STEPHEN CRANE'S NATURALISM

by

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INTRODUCTION

Although Stephen Crane is mentioned in most histories of American literature, only a mere handful of literary critics has made any significant contribution towards an understanding of the author. Chief among them are Wilson Follett, the editor of the only complete set of Crane's work; Thomas Beer, Crane's most successful biographer; Lars Ahnebrink; Carl Van Doren; and Herbert J. Muller. Of these critics, to this investigator's knowledge, only Lars Ahnebrink has made a detailed analysis of Crane's naturalism. His study concerned itself with Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris as well as Crane, and was entitled The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction. Since even in this work Crane shared consideration with two other prominent authors, it seems likely that further study of him in a naturalistic context will be rewarding.

The aim of this thesis is to study Crane in such a way that it may be determined to what extent his prose was naturalistic. His verse is omitted from consideration. In this pursuit, a great debt is admitted to Ahnebrink's analyses of Crane and other naturalists in the above-mentioned work. More of Ahnebrink's extensive research than of his method has been utilized. Whereas Ahnebrink emphasized the facts
of Crane's life and the general naturalistic aspect of his work, the method of this thesis involves a general and textual study of the author's writings. In order to study the works thus, rather extensive preparations are necessary.

It is first necessary to determine what naturalism is. For the most part, the difficulty lies in the fact that the word is an abstraction and one of many components. The chief component of this literary manner or method of composition is a deterministic doctrine. A work that is deterministic, however, is not necessarily naturalistic. This latter term further implies a scientific fidelity to truth. Émile Zola, as much as does any man, occupies the throne of the high priest of naturalists. However, abounding in determinism but lacking objective accuracy, his writings would hardly be naturalistic. The fact is that Zola has been heralded for the accuracy of his portrayals. Also characteristic of the term being discussed are the characterization of types, the use of detailed settings (the milieus), and the depiction of masses. In arriving at a definition, these and other components of the mode of composition are considered. Other terms that may require explanation are defined when their discussion arises.

It is helpful to trace naturalism to its source. There is general agreement among critics that it originated in France. Its emergence is associated with the pessimistic, chaotic works of Zola (1840-1902). Previous to him, Honoré
de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, fellow countrymen, had made departures from romanticism which presaged Zola's writing as he did. This latter author readily admitted an extensive debt to his renowned predecessors. This influence upon Zola and less important ones are considered when accounting for the existence of the new literary mode. In addition, Zola's native successors are given recognition. In the chapter of this thesis concerned with foreign influences, the nature of the impact of Russian realists as well as that of French naturalists upon American writers is treated in proportion to its significance. This is a preparation for the discussion of American naturalism.

The new literary form was gradually accepted by the American public. Conditions at home in the post-Civil War period were becoming increasingly compatible with naturalistic doctrines. The bourgeoning of industry and big business, the rise of science, and the eventual closing of the frontier all pointed up the superficiality of romanticism. Edward Eggleston and Joseph Kirkland were among the first authors to depart from the tradition of the "Feminine 'Seventies." The literary dictators of the era, William Dean Howells and Henry James, came to approve of many foreign innovations and implored their compatriots to be more realistic. Among others, four Americans went even further than had been suggested, Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser. The writings of the three other
men are related to the work of Crane. In the discussion that prefaces a consideration of his naturalism, the various industrial, scientific, geographic, and literary aspects of the American scene merit attention.

The foregoing discussion arrives at a point where Stephen Crane's writings may be considered in their proper perspective. This author's work bears the stamp of the mode of composition originated by Zola. It shows the influence that the native state of affairs and native naturalistic developments had upon it. Crane did write with a high fidelity to truth and with a sober recognition of its consequences. He characterized types and depicted masses as, for example, in his characterization of the hero and portrayal of the opposing armies in his novel of the Civil War, The Red Badge of Courage. Especially in two novelle, Maggie and George's Mother, he stressed the naturalistic themes of pessimism, chaos, and determinism. Since the purpose of this thesis is to judge of the importance of Crane's naturalism, it is necessary to study his prose in detail. A textual criticism of those of his works which are most naturalistic is appropriate.

Critics are almost unanimously agreed that of Crane's longer writings The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie, and George's Mother are the only significant ones that are naturalistic. In addition, a handful of short stories, "The Blue Hotel"
and "The Open Boat" conspicuous among them, is naturalistic. The longer works are most deserving of a textual study. Two chapters of this thesis involve close criticism of the aforementioned novel and novelle.

Sometimes even single sentences may be used to indicate the naturalistic aspect of a passage. By isolating and examining the content of a short paragraph, it is frequently possible to show how naturalistic are nearby paragraphs and related materials. However, in terms of an entire work, single sentences are inconclusive. Whole paragraphs may seem rather inconsequential. For that reason, with each work a large number of representative naturalistic quotations will be discussed. It is felt that a great many of such quotations may be used as the basis for arriving at valid conclusions. The existence of realism and impressionism in The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie, and George's Mother will also be considered. It is understandable that the presence of modes of composition allied to naturalism may be used to show the relative significance of the latter mode. When all of the evidence is in, an attempt will be made to determine the importance of Stephen Crane's naturalism.
CHAPTER I

