and nature," one in which nature is man's "enemy" and is much more

⁴²Berryman, p. 61.

⁴³Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 110.

powerful than he (VIII,596,599).⁴⁴

Following his re-acquaintance with nature's wrath in the coal mine, Crane produced several New York City sketches in the latter half of 1894 that drift even further from a concern with social realism than did George's Mother and the "Experiment" studies. Among these are "Mr. Binks' Day Off," "Coney Island's Failing Days," and "The Fire" (published in July, October, and November of 1894 respectively). Having emphasized in my first chapter the way in which these three sketches focus on nature's power and man's weakness in the face of that power, I can summarize more briefly here. "Mr. Binks' Day Off," the earliest of these three sketches, still maintains some semblance of a social study, in that it details a day in the life of an impecunious lower-middle-class family and implies that city (compared to rural) life is dull, oppressive, and too obsessed with material values. Mr. Binks, glimpsing a green park in the city, finds his "vision cheered It [the park] cried to him that nature was still supreme; he had begun to think the banking business to be the pivot on which the universe turned" (VIII,305). But the core of "Mr. Binks' Day Off" is the Binks' discovery that natural processes eventually bring death to all humans: in the struggle between nature and man, the latter must always lose ultimately (VIII,312-313). "Coney Island's Failing Days," aside from a few minor jabs at "fashion" and "respectability" (VIII,326), altogether

⁴⁴For an elaboration of this theme of "big nature/little man" in "In the Depths of a Coal Mine," see my comments on this sketch in Chapter 2.

deserts sociology for philosophy and zeroes in on the insignificance and mournfulness humans feel when confronted by nature (in this case, the sea). The narrator in the sketch finds that "'the sea always makes me feel that I am a trivial object'" and muses upon the inscrutable "'purposes of the inexorable universe which plans to amuse us occasionally to keep us from the rebellion of suicide'" (VIII, 324,326). In the excessively cynical melancholy of this I-narrator, Crane perhaps intends some irony; but though this self-styled "philosopher's" (VIII,326) response to his cosmos' indifference toward him may be too negative, the fact of that indifference is made quite clear in the sketch and is in fact its central theme. Finally, "The Fire" makes no attempt to extract social commentary or criticism from the circumstances of a fire in one of New York's poorer districts, but instead concentrates on the characters' fear of the fire as a symbol of mankind's "fear of imminent death" and general helplessness in the face of nature's flames, which were "the color of satanic wrath, the color of murder." The onlookers of the fire both fear and admire it, but pre-eminently "they felt the human helplessness that comes when nature breaks forth in passion" Nature's flames are "the common enemy" of man (VIII,339,341,344).⁴⁵

Thus it comes as no surprise that by October, 1894, in a syndicated newspaper interview of William Dean Howells, Crane (in the voice of "the other man" who in the article is the conductor of the interview)

⁴⁵Compare Bergon, p. 39: in "The Fire" there is "a concentrated attempt to make the reader feel the dread, fear, and excitement as though he were sweating in the heat from the flames."

is writing "I don't like reformatory novels anyhow" (VIII,636). Crane's last published story before his 1895 trip West, "A Christmas Dinner Won in Battle," is an interesting case in point. One would expect that in a story tailored for publication, as this one was, on January 1, 1895, in the Plumber's Trade Journal (VIII,793), Crane would take every opportunity to satirize social inequality and to present the working man's rebellion against it in a favorable light. Instead, what the plumbers read as their New Year's fare was "an adventure tale of anti-union heroics"⁴⁶ that aggrandizes the bravery of its protagonist Tom (who has parlayed his "plumbing shop in the prairie town of Levelville" into a prominent position in the town; "he was soon one of the first citizens") and that is unsympathetic toward the groundswell of lower-class revolt that follows in the wake of a railway strike (VIII,82). Though plumber Tom has become a substantial citizen of Levelville, he is not considered good enough by Colonel Fortman, the local railroad's president whose life Tom had once saved, to marry the Colonel's daughter. The aristocratic Colonel, true to his name, is bent on holding the fort against the intrusions of lower "grades of society" such as Tom's onto his own (VIII,82-83). However, when the railway strike comes, Tom is horrified by it because "it resembled a parade of Parisians at the time of the first revolution." Tom overhears plans to burn down Colonel Fortman's house and "felt himself turn cold." The striking railroad workers are abandoning

⁴⁶Holton, p. 120.

their usual middle-class, work-ethic characteristics: "the men usually so sober, industrious and imperturbable were running in a wild mob, raving and destroying." Their voices are full of hate and cries for revenge "that made a sort of barbaric hymn, a pagan chant of savage battle and death." (Both the traits of these strikers and the narrator's negative attitude toward them have their parallel in George Kelcey's nihilistic street-gang friends in George's Mother). The story further reveals an ethnic bias at work in its disapproval of these railroad strikers, since it describes them as "a concourse of Slavs, Polacs [sic], Italians and Hungarians, laborers of the company, floundering about in the mud and raving, conducting a riot in their own inimitable way. They seemed as blood-thirsty, pitiless, mad, as starved wolves" (VIII, 84-85). This is, indeed, no reformatory fiction!

In contrast to the revolution-minded poor in this story is the nouveau-riche plumbing contractor Tom, who literally holds the fort of the Colonel's house for him by standing in the doorway and beating back the mob of strikers trying to get into the house and at the Colonel's daughter, Mildred. Tom performs these heroics out of his love for Mildred: he "displayed the desperation born of his devotion to the girl within the house." Tom's display of true courage is in fact the important matter in this story, as it often is in Crane writings that are ostensibly about something else. Tom's is no story-book courage, for "although he was perhaps braver than most men, he had none of that magnificent fortitude . . . which is the attribute of people in plays; but he stepped up on the porch and faced the

throng." Tom has the natural human fears upon this dangerous occasion, but like the true Crane hero he is able to exhibit bravery despite his fears--"His face was wondrously pallid and his hands trembled but he said: 'You fellows can't come in here'" (VIII,86). Naturally (since this is, after all, a potboiling tale designed to please its plumber-readers' palates) Tom succeeds in holding off the mob of strikers and is rewarded by the Colonel with his daughter's hand in marriage (VIII, 87-88)--thus rising in society not as a result of revolution, charity, or social reform but by the hoary and eminently respectable method of marrying money.

While visiting the West and Mexico in 1895, Crane continued to write of nature's dominance over man (as in "Nebraska's Bitter Fight for Life," discussed in Chapter 2) and of man's courage in facing life's hardships and death's dangers (as in the Western tales to be discussed in Chapter 6). Crane's journalistic piece "The Mexican Lower Classes" (written about April, 1895--VIII,890-891) shows that by 1895, he is even more than before inclined to evaluate the "have-have not" situation in moral rather than environmental terms and to suggest that stoic endurance and moral courage, not rebellion or reform, constitute the preferred response to the life conditions of the poor. The poverty of the poor is now treated as a given of the natural or cosmic order of things. Thus, the poverty of the Mexican Indians and their acceptance of it are "'important to the scheme of nature. This is part of her economy. It would not be well if it had never been.'" Placed in contrast to the Mexican poor's stoic acceptance of their

fate is the increasing resentment of their poverty and potential rebellion against it by the slum dwellers in the U.S., which situation this sketch terms "distressing" "One fears this class because They have it in their power to become terrible." On the other hand, the Mexican Indians do not seem to "feel at all the modern desperate rage at the accident of their low birth," and the narrator justifies their attitude by saying "there really was no comfort in the plums riches of life after all as far as I had seen them" (VIII,436-437). (The contrast to the view expressed on this point in "An Experiment in Luxury," written one year earlier, is as significant as it is obvious.) The strongest anti-environmentalist statement in "The Mexican Lower Classes" is also the best-known. The narrator comments that

A man is at liberty to be virtuous in almost any position of life. . . . If a man is not given a fair opportunity to be virtuous, if his environment chokes his moral aspirations, I say that he has got the one important cause of complaint and rebellion against society. . . . Inversely then, if he possesses this fair opportunity, he cannot rebel, he has no complaint. I am of the opinion that poverty of itself is no cause. (VIII,437-438)

The narrator thus will not pity the poor people of Mexico, because in life's important, moral respects--the opportunity to display courage, stoic endurance, and brotherhood--they have just as much opportunity to excel as does the rich man (VIII,438).⁴⁷

Returning to New York City in 1896, Crane resumed writing free-lance newspaper articles that explored the city underlife: its

⁴⁷Compare Hoffmann, p. 181: Crane's social thinking puts its "emphasis on personal ethics and the irrelevance of wealth and station to its exercise"

opium-users, its ladies of the evening, its convicts, its ethnics, its frequenters of saloons. But now, his city sketches lack even an attempt to focus on the "have-have not" social problems of the city. This fact can be seen in the following representative sketches, all published between May and December, 1896. "Opium's Varied Dreams" proves to be a quite objective depiction of the use of opium in New York's Tenderloin district. No real attempt is made to blame society at large for the opium users' habit, and in fact the users of opium, according to this sketch, are not exactly restricted to the urban poor: "Cheap actors, race track touts, gamblers and the different kinds of confidence men took to it generally" (VIII,365). Though opium-use is several times referred to as a "vice," those who use it "may look like a deacon . . . ," and arguments given by opium-users that its effects are less harmful than those of liquor are objectively recounted (VIII,366-367). In short, this article is far more an objective survey of the opium scene (including a full page of how-to-do-it instructions on the cooking and smoking of opium!--VIII,368) than any attempt at muckraking or reformatory journalism.

In another 1896 article, Crane explores a Negro and Italian city neighborhood in "Stephen Crane in Minetta Lane," attributing the sin and crime rampant there not to poverty or to the rich's neglect of the poor but instead to racial traits of the blacks: "The inhabitants for the most part were negroes and they represented the very worst elements of their race. The razor habit clung to them with the tenacity of an epidemic . . ." (VIII,399). Moreover,

they are happy in this condition, are these people. The most extraordinary quality of the negro is his enormous capacity for happiness under most adverse circumstances. Minetta Lane is a place of poverty and sin, but these influences cannot destroy the broad smile of the negro, a vain and simple child but happy. . . . Knowing the negro, one always expects laughter from him, be he ever so poor (VIII,405,406)

An 1896 commission to Crane to write a special article for the New York World based on a visit to Sing Sing might have been expected to produce some of the same fulminations on social injustice found in "In the Depths of a Coal Mine" two years earlier, but instead we get a simple association of the convicts who have been put to death in the Sing Sing electric chair with cowardice. These were "men who died black souled, whose glances in life fled sidewise with a kind of ferocity, a cowardice and a hatred that could embrace the entire world" (VIII,667). Here, the cowardice of the killer is explicitly linked with the potential for revolutionary hatred for which fear and disapproval have been expressed in other Crane writings considered in this chapter. Not rebellion but courageous endurance and fraternal good feeling are Crane's prescription for slum living. The former quality was advocated in "The Mexican Lower Classes," while an interesting example of the value of the latter quality to Crane can be seen in the 1896 sketch "In the Tenderloin."

This otherwise trivial sketch about the denizens of a Tenderloin restaurant directly advocates fraternity as a means of breaking down hostilities, caused by social custom, that exist between people of different classes of society. "Universal suspicion" is pointed to as "the quality that generally oppresses . . ." people in a society, and

this universal suspicion is treated as one of the social "formulae which prehistoric fathers invented for man." Though the sketch speaks of this social custom of suspicion between different classes of society almost as a natural phenomenon--it "is not temporary . . . ; it is fixed and, very likely, the power that makes the rain, the sunshine, the wind, now recognizes social form as an important element in the curious fashioning of the world"--there is "a process which makes constantly toward the obliteration of the form." And that process is described as "the really Bohemian religion of fraternity . . ." (VIII,393). In suggesting in 1896 that the fraternal mixing of the social classes in a Tenderloin barroom just might lead to a solution to the "have-have not" problem, Crane's writing has travelled far from the saloon scenes depicted in Maggie and George's Mother, in which any good fellow-feeling of one bar frequenter for another (such as the floozies' profession of love and respect for Pete in Chapter 18 of Maggie) is invariably treated ironically (the whores rob Pete of all his money after he passes out in an alcoholic stupor).⁴⁸

Before looking at Maggie in some detail, we may conclude this chronological study of Crane's 1893-1896 writings about New York City with a glance at "Adventures of a Novelist" (published September, 1896), Crane's chronicle of his actions and feelings about the notorious Dora Clark affair. This writing delineates, in non-fictional form, the archetypal Crane situation: the challenge to a human being

⁴⁸Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, in Works, I, pp. 71-74.

to stand up and be a man in a situation of either physical danger (death) or, in this case, social danger (loss of respectability, persecution by society). "Adventures of a Novelist" is consistently ironic in tone; Crane defends the morality of his testifying that Dora Clark, on trial for prostitution, had not solicited anyone while in his presence, but at the same time he characterizes himself as "a reluctant laggard witness" and accuses himself of social obtuseness for following through on the moral obligation to testify for Dora Clark. "'A wrong done to a prostitute must be as purely a wrong as a wrong done to a queen,' said the reluctant witness--this blockhead." So Crane depicts himself as telling the police desk sergeant and later a reporter, both of whom advise him to spare his reputation by failing to show up to testify at Dora's trial, that it would be wrong to do so and that he could not with honesty stay away from the courtroom (VIII, 656,659,660). In a manuscript fragment (a trial run for "Adventures of a Novelist"), Crane sums up his feeling about his involvement in the Dora Clark affair, writing ironically that "there is such a thing as a moral obligation arriving inopportunistly. The inopportunist arrival of a moral obligation can bring . . . much personal humiliation . . ." (VIII,661). Crane was even righter than he knew, because the New York police, outraged by Crane's testimony on behalf of the known prostitute Dora Clark, proceeded to harass him at every opportunity thereafter until they literally made it impossible for Crane to live in New York City, either in 1896 or in 1898 when he gave it another brief try.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 221.
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I feel that the Dora Clark incident aroused in Crane what emerges in later fictions such as "The Monster" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" as his real social theme. That theme is not the struggle between the "haves" and "have nots" in the big city, though in deference to Howells and Garland he had attempted to focus on that struggle in his 1893-94 city novels, short stories, and sketches. Instead, that theme is the struggle between the moral integrity of the individual and the obligations placed on him by society to adhere to conventionally accepted behavior, which behavior often conflicts with the individual's own sense of right and wrong.⁵⁰ Being placed in such a situation, to Crane, evokes the same sort of fear and desire to flee that facing physical danger does and calls for the same sort of courage that standing up to the possibility of death does. In other words, as I have suggested before, to Crane physical courage and moral courage were nearly identical. In the context of the Dora Clark matter, Crane makes exactly these points in answer to questions asked him by a New York Journal reporter in September, 1896. Crane says that he was badly frightened by the obligation to testify at Dora's trial and that, if he could have done it with honor, he would have run away: "I well knew I was risking a [social] reputation that I have worked hard to build. But . . . she [Dora] was a woman and unjustly accused,

⁵⁰This social theme will be pursued further in my Chapter 6 discussion of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky."

and I did what was my duty as a man."⁵¹

This stress on moral integrity in "Adventures of a Novelist" in 1896 was equally evident in 1893 in Crane's most extended and significant treatment of New York City life, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. But Maggie also puts considerable stress on the influence of environment on human conduct, since at the time he wrote it Crane was very much under the spell of Howells' and Garland's social realism. As Colvert puts it, Crane's August, 1891, meeting with Garland "very probably marks the real beginning of the history of Maggie. . . . It was very likely Garland's influence that sent Crane into the city in pursuit of a subject for a novel."⁵² In Maggie, the influence on the slum dwellers of the tenement-and-saloon slum environment, with its violence, animalism, and atrocious living conditions, is self-evident. Equally interestingly, and more subtly, the novel includes among the environmental influences on Bowery behavior the romantic and social-status ("respectability") values of the larger, middle-class society; thus it is the total environment of the city, rather than just the

⁵¹R. W. Stallman and E. R. Hagemann, eds., The New York City Sketches of Stephen Crane and Related Pieces (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 225, 224.

