1-1-1985

Nature vs Society in the Works of Stephen Crane

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Nature vs Society

in the Works of Stephen Crane

(TITLE)

BY

Rodney R. Parker

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Art in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1985
YEAR

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Nature vs Society

in the Works of Stephen Crane

by

Rodney R. Parker

Submitted August 8, 1985
Director - Dr. David Downing
Graduate School
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I would like to acknowledge my Thesis Director, Dr. David Downing for his help and guidance with this thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. V. Bobb and Dr. Lee Steinmetz for their help in completing this paper.
Abstract

The five works of Stephen Crane I chose to discuss in this thesis are: "The Open Boat," "A Mystery of Heroism," "The Blue Hotel," Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, and The Red Badge of Courage. All of these works are representative of the fictional vision of Stephen Crane. A persistent theme that Crane uses in virtually all of his stories is the relationship between the human and the natural worlds. The world of nature is one of indifference. It shows no interest in the activities of mankind, and is, in fact, incapable of doing so. But Crane's characters often make the mistake of thinking of nature as either a safe refuge for them to hide away in, or as a violent world that is bent on destroying them. In the five works mentioned above Crane explores in-depth the struggles of humanity as it attempts, or not, to come to terms with both the natural world and the social world. In two of the stories, "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge of Courage, the characters progress through a series of stages until they come to a realization about their own insignificance in the face of a powerful yet indifferent force. They survive, though, by forming a bond of human fellowship that provides the comfort, companionship, and support that is needed as they attempt to exist in the world. In the other three works, "A Mystery of Heroism," "The Blue Hotel," and Maggie, there is no fellowship developed between characters and the social world in which they live is bleak and harsh. No lessons are learned in these three stories as the characters refuse to acknowledge their insignificance and even go so far as to treat the natural world with contempt. They believe in their own self-importance and shun the fellowship of humanity.

I discuss "The Open Boat" first because it is a good representative of the theme of this paper. The characters all come to a realization of
their insignificance and find comfort in the bond that is established between the men. "A Mystery of Heroism" is next because man is given a chance to learn from an act of compassion that happens during a moment of fear but he completely ignores it because he is too caught up in his own self-importance. "The Blue Hotel" shows the insignificance and pettiness of men as they play their childish games in the face of an all-encompassing storm. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is a dismal story that offers no hope to humanity. Crane paints us a picture of a humanity that is living by false moral codes and expectations. Nature, in the end, is a way of escape for Maggie, but no problems are solved and her death is meaningless. I end with *The Red Badge of Courage* because it strikes a somewhat hopeful note for humanity instead of the dirge that is played in *Maggie*. Henry Fleming not only comes to terms with his own insignificance and with the indifference of nature, but also learns of the importance of human solidarity as it is what helps him to make it through the battles he has to fight.
The problematic relationship between the human and the natural worlds is a persistent theme in virtually all of Stephen Crane's stories and novels. Crane's characters often view nature as either a peaceful savior or a powerful life-threatening force. The characters are either running to nature in order to escape from the pressures of society, or they are trapped in a world of violent nature that is seemingly bent on destroying them. In other words, the characters often make the mistake of personifying nature into either a peaceful, accepting entity, or a vicious, vindictive being. According to Crane's ultimate fictional vision, however, nature is neither of these. Nature is simply indifferent to any human activity. In such works as "The Open Boat" and The Red Badge of Courage, Crane creates his most complete representation of the human struggle to confront the natural world. Once the characters understand the indifference of nature and realize their own insignificance in the face of this powerful force, they sometimes turn to each other in order to find comfort and companionship. They form a bond of human fellowship in an attempt to survive as best they can. Moments of contemporary social solidarity, however, according to the vision of Crane, are seldom seen. Men alienate themselves within an ailing society and lose their capacity for compassion.

The five works discussed in this paper are "The Open Boat," "A Mystery of Heroism," "The Blue Hotel," Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, and The Red Badge of Courage. I examine "The Open Boat" first because it is a good example of Crane's philosophy of man being able to come to terms with his own insignificance and the indifference of nature. In the story, four men in a small boat struggle against the forces of nature, and, through a series of stages, come to accept its indifference
and their place in the universe. In "A Mystery of Heroism," Crane takes a slightly different perspective, focusing on the actions of one man who reacts foolishly to the challenge of his regiment. Here we see men waging war against each other and nature, as is illustrated by the bombing of a peaceful green pasture for no apparent reason. Once again nature remains indifferent. The characters learn no lessons as they focus on their own fear and pride and ignore the one act of compassion in the story. In "The Blue Hotel," Crane paints perhaps his bleakest picture of society. As nature swirls and eddies around the Blue Hotel, swallowing it up in an all-encompassing storm, man acts out his insignificant and fateful games inside. When the storm should have made the men feel small and weak, they feel superior to it because they can survive in it. I then turn to Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, because it is a progression from the bleak setting of "The Blue Hotel," to the dismal streets of the Bowery Section of New York City. Crane tells the story of Maggie and her family, and of the circumstances of Maggie's life that lead to her prostitution and eventual death in the river. Nature, in this story, is thought of as a relief from life by Maggie. The waters prove to be just as indifferent, however; nothing is solved and everything goes on exactly as it did before. I conclude with The Red Badge of Courage, because it is the most complete vision of Crane's philosophy of the human and the natural. During the course of the story, Henry Fleming is able to come to terms with his own insignificance and with the indifference of nature. He also learns the importance of human solidarity as it becomes a source of strength for him during the battles that his regiment fights.
Nature vs Society

in the Works of Stephen Crane

In "The Open Boat," Crane explores the realm of man's insignificance in the face of a greater, more powerful force, in this case, the sea. Crane isolates four men in a small boat in the middle of a vast and turbulent ocean, leaving them cold, bare, and helpless to face nature on their own. Their boat is small, the oars are fragile and, the men fear, ready to break, and each wave threatens to swamp the boat. The four men have been isolated in a world over which they have no power. They are not in control of their destinies, neither are they in a position to use what little power they have. They are helpless and at the mercy of a greater force, nature.

The boat and its occupants can be seen in at least two different ways. The first way is a literal view of a small boat stranded in the ocean with several men trying to save themselves from drowning in the sea. The other allegorical interpretation is to see the boat and its occupants as symbolic representations of society and the individual. The men inside the boat have developed, out of necessity, a community. Surrounding them is a hostile world in which the men must struggle to survive. The boat is representative of humanity, surrounded by a world over which they have no power. The men in the boat must learn to work together in order to survive. To alienate themselves from each other would only decrease their chances for survival. Like the boat, society is surrounded by a world that is sometimes violent and hostile. Human alienation only makes survival more difficult.

In depicting the struggle against the forces of nature, Crane
emphasizes the puniness and insignificance of man in comparison to the forces of the universe. It is through the eyes of the correspondent that we receive most of our information concerning their struggles at sea. It is through him that Crane shows the insignificance of man and the indifference of nature. The correspondent comes to realize the indifference of nature through a series of stages. During the first stage, the men in the boat viewed nature as an enemy. It was cruel, hateful, and something which they had to fight and conquer in order to live. The waves are described as being "most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall," (Crane, Open Boat 340) with crests that "snarled." Each wave they encountered "was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water." (Crane, Open Boat 341) They also perceived other aspects of nature as being against them. The seagulls they encountered, which are usually viewed by sailors as a sign of hope, became "somehow gruesome and ominous." (Crane, Open Boat 342) They had "black bead like eyes," and "were uncanny and sinister in their unblinking scrutiny." (Crane, Open Boat 342)

As the boat nears land for the first time they become confident of themselves. They light cigars and "judge well and ill of all men." (Crane, Open Boat 346) They are not allowed to land, though, and all on board feel cheated and angry. The correspondent cries out against fate, angry with the injustice of it. They are, as Leedice Kissane states, like mice in a trap. Kissane implies that Crane equated the men in the boat with lower life forms. "As a crowning indignity he is equated with forms of animal life: 'The tower was a giant with its back to the plight of the ants.'" In the famous outcry "Why was I
allowed to come so far and nibble the sacred cheese of life?' the speaker parallels himself by implication with an insignificant mouse."(412) And when the men are not allowed to land Kissane writes: "The mousetrap figure mentioned above demonstrates the most wanton cruelty of all, for just as the timid victim approaches the very stuff of life, the fatal trap is sprung." (412-13) The correspondent cries out indignantly against his fate, but his cry echoes off the empty water. It is here, according to Eric Solomon, that "man's egoistic reason attacks the perversity of nature and fate."(167) His sense of injustice is useless, though, because nature (or fate as the correspondent sees it) is indifferent to his plight.