NATURALISM

Much has been written about the term "naturalism," the manner and method of literary composition which takes for granted that man's destiny is determined essentially by heredity and environment and primitive drives and instincts. Critics have generally agreed that disagreement or, at the best, uncertainty has marked what has been thus far written. On the other hand, there have been relatively few attempts to find naturalism in Stephen Crane's prose. To be sure, some critics, notably Wilson Follett, Alexander Cowie, and Lars Ahnebrink, have considered his prose in the light of naturalism. Although it is disputed to what degree his prose is naturalistic, critical consensus has been that naturalistic elements are there. As has been said, the eventual purpose of this thesis is to isolate and judge of the importance of Crane's naturalism. Before this may be done, it will be necessary to arrive at an understanding of what is meant here by that term. This chapter is concerned solely with its definition. The attempt will be to assign to naturalism that meaning which is consistent with the majority of critical opinion. Disagreement, when of a consequential nature, will be taken into account.
The kind of naturalism with which this thesis is concerned is not easily defined. The word "kind" suggests that of the genus naturalism there may be many species, and this is true. There are two philosophical doctrines that are so named which should be discussed. In turn, works of literature that hold to these philosophies have come to be termed naturalistic. Of course, as the doctrines are quite different, those compositions that hold to one philosophy differ widely from those that hold to the other. The naturalism of this thesis is one of the two manners or modes of composition. Certainly, as an author who employs such a method of composition takes for granted one of the philosophies, the literary term has much in common with that philosophy. However, it is to be understood that it is Stephen Crane's writing, not his doctrine, which is of utmost importance here.

It is a perversity of human nature to say more easily what a thing is not than what it is. The philosophy and its attendant literary style, neither of which concerned Crane, should be considered. Eliminating them will greatly narrow the limits of our own definition. The non-Cranean doctrine is a broad one. Thrall and Hibbard said of it in their accomplished handbook of definitions that it is "used in senses corresponding with many of the various meanings of 'nature' ... thus, the 'naturalism' of Wordsworth means this poet's philosophy about the relation of external nature to man and
The doctrine of that literary school of which Crane was a member is radically unlike this host of interpretations of nature. Rather, Crane and those of his school were little concerned with such externals of nature as mountains, rivers, and trees. Malcolm Cowley has said of their view: "The effect of Naturalism as a doctrine is to subtract from literature the whole notion of human responsibility. 'Not men' is its constant echo." As regards the attitude of the Crane group towards God, Lars Ahnebrink has commented: "These authors rejected the traditional belief that man was divine, a creature of God; instead they looked upon man as an insignificant being, ruled by forces beyond his control."

All of the doctrines deriving their significance from various meanings of "nature" were of the same type. Crane, by differing from Wordsworth, differed from the other "nature" interpreters. As Crane and his fellows wrote as they believed (and those of schools like Wordsworth's did likewise), the naturalism to be discussed has nothing important in common with other modes of expression bearing the same name.

Doctrines and literary styles which are derived from


an interpretation of "nature" shall serve no further purpose in this discussion. However, the naturalistic or determin­istic philosophy which was adhered to by such writers as Crane is a key to their mode of expression. Again, this creed is that man's destiny is determined by ruthless forces, heredity and environment, and that he is motivated by primitive drives and instincts over which he exercises limited control. Malcolm Cowley has said of naturalism that it "has been defined in two words as pessimistic determinism, and the definition is true so far as it goes." 4 Cowley has explained that naturalistic authors were determinists in that they believed in the omnipotence of abstract forces. They were pessimistic in so far as they believed that individuals were incapable of shaping their destinies. In this sense, the authors were philosophical naturalists. Later in his article Cowley has discussed those emotions that are likely to be treated by a naturalistic writer. These human emotions are outside of the realm of philosophical doctrines embracing naturalism and determinism. Rather, their qualities are those of another form of literary composition, a form generally regarded as the antithesis of naturalism. Cowley has said of the naturalistic writers:

Among the romantic qualities they tried to achieve was "bigness" in its double reference to

size and intensity. They wanted to display "big" -- that is, intense -- emotions against a physically large background. Bigness was the virtue that Norris most admired in Zola's novels. "The world of M. Zola," he said, "is a world of big things; the enormous, the formidable, the terrible, is what counts; no tea-cup tragedies here."5

It is the contention of this thesis that with naturalism great stress is likely to be placed upon broad panoramic aspects of the implacable social environment. The world is likely to be pictured as vast (and to be described in lavish detail), and emotions will in all probability run high. However, infrequently the reverse is true. In order to be naturalistic, a given work need not involve all of the traits that are characteristic of literary naturalism. What Bernard Smith has said of realists is equally applicable here: "... nor are they allied by a single method: some have stood for lavishness in reproducing physical detail, others for the pruning of descriptive matter to the barest essentials. What unites them is their aim."6 It is a nice problem, which will be postponed until later in this thesis, to determine to what extent a literary specimen must be naturalistic in order to be an example of naturalism.

Just as the tendency of naturalism to render intense emotions suggested a kinship with romanticism and a

5. Ibid., p. 422.
departure from the philosophic concept, this tendency hints at a variance with realism. "The world of M. Zola is a world of big things ..." Thrall and Hibbard, in their standard text *A Handbook to Literature*, emphasized that here lies the chief difference between realism and naturalism. They said:

Naturalism is less selective, more all-inclusive, than realism. The realist selects according to some purpose those details which relate to his intent; the naturalist also selects, but in his desire to create a definite impression in the mind of his reader he reserves unto himself to go wherever he will for his material. The first distinction of naturalism, then, is its greater inclusiveness, its greater catholicity in acceptance of detail ....

