1936

The realism of Stephen Crane

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Boston University

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/18215

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE REALISM OF STEPHEN CRANE

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1936
# THE REALISM OF STEPHEN CRANE

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages present the results of a comparative study of realism and a specific study of the writings of Stephen Crane. These results include a discussion of the theory and characteristics of realism in relation to certain other isms, plus the incidental presentation of eclectic passages from Crane's works. The plentiful selections included serve a dual purpose: they not only supply internal illumination upon biographical data mentioned, and the statements of his literary and philosophic perspectives, but also illustrate the particular type of realism which characterizes his productions.
Realism is a term widely applied to certain created forms in all the fine arts. Like the words classicism and romanticism, however, it is too often loosely used, with the result that among most people the term comes to have a vague, shifting, sometimes all-inclusive meaning. Although the consensus regarding the definition of the word realism is essentially correct, being based on the root "real", many other connotations lacking the same authenticity tend to spring up around the word. Hence the confused use and confounded understanding of "realism".

A few of the most common of these connotations are those suggested by the words actual, natural, probable, and true. On the premise that the best way to arrive at a definite understanding of realism in fiction is by comparison, this paper will present a discussion of realism in relation to romanticism, sentimentalism, idealism, imagination, fact, naturalism, and truth. By this means the agglutinated false connotations may be pried away, leaving a true workable definition of realism.

Between realism and romanticism there is little but divergence. Essentially, that is, these are to be considered
opposites in literature as well as in the other arts. On the other hand, neither the romantic novel nor the realistic novel is necessarily superior; Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Flaubert's Madame Bovary are both great masterpieces. The prime difference is in point of view. Romance, even if it be historical romance, has the haze of distance or a far perspective, in which the disagreeable details are lost. It tends to worship heroism, to portray its characters as impossibly virtuous and beautiful or sentimentally wicked and homely. As a result, emotion becomes over-emphasized, characters become types, and the purpose of the novel comes to be to make the reader forget the cares and duties of life. The realistic novels, however, such as those of Henry James, face life squarely. In the words of William Dean Howells, they require the reader "to be man enough to cope with the question itself; not solving it for him by a marriage or a murder, and not spoon-victualling him with a moral minced small and then thinned with milk and water, and familiarly flavored with sentimentality or religiosity."\(^1\)

Carlyle noted the extremes into which romance was falling in the middle of the last century, and foretold the change which came years later, when he wrote, "Were it not reasonable to prophesy that this exceeding great multitude of novel-writers and such like must, in a new generation, gradually do one of two

\(^1\)Howells, CF, 120.
things: either retire into the nurseries, and work for the children, minors, and semi-fatuous persons of both sexes, or else, what were far better, sweep their novel-fabric into the dustcart, and betake themselves with such faculty as they have to understand and record what is true, of which surely there is, and will forever be, a whole infinitude unknown to us of infinite importance to us? Poetry, it will more and more come to be understood, is nothing but higher knowledge; and the only genuine Romance (for grown persons), Reality."^2

It must not be inferred that realism and romanticism are entirely incompatible. Many romances, such as those found in the writings of Defoe and Scott, have a life-likeness, or verisimilitude, gained through the inclusion of the commonplace and the minute, which entitles these works to be called realistic. The reverse is also true.

Closely allied to romanticism is sentimentalism. In fact, sentimentalism is generally considered to be a characteristic weakness of romantic fiction, and as such it becomes anathema to realistic writing. Sentimentalism, emphasizing the petty virtues and vices, usually promotes or accompanies the tendency to moralize. Bliss Perry illustrates the difference between these two types by an example from the art of painting, when he puts the "French painters in the days of Louis XV, men like Watteau, Fragonard, Van Loo, with their charming artificiality, their delicate and impossible combinations of Cupids and foun-

^2Howells, CF, 102-103.
tains and lawn-parties, over against the Dutchmen who were painting, as honestly as they knew how, what Ruskin superciliously calls 'fat cattle and ditchwater'. [3] He notes the same contrast in poetry between "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan", or between Rossetti's "Sister Helen" and Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi", etc.

Another element apposite to romanticism but opposite to realism is idealism, which has been called "the 'effort to realize the highest type of any natural object by eliminating all its imperfect elements, — representing nature as she might be." [4] Realism, on the other hand, — true realism — represents nature, whether it be human, animal, or physical nature, as it is, good or bad. Thus one does not find in real life horses like those in Regnault's painting of "Automedon taming the Horses of Ulysses", nor does one meet in the flesh a mother like Raphael's Sistine Madonna. For these are apotheosized portrayals, illumined by "the light that never was on sea or land". The realist does not idealize his characters, be they on canvas or paper; he presents the actual, the earthy.

A little less incompatible are realism and imagination. To be sure, imagination is an essential element in romantic writing, as in idealism, but some pure products of the imagination are very realistic. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, although based upon an actual incident, is almost wholly imaginative; yet it has the verisimilitude that is the essence of realism. The

[4] Ibid., 211.
same is true of his Moll Flanders. A more pertinent example is Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, which he wrote at twenty-one without ever having seen a battle. Nevertheless, it is a masterpiece of realistic writing and at the same time an imaginative tour de force. Imagination enters into the finest realism, but it is not so important there as in the romantic idealization mentioned above, where it becomes indispensable.

A wide-spread conception of realism persists in linking this type of writing with the copying of facts. To people enamoured of this idea, the realist is a photographer, indefatigably aiming his camera at each character and every event which he wishes to describe, and piecing together the innumerable resulting snapshots to form a complete whole. Particular adherents of the photographic conception of realism are those morbid writers who create ugly, immoral, inartistic works. Charged with viciousness, profanity, or merely morbidity, they slyly reply, "How can I help it? I'm a realist, and merely turn the lens upon life. I cannot be held responsible for what the camera records; it's not my fault, but life's." Others prefer to consider realism as a transcript of life, the result of fastidious note-taking, and "you cannot take too many notes," declares Henry James.  

Although fact may enter into realism, the finest realistic writing of necessity cannot depict actuality. Perhaps it is true that "the camera never lies", but the author is not and

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5 Perry, SPF, 223.
cannot be a camera. As Mr. Perry explains, "However faithfully he may attempt to copy the facts before him, some of them will escape him. All unconsciously he selects, modifies, adjusts; the camera has a greater fidelity, a more perfect impartiality, than the man; and yet somehow the man's work is better than the camera's. In other words, the subjective element, which enters necessarily into every product of man's artistic effort, however persistently the artist tries to exclude it, is precisely the element that gives the highest value to art, that gives it enduring significance as the record of the human spirit." Excellent fiction has resulted from the attempted copying of facts, but the greatest realistic work has received deliberate subjective treatment.

The fact that such a critic as Harry Hartwick considers Crane a naturalist suggests the close parallelism between realism and naturalism. Both are based on the naturalistic philosophy of a scientific universe struggling for existence. Crane certainly reflects this concept, with mere man considered a helpless animal driven by instinct and an arbitrary fate. In this respect he is very similar to Flaubert and Dreiser, and perhaps Zola, who termed himself a naturalist. But he is unlike them in the ultimate basis of his work, and although he wrote much of Bowery toughs, wars, corpses, and morbid catastrophes of one kind or another, the effect upon the reader is not the same as that which results from the reading of Dreiser.

6Perry, SFF, 227.
or Flaubert. William Dean Howells quotes Senor Valdes to this effect: "'No one can rise from the perusal of a naturalistic book...without a vivid desire to escape' from the wretched world depicted in it, 'and a purpose, more or less vague, of helping to better the lot and morally elevate the abject beings who figure in it.'"

Probably the clearest distinction between naturalism and realism is drawn by Stuart Sherman, who insists that Dreiser is properly a naturalist. Of the realistic novel and the naturalistic novel Mr. Sherman declares, "Both are representations of the life of man in contemporary or nearly contemporary society, and both are presumably composed of materials within the experience and observation of the author. But the realistic novel is a representation based upon a theory of human conduct. If the theory of human conduct is adequate, the representation constitutes an addition to literature and to social history. A naturalistic novel is a representation based upon a theory of animal behavior. Since a theory of animal behavior can never be an adequate basis for a representation of the life of man in contemporary society, such a representation is an artistic blunder."

However naturalistic may have been Stephen Crane's philosophy — of which more later —, his fiction was always based on a theory of human conduct. His soldiers, louts, or harlots, however mean, are still human beings with souls, far removed from the automatons of genuinely naturalistic novels.

7 Howells, CF, 60.
8 Sherman, OCL, 101.
Arriving at a comparison of realism and truth, we might safely dismiss these two with the single adjective, synonymous. A more thorough treatment, however, would probably call truth the shibboleth of realistic fiction. Even this indication of difference is slight, nevertheless, for fiction and truth are popularly conceived to be as far removed from one another as the poles. In spite of this conception, truth is ubiquitously revealed in realistic writing. We have seen that it necessarily cannot be truth of a factual nature because of the subjective element; no detail in fiction, however accurately written, can have the exactness of a statistical datum. The basic truth in realistic fiction is a truth to life at large, the truth that creates in the mind of the reader a sound and thorough understanding of what the author presents, the truth that is not selective.

It is the truth that Howells meant when he wrote, "The romantic spirit worshipped genius, worshipped heroism, but at its best, in such a man as Victor Hugo, this spirit recognized the supreme claim of the lowest humanity. Its error was to idealize the victims of society, to paint them impossibly virtuous and beautiful; but truth, which has succeeded to the highest mission of romance, paints these victims as they are, and bids the world consider them not because they are beautiful and virtuous, but because they are ugly and vicious, cruel, filthy, and only not altogether loathsome because the divine can never wholly die out of the human. The truth does not find these
victims among the poor alone, among the hungry, the houseless, the ragged; but it also finds them among the rich, cursed with the aimlessness, the satiety, the despair of wealth, wasting their lives in a fool's paradise of shows and semblances, with nothing real but the misery that comes of insincerity and selfishness."

He pleads for "democracy in literature", which "wishes to know and to tell the truth, confident that consolation and delight are there; it does not care to paint the marvellous and impossible for the vulgar many, or to sentimentalize and falsify the actual for the vulgar few. Men are more like than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity. Neither arts, nor letters, nor sciences, except as they somehow, clearly or obscurely, tend to make the race better and kinder, are to be regarded as serious interests; they are all lower than the rudest crafts that feed and house and clothe, for except they do this office they are idle; and they cannot do this except from and through the truth."¹⁰

Truth, then, is the source and medium of democracy, and the criterion of realism, in literature. It is the element that produces the effect of verisimilitude, probability, or merely plausibility in the finished piece. Of greater importance than any other single factor in realism is truth.