⁵²Colvert, intro. to Maggie, in Works, I, p. xxxvi. Stallman (Stephen Crane, pp. 32, 44, 66) believes the novel was begun in the spring of 1891 while Crane was still at Syracuse University and revised several times before it was published in March, 1893. Colvert (Ibid., pp. xxxiii-xxxviii) doubts that Crane began Maggie before the fall of 1891 after he had paid his first visits to the Bowery. In either case, the novel is established as Crane's first significant writing on big-city life and as having been written and/or thoroughly revised after Crane's meeting with Garland at Asbury Park in August of 1891.

poverty-stricken slum environment, that is indicted in Maggie. Charles Walcutt seems to have been the first scholar to note this fact, in his assertion that the slum dwellers in Maggie "are victimized by their ideas of moral propriety which are . . . utterly inapplicable to their lives their freedom is limited as much by their conventional beliefs as by their poverty" Several years later, Robert Schneider elaborated on Walcutt's idea: "The force that binds these people [in Maggie]. . . is not the environment, . . . but the moral code and the clash between that idealized code and the reality of the society in which they live." William Lenehan and Donald Pizer added to these views the significant insight that this inapplicable moral code of the Bowery dwellers was adopted from the middle-class society around them. In Pizer's words, "the moral poses held by the Johnsons are drawn almost entirely from a middle-class ethic which stresses the home as the center of virtue, and respectability as the primary moral goal." Therefore (continues Pizer), "Maggie is . . . destroyed not so much by the physical reality of slum life as by a middle-class morality imposed on the slums by the missions and the melodrama, a morality which allows its users both to judge and to divorce themselves from responsibility from those they judge."⁵³

⁵³Walcutt, p. 69; Schneider, p. 88; William T. Lenehan, "The Failure of Naturalistic Techniques in Stephen Crane's Maggie" (1966), in Maurice Bassan, ed., Stephen Crane's Maggie: Text and Context (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1966), p. 171; Donald Pizer, "Stephen Crane's Maggie and American Naturalism" (1965), in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 112, 114.

Certainly the values of both church and theater of the 1890s are judged in Maggie and found wanting. Though there is little direct mention of the church in the novel, enough exists to make the point clear. In Chapter 4, Jimmie visits "a mission church where a man composed his sermons of 'yous'" and "told his sinners just where he calculated they stood with the Lord."⁵⁴ The minister's smug division of humanity into good churchpeople like himself and immoral slum dwellers ("yous") who are doomed to hell shows the moral hypocrisy of middle-class religion and its lack of any real concern, or brotherhood, to help the people of the slums act better. As a result of the sermon, Jimmie is rendered "sullen with the thoughts of a hopeless altitude . . . ," heaven, which according to the minister is impossible for him to reach. The natural result is that Jimmie "clad his soul in armor . . ." and developed a nihilistic, "what's-the-use?" attitude toward the possibility of behaving better than he does (Maggie, 13-14). The Church's concern with after-the-fact forgiveness for sin rather than with trying to help people avoid sin is parodied in the

⁵⁴Stephen Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, in Bassan, Maggie: Text and Context, p. 13. All further citations to Maggie will be from this edition and will be acknowledged in the body of the text. Bowers' eclectic synthesis in Works, I, of the 1893 and 1896 editions of Maggie has not won the approval of leading Crane scholars such as Pizer and Katz. Because of this, I choose to use, for maximum ease in distinguishing the 1893 from the 1896 text, Bassan's edition of the 1893 version, which conveniently includes in footnotes all significant additions, omissions, and word changes made by Crane in the 1896 revision. For the principles upon which Bowers and Bassan respectively have based their texts, see Bowers, Works, I, pp. lxvi-lxxiii and xcii-xcvi, and Bassan, Maggie: Text and Context, pp. xiv-xv. For Pizer's and Katz's objections to Bowers' eclectic text, see Pizer, in Rees and Harbert, pp. 100, 102-103, and Katz, "Afterword," in Katz, Crane in Transition, pp. 220, 222, 226.

final chapter of Maggie by the "woman in a black gown" whose "vocabulary was derived from mission churches." This worthy tells Mrs. Johnson that disobedient Maggie certainly had been an awful affliction to her mother but urges her to forgive the disobedient girl now that she is dead, since "'she's gone where her ter'ble sins will be judged'" (Maggie, 60-61). Concerned as it is with judging sin, the church, ironically, could scarcely disapprove of Mrs. Johnson's earlier virtuous dismissal of Maggie from her house after she had stayed out all night with Pete (Maggie, 32).

The minister or priest who "saved his respectability by a vigorous sidestep" at the end of Chapter 16 rather than "risk~~ing~~ it to save a soul" is, like the minister whose sermon Jimmie had heard, enshrined in feelings of his own moral superiority and the slum dwellers' moral degradation beyond the hope of salvation (Maggie, 54). If the church tacitly preaches that the illusion of morality (respectability) is preferable to real morality (brotherly concern and aid), it is only natural that the slum people will adopt the same attitude. In fact, Pete's concern for his respectability and that of his saloon environment, alluded to five times in Chapter 16 (Maggie, 51-53), a concern that causes him to tell the now desolate Maggie to go away and never bother him again, is the same sidestepping moral irresponsibility evinced by the clergyman toward Maggie at the close of that same chapter.⁵⁵ Adding to the irony here is that Pete's saloon environment is

⁵⁵ Like Pete, Jimmie is concerned with the appearance of being moral (respectability) rather than with actually being so. He tells his abandoned girl friend Hattie to get lost so that "'people won't

not really respectable, but only pretends to be. Pete's bar is described at the start of Chapter 11 as a composite of "imitation" and "counterfeit" appearances and illusory "opulence and geometrical accuracy," while in reality the bar is a cheap dive serving "frayed fragments of crackers . . . [and] dishevelled bits of cheese . . ." to its seedy patrons (Maggie, 35). If the saloon environment of which Pete is so boastful is not truly respectable, is the church's "holier-than-thou" moral smugness any more respectable? Crane's multiple ironies are apparent.

The church's lack of true concern for the welfare of its lower-class flock is paralleled by the lack of concern for Maggie displayed not only by Mrs. Johnson, Jimmie, and Pete, but also by big-city society from top to bottom. This situation is revealed in Chapter 17, which recounts the incidents leading up to and symbolically causing Maggie's death. In this chapter, the compressed symbolic time sequence of Maggie's career as a prostitute, juxtaposed upon the literal time sequence of Maggie's spirit-weary journey toward death by drowning in the river, helps make this one of the novel's most memorable sections.⁵⁶ After the clergyman has ignored Maggie's

get onto me," and his only concern over his mother's thrusting Maggie from their home is that it makes them look bad before the neighbors: "'dis t'ing queers us! See?'" (Maggie, pp. 49, 42).

⁵⁶Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 42, calls this chapter one of the best in all Crane's writing. Bowers has analyzed well many aspects of this chapter, including its dual time schemes, in his textual intro. to Maggie in Works, I, pp. lxxiii-xci. Bowers (p. lxxxvi) credits Matthew Bruccoli with first perceiving the symbolic, telescoped, "career-of-a-prostitute" aspect of Chapter 17; however, that honor by rights belongs to Joseph X. Brennan--see his "Ironic and Symbolic Structure in Crane's Maggie," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 16 (March 1962), 308-309.

plight at the end of Chapter 16, in Chapter 17 she is both literally (as a prostitute) and symbolically (as a fellow human in need of help) ignored by her society both high and low, in the persons of a tall, bored young man in evening dress; "a stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic [more illusion!] whiskers . . ."; a businessman; a city-wise youth; a working man; a boy with "a cheery smile of unconcern upon his lips"; a drunk; a disfigured "man with blotched features"; and (in the 1893 edition though not in the 1896 one) a repulsive "huge fat man in torn and greasy garments" (Maggie, 55-56). Maggie's suicide is thus made both credible and inevitable: unable to accept the spiritual hell of prostitution and unsuccessful in getting any help from her society to escape that spiritual hell, she has no other way out. Thus is seen in Maggie the lack of responsibility and brotherhood on the part of society found in both the slum citizens and the larger middle-class population around them.

In Chapter 17, as Maggie hurries through the theater district on her way toward "a distant home" (the river), people are emerging from the theaters with "their hearts still kindling from the glowings of the stage. . . . An atmosphere of pleasure and prosperity seemed to hang over the throng, born, perhaps, of good clothes and of having just emerged from a place of forgetfulness" (Maggie, 54). Just as the teachings of the 1890s church urge its respectable clientele to forget the problems of the poor, the 1890s theater preaches the same gospel--a gospel that has obviously been well learned by the men who ignore Maggie in Chapter 17. The dance-hall and drama entertainment

offered by the Bowery saloons and theaters would naturally reflect the same illusory values proffered by the middle-class theater, and so it does. A dancer in a saloon that Pete takes Maggie to apes the steps "popular among the dancers in the theatres up-town, giving to the Bowery public the phantasies of the aristocratic theatre-going public, at reduced rates" (Maggie, 24). And the play Pete and Maggie attend is a travesty of reality, molded in sentimental middle-class values in which the hero and heroine inevitably triumph over the villain, achieve wealth, and live happily ever after. "To Maggie and the rest of the [Bowery] audience this was transcendental realism," but its moral values are exposed as not only sentimental but also hypocritical, since they lead the poor to feel that someone out there cares for them and will help them out of their misery--"the last act was a triumph for the hero, poor and of the masses, the representative of the audience, over the villain and the rich man . . ."--whereas in reality, as has been seen, the larger society wants only to ignore the poor and their problems. Given such hypocritical portrayal of reality on the stage, one can understand Maggie's illusory hope that "the culture and refinement she had seen imitated . . . by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory." The play's hypocrisy, moreover, is reflected in the hypocrisy of its Bowery audience: in their applause for the hero in the play, "unmistakably bad men evinced an apparently sincere admiration for virtue" (Maggie, 28-29). Thus the poor--here and in the episodes of Maggie's rejection by both rich and

poor in Chapter 17 just before her death--are as culpable of bad moral conduct and hypocritical concealment of it as are the middle classes--an important fact in understanding this novel.

Theatrics play another significant role in Maggie, for the characters in the novel habitually react to the poverty and hardships of their Bowery neighbors like spectators at a play; they applaud what they take to be virtue and hiss vice, but primarily they view the troubles of others as a diversion enabling them to forget momentarily their own problems rather than as an opportunity to help. When Maggie returns to her home after Pete has abandoned her, her mother begins to revile her so loudly that all the neighbors hear. "Through the open door curious eyes stared in at Maggie. Children ventured into the room and ogled her, as if they formed the front row at a theatre." They are the audience come to hiss Maggie's presumed vice; and, realizing this, Mrs. Johnson--who is skilled at displays of histrionics throughout the novel--performs the dramatist's function of parading forth a character (Maggie) full of "evil": "Maggie's mother paced to and fro, addressing the doorful of eyes, expounding like a glib showman at a museum" (Maggie,50). Like the Bowery theatre itself, Mrs. Johnson, Jimmie, and Pete throughout the novel find it easy to "act," to pretend to be something (truly moral) that they really are not. As Pizer puts it, "the key to the morality of the Bowery is . . . its self-deceiving theatricality," and "an ability to project oneself into a virtuous role is present in most of the novel's

characters."⁵⁷

If Maggie blames society at large for permitting the environment of the slums to continue to wreak its havoc upon those who must live there--thus treading the social-realism path of Howells and Garland--it is equally severe in holding each individual responsible for his or her own moral delinquency, regardless of how bad his or her given environment may be. This latter concern of the novel is, as I have held throughout this chapter, the more permanent concern of Crane, the one that grows more pervasive in his New York City writings from 1893 to 1896. Maggie thus displays an ambivalence between environmentalism and moralism, and several critics have pounced upon this as a major weakness of the novel (whereas, in that it contributes an interesting tension to Maggie, it might as easily be accounted a strength). Lenehan and Gibson both find it inconsistent that Crane should blame society for Maggie's downfall and yet, through his heavily ironic treatment of them, condemn Mrs. Johnson, Pete, and Jimmie for that same downfall.⁵⁸ For if these characters, like Maggie, are hapless victims of their social and moral environment, should they not be exonerated of responsibility for their immoral conduct toward

⁵⁷Pizer, "Maggie and American Naturalism," in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, p. 113. Credit for first perceiving the theater-audience nature of the Bowery spectators' view of their neighbors' activities belongs to Janet Overmyer, "The Structure of Crane's Maggie" (1962), in Bassan, Maggie: Text and Context, pp. 153-154.

⁵⁸See Lenehan, in Bassan, Maggie: Text and Context, pp. 171-173, and Gibson, pp. 27-29.