Lars Ahnebrink, the author of the only existing extensive treatment of Stephen Crane as a naturalist, found the essential distinction between the two manners of composition to be something quite different. He said in the introduction to *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*: "In contrast to a realist, a naturalist believes that man is fundamentally an animal without free will. To a naturalist man can be explained in terms of the forces, usually heredity and environment, which operate upon him." Just before this, Ahnebrink had distinguished realism by an underscored definition that avoided mention of determinism: "Realism is a manner and method of composition by which the author

describes normal, average life in an accurate and truthful way (exemplified in Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*)."

In the body of his book, Ahnebrink expanded upon his thesis that the absence of fatalism from realistic literature is its foremost distinction. He said, having discussed the naturalistic man as one devoid of free will: "This concept of man was fundamental in naturalism and different from that usually embraced by realists, who believed that man was a free ethical being responsible for his own judgments." Irrespective of which difference is assumed to be cardinal, the point is well taken that the two forms of expression are dissimilar in more ways than one. Herbert J. Muller gave a colorful, graphic account of what he assumed to be the difference. Having discussed the realists, he said: "Those known as naturalists commonly use plainer language, give greater emphasis to ugly or scatological detail, and in general display a fondness for taking pictures of society with its pants down."

As naturalistic authors hold to a deterministic creed, it is logical to assume that the approach to their work is a scientific one. This is true. Of all literary modes,


naturalism, in its fidelity to fact, approaches most nearly to the ideal of photography. Zola's *Nana*, an early naturalistic work, is admirably demonstrative. In one descriptive passage, not unlike many others, the author dwells for more than a page, paragraph after paragraph, upon the appearance of his heroine. The description is of Nana in the presence of the character Muffat. It is apparent that Zola had, as critics have complained of him when citing the writer as tedious, collected "the most complete and exact data obtainable." In part, he says:

Bending back thus, she displayed her solid Amazonian waist and firm bosom, where strong muscles moved under the satin texture of the skin. A delicate line, to which the shoulder and the thigh added their slight undulations, ran from one of her elbows to her foot, and Muffat's eyes followed this tender profile, and marked how the outlines of the fair flesh vanished in golden gleams, and how its rounded contours shone like silk in the candle-light. ... Nana was all covered with fine hair; a russet made her body velvety; whilst the Beast was apparent in the almost equine development of her flanks, in the fleshy exuberances and deep hollows of her body, which lent her sex the mystery and suggestiveness lurking in their shadows.¹²

This manner of reporting the facts, very much as a painter sketches in the details of a canvas, may be coupled with the tendency to render vastness in the achieving of an effect. In addition to being tedious, it has been said of Zola that the detail of his work was seldom impressive. How is it,

¹² *Émile Zola, Nana*, p. 234.
then, that Norris could say of that writer's world that it was "enormous," "formidable," "the terrible"? The fact is that, when considered in its totality, the complete inventory of even dreary minutiae may be striking. For Zola, this must be the case. Norris' idea of the man's work is representative.

The fact that a naturalist may approach to the fidelity of photography merits elaboration. In order to do so, it is necessary for the naturalistic writer to be objective. Naturalism has been said to give no better picture of what man is than a description of his biology, than that given by a three-by-five snapshot. The criticism exaggerates the case. However, undeniably the naturalist is not penetrative in the sense of an expressionist or a surrealist. Rather, he depends upon the completeness of his word-picture of exteriors to impart meaning. In respect to action, it is merely observed behavior, to be explained in terms of the forces. Jonathan Swift once declared that the inner world is better left unexplored; ¹³ The naturalists seem to be in agreement with him. It is their strategy, instead, to pile external fact upon fact until the desired impression is inescapable. For these writers, it is their readers who delve into the psychology and sociology of men and events. The essence

of the technique is the subtlety of rendition as opposed to explanation.

Naturalists select and arrange just enough to elevate their art above photography, to lend to it whatever penetration it may attain. To compensate for their lack of depth, there is always the greater breadth to their field of experience. Coordinately, there is a widening of the horizons of interpretation (for the reader) and of characterization (for the writer). However, no matter how much of experience may be examined, so much of it remains immeasurable. Today's science refutes that of yesterday. Insight, intuition, emotion and, most important, life itself are yet riddles. It is a conjecture on solid ground that as science marches forward, so shall the significance of naturalistic literature. Always, though, there must be the reminder, with its troublesome implications, that science is hardly an aesthetic pursuit. Since the work of Zola, Crane, Norris is avowedly literary, it must be judged, at last, upon aesthetic grounds.