⁹ Howells, CF, 185-186.  
¹⁰ Ibid., 187-188.
The subject matter of realistic fiction was suggested when it was stated that the truth is not selective. It is commonly believed, however, that the realistic writer does deliberately choose a certain type of material. This belief arises principally from a consideration of that branch or phase of realism that is properly called naturalism, which, though realistic in method, has a different philosophical basis and a propensity toward unpleasant material.

Another popular conception of realism has it choosing only the most ordinary subject matter. There are so many realistic pieces written about the humdrum routine incidents of everyday life that such matters might appear to be the only fodder in the stables of realism. An emphasis upon the commonplace is not altogether improper, however, for, as Bliss Perry insists, "In 'the everyday life of all' there are a hundred chances to one that the horse does not run away, that the house does not burn down, that the long-lost will does not tumble out of the secret drawer. Therefore, as Mr. Howells has triumphantly argued, fiction should not concern itself with the hundredth chance, but with the ninety-nine."\(^\text{11}\)

Although genuine realism does not avoid the commonplace, as romantic and idealistic fiction tend to do, neither does it make deliberate choice of the ordinary or the unpleasant, as naturalistic fiction tends to do. Probably the most inclusive, and exclusive, definition for our purposes is Mr. Perry's:

\(^\text{11}\)Perry, SPF, 225.
"Realistic fiction is that which does not shrink from the commonplace (although art dreads the commonplace) or from the unpleasant (although the aim of art is to give pleasure) in its effort to depict things as they are, life as it is."\(^\text{12}\) It might be inferred from these words that realistic fiction is not art (and some critics above and beyond \textit{hoi polloi} would concur with such an inference), but obviously Mr. Perry did not imply as much. It is evident that he considers great realistic fiction art, but art expanded over a broader (if not a higher) plane — art liberated.

It was stated above that Stephen Crane's work reflects a philosophy of naturalism, which developed with the growth of science, beginning around 1500. "According to science, life does not build up to anything, since Nature has no values or sense of direction. Existence is a series of brief sketches, acted with violence and novelty, but leading to nothing. There is no continuity, no story, only the ceaseless parade of anonymous characters who walk in and out of the play without cues or meaning, after the kaleidoscopic fashion of events in a tabloid newspaper. It is a mongrel flux of atoms, tossed about by storms of Nature, rising and fading in beautiful but senseless circles."\(^\text{13}\)

Crane never expressed definitely his concept of nature, but if he had, it certainly would have included this scientific

\(^\text{12}\) Perry, SPF, 229.
\(^\text{13}\) Hartwick, FAF, 31.
attitude, and might well have accorded with these words of Will Durant: "All nature is rhythmical, from the pulsations of heat to the vibrations of violin strings; from the undulations of light, heat and sound to the tides of the sea; from the periodicities of sex to the periodicities of planets and comets and stars; from the alternation of night and day to the succession of the seasons, and perhaps to the rhythms of the climactic change; from the oscillations of molecules to the rise and fall of nations and the birth and death of stars."  

Indeed, one of Crane's brilliant free verse poems reveals a picture of the world that is in full agreement with this scientific view. Says he,

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

14 Durant, SOP, 397-398.
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing."

With this naturalistic conception of the world as a rudderless ship, Crane wrote his dramatic stories, stories marked by action and atavism. Even his single volume of non-fiction is called *Great Battles of the World*, in which he describes with his customary vigor eight conflicts and campaigns chosen, not so much for their decisiveness, as for their picturesque and dramatic qualities.

In spite of this note of futility, however, he does not evince the passive fatalism adopted by so many of those imbued with the general philosophy of naturalism. Contrariwise, rather than submit weakly to the inevitable, he bids defiance to fate and the malevolent elements of nature, but reserves always a genuine respect for God. Such a reverence might be expected when one realizes that Stephen Crane was the son of a Methodist minister and the grandson of a Methodist bishop. It must be remembered, nevertheless, that he was the fourteenth and last child of the family, a person far from robust, and an artist (Carl Van Doren and Edward Garnett have called him a genius). As such, he was in a sense an unnatural offspring, and this fact, evidently, plus his naturalistic philosophical proclivities, has led no less a student of Crane than Thomas
Beer to call him an atheist. Crane's defiance, as well as a possible suggestion of atheism, is seen in the poem that begins,

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

The God he mentions here is not the true God, but the god of nature, of which Crane was always contemptuous. The Infinite is something beyond thunder and lightning, as he clearly shows, something at once far more puissant and far more gentle.

"The livid lightnings flashed in the clouds;
The leaden thunders crashed.
A worshipper raised his arm.
'Hearken! Hearken! the voice of God!'
'Not so,' said a man.
'The voice of God whispers in the heart
'So softly
'That the soul pauses,

15 Beer, MD, 182.
Making no noise,
And strives for these melodies,
Distant, sighing, like faintest breath,
And all the being is still to hear."

Surely this could not be the work of one who denies the existence of a God! No more could this, which mounts rapidly to a dynamic climax like so many of his other pieces:

"A spirit sped
Through spaces of night;
And as he sped, he called,
'God! God!'
He went through valleys
Of black death-slime,
Ever calling,
'God! God!'
Their echoes
From crevice and cavern
Mocked him:
'God! God! God!'
Fleetly into the plains of space
He went, ever calling,
'God! God!'
Eventually, then he screamed,
Mad in denial
'Ah, there is no God!'
A swift hand,
A sword from the sky,
Smote him,
And he was dead."

Here we see an almost puerile faith in God, like that found in the Old Testament stories, and very similar to that portrayed in Chaucer's *Man of Lawe's Tale*, in which the perjurer against the pious Constance also receives a dire and sudden punishment, as

"An hand hym smoot upon the nekke-boon,
That doun he fil atones as a stoon."

Crane was certainly a believer, though not a churchman. We even find him ridiculing orthodox worship in a few more poignant lines of verse:

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

Yet Crane, though quiet, mild mannered, and slow of speech, was a fighter, one who saw a continuous ebb and flow everywhere. A lover of conflicts and battles of all kinds, he believed existence itself to be a struggle -- as indeed it was for him -- and consequently his characters, if the shadowy,
misty, often nameless persons in his stories can be called characters, are forever waging battles, whether they be the bona fide conflicts of war, the futile fisticuffs of street urchins, or the mundane maneuvers of a housewife in her kitchen.

Who but Crane, for instance, could depict thus the commonplace activities of an old lady's housekeeping: "In a fourth-storey room of the red-and-black tenement she was trudging on a journey. In her arms she bore pots and pans, and sometimes a broom and dust-pan. She wielded them like weapons. Their weight seemed to have bended her back and crooked her arms until she walked with difficulty. Often she plunged her hands into water at a sink. She splashed about, the dwindled muscles working to and fro under the loose skin of her arms. She came from the sink streaming and bedraggled as if she had crossed a flooded river.

"There was the flurry of a battle in this room. Through the clouded dust or steam one could see the thin figure dealing mighty blows. Always her way seemed beset. Her broom was continually poised, lance-wise, at dust demons. There came clashings and clangings as she strove with her tireless foes.

"It was a picture of indomitable courage. And as she went on her way her voice was often raised in a long cry, a strange war-chant, a shout of battle and defiance, that rose and fell in harsh screams, and exasperated the ears of the man with the red mottled face [in the adjoining tenement]."
'Should I be car-reed tew th' skies
0-on flow'ry be-eds of ee-ease —'

"Finally she halted for a moment. Going to the window, she sat down and mopped her face with her apron. It was a lull, a moment of respite. Still it could be seen that she even then was planning skirmishes, charges, campaigns. She gazed thoughtfully about the room and noted the strength and position of her enemies. She was very alert."

The capacity for seeing conflict, or motion at least, everywhere, aided Crane in the production of magnificent personifications, which constitute the bulk of his figures of speech. As often as not, on the other hand, living things become through simile or metaphor the most commonplace objects. Notice the racing effect achieved by these sentences from several of his works:

"The following throng [of soldiers] went whirling around the flank. Here and there were officers carried along on the stream like exasperated chips."

"A small procession of wounded men were going drearily toward the rear. It was a flow of blood from the torn body of the brigade."

"The Foundling [a sinking ship] was soundly thrashed by the waves for loitering, while the captain and the engineers fought the obstinate machinery."

"A man and a dog came from the laurel thickets of the valley where the white brook brawled with the rocks."
A drowned man "had fought a battle with his immense rubber boots and had been conquered."

"Down on the wet sand stood a girl being wooed by the breakers."

"He was poking holes in the sand with a discontented cane."

Here we have an officer, wounded in the right arm, trying to sheath his sword with his left hand: "To sheath a sword held by the left hand, at the middle of the blade, in a scabbard hung at the left hip, is a feat worthy of a sawdust ring. This wounded officer engaged in a desperate struggle with the sword and the wobbling scabbard, and during the time of it he breathed like a wrestler."

The efforts of a tiny child to drag an even tinier dog up a flight of stairs is another 'battle': "The child redoubled his exertions. They had a battle on the stairs. The child was victorious because he was completely absorbed in his purpose, and because the dog was very small."

Even shadows fight with each other: "The yellow gaslight that came with an effect of difficulty through the dust-stained windows on either side of the door gave strange hues to the faces and forms of the three women who stood gabbling in the hallway of the tenement. They made rapid gestures, and in the background their enormous shadows mingled in terrific conflict."

Thus wagons, cities, and railroad engines become roaring monsters or frightened animals, while at the same time
soldiers become "bundles" lying around a camp fire or "a flow of blood from the torn body of the brigade."

Crane's philosophy may have been formed partly from his reading, which, though limited, included Tolstoy, Zola, Kipling, Henry James, Anatole France, George Moore, and Hardy. Of stronger influence, it may be argued with impunity, was his own varied experience. He was born on November 1, 1871, at Newark, New Jersey, of pious Methodist parents. His father was a mild-mannered minister, while his mother was a capable crusader for righteousness in her own right. For her, piety was more than a frock coat and a mournful expression to be worn on Sundays.