The second stage in the correspondent's realization of the indifference of nature occurs when he begins to view nature as not necessarily cruel, but, as Kissane puts it, "irresponsibly, chancily menacing." (413) He no longer views nature as angry; it has allowed him to live this long, but it is taking chances with their lives by forcing them out to sea to spend the night. As their views on the ocean/nature change, so do the descriptions of the sea: "The particular violence of the sea had ceased. The waves came without snarling." (Crane, Open Boat 351) They have not quite accepted the idea of the indifference of nature yet for there were still occasions when the water would come growling into their boat. A night at sea was too risky for the likes of the correspondent, and he still retained some anger, repeating again, "If I am going to be drowned - if I am going to be drowned..." (Crane, Open Boat 352) The shark is also considered a risky chance by the correspondent. It appears quickly and mysteriously, playing the role of a dealer of death. It flits around the boat, slashing the water
like a knife as easily as it could have slashed one of the men. Kissane states, "The shark is an appropriate cutting agent, and the severing of a man's life by its agency is as utterly a matter of chance. When the shark veers away as casually as it came, the hit-or-miss quality of fate is underscored." (413)

It is shortly after this that the correspondent reaches the final stage of his realization about nature. "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 there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers." (Crane, Open Boat 353) In his self-pity, the correspondent becomes almost childlike, further reducing his state. He wishes to strike back at something, to show his importance, to be spiteful. But, "if there be no tangible thing to hoot"... he wants to confront some person or god, saying, "yes, but I love myself." He searches for an answer but realizes that "a high cold star on a winter's night" is the answer. It is something that is unreachable and unchangeable. It cannot be questioned and must therefore be accepted as it is. The correspondent accepts his fate. There is some comfort, however, in that the other men in the boat have also come to this realization and that it is something they share in common with one another. It is unspoken, but they are no longer individually alone. They have come together in fellowship and have drawn upon each other's strengths to help themselves to survive.

The correspondent's lesson is further reinforced the following morning as they head into the beach. The correspondent is calm. Nature
"did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent." (Crane, Open Boat 355) The waves now no longer growl at all. They come rushing in and swamp the boat, but there is no longer any malicious intent to them. When the boat is swamped, the correspondent paddles leisurely towards the shore. He no longer fights against nature, but instead, contemplates his possible death: "I am going to drown? Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" (Crane, Open Boat 358) He is resigned to his fate, whether it is to reach the shore and live, or to drown in the surf. Of the four, only the oiler does not survive. He had done more to insure the safety of the little boat than any other. He is a competent sailor and is swimming strongly and rapidly the last we read of him. He is seemingly the best, but he is the one to die. Richard Adams states, "There is nothing malignant in this, nor is there anything friendly, or indeed anything at all resembling a human emotion." (423) The oiler dies not because of a vindictive intent on the part of nature, nor do the others survive because nature has somehow blessed them. The oiler dies simply because he dies. The others survive simply because they do. It is ironic that the oiler is the one who dies, but he does. "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." (Crane, Open Boat 359)

The four men in the boat, most noticeably the correspondent, have come to a slow realization of the indifference of nature and the insignificance of man. Through their unspoken comradeship and the
acceptance of their fate they are able to survive. They have come to the realization of their place in a vast and all-encompassing universe. They have learned that they are not in control of their destiny as they thought they were, but instead, are at the mercy of a far greater force. The four men have realized their unimportance, but by drawing together as a group, they have found comfort and a sense of belonging in one another.
In "A Mystery of Heroism," one of Crane's better war stories, we are given a vivid description of war. We see fields exploding, men dying, charges and countercharges, artillery weapons dealing out their deadly load, and the turmoil that is man at war. Amidst all this chaos, though, Crane focuses on the situation of one man, Fred Collins of A Company. Collins, because of his mentioning his thirst, is prodded by the other men into getting water from a well in a field that is being heavily shelled. Because of his pride and his feeling that he has to prove something, he places himself in a situation where he could very easily be killed. When he makes it back with the water he is considered, both by himself and his company, to be a hero. It is not heroic however, in that his action was prompted by feelings of pride and selfishness. His one heroic act, which is overlooked by both Collins and the regiment, occurs when he returns to give the wounded lieutenant a drink of water. He had returned for this purpose despite his fears of death, and this was a more heroic act than his run for the water, which was prompted by pride. But, even this act is rendered somewhat meaningless because the lieutenant apparently dies anyway, a victim of man's meaningless war.

Nature, despite the chaos of the war, is indifferent to the ways of society. At the beginning of the story, in the midst of all the death and destruction, there was a peaceful little meadow: "Sometimes they of the infantry looked down at a fair little meadow which spread at their feet. Its long green grass was rippling gently in a breeze." (Crane, Mystery 219) Soon, though, the field becomes heavily bombarded: "For the little meadow which intervened was now suffering a terrible onslaught of shells. Its green and beautiful calm had vanished utterly. Brown earth was being flung in monstrous handfuls. And there was a
massacre of the young blades of grass." (Crane, Mystery 220) For no apparent reason the field gets heavily shelled. It is as if man were trying to conquer nature as he would other men: "The wounded officer who was riding across this expanse said to himself: 'Why, they couldn't shoot any harder if the whole army was massed here!'" (Crane, Mystery 220) Nature, however, is unaffected by this show of man, and man's actions become meaningless. Despite his best efforts and his strongest show of force, nature proceeds on in the same slow, indifferent way that it always has. When Collins makes it to the well and peers into the water he finds that it is calm, dark, and undisturbed. The water is even smooth enough to reflect his image. When he tries to fill the canteens the water "filled with a maddening slowness." (Crane, Mystery 224) He screams out his rage, but, "The stupid water derided him," and filled at the same rate, unaffected by his anger, the same way nature is unaffected by the puny efforts of man.

Man is made to look even more insignificant by the way in which he is compared with animals. Several times Crane compares man directly to animals, and in this story, almost exclusively to horses. When Collins is getting set to head for the well the regiment gathered around him and inspected him as if he were a racehorse: "When they inspected him carefully, it was somewhat like the examination that grooms give a horse before a race." (Crane, Mystery 222) Crane does not give this horse much intelligence, though. As a man, he should be able to realize that he is more than likely going to die and should therefore avoid the situation. But, like an animal, he has been led blindly to the slaughter: "He had blindly been led by quaint emotions, and laid himself under an obligation to walk squarely up to the face of death." (Crane, Mystery 223) He is in
a dazed state, and, like a horse with blinders on, cannot clearly see or realize what he has done. As he moved out into the field the "long animal-like" regiment followed him with their "four hundred eyes." They too, seem incapable of rational thought. They allow Collins to risk his life without trying to stop him. Like animals, they stand mute, capable only of watching.

The actual horses involved in the battle best exemplify the meaninglessness of man's actions. It is their job to drag the artillery pieces into position and then stand facing the battle ready to move the pieces at the soldiers' command. The horses are under the iron control of these humans, who, in their dominance, have made these animals sacrifice their lives for them:

And at that interval to the rear where it is the business of the battery horses to stand with their noses to the fight, awaiting the command to drag their guns out of the destruction, or into it, or wheresoever these incomprehensible humans demanded with whip and spur - in this line of passive and dumb spectators, whose fluttering hearts yet would not let them forget the iron law of man's control of them - in this rank of brute soldiers there had been relentless and hideous carnage. From the ruck of bleeding and prostrate horses, the men of the infantry could see one animal raising its stricken body with its forelegs and turning its nose with mystic and profound eloquence toward the sky. (Crane, Mystery 221)

The soldiers have forced these "brute soldiers" by whip and spur into battle. They have the horses' loyalty, but the soldiers have gained it by exercising an iron control over the horses which the horses are incapable of forgetting. They do what the soldiers force them to do, but the horses have no comprehension of why they do it. They are dumb spectators, just like the animal-like regiment of men who watch Collins walk into what would appear to be almost certain death. They do not understand why he is doing it, and neither does Collins, who feels like
he was forced and prodded into doing it by the other men.