Since the naturalist regards his subjects as something of laboratory specimens, it follows that he does not identify himself with them. Instead, his tendency is to create impersonal characters. They are likely to be identified, Malcolm Cowley contended, with social groups or movements, or with individuals like Babbitt and Studs Lonigan who are regarded as typical of a group. Cowley found this to be a
characteristic as well of the American Marxist novelists. As I have said, the changes depicted by the naturalists were the result of laws and forces beyond human control. Having stated this to be his contention, Cowley said:

... That is the great difference between the Naturalists and the proletarian or Marxist novelists of the 1930's. The proletarian writers -- who were seldom proletarians in private life -- believed that men acting together could make a new world ... In the beginning of each book they portrayed a group of factory workers as the slaves of economic conditions, "the creatures of habit, the playthings of forces"; then later they portrayed the conversion of one or more workers to Communism ....14

Cowley's judgment is that the objective and exterior technique, borrowed of the naturalists, was unsuited to the depiction of converts capable of an economic revolution. This points up the consistency between doctrine and approach of the naturalists. The author of "'Not Men': A Natural History of American Naturalism" has cited a passage from Stephen Crane in a different connection, but it applies here equally well. The quotation emphasizes the compatibility of objective approach and naturalistic creed. Cowley said, in part, of one of Crane's most popular short stories:

When the four shipwrecked men in The Open Boat are drifting close to the beach but are unable to land because of the breakers, they stare at a windmill that is like "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, and nature in the visions of

men. She did not seem cruel to him, then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent."

In France, Zola had been optimistic about the future of the naturalistic world. This, at any rate, was the attitude of his latter years. He affirmed his faith in the inevitable victory of truth, which victory he came to equate with the deterministic literary faith. Cowley phrased the same idea more emphatically when he found that Zola had declared his belief in human perfectibility 'in what he called 'a constant march toward truth ...'" Cowley, like Lars Ahnebrink, felt that "it was from Zola rather than Spencer or any native source that Norris had borrowed most of his doctrines." Just previous to these comments on Zola in "'Not Men': A Natural History of American Naturalism," Norris' optimism had been discussed at length. For many, the words "Norris' optimism" have a self-contradictory ring. Cowley recognized that the author of McTeague and The Octopus had minimized persons, McTeague, for example, and magnified such forces as "The Octopus." In the words of Frank Norris that have become famous in naturalistic circles:

... Men were naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed -- FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make

15. Ibid., p. 418.
16. Ibid., p. 415.
17. Loc. cit.
way for the succeeding generation, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop.

Cowley found that Norris combined this romantic pessimism about individuals with romantic optimism about the future of mankind. Again, a passage from *The Octopus* substantiated the view:

"... The individual suffers, but the race goes on.... Annixerter dies, but in a far distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved. The larger view always and through all shams, all wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail...."

"Truth that will, in the end, prevail...." Zola might just as well have said that as Norris. This was a version of the nineteenth century belief in universal progress. Cowley felt that it was akin, too, to native or Emersonian idealism. Little of Stephen Crane's literary creed is recorded. However, a writer for the *Academy* discovered an instance of Crane's recalling that "As Emerson said: 'There should be a long logic beneath the story, but it should be kept carefully out of sight.'" Crane's recollection was found in a letter written by the author to a friend immediately after the success of his first war novel. As Emerson


was averse to preaching and as he was an idealist, the American essayist was a disciple of Truth.

That quest for Truth—the strongest bond between Emerson and such naturalists as Zola and Norris—is the vital link between Emerson and Stephen Crane. Lars Ahnebrink said of the author of The Red Badge of Courage, "Above all he considered truthfulness the most important principle. The author should be true to himself and true to the life that surrounded him." Crane, Ahnebrink said, "aimed at accuracy and truth and requested 'personal honesty' of himself and other writers. His purpose was to achieve nearness to life ...." Crane himself observed that the nearer a writer gets to life, which is truth, the greater he becomes as an artist. The implication is that in terms of integrity and genius, of all the naturalists Crane was one of the most profound. Nevertheless, honesty is universally a naturalistic trait.

The honesty of the naturalists led them to some rather startling conclusions. Cowley noted that Zola had felt that men should be studied as simple elements and that their actions should be observed. It was very much as one might study a gnat. Cowley found the theme of the beast within to be a favorite of naturalistic fiction. "The veneer of

22. Loc. cit.
civilization drops or is stripped away," Cowley said, "and we are faced with 'the primal instinct of the brute struggling for its life and for the life of its young.' The phrase is Norris', but Cowley observed that it might have been written by any of the early naturalists. Theodore Dreiser went so far as to present love as a form of electromagnetism, and success or failure as a question of chemical compounds. This is an example of one of the many startling extensions of the naturalistic approach.

Observing for the most part the same writers, Lars Ahnebrink discovered a more complex approach. These naturalists felt, Ahnebrink concluded, that man was akin to all nature. To illustrate this belief, they often portrayed him as a beast.