Maggie? The answer is that the core of Crane's thinking is always individual responsibility. Succumbing to one's environment is not in a Crane novel, as it is in those of the Naturalists, an inevitability. In LaFrance's words, "any given external conditions of life . . . [such as] the physical slum environment in Maggie and George's Mother are merely externalities, nothing more, and all men must eternally cope with them; when a man is willing to be knocked flat by them and to accept the licking, he reveals a . . . moral cowardice"59 Crane's characters, then, have choice. Maggie chooses to try to better or escape her environment, and she is defeated as much by the other characters' refusal to aid her⁶⁰ as by her own inability to differentiate between illusion and reality--which inability in itself, as I have been showing, is attributable less to Maggie's stupidity than to the failure of church, theater, and society at large to tell the truth about life.

In a recent book-length study of Crane's work, David Bergon has objected that recent commentary on Maggie has focused too much on moral issues, for "even to begin talking about Crane in social and moral terms is to make assumptions that his art calls into question. Crane's talent was quick to go over the wall to that side of experience where the spirit is quick to panic, where standards and values by

⁵⁹LaFrance, p. 48.

⁶⁰Concurring with my view that Jimmie, Pete, and Mrs. Johnson are blameworthy for their moral deficiencies are Cady, Stephen Crane, pp. 110-111; Colvert, "Structure and Theme," pp. 203-204; Osborn, "The Riddle in 'The Clan,'" p. 256; and LaFrance, pp. 50-51.

which we think we live are no longer stable or even appropriate." Bergon chastises LaFrance for making too much of Crane's 1896 statement about the root of Bowery life being cowardice in analyzing Maggie: "the statement is not untrue, but it is insufficient." To Bergon, Crane's aim in Maggie is to place the reader in "a state of uncertainty," to trap him "between repulsion and fascination" at the hellish, war-like state of Bowery existence, to make him share the feelings of the characters--fear, disgust, and so on--rather than to have him arrive at an understanding of the situation.⁶¹ Bergon here is making an excellent point about the subjective half of Crane's intention (to make us "feel" vicariously the characters' personal, ego-centric views of reality), but he is ignoring the fact that Crane intends an objective purpose also, conveyed by his narrational irony, which desires to distance us from the characters so that we can perceive the moral reality of their defects at the same time that we feel the subjective causes of them. Therefore, statements by Bergon such as "it is as absurd to forgive Maggie as it is to damn her" and "Her errors are so perfectly those of her society that forgiveness of Maggie should be extended to others" are highly misleading, and his objection that in criticism in which "Crane's characters are censured for their moral obtuseness and their lack of perception,⁶² readers

⁶¹Bergon, pp. x, 67.

⁶²Bergon (p. 54) has in mind the two book-length studies of Crane published a few years before his, LaFrance's, which stresses Crane's moral concerns, and Holton's, which asserts that faulty apprehension of reality by the characters in Maggie is the key to the novel.

project their own moralism onto Crane"⁶³ shows an apparent unfamiliarity with how pervasive moral concerns are throughout the canon of Crane's writings. Robert Schneider has convincingly demonstrated that, despite Crane's concurrence with the 1890s European naturalistic view that man is weak and insignificant in relation to the natural and social forces that press against him, Crane remained in the American tradition in insisting on the importance of right moral conduct despite the difficulty of it: "Crane embraced one aspect of the Progressive code in his insistence that to be a man means willed involvement in the human struggle. This activist spirit finds expression in [Crane's works] . . . in the quest for . . . kindness in civil society."⁶⁴ The Dora Clark incident provides a perfect example of Crane's dual view of reality, of which Bergon, in discussing Maggie, wishes to emphasize only the subjective half (the characters' egoistic feelings of fear and the like) and not the objective half (the narrator's ironic insistence that Maggie is not being treated with moral justice). When the New York Journal reporter asked if Crane had been afraid prior to his court appearance to testify for Dora Clark, he answered that of course he had been frightened and wished to run away (subjective reaction), but he had realized that it would not have been an honorable thing to evade his moral responsibility to testify (objective reaction).⁶⁵

⁶³Bergon, pp. 73, 74, ix.

⁶⁴Schneider, p. 110.

⁶⁵Stallman and Hagemann, p. 225.

For those interested in Maggie's relationship to the continuing concerns of Crane as a writer, then, the most important aspect of it is the clash between the difficulties (both environmental and personal, in the sense of the characters' understandable fears of and rage at the slum environment) of right moral conduct and the staunch insistence on the necessity of such conduct. Put to the test, the Bowery characters in Maggie fail to achieve moral conduct. That failure manifests itself in two seemingly opposite but actually very similar attitudes: "the feeling of superiority manifested by Maggie's brother, Jim, [and] by Pete . . . who thought they knew what life is all about" and a feeling "of submission" to the qualities and values of their slum environment.⁶⁶ The feeling of superiority (often manifested in fighting and violence, in a futile attempt to "prove" superiority to one's environment and circumstances) and the attitude of submission both reflect, to Crane, false understandings of reality: the former because it wrongly postulates mankind at the center of the universe, the latter because it wrongly implies that man is so incapable that it is hopeless to stand up against the environment. For Crane, neither view is true.

Chapter I of Maggie is a microcosm of the novel in its superiority/submission aspect.⁶⁷ Though the Bowery environment scarcely

⁶⁶Schneider, p. 86.

⁶⁷This chapter has been analyzed in these terms by previous critics--perhaps most notably and concisely by Overmyer, in Bassan, Maggie: Text and Context, paragraph 2, p. 153. Still, several points in my close reading of the chapter here are not found in previous criticism.

deserve defense, Jimmie and his friends, in fighting "for the honor of Rum Alley," are aggrandizing themselves and the decrepit place where they live. Their defense of their environment displays their acceptance of it, similar to the "assassin's" acceptance in "An Experiment in Misery" of his life as a Bowery bum. Indeed, "on their Jimmie's gang's small convulsed faces there shone the grins of true assassins" (Maggie, 3, my emphasis). After the fight is ended by Pete's interference, the children give egotistically inflated views of their valor in battle, "exchanging vainglorious remarks" and "distorted versions of the fight," which again symbolically reflects their contentment with the sort of life they live, their feeling that they are superior to these conditions. Pete himself is equally a composite of egotism--with his "boastfully sauntering" walk, his "chronic sneer of an ideal manhood," and his "cigar . . . tilted at the angle of defiance"--and acceptance of his environment. The reason he gives for breaking up the gang fight by clouting one of the opposing gang's children is "'Ah, what deh hell.'" In other words, he does not concern himself with the moral issues involved in fighting; he accepts violence as a way of life (and uses it himself in ending the street fight), for "'What deh hell . . .'" (Maggie, 5,4)? This phrase--repeated twice in this chapter and fifteen times in Maggie as a whole--means various closely related things: "Why not?" "What's the use?" "Who cares?" "What difference does it make?" It is often used by the Bowery characters to justify their conduct, and when Jimmie (as a young adult, in Chapter 4) "said 'Ah, what deh hell,' his voice was

burdened with disdain for the inevitable and contempt for anything that fate might compel him to endure" (Maggie, 19). In this description can again be seen the Bowery dwellers' attitude of acceptance of their environment because they (wrongly) feel superior to it, which is what Crane defines as moral cowardice.⁶⁸

The other spectators to Jimmie's gang fight in Chapter 1 exhibit the same basic acceptance of it (and thus of the violence of the slum environment) as do Jimmie and Pete. In paragraph eight of the chapter, a number of people are shown to be inertly watching the fight (like spectators in a theater). The adjectives and adverbs applied to them and their surroundings--"ignorant," "curious," "passive," "lazily"--clearly outline their attitude. Similarly, when Jimmie's father arrives on the scene, "he regarded them the fighters listlessly." When he discerns Jimmie among the combatants, he waxes violent and kicks Jimmie because he has disobeyed the father's orders not to fight. But Mr. Johnson retains an essential acceptance of the life he lives, for as soon as the pair begin to walk home, "the man paced placidly along with the applewood emblem of serenity his pipe between his teeth." The significance of his calm pipe-smoking is made still clearer by the narrator at the start of Chapter 2, when Jimmie and his father enter their tenement home district, for there "withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners" (Maggie, 4, 5-6).

⁶⁸ Compare Crane, in an 1896 letter to Nellie Crouse, on the nature of his own battle in life: "When I speak of a battle I do not mean want, and those similar spectres. I mean myself and the inherent indolence and cowardice which is the lot of all men" (Stallman and Gilkes, p. 105, my emphasis).

With this background from the opening chapter in mind, it is easy to discern in the cynical attitude toward life of the young-adult Jimmie, as narrated in Chapter 4, a species of cowardly submission to circumstances: "When he had a dollar in his pocket his satisfaction with existence was the greatest thing in the world." Jimmie responds to his environment with egotistical fist-shaking--"he . . . learned to breathe maledictory defiance at the police who occasionally . . . beat him," with violence and fighting, and at the core with acceptance: "he preserved a demeanor of serenity He smoked his pipe calmly for he knew his pay was marching on." Both the violent defiance to and the serene acceptance of his environment are spawned by foolish arrogance and conceit. Jimmie feels that, as a slum dweller, he "occupied a down-trodden position that had a private but distinct element of grandeur" "He maintained a belligerent attitude toward all well-dressed men. To him fine raiment was allied to weakness He and his order were kings,⁶⁹ to a certain extent, over the men of untarnished clothes Above all things he despised obvious Christians and ciphers with the chrysanthemums of aristocracy in their button-holes. He considered himself above both of those classes" (Maggie, 14-15). With an attitude of superiority like this, who should expect Jimmie (or Pete, or the others) to make any attempt to change the living conditions--or the moral values--of their Bowery environment?

⁶⁹Compare the remark of the "assassin" in "An Experiment in Misery" after he has enjoyed a flophouse sleep and a greasy-spoon breakfast: "'B'gawd, we've been livin' like kings . . .'" (VIII,292).

Maggie is fooled by Pete's appearance of superiority and non-chalance into thinking that he is really superior to his environment and indifferent to all the arrows of fate: "Here was a formidable man who disdained the strength of a world full of fists," and "the sneer upon his mouth told mankind that there was nothing in space which could appall him. Maggie marvelled at him" She had only admiration for Pete's open defiance of life's hard knocks (not realizing that, as in the case of Jimmie, Pete's defiance results from spineless acceptance of his low-level life). "She thought that if the grim angel of death should clutch his heart, Pete would shrug his shoulders and say: 'Oh, ev'ryt'ing goes'" (Maggie, 20-21). Though a share of the blame for Maggie's extreme naiveté in accepting appearance for reality may accrue to herself, clearly the primary responsibility is laid at the feet of the people she meets and knows: "Maggie was anxious for a friend to whom she could talk about Pete. She would have liked to discuss his admirable mannerisms with a reliable mutual friend." Unfortunately, her only two close companions, her mother and her brother, cannot help her because they are caught up in the same assimilation to their environment and pretended superiority to it as is Pete. "At home, she found her mother often drunk and always raving She broke furniture as if she were . . . getting her rights." As for Jimmie, he came home only when too drunk to be able to navigate anywhere else (Maggie, 26-27).

That Pete's conceit in the teeth of circumstances is a sham conceit is implied, even before it becomes apparent in his dealings with

Maggie, in the fight he has with Jimmie and a friend in Pete's bar. Despite all the imagery of panthers, bull-dogs, and the like used to describe the fighting trio in this scene, they are all actually afraid: "The nervous muscles about each mouth twitched with a forced smile of mockery," and "The rage of fear shone in all their eyes . . ." (Maggie, 37,38). Maggie herself first sees Pete afraid when in Chapter 14 his former girl friend, Nellie, turns up in a bar where Pete and Maggie are. Now Maggie sees the tables turned: Nellie is the one who maintains "airs of indifference" while Pete "pleaded with her," afraid that she will not take him back. Seeing this, "Maggie was dazed. She could dimly perceive that something stupendous had happened. She wondered why Pete saw fit to remonstrate with the woman, pleading for forgiveness with his eyes. She thought she noted an air of submission about her leonine Pete. She was astounded" (Maggie, 47, my emphasis). Pete, in fact, is so little in control of his own environment that in the last glimpse of him in the novel, the bar girls whom he has befriended are easily able to get him drunk, roll him, and steal all his money. Pete's illusions about the bar girls are just as extreme as had been Maggie's about Pete: shortly before he is rolled, he tells them "'yer right sort, damn it! Yehs know how ter treat a f'ler . . . !'" They certainly do--but it isn't what Pete had in mind. The final word on Pete is spoken by Nellie, the leader of the bar girls who have robbed him: "'What a damn fool,' she said, and went" (Maggie, 57,60).

It is important to discern that Maggie's illusions concerning

Pete are not what doom her to a life of prostitution ending in suicide. She would not have to become a prostitute if her family, friends, or anyone else were to come to her aid. After her vision clears about Pete's true character, she turns to a number of people for help, but is refused it by Bowery dwellers and members of the larger society alike. In turn, she is rejected by (1) her mother, (2) Jimmie, (3) Pete, (4) an unnamed man, (5) a clergyman, and (6) the eight (1896 edition) or nine (1893 edition) men, some prosperous, some poor, whom she attempts to solicit during her walk to her final death in Chapter 17. Of these, the least critical attention has been paid to the unnamed man in (4) above, whom she encounters shortly after Pete has slammed the door on her to complete her rejection by her family and friends. At this point Maggie "wandered aimlessly for several blocks. She stopped once and asked aloud a question of herself: 'Who?' A man who was passing near her shoulder, humorously took the questioning word as intended for him. 'Eh? What? Who? Nobody! I didn't say anything,' he laughingly said, and continued his way" (Maggie, 53). The man's language here parallels the cowboy's concluding line in "The Blue Hotel," "'Well, I didn't do anything, did I?'" (V,170), and the point is the same in both works. Because of an abdication of moral responsibility, of brotherhood, on the part of the other characters in "The Blue Hotel" and Maggie, the Swede and Maggie both perish.