On his way back to the regiment, Collins runs by the wounded lieutenant who he thought was dead. The lieutenant raises himself up to ask for a drink of water: "When wild-eyed Collins came running, this officer raised himself. His face contorted and blanched from pain, he was about to utter some great beseeching cry." (Crane, Mystery 225) He is like the horse in the above passage that raises its stricken body with its forelegs and turns his nose towards the sky. He rode into battle as he was told to do, never questioning, but blindly obedient. And now, like the horse, he raises himself on his arms and prepares to utter a great beseeching cry, but instead, he simply calls, 'Say, young man, give me a drink of water, will you?' (Crane, Mystery 225) Collins, at first, is too terrified and continues running. But then he turns and comes back: "But Collins turned. He came dashing back. His face had now turned gray, and in his eyes was all terror. 'Here it is! here it is!' (Crane, Mystery 225) This is Collins' true heroic act. Despite his fear of death, he returned to give the dying man a drink of water. By showing compassion for the lieutenant, Collins became a hero, although he does not realize it. His one act of unselfish comradeship with the officer joined him briefly with the fellowship of man. But the lesson is not learned and he returns to the regiment, none of whom noticed his act of bravery with the lieutenant.

Nature is calm and indifferent despite the efforts of man to dominate both himself and everything around him. Even those conscious attempts at being heroic are meaningless because in the end they amount to little or nothing. Truly heroic moments go unnoticed because no one considers them to be important. Man's moments of compassion become
meaningless because there is no lesson learned. Collins learns nothing when he stops to give the lieutenant a drink because he does not consider his act of compassion important. What he believes to be important is that he made it back all right. Everything else is merely secondary.
In "The Blue Hotel," Crane brings into play a much sharper contrast between the pettiness and insignificance of man and his actions and the forces of nature. The world of man exists inside the hotel and the saloon. It is where they play their games and act out their roles. These men are at constant odds with each other. They have no sense of fellowship. They struggle with each other over small and insignificant matters. Outside, the world of nature swirls and eddies around the hotel and the town of Fort Romper, indifferent to the men inside. By showing us the meaningless and senseless action of both the men in the hotel and the saloon, Crane points out the insignificance and pettiness of man.

Crane begins by showing us the pettiness of the men within the hotel. Scully, the proprietor, had painted the hotel a bright blue color in order to make it stand out from the rest of the town. The blue was a bright, garish color that "was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a grey swampish hush." (Crane, Blue Hotel 484) According to Eric Solomon, "The hotel is neither Eastern (travelers accustomed to the brown-reds and dark greens of the East laugh at the sight of the Blue Hotel when they pass on the train, laugh in shame, pity, and horror) nor western (the rest of the town is colorless, gray); it is a world unto itself. 'It stood alone on the prairie'... (259) Therefore, it becomes an isolated island, just like the boat in "The Open Boat." The men inside, however, do not draw together as do the men on the boat. Here, there is only tension and hatred. The men stand individually alone, lost in their own self-importance. The bright color of the hotel also helps to point out the pettiness and childishness of Scully. It is an absurd color and
used solely for the sake of being an attention grabber: "...and it was not to be thought that any traveler could pass the Palace Hotel without looking at it." (Crane, Blue Hotel 484) It was also Scully's practice, as if the Hotel did not speak for itself, to entice anybody he saw getting off of the train to spend the night in his hotel. Scully wanted the attention, though, so as to say, "This is my hotel and I'm a gracious host." Like a child, he wanted attention and credit for what he had done. When he escorts the cowboy, the Easterner, and the Swede to the basins of water he makes the three men think of him as a benevolent man: "It was notable that throughout this series of small ceremonies the three travelers were made to feel that Scully was very benevolent. He was conferring great favors upon them." (Crane, Blue Hotel 485) His actions are petty in that he strives to show the three travelers that he is an important, gracious man.

Once inside the hotel, we begin to realize that it is also not real, if we compare it to the traditional image of the west. Eric Solomon states, "The setting is strange, to be sure, but in its childishness it is a parody of the traditional atmosphere of Western fiction. Here men gamble, as in Western tales, but not for money; here men fight, as always in Western fiction, but not with guns - rather, with their fists. And in myth and reality alike, 'the law of the west' permitted a gun (or knife) in protecting one's self, but fighting with fists on foot was demeaning and not for white men." (260) The men inside the hotel defy the stereotype of the silent Westerner. As a matter-of-fact, they do very little but talk, and little else that fits the picture the Swede carries around in his head. He has been reading dime novels and is working from the assumption that these novels are an accurate
portrayal of the way the west really is. When the Swede first enters the hotel he brings with him all of his fears. He begins to lose control when the first thing he sees is a card game - a classic western scene where many a man has lost his life. He brings, in his mind, a savage impression of a world of violence and sudden death. According to Eric Solomon, the hotel is exactly the opposite. "Here games are for fun, fighting consists of fisticuffs, drinking is from clandestine bottles hidden from the wife and daughters - who in themselves violate the maleness of the western setting, where women in a bar are not wives and daughters. The Blue Hotel leads the Swede as far astray as do the dime novels, for reality exists somewhere in between."(261)

The Swede, despite the obvious fact that this hotel is nowhere near the image of the west he sees in his mind, persists in making it that way. He finally forces a fight when he catches Johnnie cheating at cards. The Easterner recognizes the pettiness and silliness of the fight while trying to keep Johnnie and the Swede apart: "As for the Easterner, he was importuning in a voice that was not heeded: 'Wait a moment, can't you? Oh, wait a moment. What's the good of a fight over a game of cards? Wait a moment--"(Crane, Blue Hotel 496) The two men are fighting over something that is insignificant, unimportant - a game; the Swede, because of his fear of an imaginary world and his need to conquer it, and Johnnie because of his desire to win. The Easterner cries out in a voice that goes unheeded, which is often the case when man is trying to prove himself important and dominant. The Easterner, in this case, knows that Johnnie cheated and that the Swede has a valid point. But, as he points out at the end of the story, he refused to stand up for the Swede. "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."(Crane, Blue Hotel 506) If the Easterner had said something, perhaps the whole incident could have been avoided. Instead, the Swede continues to feel alone and isolated. He feels that he must now conquer this world in order to survive.

In the saloon, the fight is over something even more insignificant. When the gambler refuses to drink with him, the Swede grabs him by the throat to force him to do so. The gambler reacts by stabbing the Swede and he dies a meaningless death. By forcing an issue that had no point to it and by pretending to be something he was not, a real westerner, the Swede provoked a fateful course of events. The gambler is also at fault for what happens. He overreacts to the situation by doing what was typically expected of a Westerner, especially a gambler, in such a situation. The Swede's anger was aroused when the men at the table would not allow him into their company. As long as the Swede was at the bar and paid no attention to the men at the table he was fine. Once he showed an interest though, "Instantly the men in some subtle way encased themselves in reserve."(Crane, Blue Hotel 503) They had no desire to allow him into their company, therefore isolating the Swede just as the men in the hotel had done. Society, the society of the men at the table, would not let him enter. Here, however, he tries to force his way in and, in the end, pays the penalty. The Swede was dominant in the world of the Blue Hotel, which was not the real western world he believed it to be, and he was therefore over-confident. However, he ironically meets his death in a world that is just as unrealistic as the world of the Blue Hotel. The Swede's first impression of the west is the Blue Hotel, which he mistakenly thinks is the real west. By
conquering that world the Swede believes he has conquered the west he has read about in his novels. However, the world in the saloon is completely the opposite of the world in the Blue Hotel, although it is just as unrealistic. The men in the saloon are living the lives of stereotypical westerners. They portray in their lives, especially the Gambler, what the Swede has read in his books. The Swede ironically meets his death in a world very similar to the ones in his novels, and one which he thought he had conquered.