... Yet even as they admitted man's relationship with the animals, they did not equalize man and animal. Man was a higher being than the beasts, and his better self was in constant struggle with his lower self, his animal nature. Ahnebrink found this dualism to be emphasized by Garland and Norris. On the other hand, Cowley felt that Norris, for instance, stressed the beast almost to the exclusion of all else. It is a question, very nearly, of: Animal or rational animal? Since the most sympathetic naturalist takes into account little rationality, it is an attempt to draw

This discussion of naturalism has come full circle to a reconsideration of the deterministic doctrine. This implies what has been maintained throughout, that the doctrine is integral to the mode of expression. As a result, the naturalists have approached their work in the spirit of scientists. Generally, they have been pessimistic. In quest of the inclusiveness of science, many of them have created a world of enormity, a stage of vast physical proportions. In setting their stage, they have been less selective than the realists. Variously, they have questioned the existence of free will. In their inclusion of even minute detail, they have approached to the accuracy of photography. In their absorption with surface detail, the conveyance of a sense of depth has eluded the naturalists. They have been painstakingly scrupulous, bold, sincere. They have written in their own prodigious works the best definition of naturalism. That is the definition which it has been attempted to convey here. The groundwork done, the history of naturalism may be studied in detail.
CHAPTER II

FRENCH AND RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

In view of the fact that this thesis is concerned with that which is naturalistic in the prose of Stephen Crane, my discussion of the history of naturalism will emphasize the development of this mode of literary expression in America. As with most complex entities, the American version of this literary type has many reasons for its existence. Without making undue exceptions or being guilty of oversimplification, all of the historic trends which made for Crane's writing as he did, postponing until a later chapter a discussion of the man himself, may be lumped under two headings: (1) French and Russian influence; and (2) History of American Naturalism. This chapter is concerned with the former; the next chapter, with the latter. The important consideration is that naturalism as it has been defined had its origin in France. Its development exerted a demonstrable influence on the realist, William Dean Howells, and on the early naturalists, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Hamlin Garland, and Stephen Crane. Hence, it is not enough to trace the organic evolution affected by the works of Flaubert, Maupassant, the Goncourts, and Zola. Rather, it is also necessary to take into account Russian realism, akin to naturalism, which arrived in this
country in the latter one-half of the nineteenth century. It is necessary to fit these foreign writings in their frame of reference, the world literature, and especially to indicate their influence on American naturalism. That is this chapter's multiple objective.

A consideration of the broad aspects of French naturalism merits a more extensive examination than is given here. At best this chapter is a discussion in outline or survey form. In terms of world thought, the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* seems an appropriate point of departure. This epoch-making book established biological evolution. The stimulation afforded by the great body of investigation set off by this Englishman was felt in every corner of the Western world. Views were as various as they were international and new. On one hand, it was contended that an atheistic doctrine now had significance and justification. On the other, the task of reconciling science to religion, continued to our day, was recognized and begun. Civilized men in the civilized West anxiously damned Darwin for a contention he had never made—-that there was no God. Reasoning men, including reasoning novelists, were conscious of the inconsistency, misinterpretation, and prejudice of the age. It seems inevitable that they should have been pessimistic. It is just as unlikely that they should have failed to use the doctrine, to use the approach that had served science in its discovery. Among the first
to react in the spirit of science against abuses of the age was the Frenchman, Flaubert.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) was a predecessor and guide to the French naturalists. His work clearly reflected the impressions of reasoning men. There was in his writing a firm coalition of pessimism born of disgust and a dispassionate, disinterested reflection. Lacking was sympathy and compassion, expressed or implied. *Madame Bovary*, his most popular novel, was published in 1857. From this, his first success, until the writing of *Bouvard et Pecuchet* which was unfinished at the time of his death in 1881, there was no basic change in Flaubert's work. By this I mean that it consistently reflected the same philosophy, the same approach. But Darwin's masterpiece, completely titled *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, made its appearance in 1859. Apparently it is wrong to assume that the naturalist, the scientist, foreshadowed the novelist. What Darwin did in 1859 was to cap a progression. Two years earlier Flaubert fictionalized the concept, the doctrine to which he adhered until his death, which was the culmination of the same progression capped by Darwin. It is not surprising that the theory was demonstrated in general terms before it was substantiated by science. Figuratively speaking, *Madame Bovary* was an hypothesis which Darwin found correct. Is not all fiction, after all, the hypothetical case?
Evidence of the existence of this progression should be cited. Lars Ahnebrink said of Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1832) and Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation* (1844) that they "paved the way for the evolutionary hypothesis." Of course this applies to Darwin's own findings in *Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle* published in 1840. The appearance of his and Alfred Russel Wallace's theories of natural selection coincided with the publication of *Madame Bovary*. It was not until fourteen years later that *The Descent of Man* came upon the scene. This is the book whose thesis it was that the human race is descended from an animal of the anthropoids. Unchanging, Flaubert's work was essentially the same before and after the appearance of *The Descent of Man*. The lack of logic, the very stupidity, against which Darwin tacitly revolted had manifested itself long before he was subjected to attack. Man's intellectual shortcomings had been poignantly illustrated in the lives of Charles and Emma Bovary even two years before *The Origin of Species*. The climate of the thought, enlightened and abusive, philosophical, scientific and social, the thought of the age, account for the work of Flaubert and that of Darwin which are synonymous with their names.