Max Herzberg says of her, "Apparently the chief article of her code was stoicism in the face of all difficulties and troubles; and if Crane later had any particular creed, that was it."

When her husband died, she supported herself and the younger children by writing articles for Methodist papers and by attending and reporting religious meetings for the New York Tribune and the Philadelphia Press. She was a woman of intense pride and considerable oral power, who spoke in deep slow tones at prayer meetings and argued earnestly with her dubious sons in behalf of hell, eternal damnation, salvation, and other fundamental religious concepts.

If he did not adopt or retain the orthodox creed of his mother, young Stephen did acquire from her an early and lasting

16Herzberg, Preface to The Red Badge of Courage, New York: Appleton, 1925.
interest in words. His eldest brother, Townley, was a cub reporter on the Newark Advertiser, and frequently asked his mother how to spell adjectives in his articles. As a consequence, baby Stephen's first recorded question was, "Ma, how do you spell '0'"? At fourteen he produced an impromptu essay using properly such words as "pyrotechnic" and "irascible", and is credited with the invention of a verb "higgle", meaning to behave in the manner of a school teacher. His preparatory education was obtained at Pennington Seminary and the Hudson River Institute at Claverack, New York. The latter institution was a semi-military school, where young Crane gained his earliest acquaintance with drill tactics and regimental maneuvers. Although he himself was a veritable dolt on the parade ground, he gained some practical experience which was to be of value in the writing of The Red Badge of Courage.

His only other major interest in early years (besides words) was baseball. Before he had left his home at Asbury Park for preparatory school he had already acquired a reputation as one who could catch barehanded any ball pitched to him. At fifteen he wrote to a sixteen year old friend in Chicago that he had decided to become a professional ball player. At the insistence of his mother and older brother, however, he completed his secondary education and struggled through two seasons at Lafayette College and a year at Syracuse University.

17 Beer, SC, 38.
Still his interest centered upon words and baseball. Clarence N. Goodwin, his roommate at Syracuse, gives an interesting picture of Crane at this period:

"He somehow managed to combine perfect poise and assurance with a very gentle and diffident way of speaking. He confessed afterwards that he had had some anxiety to know what I was like, and to have found reassurance in learning that the somewhat overlarge pipe which was near at hand was in practical use and not merely an ornament.

"He soon proved himself to be unstudious, brilliant, volatile, entertaining, and giftedly profane. He was at that time in years about nineteen and in worldly experience about eighty-seven. . . .

"He wrote short stories in a round beautiful hand, but I think they were quite generally rejected. He had a keen sense of the dramatic, and his countenance usually displayed an amused satirical, but kindly grin. His keen mind instantly caught the absurd, bizarre, or ridiculous aspect of any incident, and he would draw out an account of it in his own entertaining fashion. . . .

"He saw into and through the conceits, hypocrisies, weaknesses, and selfishness of mankind, but continued to smile with amusement and without bitterness."¹⁸

Indeed, disregarding his eyes, Stephen Crane's smile was

¹⁸ Follett, Second Twenty-Eight Years, Bookman, 68, 532-537.
probably his most unusual characteristic. He almost never
laughed, but this smile was generally present, at least in his
younger and healthier years. He was small and slight of build,
with a prominent nose, a generous and sensitive mouth, a sallow
complexion, and light straight hair. All who knew him, however,
mention particularly his eyes, which were grey and deeply set.
To some they were the eyes of a genius; to others the eyes of a
man who knew that his time was short upon the earth; but all re-
mark upon their striking quality.

It was a combination of his picturesque appearance, his
frank realistic writing, and his rather erratic ways that led
to the development of what is generally called "the genius
myth" or "the Crane legend", according to which he was of ille-
gitimate birth, had an illegitimate child, was a drunkard, a
dope addict, a jailbird, and anything else that is immoral or
extra-legal. To be sure, Crane smoked almost incessantly,
drank often, swore freely at will, and loaned money to anyone
who asked for it. The fact that the borrower might be a gam-
bler or a prostitute meant little or nothing to him if he had
once been introduced. The unpleasant episode which brought him
into antagonism with the New York police was only more fuel for
the insatiable flames of this wild fable. Apparently Crane was
present when a harlot threw herself upon the head of a procurer
whom the enraged populace were kicking. At the arrival of the
police the woman, shrieking against the brutality of the tor-
mentors, was arrested for swearing. Crane, in chivalrous and
passionate defiance of bigoted social convention, went to her
defence, alleging that she had been unjustly arrested. Then
again, people thought that [Maggie: A Girl of the Streets], his
earliest and most unconventional work, was autobiographical.
Those who knew him best, nevertheless, declare emphatically
that Stephen Crane was thoroughly honest, upright, and gentle-
manly in speech and action; he was intensely earnest, but never
contemptuous or indignant.

It is interesting, in connection with his notorious
powers of profanity, to note the swearing in Crane's stories.
After his first novel, he rarely included any cursing in his
writing, gaining his effect usually by merely a lurid state-
ment of the fact of swearing. A few selected examples will best
show his method:

"For the unconscious and cheerful sentry at the door was
swearing away in flaming sentences, heaping one gorgeous oath
upon another, making a conflagration of his description of his
troop horse."

"He swore a complicated oath at himself."

"The youth's reply was an outburst of crimson oaths."

"He waited, immovable and watchful, while the garrulous
'Frisco Kid expended two and a half lexicons on the middle
Mexican."

"He had continued to curse, but it was now with the air
of a man who was using his last box of oaths."

"The lieutenant, returning from a tour after a bandage,
produced from a hidden receptacle of his mind new and portentous oaths suited to the emergency."

"Upon the instant he pounced forward, and began to swear, unreeling great English oaths as thick as ropes, and lashing the faces of the Mexicans with them."

Resorting here again to brilliant figures of speech, Crane makes his characters use curses as they would use ropes or cartridges, and the oaths themselves become deadly weapons or searing flames extraordinarily real without offending the most sensitive reader.

After leaving college, Crane worked first in a mercantile house; then a year as a reporter for the New York Tribune; and finally a period with the Newark Morning Times. The reporter succumbed to the artist, however, and he was a failure as far as the newspapers were concerned. If he covered a fire, instead of reporting "who", "what", "when", "where", and "why", he would hand in an impression of "impatient horses kicking 'grey ice of the gutter into silvery angles that hurtled and clicked on frozen stone'....Nor could a city editor accept an interview with a prominent alderman when that dignitary, under charges of corruption, 'sat like a rural soup tureen in his chair and said, "Aw!" sadly whenever ash from his cigar bounced on his vest of blood and black.'"\(^{19}\)

Nevertheless, it was during this reportorial era that

\(^{19}\) Beer, SC, 82.
Stephen Crane met Hamlin Garland. It was in July, 1891, that young Crane went to interview Mr. Garland when the latter was lecturing in New Jersey. They met several times after that to discuss their mutual enthusiasm, baseball, and then drifted apart.

In the ensuing interim Crane became a free lance in New York; there followed dark days when he must have felt like the merest bit of disengaged cargo, bumping about in the black hold of this rudderless vessel of a world. It was at this time that young Stephen produced *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the vivid story of a tenemental Irish family in New York's Bowery. This bold tale, to a generation nourished upon *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, was emetic in effect, or would have been if any publisher had accepted it. But the manuscript was universally rejected, and Crane was compelled to borrow a thousand dollars in order personally to have it published, under the name, Johnston Smith. Hamlin Garland, then in New York, received a copy of the book, recognized the style, and sent immediately for Crane. The embryo author, at this time, was ekeing out a meager existence, and living in the colony of struggling New York artists, whom he affectionately called, "Indians".

The novel, *Maggie*, was a failure financially, but Garland brought it to the attention of William Dean Howells, who received it with great enthusiasm. Howells was an ardent realist, whom we have already seen pleading for democracy in literature, which is achieved through adherence to truth. At the
same time we find him championing Americanism in American literature, as he writes, "For our novelists to try to write Americanly, from any motive, would be a dismal error, but being born Americans, I would have them use 'Americanisms' whenever these serve their turn; and when their characters speak, I should like to hear them speak true American, with all the varying Tennessean, Philadelphian, Bostonian, and New York accents. If we bother ourselves to write what the critics imagine to be 'English', we shall be priggish and artificial, and still more so if we make our Americans talk 'English'. There is also this serious disadvantage about 'English', that if we wrote the best 'English' in the world, probably the English themselves would not know it, or, if they did, certainly would not own it."20

Is it any wonder that Howells welcomed Maggie with open arms? Here were "Americanisms" without stint; here was an author who put New York accents and idioms into the mouths of his New York characters, who were drawn in simple but most graphic terms, without a trace of sentimental glamour.

Unfortunately, William Dean Howells was but one in a million.

The next year Crane, in the face of bitter disappointment, and without ever having seen a battle, drew off The Red Badge of Courage, the brilliant clinical study of a young soldier in the Battle of Chancellorsville. The almost destitute

20 Howells, CF, 137-138.
author had not even the requisite thirty dollars to pay for the typing of the manuscript, but redeemed half of it for fifteen dollars. These pages he showed to Hamlin Garland, who immediately ransomed the rest of the story and presented both the author and his masterpiece to Irving Bacheller and Ripley Hitchcock. The former purchased the syndicate rights for one hundred dollars, while the latter bought the book rights for Appleton and Company. The Red Badge of Courage, first as a serial in the newspapers, and then in a single volume, was an instantaneous success.

For Crane the struggle had been won. We later find him saying of his works as a whole, and especially of this epoch, "I decided that the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist, and most of my prose writings have been towards the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism. Tolstoi is the writer I admire most of all. I've been a free lance during most of the time I have been doing literary work, writing stories and articles about anything under heaven that seemed to possess interest, and selling them wherever I could. It was hopeless work. Of all human lots for a person of sensibility that of an obscure free lance in literature or journalism is, I think, the most discouraging. It was during this period that I wrote The Red Badge of Courage. It was an effort born of pain -- despair, almost; and I believe that this made it a better piece of literature than it otherwise would have been. It seems a pity that art should be a
child of pain, and yet I think it is. Of course, we have fine writers who are prosperous and contented, but in my opinion their work would be greater if this were not so. It lacks the sting it would have if written under the spur of a great need."  