As has been seen, Maggie exhibits a composite of social realism and probing of personal morality similar to that found in many of Crane's other 1893-1896 New York City writings. The former element is

largely due, I have argued, to the influence of Garland and Howells; the latter is Crane's own abiding interest and is found in his writing throughout his career. Further, by 1895, when Crane visited the West and began to write his Western tales--the subject of my final chapter--his writings on social class problems (such as "The Mexican Lower Classes") and his big-city writings had abandoned environmentalism⁷⁰ and reverted to Crane's own persistent view of life--that, whatever their environments, humans must persevere and show courage and brotherhood. In fact, physical and moral bravery in the face of adversity is the most recurrent theme in Crane's Western fiction, just as it was Crane's common way of viewing his own life. "I will be glad if I can feel on my death-bed that my life has been just and kind according to my ability it means a life of labour and sorrow. I do not confront it blithely. I confront it with desperate resolution," he wrote.⁷¹ But, to be meaningful rather than foolish, bravery must take into account the dipolar truth about reality, dimly perceived, if at all, by the characters in Maggie: that man, subjectively, is important to himself and thus should struggle against adversity rather than tamely submitting to it; and that man, objectively, is insignificant to the universe but can, with effort, persevere and to an extent succeed in spite of that fact. Such matters are the subject of my final chapter.

⁷⁰Compare the narrator's statement in "The Blue Hotel": "there can be little of dramatic import in environment. Any room can present a tragic front; any room can be comic" (V,156).

⁷¹From an 1896 letter to Nellie Crouse, in Stallman and Gilkes, p. 105.

Wise Fools Face the Chance Universe: Crane's Western Tales

Crane's stories of the West and Mexico are an appropriate subject with which to conclude a study of his works for several reasons. The Western setting proved a natural one for the archetypal Crane situation--a test of physical or moral courage and manliness in a barren, indifferent environment constantly threatening man with death. Second, Crane's Western tales were mostly written in his most fertile period--after Maggie and before the Cuban war stories--when his art had matured but had not yet suffered from the world-weariness and desperate moneygrubbing of his last years. Even so, the Western stories have not yet received the attention they deserve; it has not yet been recognized that "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel" are not the only masterpieces among them.¹ Third, since the success of the Western tales is due in no small part to Crane's dipolar vision of reality--an element lacking in most of the late war tales and the Bowery writings, as the previous two chapters have shown--a discussion of these Western stories can solidify and summarize my thesis that Crane perceived two distinct "realities," a

¹Bergon in his 1975 study of Crane (p. 160, n. 1) states that, with the exception of Solomon's book nine years earlier, Crane's Western tales other than "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel" have generally been neglected by critics. He wishes to remedy this neglect in his chapter on these tales, but though he makes a number of interesting comments on the Western stories in general, he affords only the best-known two mentioned above sustained individual analysis.

subjective and an objective one, and that he felt humans had to understand and accept this dipolar nature of reality to have the best chance to operate successfully in the obstacle course of life with its constant threat of death.

Despite a few demurrals,² most critics have recognized that maintaining human values such as bravery and brotherhood despite the indifferent universe is an important concern of Crane's fiction. And, in Bergon's words, "Western situations . . . gave Crane a natural setting in which to examine human fear, especially the fear of death," which had been "a basic pattern" in Crane's writing as far back as the Sullivan County tales.³ Robert Dreamer points out that the myth of the American West itself involved "a code of courage and manliness,"⁴ which made it even more natural that Crane should examine such a subject in a Western environment. Crane himself liked to play the role of the revolver-toting Western cowboy, from the time (probably 1890) when he was given a revolver by a Wyoming cowboy temporarily stranded in New Jersey. "One anecdote after another tells how often thereafter he was the man with the revolver, from the time when the nightshirted boy in the college fraternity stood off the hazing [with

²Perhaps the most influential one has been that of William Bysshe Stein, who in 1959 developed the concept of Crane as a proto-existentialist with a totally nihilistic view of human life, and accordingly contended that Crane's writings dismiss any and all of man's created values, such as courage and good moral conduct, as mere self-deception in an amoral universe. See Stein, "Stephen Crane's Homo Absurdus" (1959), in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 228-238.

³Bergon, p. 112. Twelve years earlier in his Uncollected Writings, p. xxxi, Fryckstedt said much the same thing.

⁴Robert Glen Dreamer, "Stephen Crane and the Western Myth," Western American Literature, 7 (Summer 1972), 117.

gun in hand⁵ until, established in the English countryside, he affected cowboy boots and deigned to prove his marksmanship to Ford Madox Ford."⁵ Ford testified that Crane liked to carry a revolver at Ravensbrook, his English country home, while wearing cowboy pants and no jacket and to imitate a Western gunman. Ford wrote that "'a good deal of [Crane's] conversation would be taken up with fantastic boasts about what can be done with these lethal instruments [revolvers]. I don't know that he celebrated his own prowess, but he boasted about what heroes in the Far West were capable of."⁶ Ford here discerns that, though he might in part seem to be parodying the values of the cowboy hero, Crane basically took them in earnest. On this aspect of Crane's Western tales Levenson is particularly perceptive:

Crane's West was first of all the Wild West of literary convention, which he had a knack of taking seriously when for others it might seem a question of play. . . . He took [his revolver] to the West and Mexico when he went, and his later tales testify that he could imagine himself using it. Playing cowboy became a deadly serious game when the revolver was taken into account.⁷

Indeed, it is worth noting that with the exception of "The Wise Men," guns and gun use play at least a minor and usually a major role in all eight of Crane's Western tales written after his 1895 trip West; and, as will be seen, the gun-wielding showdowns in these Western tales are not played for laughs but instead are viewed as the supreme

⁵Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xxviii, xxix.

⁶Ford's views as paraphrased and quoted in Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 327.

⁷Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xxviii, xxix.

test of man's ability to display courage when facing death.

Though they share a basic theme, as I have suggested, these eight Western stories fall into three somewhat differing groups. The middle group, chronologically, consists of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel," both written in late 1897 in England after Crane had just finished "The Monster."⁸ These two Western tales have been subjected to frequent and exhaustive but not always fruitful critical analysis. They have a common theme involving the proper relationship of the individual and his society, a theme shared by "The Monster," and relating these three stories to each other can result in added insight into the well-known Western tales. Though "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel" have long been considered Crane masterpieces, none of the four Western stories Crane wrote earlier, between September 1895 and Summer 1896, has been so considered. But in Chapter 2 I showed that "The Five White Mice" was indeed one of Crane's most skillful, successful tales, and I shall suggest here that "The Wise Men," the companion tale to "The Five White Mice," has been much underrated. Though high eminence cannot be claimed for the other two of these earlier Western tales, "One Dash--Horses" and "A Man and Some Others," both are valuable in discerning the themes of Crane's Western tales. Further, these four stories as a group share a motif: gambling viewed as a metaphor of the human experience in a world of chance.⁹ The third group of

⁸These and other facts concerning the dating of these stories, here and elsewhere in this chapter, are drawn from Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xxxviii, xl-xlii, lxxiii-lxxiv, xci, and cxx-cxxii.

⁹Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xxix-xxx.
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Western tales contains "Twelve O'Clock" and "Moonlight on the Snow," both written in 1899, Crane's twilight time, within a year of his death. By common agreement these two are "the last and least" of Crane's Western stories, "lack[ing] the universal overtones and the structural and linguistic mastery that distinguish some of Crane's earlier Western stories . . . ,"¹⁰ and I would agree with this verdict.

"Twelve O'Clock" and especially "Moonlight on the Snow" are of interest in illustrating Crane's feelings about the dying American frontier in the 1890s, the clash of the "violent yet honest Old West against the law-abiding, yet venal New West,"¹¹ but otherwise these exhausted products of Crane's dying year have little merit and not much relationship to the concerns of his other Western tales. Worth noting, though, is a theme of brotherhood in "Moonlight on the Snow" that has gone unmentioned in previous criticism, since it is a fresh reminder of how consistently Crane concerned himself with this theme in his writings, early and late. Holton (among others) has noted that the protagonist of "Moonlight on the Snow," the gambler Larpent, views "the commercializing 'Easternization' of Warpost" with venomous cynicism.¹² What has not been noted is that Larpent is

¹⁰LaFrance, p. 189; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 274. Similar views are expressed by Levenson, in Works, V, p. cxx, and by Bergon, p. 129.

¹¹Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 276. See also Bergon, p. 128, and the analysis of "Moonlight on the Snow" in George Monteiro, "Stephen Crane's 'Yellow Sky' Sequel," Arizona Quarterly, 30 (Summer 1974), 119-126.

¹²Holton, p. 242.

attempting to retain the value-system of Western comradeship against the amoral legalisms (or illegalisms) of the lynch-minded townspeople, who, ignoring their previous friendship with Larpent, plan to hang him without a trial for having "shot and killed a man who had accused him of cheating at a game." "Bob Hether made a loud, long speech, in which he declared that he for one would help hang his 'own brother' if his 'own brother' transgressed this law which now, for the [material] good of the community, must be forever held sacred." In fact, all the men except Larpent agree that they will "deal out a swift punishment which would take no note of an acquaintance or friendship with the guilty man" (V,181). Larpent recognizes the triumph of material values over moral ones in such declarations, and when the townspeople decide to hang him he ironically reminds them of that fact: "'my last few minutes I am resolved to devote to inquiries as to the welfare of my friends. Now you, . . . my dear Bobbie, present to-day the lamentable appearance of a rattlesnake It is the effect of friendship upon a highly delicate system.'" When the moment of the actual lynching arrives, Larpent continues to remind the others of their abandoned brotherhood: "'I see that Smith Hanham is not here. Perhaps some undue tenderness of sentiment keeps him away. Such feelings are entirely unnecessary. Don't you think so, Bobbie?'" (V,184,185).

Not only does Larpent, in these and other incidents, urge (albeit cynically, without expectation of success) the value of fraternal feeling upon his erstwhile friends, but he exhibits such fellow-feeling himself when a stagecoach full of newcomers from the East arrives just

as the noose is being slipped around Larpent's neck. The Eastern visitors are appalled by the imminent lynching. While the townspeople scratch their heads and try to figure out what to do, Larpent takes pity on the new arrivals, "and his face was inspired with a new, strong resolution. 'Look here, boys,' he said decisively, 'you hang me to-morrow. Or, anyhow, later on to-day. We can't keep frightening the young lady and those two poor babies out of their wits. . . . Frightening women and children is your game, but I'm not going to stand it'" (V,188). Larpent's brotherhood makes him kin to that other self-professed cynic, the correspondent in "The Open Boat," who felt "the subtle brotherhood of men that was . . . established on the seas" to be "the best experience of his life" (V,73), and to the New York Kid in "The Five White Mice," who felt motivated by the conviction that his friend the San Francisco Kid was about to be murdered to generate courage to draw his revolver and save both their lives (V,49). And Larpent's fellow-feeling differentiates him from characters in "A Man and Some Others" and "The Blue Hotel" who are subjected to ironic scorn for their lack of concern for others. Clearly Crane values brotherhood in his Western characters, just as he had in the characters peopling his war tales and his sketches of New York City life.

Crane's four earliest Western stories all involve an element of "the bet or dare, a mode of frontier bravado."¹³ "The Wise Men" and "The Five White Mice" involve literal betting; the word "dash" in the

¹³Bergon, p. 120.

title of "One Dash--Horses" alludes, as Levenson has observed, not only to the horses' dash to safety but to the Western slang definition of "dash" as one roll of the dice--an all-or-nothing gamble with the fleeing men's lives¹⁴; and it is plausible to argue, as does Bergon, that even those Western tales of Crane "that do not treat gambling directly are still often presented in gambling terms."¹⁵ Though Holton feels that Crane used his interest "in the psychology of the dare" or gamble to expose man's foolishness in his "attempt to make good a challenged boast, to support an endangered pretension," Levenson sees the more positive implications of the gambling motif in Crane's Western tales: in coming West, Crane "conceived that a man entered, not necessarily a realm of terror, but a world of chance. The test of manhood was to keep one's nerves in the face of the unexpected and the unpredictable. Here the coolness of the gambler . . . was the virtue most to be prized. . . . [Gambling] was for [Crane] . . . a symbolic model of human experience."¹⁶ In truth, though there is subjective foolishness in gambling, since it is egotistical to feel confident that one will invariably win one's bets, there is objective wisdom also, in that, since the mainspring of the universe itself is chance, one shows an acceptance of that essential,

¹⁴Levenson, in Works, V, p. xxxix.

¹⁵Bergon, p. 120.

¹⁶Holton, p. 219; Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xxix-xxx.

humanity-diminishing fact by freely meeting the challenge of life's gambles.¹⁷

This testing of a human being in the crucible of life's chance events is the essence of "One Dash--Horses" (written September, 1895), a tale which by general agreement suffers from Crane's being too close to the personal incident he was retracing when he wrote it.¹⁸ The quasi-autobiographical story becomes longwinded and diffuse; narrative movement (punctuated by all-too-frequent direct interpretation by the narrator) gains the upper hand over the significant dramatic incidents and thematic concerns. In addition, the shift of focus in the middle of the story from the protagonist Richardson's bravery to the bravery of the horses harms the tale's unity.¹⁹ "One Dash--Horses" does, however, show Crane, in the first-written tale derived from his Western trip, already focusing on the necessity of being brave when faced with a gamble in which one's own life is at stake.

The Western environment of "One Dash--Horses" is the same uncarving, meaningless (in terms of human values) earth familiar from Crane's stories of war, the sea, and the city: the Western "plain was a vast, pointless ocean of black" (V,13). Since Richardson knows that this environment is hazardous, he has provided himself with a

¹⁷This dipolar view of gambling is treated at length in my Chapter 2 discussion of "The Five White Mice."

¹⁸For this view, see Berryman, p. 104; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 150; Dreamer, p. 118; and Bergon, p. 102.

¹⁹Berryman, p. 104; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 240.

