

A Contrastive Look at Stephen Crane's Naturalism as Depicted in 'The Open Boat' and 'The Blue Hotel'

Quinn Brian T.

<https://doi.org/10.15017/1355868>

出版情報：英語英文学論叢．42，pp.45-63，1992-02．九州大学英語英文学研究会
バージョン：
権利関係：



A Contrastive Look at Stephen Crane's Naturalism as Depicted in 'The Open Boat' and 'The Blue Hotel'

Brian T. Quinn

Stephen Crane's life was a brief and tragic one. He was undoubtedly a gifted writer with great talent, however, his career as an author only lasted from 1892 to 1900. He is today generally considered to have written the first naturalistic novel of city life in American literature in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). His permanent place in American Literature, however, was achieved by his short novel of the American Civil War *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Crane also produced numerous short stories and poems during his short and tumultuous career. The critics have been long divided on where exactly to place Crane in the context of American Literature and there is still much debate on whether Crane was a naturalist, a realist or even an impressionist. It seems doubtful that any definitive conclusion will ever be made due to the brevity of his life and the little information that is available to us today apart from his works.

One fact is for certain, Crane was a natural writer with little formal education. He was raised in a strict Methodist family and later dropped out of two different universities. He began his career as a newspaper writer and appeared to absorb from the popular literature around him in the 1890's the basic writing techniques which he later transformed with great imaginative energy into his own unique style. There were, of course, some models which helped to form Crane as a writer with the most frequently suggested being Zola's *La Debacle*, Tolstoy's *Sevastopol* and Kipling's *The Light That Failed*. It is dangerous to assume that Crane's view of the world was, however, formed primarily by such authors since Crane went at a young age to live alone in the Bowery of New York and someone who lives in the New York slums does not really

have to read Zola to acquire a vivid sense of the ways men can be victimized by the circumstances of life.

One of the trademarks of Crane's fiction was his early obsession with the terror of psychological conflicts that exist within human beings. Beginning with *Maggie*, Crane always shows his characters in states of struggle and conflict, which, as he demonstrates, greatly heightens man's senses and brings out both the best and the worst in man. Such struggles, for Crane, are to be observed most intensely in war and that is why he often chose the battlefield for many of his stories. It also explains his penchant for traveling around the world to observe wars as a newspaper reporter.

Naturalism first appeared in France with Goncourt and Zola and later developed with Hauptman in Germany and Ibsen in Scandinavia. It grew from realism and it claimed to be scientifically based and conceived of man as being controlled by his instincts and passions as well as by his social and economic environment. It held that man had no free will and made no moral judgment on the characters. It was deterministic and tended towards pessimism. However, it is necessary to approach Crane's literary style and American Naturalism on the whole as a complex literary phenomenon quite different from the French and German schools. As stated earlier, it is difficult to place one simple literary label on Crane as a writer but Crane chiefly differed from the European naturalists in his abrupt metaphorical style and his radical conciseness. He also had little regard for the long, boring and laborious documentation used by them to prove the environment's power over man. Many critics were quick to label Crane as an impressionist saying that he tried to do with words what the Impressionists were doing with paint. That is, to capture brief moments, sudden flashes of illumination and record the impact of pulsating life on the senses before our reason can begin to clearly rationalize what is happening. Such use of images and colors can often enable the reader to undergo the experience of his characters with a vivid intensity and a realistic sense of immediacy. Yet, unlike the Europeans, Crane's stories seldom have fixed meanings and the reader sometimes feels lost

and uncertainty at the multiple interpretations left us in his works.

Similar to the Europeans, however, Cranes's basic literary creed was to capture the essence of his characters through unbending honesty; "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." (S.Crane: Letter to John Hilliard, Jan.1896). Yet, quite unlike the French Naturalists, Crane, did not like to preach or expound any tiring dogmas in his writings and states; "I endeavored to express myself in the simplest and most concise way. If I failed, the fault is not mine. I have been very careful not to let any theories or pet ideas of my own creep into my work. Preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give readers a slice out of life, and if there is any moral or lesson in it, I try not to point it out. I let the reader find it for himself. The result is more satisfactory to both the reader and myself." (Crane: Letter to John Hilliard, 1897).