Surely the fate of The Red Badge of Courage, which appeared in 1895, was far different from that of poor Maggie, three years earlier. For eleven hundred copies of the latter he had paid eight hundred and sixty-nine dollars, of which it was later estimated that seven hundred was clear profit for the printer. Between this initial effort and his magnum opus came numerous stories, notably George's Mother, another small novel, and The Blue Hotel, one of the most vivid stories written by any American.

In the same year as The Red Badge came his first volume of poems, called The Black Riders and Other Lines, which he dedicated to his good friend, Hamlin Garland. Omar Khayyam might have pleased those liberated hedonists whom Longfellow's stuff could no longer satisfy, but these new, cryptic, unrhymed, satiric verses pleased no one. The general conclusion was that Crane was mad. Mad or not, he was certainly made, and in spite of unfavorable reviews Crane lived happily and peacefully at the home of his brother Edmund at Hartwood, in Sullivan County, New York. Here he took long jaunts through the woods on foot or

saddle, usually in the company of at least one dog, and wrote such stories as "Four Men in a Cave", "The Mesmeric Mountain", "A Tent in Agony", and "The Snake", which are essentially autobiographical.

Immediately upon his success with The Red Badge he had been engaged to take a trip through the Southwest and write his impressions for the newspapers. Numerous glimpses into his experiences on this journey are found among his short stories, including "A Man and Some Others", "The Five White Mice", "The Wise Men", and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky".

Upon his return to New York he was wined and dined and feted by all and sundry. Elbert Hubbard gave a dinner in his honor, and the two men became great friends. Crane went to East Aurora, where he was welcomed as a genuine Roycroftian rather than just another visitor, and was ever afterward considered "the Prince of the Great Men who had visited there."

Hubbard, in the face of the cancellation of subscriptions by enraged readers of his Philistine, insisted upon adorning the covers of his publication with Crane's vitriolic outpourings in verse, such as,

"You tell me this is God?
I tell you it is a Printed List,
A Burning Candle and an Ass."

But eventually the jibes and jeers of the inimical newspaper

22Shay, EHEA, 363.
paragraphers, and the burlesquing of his unique literary style, plus the annoyances of the people in general, and very likely the terrifying growth of "the Crane legend", as well, caused him to move to England. It has been said that the genius of Crane, who wrote with little advice or encouragement, was never appreciated by America; he was accepted because of his popularity in England, and because the subject of The Red Badge of Courage was the American Civil War.

In early 1896 he had joined a filibustering expedition to Cuba, sailing in the leaky old vessel, Commodore. Off the coast of Florida the ship sank, and Crane, together with the captain, the cook, and an oiler from the crew, finally reached land in a ten-foot dinghy, only to have the oiler drown in the surf when the boat overturned. The story of this voyage, which for stark realism and drama puts the tale of Captain Bligh's famous adventure to shame, is told by Crane in "The Open Boat", which is considered his greatest short story. He himself, who had never been robust, seemed almost too haggard to have endured this struggle for survival with the raging sea, and the torments he suffered, together with a fever which followed, hastened his death.

But he had always been an active man, and his zest for adventure was unshaken. He had an hypersensitivity to objects, colors, and sensations, which, perhaps heightened by the disease that eventually killed him, "left him as elaborately alive
as an exposed nerve." As a result he seized every opportunity that presented itself to view new objects and colors and to feel new sensations. Van Wyck Brooks recounts an incident which clearly bears out this point:

"My friend H—, who fought in the Spanish-American War, described to me a moment which he witnessed in the life of Stephen Crane. They were together at the Battle of Guantanamo, where Crane was acting as a correspondent. An unusually vicious fire was in progress, directed by the Spaniards against an earthwork behind which the American troops were huddled. Suddenly Crane, who was incapable of bravado, let himself quietly over the redoubt, lighted a cigarette, stood for a few moments with his arms at his sides, while the bullets hissed past him into the mud, then as quietly climbed back over the redoubt and strolled away. It was impossible, H— said, to question the insouciance of this act: Crane's bearing was that of a somnambulist. He appeared to be, as it were, detached from himself, possessed by an irresistible impulse to register, in his body, certain sensations. The curiosity of the artist, who wishes to know, was so completely in the ascendant as to inhibit the fundamental instincts of the man.

"For to the pure artist, as countless incidents show, physical existence is not an end but a means, something that has value not because it is, but rather because, having it, one

23 Hartwick, FAF, 43.
can feel and express it."^{24}

His stay in England was interrupted, then, by his work in Cuba, as well as by another journalistic enterprise in Greece, when the Greeks and the Turks were in conflict. And with all his wandering it seems that every country and each experience of significance is immortalized in his writings.

It was while he was in Athens that Crane married Miss Cora Taylor, whom he had originally met in Jacksonville, Florida. They returned to England and occupied a villa called Ravensbrook at Oxted in Surrey. He failed to take Oscar Wilde seriously and was snubbed overtly by George Meredith, but became a close friend and frequent visitor of Joseph Conrad. He had no children, but loved youngsters, and used to sit and watch the little Conrad infant for hours. We find him writing this letter to his young namesake, the son of his brother Edmund:

"My dear Stephen:

I need not say to you that I welcomed your advent with joy. You and I will struggle on with the name together and do as best we may. In the meantime, I would remind you to grow up, as much as possible, like your gentle, kindly, lovable father, and please do not repeat the vices and mistakes of Your devoted uncle,

Stephen Crane"^{25}

^{24}Brooks, SIC, 156-157.

He even wrote a volume of short stories, called Whilomville Stories. They are tales written about little children, primarily for grownups, and reveal a remarkable knowledge of child psychology, with the result that Crane here reflects the same realism he exhibited in his war stories. In this book he describes playful antics instead of fighting tactics, and the keynote is humor instead of horror, but he achieves the same telling effect. "For the first time since Mark Twain’s demigod floated with his lazy slave on the Mississippi, the national child stepped forward and yelped among the maples and swinging gates of a little town, unmoral, unadorned, and far from sweet."26

In January, 1898, Stephen and Cora Crane moved into Brede Place, an old fourteenth century semi-ruined manor. This change was made at the suggestion of Stephen’s friend, Edward Garnett, who mentioned the old structure as a place less accessible to the friends, acquaintances, and even total strangers who overran the Crane home at Oxted. Here Crane could work in his red study, undisturbed unless by the scratching of Sponge, Flannel, or Powder Puff at the door; and here he could ride on Hengist or Horsa down English lanes, musing upon the plot of a new story, or upon the length of life remaining to him. For he knew his time was not long. When he was moving into Brede Place he told Karl Harriman that he (Crane) would not live beyond thirty. "I never thought I’d live long," he said, "and I’m not

26 Beer, 30, 237.
much account any more."

Although he was "not much account", he completed another novel, Active Service, and began The O'Ruddy, which was left unfinished. In 1898 another volume of verse appeared, entitled War Is Kind, in which the first poem, of the same title, begins,

"Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands towards the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind."

But in the 1890's irony was little understood, less used, and liked not at all, so that a Bostonian was compelled to declare, "Mr. Crane's sense of humour is of a mystifying kind. He deliberately shows us the horrors of war and then entitles his work 'War Is Kind.'"

So many of Crane's traits, acts, and works were "of a mystifying kind!" He has been called both a martyr to his artist's temperament and a victim of his environment. There is little difference; America (and England, as well) could not truly understand him and appreciate the kind of work he was trying to do, and he certainly could not conform to the obtuse comprehensions and desiccated tastes of his readers. He attempted a popular novel in Active Service, but it failed as his attempts at popular news reporting had failed. He was unique in both his personal and literary styles, and any effort to alter either the one or...

28 Ibid., 223.
the other was doomed to failure.

As flies swarm around a honey pail, so the ravenous Ravensbrook vultures found their way to Brede Place, where they devoured Mrs. Crane's cooking and insulted Mr. Crane's servants, until Stephen thought to himself, "I must have Egyptian blood in me. Mummies rise from the tomb and come to pay me calls that last for days."29

A New Year's party in January, 1900, was the last event of importance at Brede Place. The Crane myth was in full bloom in England by now, and this harmless celebration was rumored to have been a Babylonian orgy. He steadily decreased his drinking and smoking, but was generally reported to be drinking himself to death. He decided to leave England, but as suddenly changed his mind. In March he suffered a hemorrhage, and when he rallied Mrs. Crane borrowed enough money to have him carried to Germany. There, in Badenweiler, on June 5, he died.

Having established a definition of realism in fiction, and having revealed Crane's naturalistic philosophy, with glimpses of his life to support our statements of that philosophy, it now behooves us to examine a little closer his works, to see that they are the representative realistic creations that we have been led to expect.

Truth has been mentioned as the keynote of realism, and is found only in one who is sincere. "Crane, as part of his tem-

29 Beer, SC, 222.
perament, combined a curious gentleness and chivalry with an inveterate disinclination to suppress the truth — he was almost a bigot of sincerity." 30 A letter which he wrote to an editor in Rochester tells us much: "The one thing that deeply pleases me is the fact that men of sense invariably believe me to be sincere. I know that my work does not amount to a string of dried beans — and I always calmly admit it — but I also know that I do the best that is in me without regard to praise or blame. When I was the mark for every humorist in the country, I went ahead; and now when I am the mark for only fifty percent of the humorists of the country, I go ahead; for I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision — he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition." 31

In all his work, Crane was as honest as he knew how to be; it was this dominant quality of sincerity in his make-up that made him refuse to rewrite material. If a novel like The Red Badge of Courage, or a group of tales like the Whilomville Stories, appeared first in serial form, he thought it dishonest and unfair to his readers to revise the work in any respect for book publication. Most of his work came forth full blown from his mind, and was not the product of slow and deliberate compo-

sition, as is the traditional novel or short story. As a result of this process some of his longest pieces were created whole in a few successive evenings, and The Red Badge itself was the product of but ten days of labor. To have rewritten his work would have been to destroy, or at least to mar, its original spontaneity and vigor.

For his characters and stories appeared fresh and real in his mind before he drew them out upon paper. He aimed at truthfulness and the result was the kind of writing Howells meant when he pleaded for the faithful portrayal of life in fiction, urging, "Let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their true proportions; let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language, that most Americans know — the language of unaffected people everywhere —."32 Had Crane adopted these rules as his literary code he could not have followed them more closely.