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The choice of *The Origin of Species*, coming as it did on the heels of *Madame Bovary*, as a point of departure underscores something more than the universality of the nineteenth century. It emphasizes that Flaubert presaged the French naturalists rather than existed as one of their members. Chronologically, naturalism did succeed the statement of biological evolution. By now the need for a clear definition of naturalism is apparent. Whereas it fits *Nana* of Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series (1871-1893), it does not apply to *Madame Bovary*. Intervening is *The Origin of Species* which preceded all naturalistic works as here defined. Nevertheless, it is understandable that Zola considered himself a disciple of Flaubert. This latter author was above all else a precisionist, and Zola likened the ideal approach to fiction to that of a scientist in a laboratory. As the scientist was impartial, objective, so was Flaubert. Herbert Muller said of him that he introduced what might be termed pure realism; "This he did in the first place by insisting on an absolute objectivity: a complete separation of the artist from his work, a complete suppression of his personality and private convictions."²

United with Flaubert's precision and impersonality was his pessimism. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt had preceded

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him in the use of technical terminology. Their work was
typified by it. Perhaps to a greater degree than had Balzac,
another "father" claimed by Zola, they had been objective.
To find a ready precedent for Flaubert's pessimism, nation­
al boundaries and the nineteenth century might well be
transcended. The attitude struck by Jonathan Swift when he
suggested in "A Modest Proposal" that the children of Ire­
land be butchered to feed the gentry was like Flaubert's.
The misanthropy that has been detected in the works of both
burned with about the same brilliance. Pessimism and mis­
anthropy thrive in the same ground and seldom exist alone.
However, in a garden of objectivity, they often become weeds.
Discussing the brief procession of Flaubert's works, Muller
observed, "The misanthropy that with each novel further dis­
torted Flaubert's mask of impersonality, twisting his expres­
sion into a fixed grimace, is apparent even in Madame
Bovary." Muller found that Flaubert's pessimism, which the
critic equated with his misanthropy, was temperamental rather
than the kind to be associated with the modern spirit. Ac­
cidentally or otherwise, French naturalism that came in the
wake of the author of Madame Bovary was sternly pessimistic.
By no accident was it concerned with such experience as
tawdry escapades of a married woman and her lovers. Flaubert

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3. Ibid., p. 133.
4. Loc. cit.
may have given expression to pure realism; it is certain that he extended its previous limits. Before him, Balzac had struck a balance between romanticism and the pure realism to which Herbert Muller has alluded. Balzac had balanced on the same precarious wire melodrama, passion, and mysticism along with a scientific point of view, comprehensiveness of scope, and faithful portrayal of ordinary and undistinguished lives. He had been comprehensive in scope as well as accurate in description and documentation. In essence, Flaubert stripped from the structure its last vestige of romanticism. Without being melodramatic, he was, if anything, more frank than his predecessor. When Balzac had been attacked for presenting so much evil, he had protested, rightly, that he had presented a world better than it was. Flaubert's portrayal was of a world no better than it is. It remained for the first French naturalists to further document this evil world. Already, their master had extended its limits to include all significant human experience.

In France after Balzac, the Goncourt, and Flaubert, real naturalism came of age. Before considering Zola, the epitome of French naturalists, I shall take into account the heightening of the realistic impulse in Russia. As in France, the period of the rise of realism in Russia was the

5. Ibid., p. 121.
last half of the nineteenth century. Its rise is important not alone in terms of world literature. Rather, Russian realism had a profound effect upon American naturalism and, more specifically, upon Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris. Ahnebrink found that Tolstoi and Turgenev were especially influential.

Russian realism contrasted strongly with that which has just been considered, Flaubert's. Muller felt that the Russian novelists were typified by a warm love for their characters and a courageous willingness to accept reality on its own terms. Having discussed Flaubert's pessimistic, misanthropic outlook, Muller said of him, "It is at any rate this attitude, more than his limited range or his relative simplicity, that distinguishes him ... among his contemporaries from the great Russians."

Of these "greats," Turgenev and Tolstoi most influenced Crane. A discussion of the Russian-American link belongs at the end of this chapter. There, specific examples of the relationship will be given. Here, a brief examination of the work of the two Russians is helpful.

Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) is known principally for his realistic portrayal of the people and life of nineteenth-century Russia. In Fathers and Sons (1862), he treated a theme which held a fascination for him throughout his life,

7. Muller, op. cit., p. 132.
the conflict between educated, Westernized youth and their provincial fathers. Turgenev's extensive Western travel persuaded him that traditionally Russia was a land of "superfluous men." Whereas man was weak, woman was strong. Ahnebrink found that this theme, like the conflict of "new" men and "old," repeated itself again and again. "Rudin and Bazarov, the heroes of Rudin (1856; Eng. tr., 1873) and Fathers and Sons (1862; Eng. tr., 1867) are illustrations of failure. The strong woman is represented, for example, by Elena in the novel entitled On the Eve (1860; Eng. tr., 1871)." His novels imply, and Turgenev actively taught, that the salvation for Russia was in Westernization. His treatment of his great theses was at once naturalistic and realistic. Traits most characteristic of his composition rightly belong to the latter school, but his nihilistic, introspective analyses arrived at much the same conclusions as did the naturalists.

Both the most popular works, War and Peace and Anna Karenina, and the fabulous career of Tolstoi (1828-1910) have been widely publicized. The sensational character of his primitivism and religious mysticism and such facts of his life as his death at a railway station have probably been stressed too much in proportion to Tolstoi's tremendous literary powers. However, the sheer weight of War

8. Ahnebrink, op. cit., p. 32.
and Peace earned for it the reputation of one of the greatest novels of all time. Anna Karenina has attained its notoriety in America, not because of its literary magnificence, but because of its bold treatment of sex. Undoubtedly, in all that he wrote, especially his plays and novels, Tolstoi was bold, frank, unconventional. His treatments of character and setting were often alike magnificent, for he combined psychological insight with a rare ability to portray panorama, spectacle. Stephen Crane was quoted as saying, "Tolstoi is the writer I admire most of all."  