"large and impressive revolver," and when he goes to bed in the Mexican adobe house where he has sought shelter, "like a cautious man he lay close to the wall, and all his property [including his gun] was very near his hand" (V,14). He is badly frightened when he hears a group of drunken Mexicans in the next room planning to kill him and steal his valuables: "The tumultuous emotions of Richardson's terror destroyed that slow and careful process of thought by means of which he understood Mexican." Further, Richardson's "nerves were tingling and twitching like live wires and [his] heart jolted within him"²⁰ Despite his fear, Richardson is able to make a show or bluff of courage, sitting "very straight and still, his right hand [gripping the revolver] lost in the folds of his blanket" (V,16,17,16). Richardson "did not move," thus bluffing a lack of fear that makes it impossible for the Mexicans to penetrate to the reality of his feelings: "he . . . sat still and with apparent calmness confronted them . . . ," and his gaze appears "not fearful, not dauntless, not anything that could be interpreted." This pose of bravery, this gamble that his inner fear will not be recognized, disconcerts the Mexicans, who wonder "why did not this American cry out and turn pale, or run, or pray them mercy? . . . Well, evidently he was a great fighter; or

²⁰Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 241, would have it that the confrontation between Richardson and the Mexican is presented as parody and that Richardson's fear is played for laughs. Bergon, however, is wiser: "there is little reason to suspect that Crane is parodying the fearless Western hero" in this scene, for "Crane was not so naive as to think that fear was unfounded in such situations. To see his fearful men only as parodic characters is to diminish his psychological penetration" (pp. 113-114).

perhaps he was an idiot. . . . who was going forward to discover
[which]?" (V,16,21,16,16). Indeed, the bluff of courage generates
actual courage, as Richardson develops "a hatred that made him capable
of fighting all of them" (V,17). However, when the Mexicans, hearing
some woman companions come in (a chance event), withdraw, Richardson's
subjective emotions cause him to exaggerate the danger; he sees the
blanket separating his bedroom from the reveling Mexicans as "a horri-
ble emblem," a black form threatening death, and though he "longed to
run. . . . in this vibrating and threatening gloom his terror con-
vinced him that a move on his part would be a signal for the pounce
of death" (V,18). He is so much exaggerating the danger to him im-
plicit in the objective truth that life is full of death-threatening
chances that it reduces him to total helplessness. Objectively,
however, humans are not denied a chance to continue existing in the
chance universe, and when morning comes and Richardson can see that
"the dread blanket did not move. . . . The candor of breaking day
brought him nerve" and he and his servant take--successfully--the
gamble of stealing out of the house (V,19).

Having won one bluff or gamble, Richardson must again risk his
life on one dash of the dice of chance--namely, on his horse's ability
to dash away from the Mexicans who soon give pursuit. Again Richard-
son is frightened--excessively so when his subjective imagination
causes him to exaggerate the danger. Just as earlier he had imagined
that the room-dividing blanket was threatening him with death, now "he
was sure he saw . . ." the pursuing Mexicans when he doesn't, and he

"imagine/s/ the brief tumult of his capture . . . the ring of the shots, his own last contortion" (V,21,23). But the anticipated death does not occur, for once more Richardson's gamble on chance pays off: he and his servant happen on a detachment of Mexican cavalry officers, who protect them from the "wild mob of almost fifty drunken horsemen" who are chasing them (V,24).

In the companion stories "The Wise Men" and "The Five White Mice," probably written some nine months after "One Dash--Horses," Crane deals explicitly with the psychology of the bet or gamble in a world of chance. These two stories are also the most effective in structure and style of Crane's earlier Western tales. Though not quite as significant or excellent as "The Five White Mice," "The Wise Men" is a story of genuine and lasting merit that scarcely deserves the near-universal critical contempt it has received. Berryman and LaFrance both call it "slight," LaFrance adding that it "will never cause much critical excitement." Solomon dismisses it as "negligible," and Holton claims that in it "Crane fails . . . to develop the material of the story into meaningful statement" Levenson is a bit kinder, calling "The Five White Mice" and "The Wise Men" direct, spontaneous, and exuberantly youthful tales that are "moving experimentally but surely toward the artistic complexity of /Crane's/ greatest works."²¹ But to deny these two stories a polished artistic complexity is to deny that which they surely possess.

²¹Berryman, p. 112; LaFrance, p. 72; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 249; Holton, p. 132; Levenson, in Works, V, xlii.

"The Wise Men," like "The Five White Mice," delineates how gambling--running a bluff--requires courage and how possessing the courage to run such a bluff may, in a chance universe, succeed in winning the day. Like the main characters in "The Five White Mice," those in "The Wise Men" are wise fools (or foolish wise men), blending the two opposing qualities that Crane finds inevitable composites of human nature. From a subjective point of view, the New York and San Francisco Kids in "The Wise Men" seem either superhuman or sub-human to those who observe them. "They were very wicked according to report . . . ," tales of "their misdeeds, and . . . their sins" were often told, and most "folk frankly were transfixed at the splendor of the audacity and endurance of these Kids." But this heroic appearance is a bluff by the Kids, for in an objective view "they were two lads . . . and far from their mothers. Occasionally some wise man pitied them, but he was usually alone in his wisdom." The story's title, then, resonates with symbolic overtones. A completely wise man would see the pathos of the human condition in the seeming confidence of youth. The two Kids themselves are wise in one sense (wise enough to tell a good bet when they see one while further realizing that even a good gamble does not inevitably succeed); yet their very youth, "their smooth infantile faces," and their undeserved reputation for vast subtlety and wickedness reminds us that, in Crane's view, it is beyond human capacity to be totally wise (V,26).

The Kids visit the bar of the Cafe Colorado in Mexico City, tended by old Pop, and display their wise-foolish nature immediately

by (1) doubting Pop's boast that the whisky he offers them is of the highest quality while (2) "pour[ing] out their allowances"--significant connotations in that word!--on this same whisky (V,27). As the three converse, old Pop claims to be, despite his age, a fast runner. Since Pop does not look like a runner--"he did not display those qualities of form which mean speed in the animal"--the Kids call him a liar. But as he tells them of his past successes as a racer and insists (with Western openness and candor) "'on the dead level'" and "'no jolly now, boys, I tell you I'm a winner,'" the Kids begin to believe that Pop may be telling the objective truth (V,28). And if he is, and if they can find fools enough in the town who will bet against Pop in a race with Freddie, a younger bartender, they can satisfy their craving for adolescent tomfoolery (men "said there was devilry afoot. Occasionally the Kids laughed in supreme enjoyment of something unknown"--V,29) and make themselves some money besides.

But before the Kids place their bets, they wisely wish to make sure Pop doesn't stack the deck on them. "'Pop, if you throw us in this thing, we'll come here and drink for two weeks without paying. We'll back you and work a josh on Freddie! But . . . if you play us for duffers, we'll get square,'" they exclaim. Pop assures them that he will try his best in the race. But Pop is objective enough to know that since a race is a chance event, he could chance to lose. In fact, Pop's quiet confidence in himself combined with his realization that he is not all-powerful is quite similar to Jim Conklin's composite of self-confidence and understanding of the human limits to his bravery. Says Pop, "'No man is cock-sure of anything in this

world, and I don't want to say that I can beat any man, but I've seen Freddie run, and I'm ready to swear I can beat 'im'" (V,29). This is the sort of subjective self-confidence (necessary human egotism) despite an objective understanding of human limitations that Crane most values in his wise-fool human protagonists; it is the best possible human response to the dipolar nature of reality.

Most men, however, are unable to balance their subjective tunnel vision with an understanding of objective reality. For this reason the other characters in "The Wise Men" either aggrandize the Kids' deeds (as indicated above) or consider the Kids total fools. The latter feeling occurs when the Kids offer to cover all bets made against Pop in the race with Freddie. The Kids' acquaintance Benson is (as he also is in "The Five White Mice") the most subjectively foolish character of all. Claiming that it is impossible for Pop to beat Freddie (in a chance universe, nothing is impossible), Benson twice calls the Kids "'a pair of asses'" for betting on Pop. Benson is "swaggering" with certainty that he has backed the right man, but this is the certainty of the egotistical fool who feels his own subjective perception of reality is the only reality there is (V,30,36). Similarly, Freddie judges by appearances only and says to the Kids, "'you boys are foolish. I tell you Pop is an old man. How can you expect him to run?'" But the wise-fool Kids are not deterred by the wholly foolish views of Freddie and Benson: "Their childish faces were bright with glee" (V,31,32). They may be childishly foolish in betting their entire wealth (which isn't much anyway) on something

that is not a sure thing; but they are wise enough to recognize that it is a good gamble, and they have courage enough to stake their money on it despite being called fools by the others for doing so. Pop shows a parallel courage: "he spoke out bravely. 'Boys, I'll pinch that race,'" even though he himself has already admitted that his winning is no certainty (V,33).

One sign of true bravery throughout Crane's writing is a quiet refusal to budge from one's dangerous position. In "One Dash--Horses," Richardson faces down the Mexican by not moving: "Richardson did not change his position" (V,18). Potter, when challenged by the killer Scratchy Wilson in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," does not retreat an inch, as will be seen. Though they are facing not loss of life but only loss of money, the Kids in "The Wise Men" exhibit the same sort of stoic courage. "The Kids remained unnaturally serene and quiet," and when one of their more perceptive friends wonders if they aren't betting more than they can afford to lose, "the faces of the Kids grew sober" But they retain the courage to feel that they will win their gamble, despite their knowledge that they could lose; as one of them says to their friend, "'I guess we've got a good thing, Blanco. Pop is going to surprise them, I think'" (V, 33,34,my emphasis). Later they tell Pop, still worried that victory is not a certainty, to do his best "'and let it go at that.'" They realize that they are in "'pretty deep'" with their many bets on Pop, but they confront the dangerous depth of their betting "stolidly" and "stonily"; they have the courage of their convictions (V,34).

Even after the race is underway, the stoic endurance of their confidence is maintained: "The Kids back near the tape exchanged another stolid look" (V,36).

In contrast to oafs like Benson who contemptuously brand their ostensible friends the Kids fools for their behavior, before the race the Kids and the other "principals spoke to each other with the respect and friendliness which comes to good men at such times," and after losing to Pop Freddie is man enough to congratulate the victor and exhibit no hard feelings (V,35,37). It appears that brotherhood as well as courage is possessed by those who can perceive and accept both the subjective and the objective realities of human existence. In the end, as they are congratulated for their courage--"'you fellows had a nerve to bet on Pop.' 'Why, I was cock-sure he couldn't win.'" --the Kids do not refrain from jeering at Benson for his losses and taunting him with the amount they have won (V,37,38). Even the best of Crane's characters are human enough to be somewhat egotistical in triumph; we are reminded of Henry Fleming in the late stages of The Red Badge and of the three survivors of the open boat, who felt that they had developed the infinite wisdom to interpret the meaning of the sea to all and sundry (V,92).

As can be seen, "The Wise Men" (like "The Five White Mice") is not a structurally diffuse story; all of its narrative events bear on the central motif of chance-taking in a chance universe and on the multi-layered meanings of the story's title. Similar structural quality is not found in "A Man and Some Others," for this tale, written perhaps

slightly later than the two stories about the Kids, is similar to "One Dash--Horses" in that its narrative sprawls more than need be and that its narrator is lamentably addicted to asserting his meaning directly rather than conveying it dramatically.²² Despite these flaws, "A Man and Some Others" can profitably be compared in certain ways with "The Blue Hotel." For one thing, both stories involve the necessity for moral courage as well as physical courage in Crane's universe. For another, the protagonist in both stories possesses mixed good and bad qualities--but in "A Man and Some Others" Bill's defects have not had enough critical attention, while in "The Blue Hotel" it is the Swede's positive qualities that have frequently been ignored.

Most commonly--and misleadingly--the protagonist Bill in "A Man and Some Others" has been considered a self-reliant, courageous "embodiment of the virtues of the legendary Western hero," "a model of conduct," a hero who dies "in the best Western tradition--on his feet and with his boots on, charging his killers"²³ True, some critics have discerned that in his past conduct as related in the story Bill has been anything but admirable, but these critics generally claim that Bill's earlier immoralities are presented humorously and

²²Another flaw in this story, according to some critics, is that the young stranger from the North in it is too obviously a "Crane-surrogate" (Dreamer, p. 119) or "a surrogate for the narrator" (Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 245).

²³Dreamer, p. 119; Gibson, p. 119; Raymund A. Paredes, "Stephan [sic] Crane and the Mexican," Western American Literature, 6 (Spring 1971), 34.

thus do not much repel the reader or that Bill, though clearly immoral in his previous life, has developed a purer morality in the incidents surrounding his death.²⁴ Solomon and Bergon perceive more accurately that Bill is truly a mixed character--Solomon calls him a "flawed Western protagonist" and "an uneasy combination of strength, amorality, vulnerability, and shame" for whom Crane nonetheless "engages the reader's sympathy"²⁵--but both still emerge with too high an esteem for Bill and his physical and moral prowess.

Like Richardson's adventure in "One Dash--Horses," Bill's experiences in "A Man and Some Others" are played out on the vast panoramas of the West that serve Crane as a paradigm of the cosmic indifference to the human drama: "The world was declared to be a desert and unpeopled," and Bill's fire sings "an ancient melody which surely bears a message of the inconsequence of individual tragedy--a message that is in the boom of the sea, the sliver of the wind through the grassblades, the silken clash of hemlock boughs" (V,53,60). The storm in "The Blue Hotel" sends a similar message. But even in the amoral universe, Crane's men are responsible for their own moral behavior, a fact significant in "A Man and Some Others" as well as in "The Blue Hotel." Bill is a former Wyoming mine owner who lost his holdings in card games and became successively a cowboy, a train brakeman, a Bowery bartender, and the shepherd that he is at the

²⁴Levenson, in Works, V, p. xlviiii; LaFrance, pp. 188-189.

²⁵Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 245, 246. See also Bergon, pp. 115, 123.

time of the story. Throughout his varied career he has retained the vanity and feeling of superiority of his lost aristocratic beginnings, a key defect of vision (subjective self-aggrandizement) from which springs in him the moral flaw of lack of concern for others (V,55-56). As a cowboy, Bill "killed the foreman of the ranch over an inconsequent matter . . ."; as a brakeman, "a creature of ill fortune himself, he practised [sic] all the ordinary cruelties upon these other creatures of ill fortune [hoboes"]; as a Bowery bouncer, he won most of his fights and "was a proud man since he had thrashed so many citizens . . . he swaggered . . . he strutted . . . importantly . . ." (V,55,56,57). Bill's vanity lets him feel no fear of anyone or anything (a foolish stance in a random, uncaring universe); he loses all moral conscience in his self-centered egotism, and his totally subjective vision of reality leads him (like the Swede in "The Blue Hotel") to believe that he is invincible (V,56-57). He is, in fact, a fool, lacking the wisdom possessed by the Kids in "The Wise Men" to see that he might sometime lose out, and lacking the brotherhood possessed by those like the correspondent in "The Open Boat" who have perceived the objective reality that humans are indeed vincible.