As the men leave the hotel to fight, the silliness of their actions and the strength of nature become evident. "Scully threw open the door. 'Well, come on,' he said. Instantly a terrific wind caused the flame of the lamp to struggle at its wick, while a puff of black smoke sprang from the chimney-top. The stove was in mid-current of the blast, and its voice swelled to equal the roar of the storm. Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall. The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea." (Crane, Blue Hotel 497) Johnnie's cheating at cards was the whole reason for the fight, and when he initially lunged at the Swede he took care not to knock the board over: "It happened that Johnnie, in rising to hurl himself upon the Swede, had stumbled slightly because of his curiously instinctive care for the cards and the board." (Crane, Blue Hotel 495) The humans had valued the cards and board and had taken care — that is, until the fight — not to harm them. Nature, on the other hand, valued neither the cards nor the importance man placed on them. When the men opened the door to go outside and fight, the cards were promptly "dashed helplessly against the farther wall," much in the same way man could be. After the door is
open the men "lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea." Swirling around the hotel is a vast ocean of snow. Like the men in "The Open Boat," who, if they were to leave the shelter of the boat, would be completely submerged in the sea, so too are these men completely surrounded by nature. The ferocity of the storm illustrates man's puniness and insignificance. It would be impossible for man to fight against such a force.

When the group does get outside, the men have to struggle against the storm to be heard:

"Scully smote him reproachfully on the arm. 'Tut, man!' he yelled. The wind tore the words from Scully's lips and scattered them far alee.

'You are all a gang of-' boomed the Swede, but the storm also seized the remainder of this sentence." (Crane, Blue Hotel 497)

They are unable to communicate because of the ferocity of the storm. Eric Solomon states that, "The wild storm comments on man's puniness and stupid verbosity by tearing the words out of their mouths and scattering the valueless arguments out of hearing." (266) It is senseless for them to be out in the storm fighting over such a trivial matter. They place such an immense value on their sense of importance and desire to dominate one another (might makes right) that they are willing to risk their lives in order, in effect, to prove nothing.

While the Swede is on his way to the saloon, Crane stated that the storm should have reminded him that men are nothing but lice: "One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamor of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a swirling, fire-smitten, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The
conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. One was a coxcomb not to die in it." (Crane, Blue Hotel 502) In the face of this great storm, the Swede should have felt, if anything, small. Instead, he becomes more conceited. He feels more pleasure than pain from the wind and driving storm. He has conquered the false western world that he was so afraid of. He is so caught up in his pride and arrogance that he does not realize that his stature is indeed small, even minuscule, when compared to the savage force of the storm. When he arrives at the saloon, the lamp outside colors the snow red – the color of death: "In front of it an indomitable red light was burning, and the snowflakes were made blood-color as they flew through the circumscribed territory of the lamp's shining." (Crane, Blue Hotel 502) Instead of being met with the blue that represents the hotel and, since he was able to conquer it, life, he is met with the color red, which is symbolic of death. Here he finds, if not necessarily a more real world, for it is also an extreme, a more savage world. The reader is forewarned of the death that waits inside, but the Swede enters oblivious, full of conceit.

The world inside the saloon is almost completely the opposite of that in the Blue Hotel. The bartender is indifferent and dreamy and the men at the table are encased in reserve. They want no part of the Swede and they do not want to play games. He forces his company on them, though, trying to show his dominance. "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." (Crane, Blue Hotel 505) The Swede, full of confidence
that he is in control of the situation, had tried to force the gambler
to drink with him, sure of his success. He could not conceive of the
possibility that he might die. When he is stabbed, when he realizes his
vulnerability, he lets out a "cry of supreme astonishment." The passage
has a double meaning, though. When man realizes that he is capable of
being killed, of being pierced as easily as a lowly melon, he is
astonished, for he conceives of himself as this all-powerful being.
When he recognizes his insignificance, however, it is usually too late,
as it was with the Swede.

In "The Blue Hotel," human actions look meaningless and
insignificant in the face of nature. While man wages his petty scuffles
and arguments, nature swirls just outside, capable of consuming them
all. Yet, the men continue to think of themselves as important. Unlike
"The Open Boat," where the men find comfort and meaning in their lives
because they draw upon one another for strength, even in the face of
nature, the men in the Blue Hotel find only emptiness and isolation.
They are too caught up in their own worlds to realize the lesson that is
to be learned from nature.
In *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Crane approaches man's insignificance from an almost entirely social point of view. *Maggie* takes place entirely in the Bowery section of New York City. The story revolves around one family consisting of five members. Two members die fairly early (Tommie and the father), and the rest of the members — Maggie, Jimmie, and the mother, Mary — participate in the remainder of the story. A simplistic and not altogether accurate summary of the story would be the tracing of the events that lead to the downfall (prostitution) and death of the girl, Maggie. I say not altogether accurate because we have to look at several other aspects of the story. We have to look at the romantic and idealistic world Maggie lived in; the narrow view and double standard by which Maggie's mother, brother, and neighbors lived; and the indifference of the people on the streets. Also, the meaningless fighting and brutality as well as the coldness and insensitivity of the characters all are directly involved in *Maggie*. Within the city man places such emphasis on his own importance that he, better than nature ever could, illustrates his own insignificance by forgetting his fellow man as he climbs the ladder of success. The higher the cities grow, the littler man becomes. Lars Ahnebrink states, "In great cities like New York and Chicago, with their towering buildings and bustling life, man felt keenly his littleness and unimportance." (219) As man built his societies and bustling cities the emphasis gradually shifted away from society itself and was placed more on the individual instead. Man became so involved in surviving and in looking out for himself that the importance of a society for the betterment of humanity was forgotten. Society, which was meant to aid mankind, instead became the tool that separated humanity. Solidarity
was forgotten in the daily struggle for survival.

Maggie and her family live in a tenement building in the Bowery that "Quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels." (Crane, _Maggie_ 142) The image of the world that Crane shows us, though, is blurred and unreal. We see the first four chapters of _Maggie_ through the eyes of Jimmie. Jimmie sees a world of harshness, brutality, and cruel savagery. We meet Jimmie as he stands atop a rock pile in defense of Rum Alley: "A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honour of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row, who were circling madly about the heap and pelting him. His infantile countenance was livid with the fury of battle. His small body was writhing in the deliverance of oaths." (Crane, _Maggie_ 137) To Jimmie, he is fighting for the honor of Rum Alley, but he is actually standing on top of a gravel heap fighting for rocks. As Donald Pizer argues: "By juxtaposing the value of honor and the reality of a very little boy, a heap of gravel, and Rum Alley, Crane suggests that the idea of honor is inappropriate to the reality, that it serves to disguise from the participants in the fight that they are engaged in a vicious and petty scuffle." (336) The insignificance of the fight is emphasized by the indifference of the people around the fight. "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." (Crane, _Maggie_ 138) This passage shows us the true condition of the
area for which Jimmie feels "honour-bound," to fight, and also the
ludicrousness of his vision. These people are completely indifferent to
his predicament. Joseph Brennan suggests that "...it sounds a
significant and pervasive theme of the novel, human indifference to
human suffering; the bloody fight of the back-alley gangs may provide
some momentary distraction for the curious or the bored, but it
apparently touches these human spectators no more deeply than that."
(329) Jimmie views himself unrealistically as the champion of Rum
Alley, fighting in defense of and for the honor of the Alley. At least
in his mind, he takes the meaningless scuffle and makes it into
something important and worth doing.

Jimmie also provides us with a description of the tenement building
they live in. "Eventually they entered a dark region where, from a
careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to
the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust
from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows.....Finally the
procession plunged into one of the gruesome doorways. They crawled up
dark stairways and along cold, gloomy halls."(Crane, Maggie 141-43)
Jimmie sees a world that is full of fear, hunger, and savagery and it is
reflected in his description. The "gruesome doorways" and "dark
stairways" represent to him the fear and pain that await him on the
inside. Like animals that live in caves, so too do these people who
only pretend to be more. Their ideals and aspirations do little more
than create an unrealistic world that is full of pettiness and
selfishness. While it is not necessarily their fault, they do little to
change it. Jimmie will receive a beating not because his mother fears
for his safety and is punishing him for disobeying her, but because he
tears his clothes when he fights and she does not want to mend them. According to Brennan, "one wonders too, when the father shouts at Jimmie, 'Leave yer sister alone on the street,' whether it is to Jimmie's pounding of Maggie or to the publicity of it that he is really objecting to." (Brennan 325) They are living in a world where the self rules supreme.