Nowhere in his works is this faithful portrayal of life more evident than in The Red Badge of Courage. Although at its

32 Howells, CF, 104.
writing he was only twenty-one, and had never witnessed a battle, Crane had studied war records and talked with war veterans. The data thus gathered were subjected to the vivifying process of his brilliant and poetic imagination, with a realistic story of war as the outcome. Old soldiers who read it were loudest in their praise of its accuracy, and Crane himself was later convinced beyond any doubt which might have remained.

When he returned from the Graeco-Turkish War he declared that The Red Badge was "all right".

"His young hero is called Henry Fleming, but so seldom is the name actually mentioned that after a first reading of the novel one is inclined to wonder if the youth had any name at all. If he seems to lack the distinct individuality of the usual novel character, however, he does have an appeal that is universal. Each reader reads himself into Henry Fleming, and sees himself on the battlefield, hoping, wondering, marching, fighting, running, bleeding, suffering, and experiencing all the other mental and physical sensations which are his. The poetry of motion so dear to Crane is manifested in the surge and flow of battle, while each isolated deed of heroism or act of cowardice is depicted in its stark simplicity and terror. Crane's uncanny photographic vision saw the glory and wonder of war, but especially he saw the havoc it wreaks, so that Edwin Markham was led to declare that "Crane, in his novel, The Red Badge of Courage, ript away the gilt and glitter that had so long curtainied the horror of war, and with a stern realism pictured for us the
bloody grime of it all."33

This passage from the end of chapter nine is typical of Crane's power of grim revelation. Henry, the new recruit, is witnessing the death throes of his friend:

"At last, they saw him stop and stand motionless. Hastening up, they perceived that his face wore an expression telling that he had at last found the place for which he had struggled. His spare figure was erect; his bloody hands were quietly at his side. He was waiting with patience for something that he had come to meet. He was at the rendezvous. They paused and stood, expectant.

"There was a silence.

"Finally, the chest of the doomed soldier began to heave with a strained motion. It increased in violence until it was as if an animal was within and was kicking and tumbling furiously to be free.

"This spectacle of gradual strangulation made the youth writhe, and once as his friend rolled his eyes, he saw something in them that made him sink wailing to the ground. He raised his voice in a last supreme call.

"'Jim—Jim—Jim—'

"The tall soldier opened his lips and spoke. He made a gesture. 'Leave me be—don't tech me—leave me be—'

"There was another silence while he waited.

"Suddenly, his form stiffened and straightened. Then it 33Herzberg, Preface to The Red Badge of Courage. New York: Appleton, 1925."
was shaken by a prolonged ague. He stared into space. To the
two watchers there was a curious and profound dignity in the
firm lines of his awful face.

"He was invaded by a creeping strangeness that slowly en-
veloped him. For a moment the tremor of his legs caused him to
dance a sort of hideous hornpipe. His arms beat wildly about
his head in expression of implike enthusiasm.

"His tall figure stretched itself to its full height.
There was a slight rending sound. Then it began to swing for-
ward, slow and straight, in the manner of a falling tree. A
swift muscular contortion made the left shoulder strike the
ground first.

"The body seemed to bounce a little way from the earth.
'God!' said the tattered soldier.

"The youth had watched, spellbound, this ceremony at the
place of meeting. His face had been twisted into an expression
of every agony he had imagined for his friend.

"He now sprang to his feet and, going closer, gazed upon
the pastelike face. The mouth was open and the teeth showed in
a laugh.

"As the flap of the blue jacket fell away from the body, he
could see that the side looked as if it had been chewed by
wolves.

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

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

Or again, we find young Fleming's comrade making a maddened attempt to save the regimental colors as the flag bearer is shot down: "The youth's friend went over the obstruction in a tumbling heap and sprang at the flag as a panther at prey. He pulled at it and, wrenching it free, swung up its red brilliancy with a mad cry of exultation even as the color bearer, gasping, lurched over in a final throe and, stiffening convulsively, turned his dead face to the ground. There was much blood upon the grass."

Psychological realism in fiction is considered one of the most modern trends of the twentieth century, and Crane is not usually thought to have been a psychological writer, as indeed he is not in the large. But although for the most part he writes objectively, depicting realistically only the surfaces of life, he is, in The Red Badge of Courage, true to the psychological core of war, just as in his Whilomville Stories he is true to the psychological core of children's complex natures. For Crane was a genuine psychologist as well as a true poet; he knew people through and through, and by the merest word or act of his characters he lays bare their innermost thoughts, just as a skilled surgeon, by a deft stroke of his scalpel, exposes the hidden tissues of the body.

The following incident, during Henry Fleming's wanderings after his flight from the front lines, reveals the boys' com-
complete process of rationalization:

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

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

Thus do we see Henry Fleming, in a series of episodic scenes, awaiting the battle, fleeing panic-stricken, wounded in the head by another fear-crazed soldier, and returning to his camp a hero. Through him, too, we smell the smoke of searing rifles, feel the throbbing pain of wounds, and see the entire ghastliness of war outlined in vivid colors. Nor was the humorous side overlooked. Crane always had a sense of humor, and such incidents as the solemn but futile exchange of letters to be sent home to relatives after the battle were soon appreciated and copied by other writers.

Let us have one more glimpse of this 'child of pain':
"The youth went again into the deep thickets. The brushed branches made a noise that drowned the sounds of cannon. He walked on, going from obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity.

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

"Near the threshold he stopped, horror-stricken at the sight of a thing.

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

"The youth gave a shriek as he confronted the thing. He was for moments turned to stone before it. He remained staring into the liquid-looking eyes. The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look. Then the youth cautiously put one hand behind him and brought it against a tree. Leaning upon this he retreated, step by step, with his face still toward the thing. He feared that if he turned his back the body might spring up and stealthily pursue him."
"The branches, pushing against him, threatened to throw him over upon it. His unguided feet, too, caught aggravatingly in brambles; and with it all he received a subtle suggestion to touch the corpse. As he thought of his hand upon it he shuddered profoundly.

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

"After a time he paused, and, breathless and panting, listened. He imagined some strange voice would come from the dead throat and squawk after him in horrible menaces.

"The trees about the portals of the chapel moved soughingly in a soft wind. A sad silence was upon the little guarding edifice."

Both British and American authors and critics have praised Crane highly. "To Zona Gale, Crane and Howells were the two earliest American writers to understand and employ realism. The service of Crane, she continued, 'in telling the truth as he saw it, without hypocrisy, without sentimentality, and with eloquent brevity, touched open many a window where had before been walls in our native fiction. Stephen Crane is the first of the moderns in story-telling.'"34

Indeed, all those who have expressed an opinion of Crane's work have been in essential agreement — all, that is, except

one, Fred L. Pattee, who declares that Crane "had no patience, no time, for collecting material. He was too eager, too much under the dominance of moods, to investigate, and his later novel, The Red Badge of Courage, which purports to be a realistic story of army life in the Civil War, is based upon a kind of manufactured realism that is the product not of observation or of gathered data, but of an excessively active imagination. When he died, though he was but thirty, he had done his work."

One or two points must be noted in connection with this adverse criticism. As a matter of fact, Stephen Crane died at twenty-eight, and if Mr. Pattee is no more accurate in his criticism than he is in his dates, his statement can be of small consequence. Furthermore, Mr. Pattee, who purports to be a literary critic, wrote nothing of any importance till after he was thirty; if Crane had sat around investigating and collecting material until that age the tree of his genius would have withered without once blossoming. Even forced as it was, it never attained full fruitage. Then again, Pattee apparently fails to realize that any realistic story must of necessity be based upon "a kind of manufactured realism". For, as our accepted definition states, realistic fiction is only an "effort to depict things as they are, life as it is"; more than that it cannot hope to be. From very early years Crane had been an acute observer of human nature; also, he had gathered ample data for an accurate background for his masterpiece; and that

35 Pattee, HALS, 398. 35A Beer, SC, 27.
his imagination could and did serve to complete the picture is the most praiseworthy feature of the entire achievement.

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is another series of episodes, but with a setting in an entirely different world. In this, his earliest piece, Crane presents a remorseless study of slum morals. His Bowery is "a world without virtue and yet one that uses the social taboo to condemn Mag — the only pure one of the lot. The story was an attack on everything that was respectable in American literature — a notable achievement in a world of shoddy romanticism." It is the account of a daughter's escape in desperation from brutality and wretchedness at home to the transient security of the streets. As one reads at the beginning of chapter five, "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud-puddle," and it might be added, by way of summary, "withered in a mud-puddle, and died in a mud-puddle."

Here again, as in most of his works, we find conflicts in great plenty. Not only do Maggie's mother and father engage regularly in drunken brawls, but also at the very outset of the story there is a wild street fight of boys. Crane had a natural dramatic sense, and Maggie, like Ben Jonson's The Alchemist, opens in the midst of a bitter quarrel, thus:

"A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row, who were circling madly about the heap and

36 Farrington, BCRA, 328.
pelting him. His infantile countenance was livid with the fury of battle. His small body was writhing in the delivery of oaths.

"'Run, Jimmie, run! Dey'll git yehs!' screamed a retreating Rum Alley child.

"'Naw', responded Jimmie with a valiant roar, 'dese mugs can't make me run.'

"Howls of renewed wrath went up from Devil's Row throats. Tattered gamins on the right made a furious assault on the gravel-heap. On their small convulsed faces shone the grins of true assassins. As they charged, they threw stones and cursed in shrill chorus.

"The little champion of Rum Alley stumbled precipitately down the other side. His coat had been torn to shreds in a scuffle, and his hat was gone. He had bruises on twenty parts of his body, and the blood was dripping from a cut in his head. His wan features looked like those of a tiny insane demon. On the ground, children from Devil's Row closed in on their antagonist. He crooked his left arm defensively about his head and fought with madness. The little boys ran to and fro, dodging, hurling stones, and swearing in barbaric trebles.

"From a window of an apartment-house that uprose from amid squat ignorant stables there leaned a curious woman. Some labourers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river, paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily over a railing and watched. Over on the
island a worm of yellow convicts came from the shadow of a grey
ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank."

Thus he not only focuses immediate attention upon the
story, but also heightens the action by the excellent use of
what the pictorial artist calls chiaroscuro, with the impassi-
vity of the onlookers contrasting brilliantly with the furious
activity of the street urchins.