Thus, sheepherder Bill is as conscienceless as the Mexicans who for no good reason tell him they will kill him if he does not get off the range; he rejoins that if they try it he will kill at least half of them first (V,54). "Bill loved [his revolver] because its allegiance . . . questioned neither social nor moral position; it . . .

was . . . the poison of the snake Wherefore it was his dearest possession . . ." (V,57-58). As seen by the stranger from the North who chances into Bill's camp, Bill's excessive pride in his abilities and achievements is, from an objective point of view, hardly warranted: "Here was evidently a man who had often stormed the iron walls of the city of success, and who now sometimes valued himself as the rabbit values his prowess" (V,59). Secure in his cleverness, Bill rigs up a blanket roll to counterfeit his sleeping form, and when the Mexicans have been fooled into thinking they have killed him, he arrogantly laughs "a fearsome laugh of ridicule and hatred" that "might have been demoniac" and guns down one of the Mexicans. "'Now you are worse off than ever,' said the young man, dry-voiced and awed," concerned about the moral issue involved in the murder; but Bill, deaf to such matters, answers "'No, I ain't' . . . 'I'm one ahead'" (V,61,62). The stranger is rattled at the sight of the Mexican's corpse, but even more rattled by the taking of a human life. "At last he cried, 'Oh, I know the whole thing was square enough . . . but--somehow or other, that man there takes the heart out of me.' . . . 'he makes me feel like a murderer.'" Bill cannot understand this feeling, since he and not the stranger shot the Mexican; but he tends to pin the blame on the stranger's being "'a' eddycated man,'" and when they are suddenly ambushed by the Mexicans during the process of this speculation, "'This comes from discussin' things,' cried Bill, angrily." The philosophical issues of man's place in the universe and his moral conduct therein do not interest Bill;

his *métier* is "lift^{ing} his revolver, . . . poised like . . . a snake," and smiling in a manner "cynical, wicked, deadly . . ." (V, 64).²⁶

Previous commentators on this story have not observed that Bill's death is a product more of foolish vanity than of bravery. Pinned down by the Mexicans, Bill "began to invent epithets and yell them at the thicket" in which the Mexicans are concealed; such conduct is the sort of fist-shaking rage at the natural universe for not valuing one more that Crane finds both silly and worthless. Then, as the Mexicans return the epithets and term "him nine kinds of coward, a man who could fight only in the dark . . ." and by means of an underhanded strategem like the blanket-roll trick, "he began to grow angry" at these insults to his pride (V,65). Bill is so enraged that he throws caution to the winds and commits the very unveteranlike mistake of thrusting his head up as a target while cursing the Mexicans and saying "'I'll go after 'em in a minute.'" Naturally, the Mexicans use his exposed head for target practice and he receives his mortal wound (V,66). It is true that the youthful stranger, faced with dying himself, fights valiantly to prevent it, kills one of the Mexicans, and learns "that it was easy ^{but} not always good[?] to kill a man."

²⁶Some critics might feel that being an educated man should be counted as a defect rather than a virtue in the Northern stranger, but I do not think this is Crane's view, here or elsewhere. Compare Larpent in "Moonlight on the Snow," who "had been educated somewhere" (V,180) and who is certainly the most right-thinking (as well as brotherly) character in that story.

But the stranger, unlike Bill but like Henry in The Red Badge and Lieutenant Lean in "The Upturned Face," retains a healthy respect for death, for when he encounters another dead body while leaving the scene of the fight, "slowly and warily he moved around it" And the stranger's feeling of "idolatry" for the dying Bill, his seeing in Bill's death pose "the dignity of last defeat, the superiority of him who stands in his grave . . ." (V,66,67,66-67), is similarly a respect for death and for one who has met death, not a respect for Bill as a human being, with his moral deficiencies and lack of insight into the objective half of dipolar reality.²⁷ In sum, Bill is a less admirable human than the Swede in "The Blue Hotel." Both possess excessive egotism and lack an objective understanding of their position in the universe; but whereas Bill, confident in his superiority to other mortals, practices inhumanity as a way of life, the Swede is the victim, not the practitioner, of similar inhumanity and uncaring.

Unlike most of the Western tales so far discussed, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," long acknowledged as one of Crane's premier stories, has been well understood and effectively analyzed by several previous critics. The pioneering article to explore a key aspect in this story, that of the values of the civilized East overtaking those of the frontier West (i.e., the consequences of the passing of the American frontier in the 1890s, an issue highlighted in that same

²⁷Most critics aggrandize Bill on his deathbed and greatly overestimate the empathy Crane intends us to have for him. See, e.g., Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 247; Parades, p. 34; LaFrance, pp. 188-189. Bergon, p. 115, credits Bill with veteran-like competencies that I do not at all feel he possesses.

decade by Frederick Jackson Turner's well-known article), was written in 1958 by Robert Barnes, and a few years later Kenneth Bernard and Eric Solomon both offered effective extensions of Barnes' point of view.²⁸ Bergon, though not denying that "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and several other of Crane's Western tales probe the changing nature of the West as it is affected by the values of the East, claims that "the discrepancy between the real West and its myth . . . is the most obvious and the least interesting of Crane's Western observations." Considering the importance in the history of American ideas of the mythical significance of the West, or frontier, Bergon's opinion seems scarcely merited; Dreamer's recent article has demonstrated just how pervasively "The Bride," "The Blue Hotel," and "Moonlight on the Snow" embody the nostalgic "lament of the coming of modern civilizations, which is so important an aspect of the Western myth"²⁹ There are, however, other significant aspects of "The Bride" that have been attended to with less perception than its East-West theme.

²⁸Robert Barnes, "Crane's 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,'" The Explicator, 16 (April 1958), item 39; Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 253-255; Kenneth Bernard, "'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky': History as Elegy" (1967), in Gullason, Crane's Career, pp. 435-439. See also Stallman, Stephen Crane, pp. 326-327, and Holton, pp. 226-228. George Monteiro, "Stephen Crane's 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,'" in Approaches to the Short Story, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Louis H. Leiter (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 221-237, finds the East-West theme in this story to be overlaid with myth and ritual (Apollo versus Dionysus, Scratchy as "Lord of Misrule"), Freudian psychology, and intricate clusters of related imagery. Monteiro's reading, though ingenious, is convoluted and probably far-fetched; Crane as I understand him does not work in an elaborate mythico-ritualistic mode, either in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" or in his other fictions.

²⁹Bergon, p. 107; Dreamer, p. 121.
(276)

For one thing, "The Bride" contains a previously uncommented-on gambling motif that links it to several of Crane's earlier-written Western tales. By getting married, Marshal Jack Potter is gambling that the townspeople of Yellow Sky will accept the change of role that he has made without consulting them. As Potter's thoughts in the story reveal, it has cost him some courage to take this gamble, and it costs still more when he must face the armed gunman Scratchy Wilson without a weapon of his own (because he is in his marriage clothes). Potter bravely accepts this final challenge, and, as in "The Five White Mice" and "The Wise Men," through a combination of chance and his own courage he gains acceptance of his new condition as a married man from Scratchy, the representative of his town. It is possible that Crane chose the name of his marshal to emphasize this aspect of the gamble in the story. Jack Potter is close to jack pot, and Potter certainly does win the jackpot at the end of the story by daring to stand up for his right of individual choice as against the role in which society might prefer to cast him.

Potter's bravery at the end of "The Bride" is, I think, undeniable. Like Richardson, the Kids in "The Wise Men," and the New York Kid in "The Five White Mice," Potter faces his dangerous situation by assuming a stoic calm, "stiffening and steadying" despite Scratchy's "revolver [thrust] venomously forward," and by maintaining a stolid immobility, a refusal to flinch: "His heels had not moved an inch backward" (V,119).³⁰ Too many critics have read "The Bride's"

³⁰In "Moonlight on the Snow," V, p. 188, both Potter and Scratchy are referred to as "two-handed men of terrible prowess and courage"

final confrontation scene as parody or have considered the child-like Scratchy no real threat to Potter.³¹ Actually, Scratchy "is absurd and childish perhaps, but also deadly," and in the story's final scene, Potter "displays a very real courage . . . which Crane treats entirely without irony."³² Perhaps the best evidence that Potter, in daring possible death at the hands of Scratchy despite his new social eminence (as a married man) in civilized Eastern terms, is indeed being brave comes from a Crane letter to Nellie Crouse written some seven months before "The Bride" was composed. In this letter, devoted mostly to expressing his scorn for the "new-rich," "the society matron," and all other people who "chant 143 masses per day to the social gods . . .," Crane shows that he ultimately judges men not by their possession or lack of social eminence but by their courage under the gun:

For my part, I like the man who dresses correctly and does the right thing invariably but, oh, he must be more than that, a great deal more. . . . when I see a man of that kind I usually put him down as a kind of an idiot. Still, as I have said, there are exceptions. There are men of very social habits who nevertheless know how to stand steady when they see cocked revolvers and death³³ comes down and sits on the back of a chair and waits.

³¹See, e.g., Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 255; Holton, pp. 226, 228; Bernard, in Gullason, Crane's Career, p. 436; and A. M. Tibbetts, "Stephen Crane's 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,'" English Journal, 54 (April 1965), 316.

³²Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 254; Dreamer, p. 123. Also agreeing that Potter needs and displays real courage in his final confrontation with Scratchy are Tanner, p. 17; Levenson, in Works, V, p. lxxv; and Ray B. West, Jr., "The Use of Action in 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,'" in West, ed., Reading the Short Story (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), p. 22.

³³Stallman and Gilkes, pp. 115, 114.

Potter in "The Bride" is just such a man. Having taken on the trappings of a civilized Easterner by his marriage and his ride in the ornate Pullman car, Potter does develop the ability to abide his townspeople's scorn at his new estate and to brave their (Scratchy's) threats to his life caused by his adoption of his chosen new role.

There are clear parallels between Potter's bravery in facing the ridicule or wrath generated in his townspeople by his newly married condition and the bravery Crane himself must have had to summon up in England in 1897 when he began to pass off Cora Taylor, former madam of a Jacksonville brothel, as his wife. Potter wonders how he could have had the gall to "marry . . . without consulting Yellow Sky for any part of the transaction." True, people generally do marry as they please, "but such was Potter's thought of his duty to his friends, or of their idea of his duty . . . that he felt he was heinous. He had committed an extraordinary crime." Potter subjectively exaggerates the importance of his marriage to the community at large; he fancies that "his friends could not forgive him"; he feels "a new cowardice . . . upon him" and thus "he feared to . . ." inform his friends of what he has done; and "a sense of mutual guilt invaded [the] minds . . ." of him and his new bride (V,111,112). Potter must come to a more objective understanding of the situation: no man--and thus no man's personal activities--is significant enough that the world at large much cares what he does; but if one is to follow his own drummer he must have the courage to march to the beat, as Potter shows that he does in the final scene with Scratchy. Similarly, Crane in his own life

was learning that, despite the embarrassment and even guilt that he felt, he could get away with his new relationship with Cora in society if he was brave enough to see it through.³⁴ As Levenson says, Crane's "qualms" about revealing his new state (ostensibly, marriage) with Cora to his English friends and to his relatives back in the United States "may well have provided the germ of the tale ['The Bride']." ³⁵

Gilkes relates Crane's "crisis of social embarrassment, . . . marked with his own brand of irony and sardonic humor--Crane's familiar armor against the world . . . ," not only to "The Bride" but also to the story completed just prior to it on September 9, 1897, "The Monster." This view makes sense. As Berryman puts it, in "The Monster," "for rescuing the Negro, the doctor is ostracized. For trying to rescue Dora Clark, Stephen Crane had been beaten out of New York, and he was now making up his mind to do the same thing again, to 'rescue' Cora Taylor by (as it were) marrying her." In his article on "The Monster," James Hafley writes that "Crane is in 'The Monster' convinced that whatever constitutes the goodness of man is not to be found in modern social convention."³⁶

³⁴Among those commenting perceptively on the parallels between the marriage in "The Bride" and the Cora-Stephen Crane relationship are Berryman, pp. 196-197; Stallman, Stephen Crane, pp. 326-327; and Lillian Gilkes, "Stephen Crane and the Biographical Fallacy: The Cora Influence," Modern Fiction Studies, 16 (Winter 1970-1971), 451, 454.

³⁵Levenson, in Works, V, p. lxxiv.

³⁶Gilkes, p. 451; Berryman, p. 192; Hafley, in Gullason, Crane's Career, p. 443.

Indeed, this conviction is Crane's real social theme, as I suggested in the preceding chapter; and in the group of adventure stories he wrote between the Fall of 1897 and January of 1898--"The Monster," "The Bride," and "The Blue Hotel"--Crane explored the way in which society's teacup-codes ("The Monster"), conventional expectations of people ("The Bride"), and essential lack of concern for those in need of help ("The Blue Hotel") cause mistreatment of those individuals who dare to be different. When individual and society clash, Crane's sympathies are invariably with the individual. For instance, as critic George Johnson says of Dr. Trescott's insistence on aiding the black man (Henry Johnson) who has saved his son from death in a fire in "The Monster": "Obeying his private feelings and rejecting 'public institutions,' Trescott fulfills one human obligation, but he also learns that he cannot 'beat the game,'" for he and his wife are ostracized by the entire town. "The Bride" has a happier ending, for in this tale Potter does "beat the game" of formulaic social expectations by courageously sticking to his convictions. Unfortunately, both George Johnson and Frank Bergon mistake the type of teacup ceremony and conventional social decorum that are the villains in "The Monster" and "The Bride" for a positive social decorum by connecting it with Crane's concept of veteran-like duty and conduct, with which I believe it has no relationship whatever. Johnson in his article jumbles together what he calls the "decorum" of amazingly dissimilar situations--that of the teaparty, the game, the fraternity, the soldier--in order to claim that "despite its lack of ultimate

meaning, decorum . . . allows the veteran to accept incongruities which would otherwise overwhelm his imagination."³⁷ And Bergon falls into a similar trap when he analogizes "the ceremony of teacups in 'The Monster'" and the honorable code of conduct of the veteran soldier in The Red Badge: "Though participation in such a [teacup] ceremony may be only the guise of decency, it is still a stay against chaos or against the nothingness Fleming faces when he fails to abide by the rituals of regimented combat." This equating of lemons with nectarines leads Bergon falsely to overrate the value that social convention held for Crane in a story like "The Blue Hotel": this "story ends in a dilemma. While Henry Fleming was lucky enough to find an arbitrary construction of tradition that protected him from the metaphysical horror he saw in an isolated corpse, the Swede retains the 'splendor of isolation' and becomes that cipher [corpse] himself. However capricious or false, the communal forms of the saloon and hotel are necessary for survival."³⁸ George Johnson caps these absurdities by claiming "it is even possible to speculate that what literally drove Crane to Cuba was the ironic realization that the decorum of the veteran was no more meaningful than the rituals of tea."³⁹

³⁷George W. Johnson, "Stephen Crane's Metaphor of Decorum" (1963), in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 73-74, 74.