In chapter four, Jimmie took a job as a truck driver and "invaded the turmoil and tumble of the downtown streets." (Crane, Maggie 153) While on the truck, Jimmie pictures himself as seated on a throne, staring down at the rabble of humanity. People on foot became nothing more to him than nuisances. "Foot passengers were mere pestering flies with an insane disregard for their legs and his convenience. He could not comprehend their desire to cross the streets. Their madness smote him with eternal amazement. He was continually storming at them from his throne. He sat aloft and denounced their frantic leaps, plunges, dives, and straddles." (Crane, Maggie 154) The mass of humanity that "dove and plunged beneath his horse's hooves" act suspiciously like animals. Jimmie is placed, ironically, in a position that is above the rest of humanity. He looks down at mankind and storms at them for their stupidity. He gives no compassion and expects none in return. He does not consider himself as being a part of them. Jimmie himself, however, is just as animalistic as the rest of mankind. On a daily basis Jimmie would enter into quarrels, sometimes violent ones, with other drivers and pedestrians in order to solve such meaningful questions as who had the right of way. "...and the rest of the world was composed, for the most part, of despicable creatures who were all trying to take advantage of him, and with whom, in defence, he was obliged to quarrel on all
possible occasions." (Crane, Maggie 153) Jimmie has placed a certain amount of significance on something that is petty and insignificant, as he did at the beginning of the novel with the urchins from Devil's Row. Where he stood upon a heap of gravel before, now he sits upon a wagon and fancies himself to be better than the rest of humanity. The wagon is his skyscraper. He perceives that "Providence had caused it to be clearly written that he and his team had the inalienable right to stand in the proper path of the sun-chariot and if they so minded, to obstruct its mission or take a wheel off." (Crane, Maggie 154-5) If someone opposed this view, Jimmie then felt it was his responsibility, perhaps even his duty, to step down from his throne and do battle with them. His delusions of grandeur only hide from himself, and the rest of humanity, the fact that, just as it was when he was a child, he is involved in meaningless fights over insignificant actions. By convincing themselves that what they do is indeed glorious and meaningful, mankind only enhance the ludicrousness of their actions and show that their efforts to glorify and enlighten themselves has only served to emphasize the pettiness, insignificance, and essentially animal nature of their behavior.

As nature follows the rule of survival of the fittest and only the strong survive, so does Jimmie and the rest of humanity. Early on in his truck driving days, Jimmie made the decision that he would be an immovable object in the streets of the city if he so desired, except, of course, whenever a larger object or man decided otherwise: "He resolved never to move out of the way of anything until formidable circumstances or a much larger man than himself forced him to it." (Crane, Maggie 154) With larger men Jimmie would move only after he had fought them, and
then only after he had been beaten severely enough to decide circumstances warranted his moving his truck. There were only two forces that Jimmie developed respect enough for that he would generally move whenever they wished it. The two forces were the police and firetrucks. The police were the only ones capable of dethroning him..."who, occasionally used to climb up, drag him from his perch, and punch him." (Crane, Maggie 153) In a world where strength rules supreme, Jimmie has learned to fear the police because they wield more power than he does. Only someone stronger than Jimmie could drag him from his throne. He would climb down to fight pedestrians and other drivers, but those were voluntary cases of Jimmie lowering himself to their level. The police would forcibly remove Jimmie.

Jimmie also feared the city's fire-trucks. "As one charged toward his truck, he would drive fearfully upon a sidewalk, threatening untold people with annihilation." (Crane, Maggie 155) The fire engine, because of its brute force, ("It had been known to overturn a street-car.") forces Jimmie to respect it. Joseph Brennan believes that "Taken in isolation the fire engine may be regarded simply as a symbol of irresistible brute force, the only fact which Jimmie can either respect or admire, for that alone can touch his soul with fear." (330) Jimmie even goes so far as to admire it. "A fire-engine was enshrined in his heart as an appalling thing he loved with a distant, dog-like devotion." (Crane, Maggie 155) He admired it from a distance because it was safe that way. Jimmie views the fire-engine as the strongest of the strong and as something that he was not capable of drawing closer to. Jimmie admires and fears those things that have power over or are capable of dominating him. In Jimmie's world this principle holds true.
The strongest rule on the streets through fear and intimidation. They fight simply because they like to enforce their authority and to prove that they are men. The more fights they have the more it is proof of their manhood. Pete is a man in the eyes of Maggie because he manhandles drunks in the bar where he works. Jimmie feels strong and powerful when he climbs down off of the perch of his wagon to manfully contest the right of way. Jimmie's world is full of needless violence. In the natural world, fighting is for survival. It is a matter of life or death, not a means of entertainment. There is a difference when one animal kills another animal for food, and when Jimmie or Pete fight. There is violence in the natural world, but it is a form of violence that is necessary for survival. It cannot be morally condemned. Jimmie and Pete's violence, on the other hand, can be morally condemned because it only leads to fear, pain, and isolation. It only establishes social alienation in a society all ready sorely lacking in compassion. In the natural world there is no pleasure or remorse in fighting or death. Jimmie and Pete gain pleasure through a good fight.

The pictures and impressions we get of the Bowery and the lives that are led there are often distorted. On a physical level we are shown this in many ways. The characters frequently peer through either smoke or blurred glass, thus giving them a distorted perception of reality. Milne Holton argues: "Reality is never seen clearly in the second half of [Maggie]. Characters are often drunk, or confused by rumor. Scene after scene takes place in bar, beer hall, or theater. The air is continually smokey, and images are blurred by glare or darkness."(47) However, the characters' lives are just as distorted as the perceptions of their physical surroundings. They are all caught up
in their imaginary worlds or distorted perceptions of reality. The moral and ethical code by which they live is totally out of proportion to the reality of their environment. They believe (with Maggie's family as an example) in the ideal that the home is the center and most important part of their lives, with the family drawing strength from one another as an unit. According to Donald Pizer, "The moral values held by the Johnsons are drawn almost entirely from a middle class ethic which stresses the home as the center of virtue, and respectability as the primary moral goal." (337) In other words, one should never do anything that would bring shame upon the family. On one level the Johnsons believe in this moral code, but in practice they certainly do not follow it. They strike the poses of morality for the sake of appearing moral, not because they have any actual desire to be moral. They adhere to an ethic that a closely knit family would adhere to, but they fail because they do not have the compassion or desire to be a loving family. The family as the center of virtue especially does not hold true for the Johnsons. The violence and hypocrisy that happens to the children inside the Johnsons' apartment is often much worse than what happens to them outside of it. It is often directly attributable to what happens to Maggie and Jimmie. It is inside the home where Jimmie and Maggie live and learn what their world is like. It is here that Jimmie becomes so cold and aggressive. It is from his mother that he learns to be so hypocritical. It is from the family and the life that her family makes her lead that Maggie wants so desperately to escape from, and which leads her down the road to destruction. There is no solidarity to this family, or to the society in which they live. The children, especially Jimmie, learn from the home to look out for their
own best interests.

It is from this false middle class ethic that the double standard of the mother, Jimmie, Pete, and the neighbors, arises. Both her mother and her brother, Jimmie, reject Maggie in the end because of her threat to their respectability. The two of them fail to realize that they themselves have no respectability. Jimmie has been guilty of doing to other girls what has been done to Maggie, and the mother is the one who forced Maggie into the situation in the first place by throwing her out of the home and then refusing to let her return. And even if they had any claim to respectability it would still be out of place inside the environment in which they live. The Johnsons lived in a warzone. All around them waged the same viciousness, insensitivity, vice, and strife that they experienced and created in their own home. True morality would be very much out of place in this type of setting; therefore a pose of morality is completely contrary to the reality that exists. Donald Pizer states: "The moral poses adopted by the Johnsons and by Pete have no relation to reality, however, since the home and the bar are parallel settings of warfare rather than of virtue."(338) By attempting to create the illusions of morality and of their self-importance the Johnsons illustrate the ridiculousness and insignificance of their lives. There is no solidarity or compassion, so there is no true morality.