Though Crane may not have been a moralist, he was, however, a strong determinist, a tendency which goes back to his Bowery experience and mirrors one side of the French naturalist school. In his works Crane consistently shows the reader how a sequence of events takes place independent of the wills and hopes of the characters involved in a given story. There is no moralizing, no sentimentality but Crane continually shows throughout his works that men's wills do not control their destinies.

Crane filled his works with characters from the lower classes. His characters are often the poor, the uneducated, the unsophisticated. His fictional world is that of the commonplace and of dull daily existence. Yet, as a naturalist, Crane is able to isolate those qualities in man which are usually associated with the heroic or adventurous, in times of violence and passion which so frequently in his stories culminate in death. Crane takes all these critical events and reduces the violence and extraordinary to the commonplace, which has the effect of making all such experiences more universal.

Throughout all of Crane's works, one of his major naturalistic themes

is Nature's total ambivalence to the plight of man. Nowhere is this theme more clearly depicted than in two of his free verse poems:

A Man Said To The Universe

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation."

1894

(p1408)

(Hereafter all quotes from Crane's works have been taken from *The Concise Anthology of American Literature*, George McMichael: Editor. Macmillan, 1985)

Nature's complete indifference to whether a man lives or dies is best seen in Crane's following free verse poem:

A Man Adrift On A Slim Spar

A man adrift on a slim spar

A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle

Tented waves rearing lashed dark points

The near whine of froth in circles.

God is cold.

The incessant rise and swing of the sea

And growl of crest

The sinkings, green, seething, endless

The upheaval half-completed.

God is cold.

The seas are in the hollow of The Hand;

Oceans may be turned to a spray
Raining down through the stars
Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.
Oceans may become gray ashes,
Die with a long moan and a roar
Amid the tumult of the fishes
And the cries of the ships,
Because The Hand beckons the mice.

A horizon smaller than a doomed assassin's cap,
Inky, surging tumults

A reeling, drunken sky and no sky
A pale hand sliding from a polished spar.
God is cold.

The puff of a coat imprisoning air.
A face kissing the water-death
A weary slow sway of a lost hand
And the sea, the moving sea, the sea.

God is cold. 1897 (p1409)

Both of these poems seem to concisely crystallize the themes of Crane's fiction and exemplify Crane's tendency to fill all his works with much cynical, biting irony regarding man's plight on this earth.

It is interesting to see in Crane's works that despite the cold harshness of his world there always seems to be a hidden ray of hope waiting to deliver man to salvation. For Crane, such salvation was always to be found in the attainment of Brotherhood among men. This strong admiration may stem from Crane's background as an excellent baseball and football player in his school days. Crane believed that this feeling of trust and mutual confidence among men is essential, and it is one of the few human values that he continually confirms throughout his fiction. It

is this quality which brings together the four men in his "Open Boat" and gives them the moral strength to survive. On the other hand, it is the same absence of this quality and its replacement by fear and distrust which characterizes the world of "The Blue Hotel" and leads directly to the story's tragic ending.

In this study I would like to contrastively compare two of Crane's most enduring stories written at the height of his artistic powers before succumbing to tuberculosis at the age of 29. The background for "The Open Boat" stems from a true experience that Crane had when, as a reporter, he was traveling on a ship bringing arms to Cuba which sank off the coast of Florida. The story graphically describes the ordeal of four shipwrecked men and their struggle for survival in a small lifeboat. Crane first wrote a newspaper article about his experiences and then later wrote his story. This work, like *The Red Badge of Courage*, reveals Crane's characteristic subject matter—a detailed description and analysis of the physical, emotional and psychological responses of men under extreme pressure—and the dominant themes of Nature's indifference to humanity's fate and the consequent need of compassionate collective action in order to survive. In this story we can also see the harsh use of irony contrasted with the author's uncompromising demand for courage, integrity, grace and generosity in the face of perilous danger.