³⁸Bergon, pp. 124, 131.

³⁹Johnson, in Bassan, Collection of Critical Essays, p. 69.

It is important that such misconceptions be discarded. Contrary to Johnson's and Bergon's view, Crane does not see veteran-like behavior as the product of capitulation of the individual to silly military codes of conduct. Rather, as I have argued in discussing The Red Badge and "The Veteran," veteranly status to Crane is attained through an understanding of reality's dipolar nature. Perceiving objectively that the universe cares not for them, veteran soldiers like Jim Conklin and Henry Fleming in "The Veteran" paradoxically retain enough self-concern (egotism) despite their smallness, and enough concern (pity) for others despite those others' equal smallness in the scheme of things, to fight with bravery and not to desert their fellow soldiers on the battlefield. In short, Crane views soldierly duty as a hard-won development of individual morality by "wise-fool" humans in the face of the objectively meaningless universe. He does not identify veteran conduct with capitulation to a set of social values. And he reserves only scorn for those who do abandon their individuality for conventional or "teacup" morality, whether in Maggie, "The Monster," "The Bride," or any other of his works. Indeed, in one of his preachy Whilomville stories, "The Stove" (1899), Crane writes a diatribe on the silliness of teaparty conventions in which he states in no uncertain terms that individualist outsiders (like himself) are greatly sinned against by the socially conventional "nice" people of the world:

Instead of seeing that they [the teaparty givers] were very stupid they thought that they were very fine.
And they gave and took heart bruises--fierce deep heart

bruises--under the clear impression that of such kind of rubbish was the kingdom of nice people. The characteristics of outsiders of course emerged in shreds from these teaparties and it is doubtful if the characteristics of insiders escaped entirely. In fact these tea-parties were in the large way the result of a conspiracy of certain unenlightened people to make life still more uncomfortable. (VII,200)

Bearing in mind Crane's unwavering disdain for conventional or piously hypocritical social behavior ("The Monster," "The Bride," "Moonlight on the Snow"), his equal disdain for humans so self-centered that they hurt, or are too cowardly to help, their fellow man ("A Man and Some Others," "The Monster"), and his lifelong admiration for people who, despite fear, are able to stand up and be men in a crisis situation ("One Dash--Horses," "The Five White Mice," "The Bride"), one is able to clarify the mysteries of Crane's most debated and disputed story, the acknowledged Western masterpiece "The Blue Hotel." A recent trend in discussions of this story is to refuse to decide between the various possible ways of interpreting it, instead terming it a mysterious reflection of the mysterious incomprehensibility of life itself as Crane sees it. Solomon in 1966 claimed that "'The Blue Hotel' closes with a choice of readings" and that "not all [of the story's questions] find answers by the end of the tale" In 1970, Levenson opined that no single "character by himself gives the clue to [Blue Hotel's] action, and even the narrator's general view, in which the central action appears diminished, is open to question" and added that "the story constructs a universe which defies every quest for certain meaning." And Bergon's

1975 view was that "Blue Hotel" "balance[s] all the forces impinging on event so that no single causal development can explain away the Swede's murder without ignoring or seriously distorting other reasons for the death" and that this story, like much of Crane's work, "plays with ideas and stresses the inconclusiveness of various interpretations."⁴⁰

In truth, however, the quest for a key to unlock the door of "The Blue Hotel" need not end in such a muddle as this. By focusing on three of the main issues in this story, one can discern that what Crane is doing in this tale is not dissimilar from what he had done in several of his other Western stories discussed above. These issues in the story are, first, the moral complicity or responsibility of the other characters for the Swede's death; second, the mixed qualities of the protagonist Swede himself; and third, the function and significance of the oft-quoted "conceit of life" passage in the story.

On the first point, the complicity of the others in "Blue Hotel" in the death of the Swede, some critical agreement exists. Only a minority of interpreters have held that the characters bear no responsibility whatever for what happens to the Swede or that the Easterner's assertion at the story's end that "'we . . . have collaborated in the murder of this Swede'" (V,170) is exaggerated or only

⁴⁰Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 274, 258; Levenson, in Works, V, pp. xcvi, xcvi; Bergon, pp. 125, 25.

partly true.⁴¹ The majority opinion on this issue is well represented by Max Westbrook, who discerned in a 1962 article that since "Crane's social ethic holds men responsible . . . ," the truth is that the "Swede is murdered . . . because five men side-step their responsibility." Westbrook convincingly documents Scully's betrayal of his responsibility as host to the Swede (he permits and even arranges the fight between Johnnie and the Swede), the Easterner's willful refusal to get involved even though he alone really understands the causes of the Swede's fears, and the implicit denial of moral responsibility by the other characters as signified by the ironic ring of their repeated lament "'I didn't do nothing!'" throughout the story.⁴² Similarly, in an excellent early article (probably the best article to date) on "Blue Hotel," Joseph Satterwhite noted that the characters failed in their "responsibility to understand the Swede and bring him into the human community, 'the subtle brotherhood of men' . . ." that the men in the open boat worked to develop in their own crisis situation. The storm raging throughout "Blue Hotel" symbolizes the fact that "the five men who take shelter

⁴¹That the characters are in no way at fault is asserted by Walcutt, p. 74; Robert F. Gleckner, "Stephen Crane and the Wonder of Man's Conceit," Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Autumn, 1959), 276; and Griffith, p. 87. Claiming that the Easterner's final statement of collaborative responsibility does not reflect Crane's view are Berryman, p. 213; Griffith, p. 87; LaFrance, p. 231; and Robert Narveson, "'Conceit' in 'The Blue Hotel,'" Prairie Schooner, 43 (Summer 1969), 190.

⁴²Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane's Social Ethic," American Quarterly, 14 (Winter 1962), 593, 593-595.

in the hotel from the raging blizzard are . . . banded against an unfriendly cosmos. The symbolic nature of their situation makes the failure of the four to understand the Swede . . . reprehensible." Scully's motives are economic, as he is concerned to protect his investment in the Swede and his hotel's reputation rather than showing concern for the Swede himself. Johnnie responds to the problem posed by the Swede with unthinking wrath, the cowboy with stupid bewilderment, and the Easterner with passive reticence. All of them (and also the gambler who actually takes the Swede's life) make professions of not understanding the Swede, not knowing about him and not wanting to know about him, and not having done anything to him (and certainly not for him!).⁴³

To Westbrook's and Satterwhite's excellent elucidation of the presence in "Blue Hotel" of Crane's frequent theme of the necessity for brotherhood and moral responsibility toward others may be added more corroborating evidence. First, it is apparent that Johnnie is morally derelict in cheating the Swede at cards, not only from the

⁴³Joseph N. Satterwhite, "Stephen Crane's 'The Blue Hotel': The Failure of Understanding," Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (Winter 1956-1957), pp. 241, 239-240, 239. Two other scholars who have rightly stated that "Blue Hotel" insists on the moral responsibility of the other characters for the Swede's death are LaFrance, p. 224, and Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane, p. 157. In Cady's The Light of Common Day: Realism in American Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), p. 176, he concludes that the Easterner's statement that the characters have collaborated in the Swede's death is a deliberate reflection on Crane's part of the Howellsian doctrine of complicity; Cady is probably right. Solomon, Parody to Realism, pp. 266-267, succinctly lays bare the flaws in the characters' natures that prevent them from aiding the Swede; Solomon's reading of the characters is very similar to Satterwhite's.

Easterner's open assertion of that fact but also through the indirect evidence of the quarrels between Johnnie and the old farmer during earlier card games and the "look of heated scorn" (V,145) given Johnnie by the farmer when the latter stalks with dignity away from their second quarrel. That the Swede directly makes an appeal for help from the Easterner is apparent, for the Swede "sent an appealing glance in the direction of the little Easterner." When the latter, "after prolonged and cautious reflection," deliberately chooses not to become involved, instead telling the Swede that he does not understand him, the Swede feels that "he had encountered treachery from the only quarter where he had expected sympathy if not help" (V,146, my emphasis). The narrator's language here speaks for itself. Later, when the Swede announces that he will leave the hotel "'because I do not want to be killed'" (a prophetic insight on his part), the Easterner claims to see nothing at all wrong, and Scully, who "resembled a murderer," will not permit the Swede to go; instead, with an ironically "generous movement," he further aids the Swede's downfall by handing him a bottle of liquor and getting him drunk (V,148,149, 151). After the Easterner explains to Johnnie and the cowboy that the Swede's visions of the Wild West are what have been making him so frightened, this lovable, brotherly duo react by saying that they cannot stand having the Swede around and wish Scully would toss him out on his ear (V,152). Thus, even after these men understand the Swede, none of them has any desire to help him. On the contrary they wish him nothing but the worst, as during the Swede's fist fight with

Johnnie the cowboy exhorts Johnnie to "'kill him!'" and he, Scully, and the Easterner all cheer Johnnie when he momentarily seems to be winning (V,160-161). After the fight is over, the Swede wishes to pay his hotel bill, but Scully insists that he is owed nothing, which provokes the symbolically significant reply from the Swede, "'I guess you're right. I guess if it was any way at all, you'd owe me somethin''" (V,164)--a modicum of human kindness, no doubt? Later, not only the gambler who actually knifes the Swede but also the bartender and the other saloon patrons are included in the complicity against the Swede: the bartender is pictured as indifferent and "calloused"; the other men, when approached by the Swede, parallel the Easterner by immediately "encas[ing] themselves in reserve"; and the gambler, who like Johnnie is a "thieving card-player," scarcely needs to give the Swede a mortal knife wound just because the Swede desires to have a drink with him (V,165,168,166,167,168-169).

These characters are in Crane's view fools, for, as he wrote in an 1896 letter to Nellie Crouse, "the final wall of the wise man's thought . . . is Human Kindness of course. . . . Therefore do I strive to be as kind and as just as may be to those about me and in my meagre success at it, I find the solitary pleasure of life."⁴⁴ With all of the evidence in "Blue Hotel" that points to a failure of brotherhood and moral responsibility as the mainspring of the Swede's death, it is amazing that to my knowledge no commentator on the story has ever recognized that the cash-register's slogan upon which the

⁴⁴Stallman and Gilkes, p. 98, my emphasis.

Swede's eyes fix at the moment of his death, "'This registers the amount of your purchase'" (V,169), actually harmonizes with this responsibility theme rather than conflicting with it. The universal reading of this slogan may be represented in LaFrance's language: "the dreadful legend pins the responsibility for the Swede's death upon the protagonist himself" ⁴⁵ Nonsense: the emphasis in this slogan belongs upon the sellers of the purchase, not the buyer! Scully earlier insisted that the Swede owed him nothing, but the Swede actually purchased with his life the callous indifference toward him of Scully, Johnnie, the cowboy, the Easterner, the bartender and his patrons, and the gambler. Thus "Blue Hotel" is a variation on the theme of Maggie: in an uncaring environment, humans will suffer and die if other humans do not care about their fate.

The Swede himself lacks the moral despicableness of the other characters in "Blue Hotel"; indeed, his conduct might even be considered praiseworthy, though precious few critics would grant that. ⁴⁶ Some sympathy is generated for the Easterner by his self-castigation at the story's end, but prior to that he is the most culpable character of all, since he maintains his indifference toward the Swede's fate despite knowing of Johnnie's cheating. And surely the reader can have no respect for the hypocritical and materialistic Scully,

⁴⁵LaFrance, p. 231.

⁴⁶The reader with a less than sensitive palate may sample typical vituperation of the Swede in Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 264; Gibson, pp. 111-113; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 175; Holton, pp. 234-235; and Bergon, pp. 73, 128.

the dense cowboy, the venal and wrathful Johnnie, the unconcerned saloon crew, or the overreacting gambler who in his gambling career also "prey[ed] . . . upon reckless and senile farmers . . ." (V,167). It seems doubtful that the Swede "creates" the Wild West of his illusions, a charge for which he is often indicted⁴⁷; rather, "the Swede ironically does find in reality the violent Western society that the others regard as illusory: Fort Romper . . . gives the Swede a death strictly in keeping with his idea of the niceties of Western manners."⁴⁸ The Swede does not force Johnnie to cheat (or to fight to defend his "honor" when caught at it), or Scully to lie, or the cowboy to be stupid, or the gambler to be hypocritical, or the Easterner to silently condone; they do these misdeeds of their own volition.⁴⁹ As William Dillingham points out, "the Swede actually commits no crime [physical or moral], and he is basically an honest person . . .," facts hardly true of any of the other characters. Dillingham may be right in claiming that by withholding the fact of Johnnie's cheating until the end of the story, Crane wishes to implicate the readers along with the other characters for not concerning themselves enough with what happens to the Swede: "The complicity the Easterner speaks of involves not only the characters of the story but also each reader

⁴⁷E.g., by LaFrance, pp. 222-223, and Gleckner, p. 278.

⁴⁸Walter Sutton, "Pity and Fear in 'The Blue Hotel,'" American Quarterly, 4 (Spring 1952), 76.