The moralistic attitude of the Johnsons is not from any sincere or deep-seated sense of their own beliefs, but is for the sake of the neighbors. Pizer argues: "The key to the morality of the Bowery is therefore its self-deceiving theatricality. Those expressing moral sentiments do so as though playing a role before a real or implied
audience." (Pizer 338) They adopt morals because they believe it is what is expected from them. Pizer also suggests: "The roles bring social approbation, and they are also satisfying because the playing of them before an audience encourages a gratifying emotionalism or self-justification." (Pizer 338) When Maggie returns home after Pete has rejected her she is greeted by her mother, Jimmie, and an audience of curious neighbors:

"Maggie's mother paced to and fro, addressing the doorful of eyes, expounding like a glib showman. Her voice rang through the building. 'Dere she stands,' she cried, wheeling suddenly and pointing with a dramatic finger. 'Dere she stands! Look ut her! Ain' she a dandy? An' she was so good as to come home teh her mudder, she was! Ain' she a beaut'? Ain' she a dandy?'
The jeering cries ended in another burst of shrill laughter. The girl seemed to awaken. 'Jimmie'
'He drew hastily back from her. 'Well, now, yer a ting, ain' yeh?' he said, his lips curling in scorn. Radiant virtue sat upon his brow, and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination.
Maggie turned and went.
The crowd at the door fell back precipitately. A baby falling down in front of the door wrenched a scream like that of a wounded animal from its mother. Another woman sprang forward and picked it up with a chivalrous air, as if rescuing a human being from an oncoming express train." (Crane, Maggie 203)

Jimmie and the mother react this way because of the presence of an audience. Pizer argues: "Each crisis in the Johnson family is viewed by neighbors who comprise an audience which encourages the Johnsons to adopt moral poses. In the scene in which Maggie is cast out, both Jimmie and Mrs. Johnson are aware of their need to play the roles of outraged virtue in response to the expectations of their audience." (Pizer 338–9) Maggie is therefore driven from her home and into a life of prostitution and then premature death because of a morality imposed on her not just by the family but by her neighbors as well. All around them is corruption and vice which the Johnsons and
their neighbors participate in and encourage on a daily basis. It is a way of life for them. They live in a world where morals are often set aside, or where morals apply to others, but not to themselves. Maggie is a victim of this type of morality. She, because of her desires and dreams, is seduced by Pete. Unwilling to adjust to and accept her life in the Bowery, Maggie searched for and found an escape in Pete. He was strong, protective, and apparently led the life of dinners and theaters that Maggie wanted (he at least had two different suits). Maggie hurt herself, though, in that the more involved with Pete and his dreamworld she became, the less able she was to tolerate reality. Milne Holton suggests: "For her fantasy had been indulged to an extent that she can no longer tolerate the reality of her environment. And it is this instinct to avoid a confrontation with reality which leads directly to her seduction and then to her death."(49) She leaves reality and enters her dreamworld under the protection of Pete. Even Maggie has fallen back to the animalistic instinct of "only the strongest survive," when she began to regard Pete as her protector. "She thought of her former Rum Alley environment and turned to regard Pete's strong protecting fists." (Crane, Maggie 189) Pete is later referred to by Maggie as having "man-subduing eyes." When Pete no longer protects her, Maggie is lost. She is unable to return to her family because of their moral condemnation, and Pete will have nothing to do with her because, in his mind, she threatens the respectability of his bar. Neither of the poses of morality forced upon her have anything to do with the reality of the Bowery. Neither view is based upon virtue, but they are founded only upon meaningless gestures in pursuit of inappropriate ideals.
Maggie, in the end, commits suicide. Unable to deal with the reality of her existence, she ends it in the dark, indifferent waters of a river: "At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence." (Crane, Maggie 211) Maggie finds relief in the waters of the river. The river is cold, indifferent, and even uncaring, but it is a release from the moral hypocrisy and animalistic behavior of the city. At the river there is no judgment or false dreams, only dark quiet waters. It is indifferent to her problems, but it creates no new ones for her. It does not curse and condemn her for being a prostitute, it just flows along on its path, indifferent to the plight and suffering of mankind. But, for Maggie, this is a release. The indifference is better than the condemnation.

In Maggie Crane himself, however, can be seen as condemning many instances of false morality. False morality starts when someone violates a moral code and is condemned by individuals who have more than likely been guilty of the same shortcoming. Crane writes that "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud-puddle." It is not Maggie's physical environment that led to her downfall. Crane's point is, Donald Pizer suggests, "that Maggie came through the mud-puddle of her physical environment untouched. It is only when her environment becomes a moral force that she is destroyed." (340) Crane maintains Maggie's innocence throughout the novel. She has, in fact, committed no sin other than her mistake in thinking that Pete was the man of her dreams. In her attempt to escape the world of Rum Alley, she mistakenly enters into an identical
world. Maggie has no conception of doing anything wrong. In her eyes she was only trying to be happy. She is condemned and punished for her efforts, however, and never given a chance to redeem herself. She takes her life in the waters of the city river, hoping that there she will find peace and an escape from her problems. She escapes into nature in the sense that she has escaped the problems of life by dying. But nature is still indifferent, for in the end Maggie has done nothing more than die and nothing that is left behind her has changed. Because of the lack of human compassion and solidarity Maggie finds no place in society for herself. She is alone and isolated, but nature was not the solution to her problems that she thought it was.
In Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming is a young man concerned with the question of his own courage in the face of battle. Through Henry and the numerous war scenes, Crane shows us the futility and insignificance of man's actions in a number of ways. Henry comes to a realization of his own, as well as all mankind's, insignificance through the death of his friend Jim Conklin and through his attempted escape into what he thought would be the seclusion and safety of nature. Crane also focuses on the idea of man's interest in his own individuality and his own well-being. Man, when concerned only with himself, isolates himself not only from the rest of mankind but also from a sense of belonging with anything. When he places on himself the burden of self-importance then he becomes less important, isolating himself into his own little world and away from the fellowship of mankind. As with the men in "The Open Boat," Henry has to learn the lesson of communion with mankind, for it is only when men help each other that they have a sense of belonging. Crane, as he did in "A Mystery of Heroism," also attributes animal characteristics to the actions of men. The men behave and act in the manner of animals, often being described as fish, chickens, wild beasts, and sheep. Their animalistic characteristics further emphasize their insignificance.

When we first meet Henry Fleming he is positioned in his regiment's camp. They had been stationed there for almost two weeks waiting to go into battle. During that time he had had plenty of opportunity to examine himself and to try to figure what he would do when it came time to actually to go into battle. Crane, here, begins what is to be the start of several cycles within the story. These cycles focus on Henry's thoughts and actions. They repeat themselves in various ways, sometimes
comparing what is happening to Henry to what is happening to the regiment. Henry's cycle begins the day before they go into battle. He is in the midst of examining himself, focusing all of his energies upon himself. He is mostly oblivious to what is going on around him and prefers to remain by himself. He is being extremely self-centered, concentrating on his own thoughts and emotions and wondering how well he will do in battle and not on how well the army or his regiment will do. According to Thomas Lorch, when the morning of the actual battle comes, Henry adopts another state of mind: "Henry Fleming alternates between two states of mind. The first is self-centered; when in it, his pride and extreme consciousness of himself lead his thinking into rationalization and his imagination into exaggeration. In the second state Henry forgets himself and either acts instinctively (animal imagery is usually used to describe this type of action) or observes and interprets the action and his part in it accurately." (352) The morning before the battle Henry is in the self-centered state. He is analyzing and isolating himself from the rest of the regiment. Because he could not "mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle" (Crane, Red Badge 15), he felt fear, panic and isolation because he was afraid that the rest of the regiment were all fearless and had never entertained even the notion of running. His fears were somewhat reassured by Jim Conklin who told him, "I've thought it might get too hot for Jim Conklin in some of them scrimmages, and if a whole lot of boys started and run, why, I s'pose I'd start and run. And if I once started to run, I'd run like the devil, and no mistake. But if everybody was a-standing and a-fighting, why, I'd stand and fight. Be jiminey, I would. I'll bet on it." (Crane, Red Badge 20) Henry is
reassured because he had feared that all the other men had no fear:
"The youth of this tale felt gratitude for these words of his comrade. He had feared that all of the untried men possessed a great and correct confidence. He now was in a measure reassured." (Crane, Red Badge 20)

But, for the most part Henry continues to isolate himself.