Émile Zola had begun his Rougon-Macquart series (1871-1893) before Tolstoi had finished War and Peace (1865-1872). Naturalism had achieved its full stature in France at the time that realism was enjoying its greatest period in Russia. The movements were characterized by an independence of one another. Zola, spokesman of the French naturalists, professed his own great indebtedness to native realists. In turn, "Zolaism" became applied to the mode of expression that aided in molding American naturalism. For America, as for Europe, Zola became more than a spokesman, or the root of a synonym, for French naturalism. He became its symbol.


10. "With a glad piety he [Zola] acknowledged his masters, Balzac and Flaubert, and by his own admission was more immediately anticipated by the Goncourt brothers." Muller, op. cit., p. 161.
Practically every tenet (even those that were obscure) of French or any other naturalism was held by Zola. With the zeal of a minister, he practiced and he preached the new faith. He explained how he had borrowed from Balzac his monumental documentation; from Flaubert, his relentless detachment; from Taine, his right interpretation of the new science. When pressed, he apologized for the shortcomings of himself and his fellow artists; only tacitly did he apologize for their art. Since it was amoral and uninhibited, accessible to its truthful version were the depths of corruption and vice. Disgusted and shocked at the sight of the depths, the mass of readers revolted. They turned their backs upon anything that smelt of evil. Hence, the amoral artist conceived of his role among men as that of moralist. The lesson he taught was inherent in his materials. Was not a single example, a single demonstration, better than an hundred lectures? Thus Zola lectured.

Artistically speaking, Zola was a new species, the literary man with his "Bachelor of Science." As science was the key to naturalism, it was the key to Zola's art. In the handbook of the naturalists, Le Roman Experimentale (1880), Zola had explained the method and theory of scientific art. For the author, there was no discrepancy in the invasion of a ground that had been the sanctuary of imagination, escape, and flights of emotion. Since it was virgin soil for the scientific plant, it might be expected
to raise a bumper crop. This it did. Zola wrote in series rather than books. His individual works were largely shouldered out by the bulk of his three great series, the *Rougon-Macquart*, the *Trois Villes* (1894-1897), and the *Quatre Evangiles* (1897- ), incomplete at the author's death in 1902. Apparently there was more to document than there was time. For Zola, the ideal setting was the milieu, a representation of as much of environment as is possible through the selection of details. The license of the scientific artist provided wider scope than did that of the plain artist. Scientific license permitted the dissection of man. It opened up great new areas for documentation: the slums, the red-light districts, the sweatshops, the sprawling tenements with their narrow streets and insufficient light. Into all these, Zola entered. Into many he led the disciples, principally de Maupassant, Huysmans, Paul Alexis, Céard, and Hennique. For the most part, the human animal found in this habitat was the one dissected. He was discovered slinking in the doorways, cramming his maw with rough food at the table, tottering away from a bar, or driven at last by a primitive instinct, a craving, to one of his species of the opposite sex. In Zola's time, the human beast was found doing those things which he still could. The milieu, its sweatshops, tenements, and (for Zola, the moralist) its dens of iniquity, had taken a toll upon him.

Self-consciously, with meticulous care, Zola assembled
the facts, counted the stones of the pavement, recorded the change in color on a face. Voraciously, he searched the literature of the past for clues. No competent biographer of Zola has ignored these two traits: a tireless concern for minute accuracy, and a persistent quest for purer art. His ponderous notetaking was matched by his prowling after the essence of artistry. The occupations, the diversions, the quirks, the views of life of his subjects were all of importance. When and how to use the materials was important. The way in which they had been handled by other right-thinking novelists was important too. Investigations, expeditions, countless audiences, submission to a psychoanalysis—all were aspects of the Zola regimen. In the variety of his own experience, he may have sought the "feel" of life. If it escaped him, there must have been consolation in the magnificence of the try.

There was a tremendous impact, a tremendous reaction. "Impact" is descriptive of the effect Zola's work had upon early American naturalists. The "reaction" of the reading public was violent. This second aspect of Zola's reception will be considered after the first. The influence of Zola and of the Russians will be treated simultaneously. They will be restricted to their effect upon Garland, Norris and, most important, Stephen Crane.

Crane rightly considered Zola an honest writer
although he found him "pretty tiresome." The American author had an aversion for great length, an objection he found with Tolstoi, and this is likely the chief reason why he considered Zola wearisome. However, the two writers had much in common. Besides their honesty, there was their subject matter. Zola created innumerable characters of the Parisian slums. Crane created Maggie, her brother, her parents, George of George's Mother, and this young man's acquaintances, all variously representative of the Bowery which the author had meticulously studied. Ahnebrink has discovered an even better basis for similarity between the two writers. He has cited a rather striking parallel between two of their better-known works:

Actually, Maggie comes close to the theme and method of L'Assommoir. Both authors described a good woman's way toward ultimate destruction, and both told their stories with frankness and objectivity, yet with a certain degree of sympathy for their heroines. The slum environment together with a weak temperament was in part responsible for the inevitable catastrophe; both novels gave evidence of the curse of alcohol not only for the individual but for society at large.  