⁴⁹Compare Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 273.

whose sympathies paralleled those of the men who failed to try to understand and to be a little sorry for the waste of human life."⁵⁰

The Swede himself, of course, is hardly an unexceptionable character. Though not pictured as bereft of moral concern like the other characters, the Swede in his own way is just as foolish. His unwisdom stems from his total inability to evaluate objectively his relationship to others and to his universe. His appearance as "a badly frightened man" at the story's start, while the blizzard howls outside and the unfamiliar figures of a strange Western environment churn up in him a "sense of silly suspicion," signifies a hopeless dread of his environment that is, objectively, unwarranted, since the human condition, though perilous, is not hopeless. Since he is thus foolishly afraid, the Swede's assumption of an "air of advanced valor," "a kind of false courage and defiance," is such a patent sham that it only makes him seem more foolish to the reader (V,144-146). After Scully attempts to brace up the terrified visitor by forcing liquor upon him, the Swede veers from one subjective extreme to the other: whereas before he had viewed himself as a helpless victim of his environment, now he feels that he is superior to and even in control of that environment--"he seemed to have grown suddenly taller . . ." and he "domineered the whole" dinner and subsequent card game (V,154). No longer afraid of Johnnie and the others, he exhibits

⁵⁰William B. Dillingham, "'The Blue Hotel' and the Gentle Reader," Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (Spring 1964), pp. 225, 226.

instead the irrational certainty of bravado. And his defeat of Johnnie in the fistfight feeds his foolish self-assurance to the point where he takes a perverse pleasure in the harshness of the human condition: "His face, fresh from the pounding of Johnnie's fists, felt more pleasure than pain in the wind and the driving snow," and he announces "'I like this weather. . . . It suits me'" (V,165,166). He "bluster[s]" to the other men in the bar about his triumph over Johnnie and, "ruffl[ing] out his chest like a rooster," attempts to dominate this saloon environment, as he had been able to dominate that of the hotel, by forcing the reluctant bar patrons to share a drink with him (V,166-168). As oblivious now, in his boastful feeling of superiority, as he had been earlier, in his terrified feeling of helplessness, to the environment's objective indifference toward humans, the Swede goes to his death "with a cry of supreme astonishment" (V,169,my emphasis), for throughout the story he has lacked the wisdom to temper the inevitable subjectivity of human nature in the crucible of objective insight into man's actual condition within the cosmos.

Though the Swede is foolish in his imprisonment by his own subjective vision of life, the perceptive reader, noting that the Swede at least is morally superior to the other characters, may value him more highly than is usually done. Despite the excessiveness of his terror, the Swede scarcely deserves the kind of treacherous refusal to help dispensed by the Easterner, as displayed in the passage already quoted. In spite of his fear for his life, the Swede

announces early on that "'I don't want to fight!'" (V,146). Only after Scully gets him drunk does he resort to domineering and threats to coerce the others into a card game, and even in these bravado-motivated activities, he still symbolically "seemed to have grown suddenly taller . . ." (V,154-155,154). In other words, while objectively the Swede is just as small as all men are in relation to the huge and indifferent cosmos, subjectively he perceives himself as valuable and is truly "taller" morally than the other characters: when he sees Johnnie cheating, he immediately announces that fact.

The following sequence of events makes crystal clear the important but little-recognized fact that it is Johnnie, not the Swede, who insists on fighting. "'I don't cheat and I won't let no man say I do!'" cries lying Johnnie; "'I'll fight any man what says I cheat!'" The Swede, showing both physical courage and moral conviction, will not back down from his assertion, despite the Easterner's morally inert refrain "'What's the good of a fight over a game of cards?'"-- and Johnnie insists again, "'We must fight.'" Only at this point does the Swede respond, "'Yes, fight! I'll show you what kind of a man I am! I'll show you who you want to fight!'" (V,157). Thus the Swede proves his mettle as a man, in contrast to the cowardly Easterner, who says at the story's end that when he saw Johnnie cheating, he "'refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone'" (V,170). In the fight itself, the Swede as a "man" triumphs not only over Johnnie but over the others as well, and his triumph is moral as well as physical, as implied in the language Johnnie uses

after the Swede knocks him down for the final time: "'I--ain't--any good--any--more'" (V,161). Later, in the saloon, the Swede smiles "fraternally upon the barkeeper," in contrast to the latter's indifference, and makes a brotherly offer (to share a drink) with the others in the bar, who uncordially refuse (V,165,166). All in all, the Swede combines an unwarranted high opinion of himself (unwarranted in the sense that no men are "tall" in comparison to the universe, symbolized in this story by the storm) with the only physical bravery, moral courage, and fraternal inclinations shown by anyone in the tale. Though more foolish than wise, the Swede should probably gain the aware reader's pity and empathy as much as his scorn or contempt.

In connection with this point comes the "engine of life" passage in "Blue Hotel's" eighth section, which, if construed correctly, is not only a key to this story but an appropriate summary of that dipolar vision of reality undergirding most of Crane's successful art throughout his career. Far too commonly has this passage been taken as a simple condemnation of the Swede's conceited arrogance and delusion of invincibility after his triumph over Johnnie.⁵¹ This view mistakes the objective half of Crane's vision of reality for the total reality. Objectively speaking, it is true that men are not "conquering and elate humanity" but rather "lice . . . cling^{ing} to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb," and it is

⁵¹For this view, see Colvert, "Structure and Theme," p. 208; Solomon, Parody to Realism, p. 268; Gibson, p. 112; Rogers, p. 295; Narveson, p. 189; LaFrance, p. 229; Holton, p. 235; and Colvert, in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 145.

the ultimate conceit in humans not to (as the Swede does not) simply lie down and "die in" such a world. Subjectively, though, the way in which humans continue to exist and struggle to do their best under such hostile conditions seems a "marvel" and mantles those struggling humans in "a glamor of wonder . . ." (V,165). Crane's view, then, in this passage and elsewhere, is deeply ambivalent: in Levenson's words, "if the conceit of man is taken to be the engine of life, it is hard to say whether the folly is more to be emphasized than the vitality" ⁵² Greenfield discerns the same ambivalence in saying that "Blue Hotel" "counterpoints the theme of man's arrogance in even existing . . . on this 'space-lost bulb,' and the idea that one must withal act morally [as the Swede does] and try to interpret his existence [as the Easterner does at the story's end]." ⁵³ Above all, one should recognize that Crane perceived the subjective half of his vision of reality to contain wisdom as well as foolishness. The foolishness comes because life as life is, objectively, scarcely to be valued, but wisdom also is involved, because placing an egotistically high valuation on life and on ourselves as living beings is absolutely essential to the function of living. The well-known sentence in "Blue Hotel," below, that expresses this ambivalent vision

⁵²Levenson, in Works, V, p. xcvi. Compare Cady, Stephen Crane, pp. 93, 94: "the ultimate twist of Crane's irony came from his perception that man's ridiculous, wicked conceit was necessary to his existence in nature and in society," for "If man's vanity was absurd, it was also necessary. . . ."

⁵³Greenfield, p. 566.

of reality should be paralleled with three equivalent and equally striking passages from "The Open Boat," "The Five White Mice," and "Coney Island's Failing Days" respectively that are not nearly so well known as they should be:

The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. (V,165)

Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature. (V,91)

And now here is the unreal real: it [life] had no right to be supreme but it was supreme (V,49)

"Now he is confronting it [life's inevitable difficulties and sorrows], and as he can't battle it, he scorns it. . . . If he had no vanity--well, it is fortunate for the world that we are not all great thinkers." (VIII,327)

Many of Crane's protagonists share the vanity of the Swede of "Blue Hotel," the foolish but strangely necessary vanity of lice-like human beings. Stallman compares the Swede in this respect to Fleming in The Red Badge and to the little man in "The Mesmeric Mountain,"⁵⁴ and the list could be extended to include the protagonist in other Sullivan County Sketches, the correspondent in "The Open Boat," Collins in "A Mystery of Heroism," the Kids in "The Wise Men," and a host of others. Further, it is clear that "the Swede's [arrogance] exceeds the pomposity of either Henry or the men in the boat," being "a sort of insolence toward . . . fate itself," a "kind of hybris"⁵⁵ In other words, the Swede's conception of reality is trapped in near-

⁵⁴Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 175.

⁵⁵Holton, p. 236.

total subjectivism, rather than taking cognizance of reality's dipolar nature as is the case, in varying degrees, with Fleming, Collins, the New York Kid in "The Five White Mice," and the correspondent in "The Open Boat"--though the Swede's subjective egotism never takes the form of inhumane treatment of others as it does in the villainous fools of Maggie, "An Experiment in Misery," "The Monster," "A Man and Some Others," and many another Crane story.

As a group, Crane's Western stories describe the thoughts and actions of men trapped in a universe and a social environment not of their own making or choice. To the extent that they objectively recognize their insignificance along with retaining their natural subjective concern for self-protection against the threat of death--a self-sympathy that at its best extends to lending sympathy and a helping hand to others--these men are "wise fools," which is the best role of which Crane finds mere mortals capable. As Schneider puts it, to Crane "anyone who can conquer the animal instinct to flee, who will cling to the code of conduct and do his duty, is a man."⁵⁶ Thus Crane's ethic values physical and moral courage above all else. Bergon's recent, penetrating study of Crane's art is valuable in spite of, not because of, the fact that "Bergon [in it] is not much concerned with [Crane's] ideas . . . ,"⁵⁷ for Crane, like all writers of

⁵⁶Schneider, p. 97.

⁵⁷James B. Colvert, review of Frank Bergon's Stephen Crane's Artistry, in American Literature, 48 (November 1976), 397.

fiction of permanent value, used his aesthetic skill to convey with maximum impact a vision of life--a vision of dipolar reality--that is penetrating and significant. There is no sense in arguing whether "Crane's primary aim was to create effects in aesthetic form [or] (as much recent criticism seems to assume) to dramatize ideas or moral issues,"⁵⁸ for, as demonstrated in my Chapter 2, "Crane's Vision and Crane's Art," successful writers like Crane are those who are able to fuse significant idea and effective technique into an aesthetic and intellectually pleasing unit.

In the last ten years, Crane criticism has advanced many leagues in its understanding of this artist's work; yet even today it is still common to mistake Crane's master-theme as one of illusion versus reality rather than one of two distinct realities. Andrew Wright's observation in "Irony and Fiction" (1953) that, as between reality and appearance, "the ironist is not sure which is and which merely seems"⁵⁹ has been too little applied to Crane's works. And in cases where a view similar to Wright's has been espoused, it has been confined to studies of a single Crane work, as for example in this perceptive comment by Olov Fryckstedt in an article on The Red Badge: "we must not

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 396-397. Despite its deficiencies, LaFrance's 1971 A Reading of Stephen Crane is valuable for its elucidation of the important moral base that underlies all of Crane's art. Among several other perceptive assertions of the significance of moral issues in Crane's work might be singled out Robert Schneider's Five Novelists of the Progressive Era, the section on Crane in Edwin Cady's The Light of Common Day, and Max Westbrook's articles on Crane.

⁵⁹Wright, p. 113.

be deceived by Crane's irony; its aims are complex. While it derides the thoughts of the main character [Fleming] it brings out at the same time the universal pathos of his situation which is also that of all men This tends to arouse our pity rather than our contempt."⁶⁰

For every occasional insight such as Fryckstedt's, however, there have been a score of litanies insisting that Crane's goal is simply to puncture illusion. James Colvert's seminal 1959 article "Structure and Theme in Stephen Crane's Fiction" finds "Crane's essential theme [to be one of exposing] the consequences of false pride, vanity, and blinding delusion," and since the 1950s Robert Stallman's conception of Crane's "double point of view" has consistently focused on a puncturing of illusion by reality: Crane "felt pity for his characters, but he also recognized the irony of their plight. . . . the ironic voice undercut[s] the sentiment" ⁶¹ Eric Solomon's 1966 book From Parody to Realism gives some excellent readings of individual Crane works, but the over-emphasis on parody in Crane causes Solomon frequently to find ridicule in Crane's treatment of man's subjective egotism where Crane's actual attitude is one of ambivalence. The valuable 1970 introduction by J. C. Levenson to Tales of Adventure (Works, Vol. V) falls prey to the same traditional belief that Crane's goal is to pierce illusion and reveal simple reality, for

⁶⁰Fryckstedt, "Henry Fleming's Tupenny Fury," p. 267.

⁶¹Colvert, "Structure and Theme," p. 200; Stallman, Stephen Crane, p. 102.

Levenson finds that the protagonist of "The Open Boat" grows or "progress[es] from self-engrossment to clear vision" ⁶²--a reading of "The Open Boat" that my second chapter shows to be a considerable oversimplification. Marston LaFrance's 1971 book on Crane again holds that Crane's ironic doubleness is used to expose "appearance to bring about an awareness of reality." And Milne Holton in Cylinder of Vision (1972), despite his valuable insight that a "pressure to see [reality correctly] . . . remains the characteristic phenomenon of Stephen Crane's prose writing," still postulates that insofar as perceiving man is not able "to reengage reality by apprehending its objective nature objectively . . . ," he is subject to "the will's delusions" ⁶³

It is encouraging that lately a few critics have begun to glimpse something of Crane's authentic vision: that there are two realities, subjective and objective, both conflicting but neither inauthentic or illusory. In a 1972 article, Max Westbrook finds Crane "realiz[ing] that reality is not unilateral, not confined to [subjective] observer and [objective] observed. There is an image in between, one which most of us realize but dimly." ⁶⁴ Actually, as I have shown, Crane, rather than postulating a "true" reality between that of the subjective observer and that of the objective observed, accepts both the

⁶²Levenson, in Works, V, lxviii.

⁶³LaFrance, p. 251; Holton, pp. 285, 274.

⁶⁴Westbrook, in Katz, Crane in Transition, p. 98.

subjective and the objective realities as each in its way true. Finally, Frank Bergon, in his 1975 Stephen Crane's Artistry, "perhaps the best book on Crane to appear in twenty years,"⁶⁵ comprehends well the ambivalence of Crane's "'either-or' approach" to the perception of reality. As Bergon sees it, to Crane, human "visions Even when illusory . . . have to be accepted as part of reality--the way a mind works and its tendency to play tricks on itself. . . . Crane was often in sympathy with such a vision" ⁶⁶ Bergon here approaches a full understanding of Crane's dipolar vision of reality, yet falls short because he still insists on that word "illusory." In fact, Crane's characters' subjective visions of their selves as all-important to themselves are as true from that point of view as is their objective non-importance from the perspective of the universe. To cite again "The Five White Mice" and "The Blue Hotel," man's self-centered view that his own life is "supreme" is to Crane "the unreal real," and "the conceit of man . . . [is] the very engine of life" (V,49,165). Crane's deep awareness that man does not and will not cease loving and valuing himself despite his (man's) feeling that the universe does not care a whit for him is one of the most poignant and significant insights for twentieth-century man to contemplate. Truly Crane's dipolar vision of reality is worthy of his art.

⁶⁵Colvert, rev. in American Literature, 48, p. 397. I agree with Colvert's judgment, with the reservation that a weakness in this otherwise fine book is its specific interpretations of Crane's important fictional works; in this area, Solomon's Parody to Realism is usually sounder and more insightful.

⁶⁶Bergon, p. 47.

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