The morning of the battle we find Henry in the second state of mind. "He was bewildered. As he ran with his comrades he strenuously tried to think, but all he knew was that if he fell down those coming behind would tread upon him." (Crane, Red Badge 40)

Henry is now caught up in the action of those around him. He is part of the group moving forward to test themselves in battle. When Henry first confronts the enemy he is still in this frame of mind: "He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire." (Crane, Red Badge 64)

Henry is no longer isolated and thinking only of himself. He becomes caught up in the common cause of everyone around him and forgets about his fears. Once the skirmish is over and Henry has time to think, however, he begins to feel proud of himself and his illusions of glory return. Henry is busy feeling proud of himself when the next attack begins. Because he is caught up in thoughts about himself his response to the second attack is one of flight. As Thomas Lorch explains, "The cycle which Crane establishes reveals why Henry fails, and how he may succeed. He fails whenever he isolates himself, exaggerates his own importance, gives himself over to self-centered thought and imagination, and falls into romantic illusions. He succeeds when he forgets himself,
becomes a part of the group, and sees things as they are." (353) Henry must learn to forget himself and participate with the whole, as in "The Open Boat," where the men in the boat have to work together to survive, and in doing so develop a sense of community amongst themselves. Henry can lose his sense of insignificance if he becomes a member of the society of mankind. Henry becomes caught up in his own self-importance, however, and forgets the rest.

When Henry runs from his regiment, he runs to the peacefulness and serenity of nature. He has run away from the community of man because, since he is now concentrating upon himself, he has lost that sense of communion that he briefly shared. He is angry with the army and all of mankind because they have dared to ask too much of him. He is too smart to let the army foolishly throw his life away. When he realizes that his regiment has held he feels angry and cheated: "He grew bitter over it. It seemed that the blind ignorance and stupidity of those little pieces had betrayed him. He had been overturned and crushed by their lack of sense in holding the position, when intelligent deliberation would have convinced them that it was impossible. He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark, had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge. He felt a great anger against his comrades. He knew it could be proved that they had been fools." (Crane, Red Badge 88) "A dull, animal like rebellion against his fellows," (Crane, Red Badge 89) grew within him and he headed into the deep woods in order to drown out the noise of battle and the reminder of his shame. Henry pictures nature as a release from his fear and shame: "The landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace." (Crane, Red Badge 90) Henry observes a squirrel running in fear
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from him and rationalizes that this is nature's way of showing him that in running from the battle he did what any intelligent man or creature would do. What Henry fails to realize at first is that nature is not a refuge for him. It is indifferent. It does not enforce his arguments and prove that he is right. After Henry's first test in battle he looks up at the sky and is surprised to find "the pure, blue sky and the sun gleaming on the trees and fields."(Crane, Red Badge 73) Despite man's wars and battles, nature had gone on as though nothing had happened at all. Nature does not give Henry a sign of acceptance by allowing him to enter the woods. It does not give him anything. Henry is just there, much like the other animals of the forest.

As Henry moves deeper into the forest he sees a small animal plunge into the water of the swamp and emerge with a fish between its teeth. This is just a hint that death can happen in nature as quickly as it can come in the world of man. The world of nature is not the peaceful, receptive world that Henry imagines it to be. He eventually comes to a place where the tree limbs form together to make a chapel. Henry is shocked when he discovers what is inside: "He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a column-like tree....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."(Crane, Red Badge 92) It is now that Henry comes to the realization that nature is not what he expected it to be. Olov Fryckstedt argues that, "When suddenly confronted with the decomposing corpse upon whose face ants are eagerly feeding he realizes with a shock of terror the real law that
governs nature....Nature could offer him no escape or relief from life on the battlefield; in fact he had found that the laws which governed nature were not too different from those which seemed to rule on the battlefield. The corpse in the forest cathedral blocked his retreat away from men and forced him back"(142). Henry has found in the forest what he was running away from on the battlefield. Nature will not protect him from death. The unfeeling world of nature, at that moment, seemed as cruel, if not more so, than the world of Generals and bullets. What had started out for Henry as a somewhat religious experience had quickly turned into a brush with the reality of the world. Milne Holton suggests: "For now Henry sees man's real place and relationship with Nature, a relationship engaged only through death. Now, alone in the forest, separated from his fellows, he confronts that moment of engagement, the process of natural death itself. And he sees simultaneously how alien and unimportant he is to the natural process..."(101). There is no feeling of renewal to Henry. He runs from the cathedral realizing how unimportant and small he really is.

Henry turns back towards the wars of man and along the way begins to come to an understanding of the inadequacy of human presumptions. "Reflecting, he saw a sort of humor in the point of view of himself and his fellows during the late encounter. They had taken themselves and the enemy very seriously and had imagined that they were deciding the war"(Crane, Red Badge 96-7). Henry is beginning to come to the realization of man's limited capabilities and the meaninglessness of his actions. When he breaks out of the forest and comes upon the line of wounded he meets up with Jim Conklin, who has been mortally wounded, and a tattered soldier, who accompanies Henry as he watches his lifelong
friend die. In the forest Henry had come upon the nature of death, but, up to this point, Henry has not actually seen anyone close to him die. He has seen people die, but so far he has watched them from a detached point of view. In the forest Henry has come to a better understanding of death, but now, because Jim is a close friend, he is going to experience death.

During Henry's tour of duty he had always turned to Jim for comfort and support. He had drawn close to him and had actually begun to look to him as an older brother. Jim represented the strength and maturity that was missing in Henry and the loud soldier, Wilson. Of the three, he has always been the strongest but, ironically, he is the first to die. In "The Open Boat," the Oiler is the strongest and the most seaworthy of the occupants of the boat. Yet, of the four, he is the only one to die. He dies, not because of the vindictiveness of nature, but because he does—a victim of random violence. His death is meaningless and has no point to it, and neither does Jim Conklin's. His death helps Henry to understand the true nature of life and death better. Like the grotesque and distorted features of the soldier in the cathedral, Jim dies a violent and very painful death. Olov Fryckstedt explains that, "Fleming's intense suffering at the sight of his friend's death struggle is enhanced by his growing realization that it is totally meaningless and that its cruelty serves no purpose"(143). Like the Oilers death, Conklin's death serves no purpose. Henry's indignation at the cruelty of Jim's death manifests itself when he turns and shakes his fist at the battlefield:

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

'Hell--'

The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (Crane, Red Badge 115). Henry's gesture and Jim's death are both meaningless as the war does not stop and the sun does not fall from the sky. The sun, as it was when Henry first noticed it after his first fight, as a representative of nature and its indifference, is unaffected. Fryckstedt also suggests: "Here as elsewhere in the book the sun is a symbol of impassive nature...We are made to see man's insignificance and the relentlessness of the laws governing the universe" (143). Henry has come to the realization that man's place in the universe is one of insignificance and eventually of meaningless death. When Henry turns towards the battlefield he does so in rage and in frustration. He realizes that there is nothing he can do about it. He must learn to accept his place in the universe. But the insignificance of society is lost on much of mankind, as illustrated by the soldiers in blue. The regiment's position in the battle is not given, neither do they realize which side is winning or losing. Even at the end of the novel the soldiers do not know if the battle is over or if anybody won. The soldiers do not even know why they are fighting this particular battle. As Henry realizes, the war and the efforts of man are meaningless. They have no consequence in the whole picture. Men are dying horrible deaths and they do not know why. Yet, each soldier and each regiment thinks that their particular unit is fighting the most important part of the battle. The men have blindly accepted the fact that they must be there for an important reason, but none have considered or even bothered to ask why. They are there as a unit, but none know why. Henry realizes
early on that he is part of one small unit that makes up one vast blue fighting machine. Yet, he does not really come to understand or accept this idea until after he has seen Jim die. When Henry left home to go to war, his mother gave us an insight into his true character: "Don't go a-thinkin' you can lick the hull rebel army at the start, because yeh can't. Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others, and yeh've got to keep quiet an' do what they tell yeh. I know how you are, Henry." (Crane, Red Badge 9) Henry imagines himself as an important and integral part of the army. The whole reason he joined was because of the glorious aspirations he had for himself. Through Jim's death, however, Henry has come to a better understanding of his own insignificance.