The story itself is almost a factual account of what happened. The experience was the most terrifying one of Crane's life. Yet, in introducing him personally to the cruel natural forces about which he had so frequently written, this ordeal gave him a more concrete image of man's precariousness in the world. The narrative has been written on three literary levels including a detached description, a mundane dialogue and the philosophical ponderings of the correspondent.

The now famous opening paragraph is an excellent example of Crane's impressionistic use of color and imagery to heighten the effect and make the scene more vivid in our minds:

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level,

and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. (Crane: *The Open Boat*, p1409)

Crane's use of anonymity is best remembered in the *Red Badge of Courage* where we meet such characters as "the youth", "the tall soldier" and the "loud soldier." Crane again uses this same technique to powerfully describe his four helpless characters in this story as the captain, the cook, the oiler and the correspondent. This use of anonymity helps to increase the sense of distance to the characters described. As in all his works, Crane gives only as much detail as is absolutely necessary, which is in strong contrast to Zola, Tolstoy and his other European counterparts.

Even though the story is a terrifying one of a life and death struggle, the narrator always maintains a cool detached distance from the other four men. The theme of an overwhelming sense of brotherhood which brings the men together soon becomes apparent in section three:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it, but it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time it was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. (The Open Boat, p1413).

Throughout the story there is a total absence of any panic and Crane is quite remarkably able to bring the men's terrible tragedy of possible imminent death down to a very matter of fact level:

As for himself, he was too tired to grapple fundamentally with the fact. He tried to coerce his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was dominated at this time by the muscles, and the muscles said they did not care. It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame. (The Open Boat, p1423)

One of the strongest impressions is made by the grace and civility under pressure that all the men exhibit throughout the story. Crane's descriptions of such grace and selflessness in the grips of a masculine world of conflict were to later greatly influence such writers as Hemingway. One of the prime examples of this is how, even though suffering from complete exhaustion, the men never lost the spirit of cooperative give-and-take needed to survive:

"Billie !" There was a slow and gradual disentanglement. "Billie, will you spell me ?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the old comfortable seawater in the bottom of the boat, and he had huddled close to the cook's life-belt he was deep in sleep, despite the fact that his teeth played all the popular airs.

This sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name in a tone that demonstrated the last stages of exhaustion.

"Will you spell me ?"

"Sure, Billie." (The Open Boat, p1421)

The most pervasive and oft repeated theme of the story, however, is that of the alienation of man in a seemingly uncaring universe. With the overwhelming sense of powerlessness we observe Crane's characters vacillating between extreme passions of panic, hope, fear, helplessness, rage and anger:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers. (The Open Boat, p1420)

Yet, this all encompassing indifference of Nature afforded the narrator moments of lucid human understanding which touch the bottom of his very soul:

This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual-nature in the wind, nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. It is, perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life and have them taste wickedly in his mind and wish for a second chance. (The Open Boat, p1422)

The story also becomes a psychological study of man's conflicting emotions. Crane is able to realistically portray man's anger and petty feelings of self importance in which human beings see themselves as the center of the universe:

"If she has decided to down me, why did she not do it in the 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, no, and then hear what I call you !" (The Open Boat, p1415)

In the end, however, we see the hero as one simple lost soul who, more than anything else is completely confused by his own tragic fate while demonstrating feelings of childlike helplessness and biting irony:

“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, why was I allowed to come this 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 ? ” (The Open Boat, p1418)

Finally, the boat is finally overturned by rough seas and the men courageously swim toward the shore. The correspondent, captain and the cook are miraculously brought to shore by a heaven sent giant wave. Yet, at the height of Crane’s sharp, biting irony is the incomprehensible fact that only the oiler dies, who just happened to be the bravest, strongest and best swimmer of them all, after being struck by a piece of driftwood. The cold harshness of the men’s trial has signified a kind of spiritual purification and left all of the fortunate survivors with a deeper sense of understanding that somehow cannot help but have changed their view of the world:

The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land’s welcome for it could only be the different and sinister hospitality of the grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the soul of the great sea’s voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters. (The Open Boat, p1425)

Therefore, even though Crane hints at the fact that the men who were

miraculously saved will probably soon revert back to their primitive and selfish ways, they are indeed able to attain a rare catharsis, even if only temporarily, because they were able to find a sense of camaraderie and brotherhood in order to overcome their ordeal.