But this bold bad tale, dominated by the same quality of
fatal necessity found in classic Greek tragedy (and in Crane's
own philosophy of life), was shocking to the reading public of
1892. The book's open recognition of social evils, its low-
born woman fallen from grace, its vivid impressionistic figures
of speech, and its striking 'Americanisms', achieved by the use
of profanity and Bowery 'slanguage', were decidedly not to their
taste. For even today there are "many foolish people who cannot
discriminate between the material and the treatment in art, and
think that beauty is inseparable from daintiness and pretti-
ness." Of such there were even greater numbers in 'the gay
nighties'; in fact, they constituted the majority, and there-
fore Maggie was doomed.

Of the other Crane novels, probably George's Mother is
the most outstanding. As in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, the
few characters are more typical than individual, with the re-
sult that the same anonymity and universality are here that are

37Howells, An Appreciation, Maggie and Other Stories, 135.
   New York: Knopf, 1931.
in *Maggie* and *The Red Badge*. George, who is a representative ignorant, wastrel son, and his mother, who typifies blind maternal devotion, are nevertheless based upon actual people, relations of Harvey Wickham, who was a classmate of Crane at the Hudson River Institute. This man, writing in 1926, says, "Crane transposed them to the slums, preserving only the characters—a plausible and worthless young man with an indulgent and credulous parent. The vaunted Crane realism was never of the photographic sort. Thus the only incident which really happened was George's amazing lunch—a charlotte russe and a beer." 38

Undoubtedly he had observed happenings and people corresponding closely to those he described in his book, but just as surely and by great good fortune he was not limited to what he saw and heard. So we find this fellow, George Kelcey, going from indifferent to bad, and from bad to worse, until he is finally summarily interrupted at the beginning of a brutal street brawl and summoned to the deathbed of his old broken-hearted mother.

Of all Crane's works, this is for me the most intriguing and realistic; the entire story is presented with precision and vividness, until inconsequential details become piled up with a cumulative effect that is breath-taking. In *George's Mother* there are examples of all the finest qualities in Crane's fiction—elements of realism, conflict, motion, detail, color, contrast, and magnificent figures of speech. The picture of

the drinking party, which progresses inexorably through most of two chapters, is fascinating. Chapter ten begins with the appearance of the room the next morning:

"At first the grey lights of dawn came timidly into the room, remaining near the windows, afraid to approach certain sinister corners. Finally, mellow streams of sunshine poured in, undraping the shadows to disclose the putrefaction, making pitiless revelation.... The grim truthfulness of the day showed disaster and death. After the tumults of the previous night the interior of this room resembled a decaying battlefield. The air hung heavy and stifling with the odors of tobacco, men's breaths, and beer half filling forgotten glasses. There was ruck of broken tumblers, pipes, bottles, spilled tobacco, cigar-stumps. The chairs and tables were pitched this way and that way, as after some terrible struggle. In the midst of it all lay old Bleecker, stretched upon a couch in deepest sleep, as abandoned in attitude, as motionless, as ghastly, as if it were a corpse that had been flung there."

It is in this room that George Kelcey awakens on the morning after, and we get a view of his mind at work, even as we glimpsed the cogitations of Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*:

"A pain above his eyebrows was like that from an iron clamp.

"As he lay pondering, his bodily condition created for him a bitter philosophy, and he perceived all the futility of a
red existence. He saw his life problems confronting him like granite giants, and he was no longer erect to meet them. He had made a calamitous retrogression in his war. Spectres were to him now as large as clouds.

"Inspired by the pitiless ache in his head, he was prepared to reform and live a white life. His stomach informed him that a good man was the only being who was wise. But his perception of his future was hopeless. He was aghast at the prospect of the old routine. It was impossible. He trembled before its exactions.

"Turning toward the other way, he saw that the gold portals of vice no longer enticed him. He could not hear the strains of alluring music. The beckoning sirens of drink had been killed by this pain in his head. The desires of his life suddenly lay dead like mullein-stalks. Upon reflection, he saw, therefore, that he was perfectly willing to be virtuous if somebody would come and make it easy for him."

This is the key to young Kelcey's entire nature, for his is a personality that can wish but not will, plan but not accomplish. He recognizes the futility of his "red existence", but lacks the initiative to reform and live a "white life".

The death of George's mother forms the conclusion of the novel. This scene is superbly drawn, with a wealth of detail and more of Crane's startling chiaroscuro. Even here the realism is not photographic, nevertheless, although the effect of absolute sincerity and truth is undeniably present. At the fi-
nal page we find Kelcey and the clergyman sitting near the deathbed:

"The little old woman lay still with her eyes closed. On the table at the head of the bed was a glass containing a water-like medicine. The reflected lights made a silver star on its side. The two men sat side by side, waiting. Out in the kitchen Mrs. Callahan had taken a chair by the stove and was waiting.

"Kelcey began to stare at the wall-paper. The pattern was clusters of brown roses. He felt them like hideous crabs crawling upon his brain.

"Through the doorway he saw the oil-cloth covering of the table catching a glimmer from the warm afternoon sun. The window disclosed a fair, soft sky, like blue enamel, and a fringe of chimneys and roofs, resplendent here and there. An endless roar, the eternal trample of the marching city, came mingled with vague cries. At intervals the woman out by the stove moved restlessly and coughed.

"Over the transom from the hallway came two voices.

"'Johnnie!'

"'Wot!'

"'You come right here t'me! I want yehs t'go t'd' store fer me!'

"'Ah, ma, send Sally!'

"'No, I will not! You come right here!'

"'All right, in a minnet!'"
"'Johnnie!"

"'In a minnet, I tell yeh!"

"'Johnnie — — — ! There was the sound of a heavy tread, and later a boy squealed. Suddenly the clergymen started to his feet. He rushed forward and peered. The little old woman was dead."

Even in these few brief selections from three of Crane's novels may readily be discovered all the requisite elements of realistic fiction. Surely he did not shrink from the commonplace, or from the unpleasant, and undeniably his effort was to depict things as they were, life as it was, in the time and location in which his stories took place.

Consider the last picture reproduced above. First we are made to sense the stillness in the sick room; the "little old woman" is lying quietly in bed; the two men, and Mrs. Callahan in the next room, are sitting quietly near by. All are waiting, waiting. Then our attention is focused upon the son. Through his eyes we stare at the wall paper, with its clusters of brown roses that crawl like crabs upon his brain. We, too, glance through the doorway at the oilcloth glimmering in the sunlight. Our gaze wanders on with his through the window, and we see sky, chimneys, and roofs. To our ears comes dully the "endless roar, the eternal trample" of the restless city, while each stir and every cough of the neighbor in the kitchen insists upon receiving particular notice. At such a time, and in such a situation, an ordinary mother-son argument about an errand to the store
becomes unusually impressive. Each word crashes its way into the consciousness of the young man who sits waiting inside. As the action and noise which constitute the argument increase without, the movement and sound which make manifest the life of the old patient decrease within, until the young boy's shrill squeal marks the old woman's last gasp.

In this dramatic scene there is the largess of detail which is of such importance in realistic fiction; there is the commonplace event; there is the strict adherence to truth in description and dialogue; in short, there is a sincere effort — and a fruitful one — to depict "life as it is, things as they are". The details are not all objectively portrayed; we not only view the scene with the author, but also see, hear, and feel everything that occurs, with the young man, George Kelcey. We become one with him. Likewise, we feel the ceaseless surge of life so real to Crane, in the mention of the "eternal tramping of the marching city", and we glimpse shades of brown, silver, and blue, — some of the colors which signified so much for him. Conflict, too, — that insistent, speechless actor — intrudes brusquely, yet effectively, even upon this quiet scene.

In the volume of short stories entitled The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure (1898) Crane achieved the perfection of his style. The first of this group is "The Open Boat", which some have called his finest piece of writing. The story is an accurate account of Crane's own experience when he was shipwrecked off the coast of Florida, but is not told in the first
person, and there is nothing to prove that the author himself was the correspondent mentioned in the story. There are only the four men, in a ten-foot dinghy, and the only one given a name is Billie, the oiler, who drowns in their attempt to gain the shore.

The narrative opens in the midst of their perilous voyage, and the very first sentence reveals the precariousness of their situation: "None of them knew the color of the sky." In a moment we are sitting, cramped and weary, in the tiny boat, searching with them for land, hoping with them for succor, and with them eyeing suspiciously each new wave that approaches in menacing surges. "These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small-boat navigation."

But here Crane is the pure artist, and in depicting the ironies and passions of life he is careful to maintain a subdued tone, a tone which never rises artificially above the seriousness and anxiety which the characters feel; it is what Mr. Munson calls "le ton juste."39 The picture is a desolate one, for in truth the original experience had been desolate. All through the night, while the captain lies ill in the bow, and the cook holds the fragile oar as a rudder in the stern, the oiler and the correspondent row, keeping within sight of land, but beyond the grasp of the treacherous surf: "Grey-faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden

39 Munson, SFAP, 170.
oars." The rhythm of the sea, the poetic motion which characterizes almost all of Crane's work, is strikingly apparent here. "Turn by turn, plied the leaden oars," — it can easily be scanned, and the monotonous straining to and fro of the rowers is readily revealed. To be sure, this is not a transcript of life, not actuality, not the copying of facts. The men were not machines, the oars were not constructed of lead; but they felt like lead, and the oarsmen sensed in their own movements the dull, monotonous, continuous regularity that is seen in things mechanical. The truth is in this scene, and the reader sees the truth and understands the whole experience; therefore the writing is realistic.

Munson goes on to say of "The Open Boat", the "story moves on two planes. On the physical plane it is developed by reiterated descriptions of the hugeness and might of the waves and the smallness of the boat. On the emotional plane the development proceeds by alternation, the alternation of hopefulness and despair.

"In the end I believe all who study the story will concede that it is itself wavelike in form. The reader's sympathy is firmly attached to the four men because of their utmost exertions in fighting the sea, and because of this sympathy the reader shares their suspense and is carried by hope up to the crest of an emotional wave only to tumble into the trough of despair as some new hostile element enters. Finally, in a surf of exited feelings, the story grounds on the shore of its con-
Throughout the story may be perceived the elemental struggle for life. Crane, as we have seen, went to great lengths to taste reality, and philosophically his conception of reality was stern. Unlike most men, he was not blinded by comfort, but saw human beings as castaways on this rudderless vessel of a world, fighting against tremendous odds for even the most meager existence. That the reader's conception may not coincide precisely with Crane's does not make the story any the less realistic, for each author, of necessity, must depict life as it is, things as they are, — to him. This Crane does with utmost sincerity and honesty.