Henry receives his "red badge of courage" at the hands of a union soldier and not a rebel soldier. The wound is not a sign of courage for Henry, but it does serve its purpose. Henry, at the time, is attempting to return to his regiment and receives the wound from a retreating union soldier whom he is trying to keep from retreating: "Within him something bade to cry out. He had the impulse to make a rallying speech, to sing a battle hymn, but he could only get his tongue to call into the air: Why-why-what-what's th'matter?" (Crane, Red Badge 137) Henry has made the complete route back from his initial flight of fear. He is now heading back towards his unit and the war and away from isolation and loneliness. He is now heading back towards the fellowship of man. Henry's wound, although not the typical red badge of courage, is a sign of a victory of sorts for him. But the wound does allow him to rejoin his regiment without any apparent shame, and to be accepted once again into the company of man. He is now an accepted member of the
community of man and no longer an isolated individual. It is the end of
a cycle for Henry. Henry's acceptance is marked first by the help of
the "cheery man" whose face Henry never sees, and by the help of the
loud soldier, Wilson, who is no longer quite so loud and who has himself
gone through a cycle of sorts. He temporarily takes the place of Jim
Conklin for he is now quiet and assured of himself and the blustering
braggart has now been replaced by someone who breaks up fights instead
of starting them. Once the corporal accepts Henry's story the
acceptance of Henry is complete. When he lies down to sleep that night
he has become part of the men.

Crane often points out the insignificance of man, as he does
throughout this story, by describing man and his actions as portraying or
duplicating the actions of animals. This helps to further illustrate the
insignificance of man by comparing him to creatures that man believes
himself to superior to. Animals are often thought of as possessing very
little intelligence and as being able to live basically by instinct
alone. Men, on the other hand, consider themselves to live almost
entirely by intelligence with very little reliance on instinct.
Throughout The Red Badge of Courage, however, we see members of society
very often relying on their instinct and being basically animalistic in
their nature. Throughout the war scenes Henry, his regiment, and both
armies are described as animals. There is no conscious, intelligent
thought behind the process of fighting. They simply throw their weapons
to their shoulders and begin to fire. After Henry has rejoined his
regiment they go into battle the next day and Henry loses himself in a
battle frenzy: "When, in a dream, it occurred to the youth that his
rifle was an impotent stick, he lost sense of everything but his hate,
his desire to smash into pulp the glittering smile of victory which he could feel upon the faces of his enemies." (Crane, Red Badge 191) During this same fight Henry is described as fighting like a dog: "When the enemy seemed falling back before him and his fellows, he went instantly forward, like a dog who, seeing his foes lagging, turns and insists upon being pursued." (Crane, Red Badge 192) Lost in the battle frenzy, Henry loses all conscious thought of the intelligent man within him and lets loose the animal side of himself. During the charge that immediately followed this battle the men "snorted and blew," acting like calvary horses during a charge. When Henry tries to capture the enemy flag he lunged at it like a "mad horse." Wilson "sprang at the [enemy] flag as a panther at prey." Henry describes his comrades in arms during the charge as having "vicious wolf-like temper[s]." The lieutenant refers to Henry as having fought like a "wild cat." During the fighting, Henry and the rest of his regiment are not like men. Their courage and fighting ability come from the animal side of their nature. Whenever they pause to rest or to contemplate their situation they become like men again and manage to get themselves into trouble. During the charge they run out of wind and pause to rest: "Among some stolid trees it began to falter and hesitate...Since much of their strength and their breath had vanished, they returned to caution. They were become men again." (Crane, Red Badge 210) They begin to take stock of their situation and begin to become afraid. They freeze in one place and the enemy begins to take the advantage. It is only when the human side takes over that the men begin to get into trouble. When they were under the influence of their animal natures they did just fine.

When the men are afraid, however, they are also described as
animals. When they are standing motionless in the middle of their charge they are described as being "huddled like sheep." After the first battle Henry observes a soldier run "like a rabbit," and Henry follows him like "the proverbial chicken." When Henry's regiment is marching to their first battle Henry is afraid that they are all going to be "killed like pigs." But he is also afraid to say anything because he is afraid that if he is wrong it would "turn him into a worm." As Mordecai Marcus points out, most of the fear imagery happens during the first part of the book and there is a progression in the terminology used to described Henry throughout the book. "The novel consists of twenty-four chapters: in the first twenty-three Henry has changed from a worm and a chicken to a wild cat; in chapter twenty-four he realizes that he has been an animal all the time that he was fighting, and his new acceptance of his precarious lot as a man is shown by his realization that he is a man and not an animal. "He was a man...He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war." (345) Earlier Henry had learned the lesson that man was not the center of the universe, neither was he immortal. Now he has to realize that man is not that different from the animals of the field. He is capable of being herded into position just like cows. Marcus also points out that, "In the thick of battle Henry becomes a "well-meaning cow," and there is in his eyes the look that can be seen in those of a "jaded horse.""(Marcus 345) He can do what he is told to do without knowing why he is doing it. "His mind took a mechanical but firm impression, so that afterward everything was pictured and explained to him, save why he himself was there."(Crane, Red Badge 209) Henry possesses the same instinct of survival and desire to live as animals do. Therefore,
Henry has had to realize that man is a simple being. Man considers animals, especially domesticated ones, to be simple animals that merely exist. If man, therefore, is similar to the animal, then he is also a simple creature.

In the early stages of the book, Henry let himself be ruled by the natural forces of his body. These forces would dictate whether he would run, or stay his ground and fight. As the novel progresses Henry begins to gain control of these forces and to recognize them for what they are. He has played the role of coward, fighter, hero, and observer, and come away with a different perspective from the one he had when he entered the war. When he joined he did so because he sought glory for himself. He wanted nothing more than to be able to come home and show his medals of glory to his mother and friends. Throughout the course of the novel, though, Henry changes from an individual concerned about his own welfare to a young man who is more concerned about the welfare of his regiment. He has joined the community of man and has accepted the compromises that this has called for. Eric Solomon notes that, "He has become a new man who views life in a fresh framework, not as an opportunity for glory but as a job to be done."(97) What Henry had originally viewed as an opportunity for glory turned into something that simply had to be done. He has also learned that life is not the romantic ideal that he thought it to be. He has seen and experienced death first hand through the death of Jim Conklin and he has also experienced the shame of abandoning another human being to his fate. He has sought refuge in nature, hoping to hide both himself and his problems, only to realize that nature is not interested in the problems of man. Henry, through a comparison of man to the natural world and to his own animalistic nature,
has realized the insignificance of man. Henry has learned of the importance of the community over the self and also that the self only becomes important when he is a member of humanity. He has realized that as an isolated individual he was less important because he had isolated himself away from the fellowship of mankind. There was no sense of community or belonging to anything. Once he establishes this sense of belonging then, he becomes welded into the common desire of humanity.

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry comes to a realization and understanding of man's insignificance and relative unimportance in the universe. He has also realized that self-importance can be found in a unification with humanity. The men in "The Open Boat" also come to the same conclusion as Henry. Both stories reflect an optimistic and hopeful view of man and his relationship with the world around him and with other men. On the other hand though, no hope can be found in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, and "The Blue Hotel." The characters in these works are at odds with both society and with the natural world. There is no understanding or effort at communion with mankind. In "A Mystery of Heroism," there is a brief flash of hope when Collins returns to give the wounded lieutenant a drink, but it dies at the end of the story when we realize that no lesson has been learned. In these five works Crane offers both hope for society through an understanding of nature and of the importance of fellowship with humanity, and despair when man fails to realize his own insignificance.
Works Cited


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