This warm sense of trust and mutual confidence among men, on the other hand, is painfully absent in Crane's other classic story "The Blue Hotel" (1898). As in his other masterpieces "The Blue Hotel" is filled with a great tension of fear with an air of death hanging painfully in the air. Just as in his previous story, "The Blue Hotel" deals with an extreme situation of five strangers accidentally thrown together by fate on a cold winter night in Nebraska. Crane continues with his patented use of anonymity as we see such characters, respectively called the Easterner, the cowboy, and the Swede happen to enter by chance into Scully's Blue Hotel along with Scully's highstrung and foolish son Johnnie. The Swede has brought along his image of a dangerous and violent Wild West and soon the reader sees how his paranoia eventually becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. After these various poor creatures are assembled together, Crane then shows how civilized norms and the structure of human character start to collapse under the weight of man's primitive drives. This time, however, in stark contrast to "The Open Boat", the men are again thrust into a situation of danger but are unable to avoid the sense of fear and panic. There is ultimately a total failure in reaching any solidarity of brotherhood and the men become lost in their most primitive urges. More than any overt action, the heart of the story deals with the response of men to an extreme crisis. The unique and pessimistic aspect of this story, in comparison to Crane's other works, is that no human solidarity is ever really achieved and eventually results in a senseless death.

The central figure in "The Blue Hotel" has no name, as in most of Crane's works. He is simply called "the Swede", who has brought to the hotel a distorted image of fear and sense of panic most likely after reading about too many shootouts in the newspapers about the "Wild West". The height of irony is achieved when the big Swede becomes

convinced that he will be killed and finally his imagined threat becomes a reality. Yet, in the story, his death becomes symbolic of the other men's failure to relieve the Swede of his anxieties in order to stop a potential tragedy in the making.

The story displays Crane's descriptive talents at their height with his metaphoric, animistic images and use of colors filled with dense implications. Just as the snow storm in the story breaks out, so does the approaching presence of violence in the world of human nature:

Scully announced the presence of a blizzard. The guests of the blue hotel, lighting their pipes assented with grunts of lazy masculine contentment.

No island of the sea could be exempt in the degree of this little room with its humming stove. (The Blue Hotel, p1427)

By showing clearly that this group of travelers has been brought together by chance, Crane shows that there is no escaping the cruel harshness of human nature. Crane's view in this story is a cold and deterministic view which fits well into the Naturalists' creed. If not in the Palace Hotel, then this tragedy would just as likely have occurred somewhere else with the same outcome.

Right from the opening paragraph the story is full of Crane's trademark impressionistic imagery:

The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a gray swampish hush. (The Blue Hotel, p1423)

In the story, the hotel proprietor's overt friendliness is ironically contrasted by his complete lack of understanding the Swede's fear and

anxiety. The reader sees the Swede's mind buzzing with imagined terror. He is essentially at war with himself and angry at Nature. It is also tragically ironic that the Easterner is the only man intelligent enough to comprehend the situation, yet he fails to intercede in the matter and simply lets Nature take its course which leads to the ultimate death of the Swede. Even the Swede seems to inherently realize that only the Easterner can help him:

Apparently it seemed to the Swede that he was formidably menaced. He shivered and turned white near the corners of his mouth. He sent an appealing glance in the direction of the Easterner . . . The latter answered after prolonged and cautious reflection. "I don't understand you," he said impassively. (The Blue Hotel, p1428)

Here it is obvious that the Easterner just does not want to get involved and does not care what happens to the foolish Swede.