Therefore the thoughts of these involuntary voyageurs, as they near the turbulent surf, are typical of Crane: "As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: 'If I am going to be drowned — if I am going to be drowned — if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the

40 Munson, SFAP, 169.
beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd.... But no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.' Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds: 'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!'

These words express the thoughts that all mankind thinks, when impotently facing the vacillating forces of nature. Yet it declares not only a bold contempt for the vagaries of "this old ninny-woman, Fate," but also the deep-rooted longing for life, the insistent clinging to the merest threads of life, that is universal, and the reader sighs with relief and gratitude upon learning that when the correspondent finally "achieved safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each particular part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from the roof, but the thud was grateful to him."

At first consideration, it might be supposed that figures of speech would tend to lessen the realism of any piece of fiction. Most of the finest similes, metaphors, and personifications are the products of the originator's imagination, or perhaps even of his fancy, and might for that reason be considered apropos to romantic fiction but not to genuine realism. The fact that figures of speech form such a large part of common, everyday conversation, however, would tend to indicate that they are not only permissible but valuable in the promulgation of information — the utterance of truth. A man is a pillar of
the church; another is a parasite, living on his relatives or friends; another is a fox, another a wolf in sheep's clothing, another a rat or a skunk. One man's fortune goes up in smoke; another's is salted away. These and dozens of other figures are glibly pronounced in daily speech, and with them goes a clear and true picture of the person or thing described.

Crane's work abounds in figures of speech (as has been mentioned above), the effect of which is invaluable in the drawing of his realistic scenes. Nowhere is this particular skill more in evidence than in the short story entitled "An Experiment in Misery". As in his other short stories, the subject matter is one in which Crane was steeped to the point of saturation, as the realistic writer is wont to be. He had wandered in the slums of New York, slept in flop-houses, and sat listlessly on park benches while the world of people flowed by. Perhaps he partook of such experiences more as experiments in sensation (of which he was particularly fond), than from necessity, but the effect upon his sensitive nature was the same. He felt and he observed, and whatever he missed in this way he imagined. So we gain a unique, yet realistic, view of New York in the eighteen-nineties in such pictures as this:

"Through the mists of the cold and storming night, the cable cars went in silent procession, great affairs shining with red and brass, moving with formidable power, calm and irresistible, dangerfule and gloomy, breaking silence only by the loud fierce cry of the gong. Two rivers of people swarmed
along the sidewalks, spattered with black mud, which made each shoe leave a scarlike impression. Overhead elevated trains with a shrill grinding of the wheels stopped at the station, which upon its leglike pillars seemed to resemble some monstrous kind of crab squatting over the street. The quick fat puffings of the engines could be heard. Down an alley there were somber curtains of purple and black, on which street lamps dully glittered like embroidered flowers.

"A saloon stood with a voracious air on a corner. A sign leaning against the front of the door-post announced 'Free hot soup to-night!' The swing doors, snapping to and fro like ravenous lips, made gratified smacks as the saloon gorged itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men came from all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition.

"Caught by the delectable sign the young man allowed himself to be swallowed."

These sentences leave more than an objective impression of the physical aspect of the streets and buildings; they also reflect the attitude of the young man in the story and the effect of his environment upon him. In other words, the picture, though not factual, is truthful. At the end of the story the changes wrought by his mean existence upon his innermost nature are made manifest in his thoughts:

"In the City Hall Park the two wanderers sat down in the little circle of benches sanctified by the traditions of their
class. They huddled in their old garments, slumbrously conscious of the hours which for them had no meaning.

"The people of the street hurrying hither and thither made a blend of black figures changing yet frieze-like. They walked in their good clothes as upon important missions, giving no gaze to the two wanderers seated upon the benches. They expressed to the young man his infinite distance from all that he valued. Social position, comfort, the pleasures of living, were unconquerable kingdoms. He felt a sudden awe.

"And in the background a multitude of buildings, of pitiless hues and sternly high, were to him emblematic of a nation forcing its regal head into the clouds, throwing no downward glances; in the sublimity of its aspirations ignoring the wretches who may flounder at its feet. The roar of the city in his ear was to him the confusion of strange tongues, babbling heedlessly; it was the clink of coin, the voice of the city's hopes which were to him no hopes.

"He confessed himself an outcast, and his eyes from under the lowered rim of his hat began to glance guiltily, wearing the criminal expression that comes with certain convictions."

Probably his war stories are those most typical of Crane's creative work. Episodes from the Civil, Spanish-American, and Graeco-Turkish conflicts are included among his vivid tales, and we find complete volumes, such as The Little Regiment, and Other Episodes of the American Civil War, and Wounds in the Rain, devoted entirely to these weird, almost bizarre, narra-
Although he depicts with his usual brilliant realism the haphazard, jolting actions of men and machines in conflict, with the fitful gunfire and the jerky advances and retreats of stumbling soldiers and jostling cannon, Crane never forgets the rhythmic ebb and flow of life in the large — the poetic motion of existence. This feeling he conveys to his reader largely through the use of repetition. Thus in "The Open Boat", the first part of the passage quoted above — "If I am going to be drowned — if I am going to be drowned — if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, etc." — appears several times before the end of the story, suggesting not only the restless surging of the sea but also the recurrent progression and retrogression of the universe.

The same effect is achieved in the story entitled "The End of the Battle", in which a group of soldiers, under the command of a sergeant, make a desperate but futile effort to withstand an enemy attack upon the old deserted house they have occupied. One by one the defenders are searched out by hostile bullets, until one man is left hanging lifeless out of the open window, while others, wounded or dead, sprawl about the room. One man, who has been shot in the throat, is lying in speechless immobility, still conscious, on the floor. The sergeant is actively engaged in the final exchange of bullets, when we read, "The man who had been shot in the throat looked at him." Then, about a page farther along, "The man who had been shot in the
throat looked up at him," and after a few more lines comes a new paragraph:

"Meantime the sergeant was reloading his rifle. His foot slipped in the blood of the man who had been shot in the throat, and the military boot made a greasy red streak on the floor."

One can almost feel the throb of the pain felt by that wounded soldier, and sense the steady ebbing of life within his body.

More repetition, suggestive of the stream-of-life element which characterizes the work of moderns like Mann, Joyce, and Mrs. Woolf, appears in another episode of war, entitled "The Upturned Face". This brief incident relates the burial, by a soldier named Timothy Lean and his superior officer, of a brother officer's body, and opens thus:

"'What will we do now?' said the adjutant, troubled and exited.

"'Bury him', said Timothy Lean.

"'The two officers looked close to their toes where lay the body of their comrade. The face was chalk-blue; gleaming eyes stared at the sky. Over the two upright figures was a windy sound of bullets, and on the top of the hill Lean's prostrate company of Spitzbergen infantry was firing measured volleys."

The two living men finally search the clothes of the dead one; they gingerly tumble him face up into the shallow grave, and having recited a few meager lines of the burial service, or-
der the two privates to shovel back the dirt they have just dug up. After but a few moments of desultory shoveling upon the feet of the corpse, one of the privates is wounded, and he and his comrade are sent to cover by the officers. Then:

"Timothy Lean filled the shovel, hesitated, and then in a movement which was like a gesture of abhorrence he flung the dirt into the grave, and as it landed it made a sound — plop! Lean suddenly stopped and mopped his brow — a tired laborer.

"'Perhaps we have been wrong,' said the adjutant. His glance wavered stupidly. 'It might have been better if we hadn't buried him just at this time. Of course, if we advance to-morrow the body would have been — '

"'Damn you,' said Lean, 'shut your mouth!' He was not the senior officer.

"He again filled the shovel and flung the earth. Always the earth made that sound — plop! For a space Lean worked frantically, like a man digging himself out of danger.

"Soon there was nothing to be seen but the chalk-blue face. Lean filled the shovel. 'Good God,' he cried to the adjutant, 'Why didn't you turn him somehow when you put him in? This —'

Then Lean began to stutter.

"The adjutant understood. He was pale to the lips. 'Go on, man,' he cried, beseechingly, almost in a shout. Lean swung back the shovel. It went forward in a pendulum curve. When the earth landed it made a sound — plop!"

That is all; the story ends with that last "plop!" but the
intense picture is absolutely unforgettable. One sees this harrowed officer shoveling desperately on and on, interminably, in his frantic effort to cover the remains of his old friend.

It is this poetic quality in his writing which is responsible for so many of Crane's beautiful descriptive passages. His interest in the scene was excelled only by his passion for particular, meaningful details within the scene, as in this soothing sentence from "The Little Regiment": "After the red round eye of the sun had stared long at the plain and its burden, darkness, a sable mercy, came heavily upon it, and the wan hands of the dead were no longer seen in strange frozen gestures."

The same objective quality, so essential to realistic writing, is apparent in "Three Miraculous Soldiers": "High in the tree branches she could hear the voice of the wind, a melody of the night, low and sad, the plaint of an endless, incommunicable sorrow. Her own distress, the plight of the men in gray — these near matters as well as all she had known of grief — everything was expressed in this soft mourning of the wind in the trees. At first she felt like weeping. This sound told her of human impotency and doom."