In *The Red Badge of Courage* Henry is likewise scared to death but after finding help and support from his soldier comrades he is later able to overcome his fear and become a hero. In "The Blue Hotel", however, the Swede's fear only leads to self destruction without any salvation. Crane does show us numerous instances where we see the Swede reaching out for help:

Finally the Swede announced that he was thirsty. He moved in his chair, and said that he would go for a drink of water. (The Blue Hotel, p1432)

Here we see the Swede thirsting for some human kindness and compassion. Even his ultimate death comes about as a result of not wanting to drink alone, when he forces a gambler to drink with him and eventually gets killed by the man. In the story Crane thus shows us that men are stupid, foolish and selfish and whenever assembled together there is little enlightenment or humanity present. In Crane's world, men anywhere

and anytime may have to suddenly undergo a supreme test of courage and will, in a struggle of life and death. At this moment they can either rise to the occasion or sink down to their primitive urges.

The lamp burned badly, and at once he stopped to adjust the wick. The newspaper, as he turned from page to page, rustled with a slow and comfortable sound. Then he heard three terrible words:

"You are cheatin' !"

Such scenes often prove that there can be little of dramatic import in an environment. Any room can present a tragic front; any room can be comic. This little den was now hideous as a torture chamber. The new faces of the men themselves had changed it upon the instant. (The Blue Hotel, p1434)

In the above passage we see that, for Crane, the world is a stage that can at any moment become a passionate hell. When the Swede and Johnnie finally decide to fight it out, the men once again tumble into the sea just as in "The Open Boat" and are literally fighting for their lives:

The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into the sea. (The Blue Hotel, p1435)

The majority of people in the story are base and uneducated and while not inherently evil, they are merely incapable of understanding what is happening. The real tragedy, however, lies in the stark inaction of the perceptive Easterner, for only he was capable of seeing what the Swede's fear would eventually lead to and, thus, could have prevented it:

During this pause, the Easterner's mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men—the iron nerved master of the ceremony; the Swede, pale, motionless, terrible; and Johnnie, serene yet ferocious, boyish yet heroic. The entire prelude had had in it a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action, and this aspect was accentuated

by the long, mellow cry of the blizzard as it sped the tumbling and wailing flakes into the black abyss of the south.(The Blue Hotel, p1436)

Crane leaves the reader with no doubt in his unmistakable condemnation of the haughty Easterner who could not be bothered with other men's problems and only succeeds in demonstrating his total indifference:

He knew now that all this time the cold had been sinking into him deeper and deeper, and he wondered that he had not perished. He felt indifferent to the condition of the vanquished man.(The Blue Hotel, p1437)

After the Swede's initial victory in a fistfight with young Johnnie, he overestimates his own power and fate soon leads him to another saloon in town where the men around him once again fail to calm him down. Crane here shows recurrent violence as a basic pattern of mankind. In the Blue Hotel, he stresses that we can never escape from this unfortunate human condition. According to Crane, if five men are thrown together by chance and circumstances then you immediately get a microcosm of the world which usually results in the same tragedies time and again from which there is no escape.

The height of Crane's icy, piercing irony in the story is his cold impersonal description of the Swede's death which closely resembles the death of some big animal at a meat factory:

There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.(The Blue Hotel, p1442)

Crane's irreverent description of a fading human life in its last throes

enunciates the complete absence of any human dignity in the town. However, man's longing for human tenderness and compassion, which is satisfied in both *The Red Badge of Courage* and "The Open Boat", is still present in this frigid Nebraska town when, after the murder, the bartender runs out of the bar feeling the utter loneliness of the world:

A moment afterward the bartender was in the street dinning through the storm for help and, moreover, companionship. (The Blue Hotel, p1442)

Crane's final twist of cynicism comes when he describes the dead Swede's body lying on the floor while staring up at the cash register:

The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash-machine: "This registers the amount of your purchase." (The Blue Hotel, p1442)

The cash register almost seems to say to the Swede that death was the price he had to pay for his stupid fear and vanity. Later, in a surprising and, for Crane, a rather uncharacteristic epilogue (in which the author almost appears to be moralizing), we encounter the Easterner meeting up with the cowboy some months later. By now the Easterner realizes how responsible they all had been on that fateful day:

"Fun or not," said the Easterner, "Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone. And you know—you were simply puffing around the place and wanting to fight. And then old Scully himself! We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is a kind of adverb. Every sin is the result of collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede

The cowboy, injured and rebellious, cried out blindly into the fog of mysterious theory: "Well, I didn't do anythin' did I?" (The Blue Hotel,

p1443)

For the Easterner, his realization has come far too late to be of any good to the dead Swede, while the base and uneducated cowboy will never even be able to comprehend anything but his own primitive urges. Such an epilogue seems almost unnecessary and even has an air of preaching. This is one of the rare times that Crane, perhaps, has even made the moral too clear.

All of Crane's major fiction deals with men trapped in extreme situations of great danger or at moments when they are in the grip of powerful emotions. Crane's genius is his perceptive ability to delve deep into the consciousness of his highly stressed protagonists. By showing his characters in struggle with Nature, Crane shows that their heightened senses often bring out both the best and worst in man. Crane's Naturalism consisted primarily of showing in his stories how a sequence of events takes place independent of the wills and hopes of the characters involved. Crane expounds no moral sentiment, nor does he fall victim to popular sentimentality, however he clearly shows that men's wills do not control their destinies. This pervading pessimism in his works is continually underlined by Nature's total ambivalence to the plight of man.

Crane's language is also harsh and brutal because he wants the reader to feel the icy emotions of his characters. Yet, even despite the cold harshness of Crane's world, there is always a ray of hope waiting to save man. This glimmer of salvation, however, always depends on the characters' ability to discover a sense of brotherhood among men.

These naturalistic aspects are successfully depicted in two of his greatest stories "The Open Boat" and "The Blue Hotel." The four shipwrecked men in the first story are brought together by feelings of trust and mutual confidence and these qualities help them to eventually find the moral strength to survive. On the other hand, it is the absence of this quality of brotherhood and its replacement by fear and distrust which characterizes the cruel world "The Blue Hotel" and directly leads to its tragic ending. Unlike the first story, here five strangers are thrown

together on a cold Nebraska night and Crane then shows how all civilized norms begin to break down as all soon fall prey to man's primitive drives. Similar to "The Open Boat", these men are thrown into a situation of great danger, however, this time they are unable to avoid the sense of fear and panic. The most pessimistic aspect of the story remains the fact that no human solidarity is ever really achieved resulting in a senseless death.

Crane also constantly fills these works with a cynical irony regarding man's plight. In the first story, it is the best swimmer who eventually drowns while in the last story, it is only when the Swede finally feels "safe" that he is actually killed.

Both stories also display Crane's impressionistic descriptive talents at their height. As in all his works, Crane gives only as much detail as is absolutely necessary and it is this aspect, along with his patented lack of moralizing or preaching dogma, where he differs most from his European Naturalist counterparts such as Zola

Crane's world is continually filled with stupid, foolish and selfish men who, when assembled together by fate, always have the potential to find a glimpse of human enlightenment. Yet, these same men may at anytime have to suddenly undergo a supreme courageous test of life and death. At such moments, Crane shows us that men can either rise to the occasion or sink down into their most primitive urges and perish.

References

Cady, Edwin H. *Stephen Crane*

New Haven, Connecticut: College & University Press, 1962.

Crane, Stephen. *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane*

New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage*

New York: Norton, 1976.

McMichael, George: Editor. *Concise Anthology of American Literature*

New York: Macmillan, 1985.

Mitchell, Lee Clark. *New Essays on The Red Badge of Courage*

London: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Weatherford, Richard: Editor. *Stephen Crane: The Critical Heritage*

London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973.