Crane's versatility is revealed in his ability to write not only stories of war and horror but also tales of humor. Of the latter type are the Whilomville Stories, which appeared individually in Harper's during Crane's last years. His inter-
est in and psychological knowledge of children is evident; he knew thoroughly their thoughts, their actions, and their language. In this volume there is also much of the irony which adorns his poetry. In "The Angel Child" he writes, "Mrs. Trescott owned a cousin who was a painter of high degree." A boy in "The Lover and the Telltale" "was of the worst hoodlums, preying upon his weaker brethren with all the cruel disregard of a grown man." When a boy falters miserably during elocution exercises at school, in "Making an Orator", Crane observes that "Jimmie, of course, did not know that on this day there had been laid for him the foundation of a finished incapacity for public speaking which would be his until he died." Such charming expressions of ironic wit as these are unusual in American writers of and preceding Crane's day, but have since been highly acclaimed when displayed by Mr. Cabell, Miss Glasgow, and others of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the peak of realistic narration among this particular group of stories is reached in "The Carriage-Lamps". Young Jimmie Trescott, son of the town doctor, is sent into the house for throwing stones and breaking some carriage-lamps. His pals come to 'rescue' him while his father, interrupted in his chastisement of his boy, becomes an observer of the proceedings, in which his son cannot participate: "The doctor could tell by his son's increasing agitation that the great moment was near. Suddenly he heard Willie Dalzel's voice hiss out a word: 'S-s-silence!' Then the same voice addressed Jimmie at the window:
'Good cheer, my comrade. The time is now at hand. I have come. Never did the Red Captain turn his back on a friend. One minute more and you will be free. Once aboard my gallant craft and you can bid defiance to your haughty enemies. Why don't you hurry up? What are you standin' there lookin' like a cow for?'

Of his poems there remains little to be said. Those already quoted in this paper reveal the sharp, ironic, questioning tone in which most of them were written. Cryptic, symbolic free verse, they comprise but two volumes, *The Black Riders* (1895) and *War Is Kind* (1899). Perhaps they were stimulated most by the poetry of Emily Dickinson, if at all, and like her work, were not appreciated in the period which marked their origin. The right of free speech was considered then to have been abused if people's feelings were hurt by either the written or the spoken word.

Hamlin Garland describes interestingly the actual process by which Crane's verses were created: "According to his [Crane's] explanation the composition of these lines was an entirely automatic, subconscious process.... It was precisely as if some alien spirit were delivering these lines through his hand as a medium....it was evident that his composition (even to the process of punctuation) went on beneath consciousness, and that setting his poems down was for him a kind of transcrib-
ing as from a printed page."\(^{41}\)

Call it impressionism, call it genius, call it what you will, this is obviously a true picture of Crane's creative process, at least as far as his poetry is concerned. Although such spontaneity in composition is admirable, however, it must be admitted that such a technique is not subject to development. Yet Crane's poems are fraught with an imagery and beauty that can hardly be excelled by \textit{vers librists} anywhere. Consider the closing lines of this piece:

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

And finally, there is one which positively gleams with color, and may possibly have been intended for his own remorseful elegy:

"There was a man who lived a life of fire,

\(^{41}\)Garland, Stephen Crane as I Knew Him, Yale Review, 3, 494."
Even upon the fabric of time,
Where purple becomes orange
And orange purple,
This life glowed,
A dire red stain, indelible;
Yet when he was dead,
He saw that he had not lived."

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Surface realism, as distinguished from inner realism, requires not to be discussed at length. As its very name suggests, it emphasizes the scene, and the physical activities and exterior appearances of the characters, and tends to shun what cannot be recognized by at least one of the five senses.

Inner, or psycho-, realism, on the other hand, delves into the consciousness of the characters, and is more interested in their mental activities than in their environment or their physical actions. Thus one finds in realism of this type, which came into prominence with George Eliot, the tendency to probe for motive, and to attempt to lay bare the complexities of the mind.

Inasmuch as we are primarily concerned in this paper with surface realism, notice must be given to impressionism, which is really the process or technique of those who portray the surfaces of life. Monet, in 1874, painted a picture which
he called, "Sunrise — An Impression," and other artists immediately adopted the method or form of that production. "Novelists like Crane and Conrad, as well as poets like Mallarmé, were beginning to do the same thing in literature, where the technique consisted of reducing prose or verse to a procession of images."\(^{42}\)

Louis Weinberg rather fully explains this literary method: "Impressionism as a technique is a means of recording the transitory nature of phenomena and the fluidity of motion. As a principle it is based on a philosophy of change. As painters, as writers, as musicians, impressionists are not so much men of strong convictions and deep words as they are craftsmen recording the flitting sensations of an ever changing world. The chief interest of impressionism is the ephemeral."\(^{43}\) In the light of this statement it must be admitted that Stephen Crane was an impressionist (Edward Garnett called him the chief impressionist of his day).\(^{44}\) His was certainly a philosophy of change, and he was continually recording "the flitting sensations of an ever changing world."

As has been implied above, the realism of Stephen Crane is a surface realism. "He is undoubtedly such an interpreter of the significant surface of things that in a few strokes he gives us an amazing insight into what the individual life is.

\(^{42}\)Hartwick, FAF, 35.  
\(^{43}\)Weinberg, Current Impressionism,  
The New Republic, 2, 124.  
\(^{44}\)Garnett, FN, 209.
And he does it all straight from the surface; a few oaths, a genius for slang, an exquisite and unique faculty of exposing an individual scene by an odd simile, a power of interpreting a face or an action, a keen realizing of the primitive emotions — that is Mr. Crane's talent." It is Edward Garnett who makes explicit this unique quality of Crane's writing: "The rare thing about Mr. Crane's art is that he keeps closer to the surface than any living writer, and, like the great portrait-painters, to a great extent makes the surface betray the depths.... He is the perfect artist and interpreter of the surfaces of life." 

45 Garnett, Mr. Stephen Crane, An Appreciation, Academy, 55, 483.
46 Ibid.
Realism is a term widely used, but often misunderstood and misapplied. It is essentially opposite to romanticism, has no use for sentimentalism, shuns idealism, mistrusts imagination, is not dependent upon fact, is closely akin to naturalism, and aims to present the truth.

Realistic fiction, therefore, has been defined as "that which does not shrink from the commonplace (although art dreads the commonplace) or from the unpleasant (although the aim of art is to give pleasure) in its effort to depict things as they are, life as it is."\(^1\)

Stephen Crane was imbued with a scientific, naturalistic philosophy of life. To him, existence consisted of a continuous struggle waged between man and nature, and life was a series of brief episodic sketches, acted with violence and novelty. Against the malevolent influences of fate Crane exhibited a notable defiance, which can readily be discovered in his poetry. But despite his naturalism he reveals also a genuine faith in God.

Crane was born on November 1, 1871, at Newark, New Jersey. From his father, who was a Methodist minister, and his mother, young Stephen gained not only deep religious convictions but also a love of words that was a potent influence in his later

\(^{1}\)Perry, SPF, 229.
life. After his preparatory education at Pennington Seminary and the Hudson River Institute at Claverack, New York, Crane struggled through two seasons at Lafayette College and a year at Syracuse University, where he proved to be "unstudious, brilliant, volatile, entertaining, and giftedly profane." His chief interests till well beyond his college years were words and baseball.

After a period of unsuccessful newspaper reporting in New York and New Jersey, Crane wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the vivid story of a tenemental Irish family in New York's slum district. The heroine, Maggie, is seduced by a barkeeper, who soon tires of her. Scorned by her equally wicked brother, and reviled by her drunken parents, Maggie eventually commits suicide. Needless to say, this bold bad tale (which Crane was compelled to publish at his own expense) shocked the sensitive tastes of a generation nourished upon *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and was consequently condemned.

Through *Maggie*, however, Crane was brought to the attention of William Dean Howells, who encouraged him enthusiastically. In the next year (1895), without ever having witnessed a battle, Crane drew off *The Red Badge of Courage*, the brilliant clinical study of a young soldier in the Battle of Chancellorsville. This story, appearing first in syndicated form, and then as a single volume, was an immediate success.

Following the success of *The Red Badge*, Crane took a trip

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2Follett, Second Twenty-Eight Years, Bookman, 68, 534.
to the Southwest, writing his impressions for a newspaper syndicate. He also entered upon a filibustering expedition to Cuba, in the course of which he was shipwrecked and very nearly drowned off the coast of Florida. Later he moved to England, and thence to Greece, where he married Miss Cora Taylor, of Jacksonville, Florida.

After reporting the Graeco-Turkish War, which convinced him that his *Red Badge of Courage* was "all right", he and Mrs. Crane returned to England, where they lived during Crane's last years. An interruption in this period was Crane's journey to Cuba, where he acted as war correspondent during the Spanish-American conflict. He died of tuberculosis, in Germany, on June 5, 1900.

The various places he visited and interesting experiences he had are reflected in his writings. Perhaps the greatest of his short stories is "The Open Boat", which relates in vivid detail the experience he had when shipwrecked. *Maggie and George's Mother* are novels that reveal his familiarity with the New York slums, whereas *The Red Badge of Courage, Active Service*, and most of his short stories depict the grisly horror of war. Then again, the group entitled *Wilomville Stories* are thoroughly humorous, narrating in a tone of ironic whimsicality the antics of a group of children in a small American town. Two small volumes, *The Black Riders and Other Lines*, and *War Is Kind*, contain his poems, which are poignant, cryptic, symbolic, imagistic *vers libres*, teeming with irony and eviden-
ces of Crane's naturalistic philosophy.

One passage, from Crane's masterpiece, The Red Badge of Courage, will illustrate the quality of his realism. A comrade of Henry Fleming, the central figure of the story, is making an heroic attempt to save the regimental colors as the flag bearer is shot: "The youth's friend went over the obstruction in a tumbling heap and sprang at the flag as a panther at prey. He pulled at it and, wrenching it free, swung up its red brilliancy with a mad cry of exultation even as the color bearer, gasping, lurched over in a final throe and, stiffening convulsively, turned his dead face to the ground. There was much blood upon the grass."

In this brief selection may be noted the simple, objective, and impressionistic, yet dramatic, manner of presentation which he employed. There are conflict, motion, and color — all of which Crane loved so passionately —, and also particular attention to detail. Obviously, moreover, he does not shun the commonplace or the unpleasant, in his effort to depict life as it is, things as they are, in war.

The following poem, from The Black Riders, discloses Crane's naturalistic conception of the world as a rudderless ship, and also reveals his poetic style:

"God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.  
With the infinite skill of an all-master  
Made he the hull and the sails,  
Held he the rudder
Ready for adjustment.
Erect stood he, scanning his work proudly.
Then — at fateful time — a wrong called,
And God turned, heeding.
Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
Going ridiculous voyages,
Making quaint progress,
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing."

The realism of Stephen Crane is a surface realism, produced through impressionism, but he makes the surface reveal the depths. "He is the perfect artist and interpreter of the surfaces of life."\(^3\)

\(^3\)Garnett, Mr. Stephen Crane, An Appreciation, Academy, 55, 483.
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