Ahnebrink took into account that previously L'Assommoir had been suggested as a possible source for Maggie, that La Débâcle bears a close resemblance to The Red Badge of Courage.

12. Ibid., p. 251.
13. Ibid., pp. 249-250.
Generally, it may be stated that Crane seemed to take from Zola inspiration as well as technique. Zola had established a precedent, that a treatment of the slums might be successful. He had proved that it might attract a readership and that its significance might be recognized. For a serious artist like Crane, these were essentials. It is not to be misunderstood that Crane sacrificed his individuality as a consequence of Zola's inspiration and teaching. The French author was widely imitated, notably in his own country. A listing of his native disciples has already been given. Whereas the works of these men clearly show that they borrowed, it is more fair to say of Crane that he learned. He learned much about the characterization of a type, the milieu of rich detail, the theme of degradation. He perfected the method of selection of details; he introduced a whole stock of illustrative terms and phrases, highly personal in their associations. He substituted tragic episodes for the histories, volumes in series, that are a mark of Zola. The relationship of Crane to Zola is best characterized as extensive, notable for exceptions which allow individuality to both.

The exceptions to similarity between the works of Frank Norris and Zola are not so important. Norris had lauded Zola for his Big World and he sought to duplicate it. Ahnebrink found that of Crane, Norris, and Hamlin Garland,
Norris' debt to Zola was the greatest. It was traceable, in varying degrees of intensity, in all of Norris' novels. Apparently Zola's world appealed to Norris for the fact that the men were of the same temperament. As has been said, the realm of *McTeague, The Octopus, The Pit* was no meagre estate. Garland, on the other hand, was most like Zola in his aversion for crime, drunkenness, squalor, and human misery generally. Ahnebrink felt that of the three American authors, Hamlin Garland was the least dependent upon the foremost French naturalist. If less in degree, Garland's dependence extended to such important literary considerations as technique, philosophy, and motif, and is almost as extensive as that of either of his younger compatriots.

Early American naturalists were less dependent upon the Russians than upon the French. As with the latter, there was no single author among the Russians who deserves unanimous attention. It has been mentioned that Crane considered Tolstoi the pre-eminent novelist. On the other hand, Ahnebrink has cited many similarities in the work of Crane and Turgenev. He has discovered similarities of theme between *George's Mother* and *Fathers and Sons*: "George Kelcey was an irresolute, weak, and 'superfluous' man, unfit for life. He may well be linked with Turgenev's heroes, who to varying

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degrees felt 'superfluous' ... because of their inherent weakness, over-reflectiveness, and incapacity to act and to love ...." It will be recalled that the cleavage between the older and younger generations fascinated the Russian. Ahnetrink has found that this theme was dominant in George's Mother. In particulars, Crane's story was like Turgenev's Fathers and Sons:

Crane's portrayal of George Kelcey and his mother recalls Turgenev's description of Bazarov and his mother, Arina Vlassievna. Both Bazarov and George were only sons -- George's brothers were all dead -- and the sole joy of aged parents. Like Bazarov, George was morose and sullen, and both were irritated by their over-solicitous mothers. George Kelcey, a laborer, lived in the New York slums with his gentle and hard-working mother, all of whose loving thoughts and tenderness were concentrated on her son. Like Arina Vlassievna, who loved her curt and unresponsive son with an all-sacrificing love, George Kelcey's mother endured patiently her son's impatient and irritating manners ....

And so on and on; in The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction, Ahnebrink has arrayed an impressive list of likenesses between the two works.

Norris, like Crane, dealt frequently with weak and irresolute men. Moreover, he played them against superior women in a game where fate seemed to rule. Ahnebrink made a rather exhaustive study, marked by an unwillingness to arrive at unjustified conclusions, of the relationship of

17. Ibid., p. 329.
Norris to Turgenev. He linked his conclusions to circumstances of Zola's and Garland's work. The magnitude of the work entailed by such a discussion is inappropriate here. However, Ahnebrink's findings seem valid and they are unquestionably pertinent. Chief among them are: (1) "Norris's debt to Turgenev can be traced in at least two novels: The Octopus and The Pit." (2) "Four of Turgenev's novels, in particular, seem to have attracted Norris: Rudin, Fathers and Sons, Virgin Soil, and Smoke." (3) "Like Garland, Norris was in part indebted to Turgenev for the literary portrayal of the failure type of man." (4) "The 'poetic' realism of Turgenev, devoid of brutality and obscenity, may have been one of the factors that helped to counterbalance the influence of Zola on Garland and to some degree on Norris in his last novel." The interaction among the Americans, Garland, Norris, and Crane, justifies this consideration of foreign influence upon the first two mentioned authors. This interaction will be considered in the next chapter.

Finally, it is the purpose of this chapter to give a very general impression of the reaction of the American public to the foreign authors. The reaction is faithfully mirrored in comments made by conservative literary journals of that period. William C. Frierson and Herbert Edwards have

18. Ibid., p. 342.
made an excellent analysis of these comments in an article that was entitled "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion 1877-1892." Their findings have been used extensively here. Russian realists and the French realist, Flaubert, were taken into account by Frierson and Edwards. They said: "Any treatment of the impact of French naturalism on American current opinion should be prefaced by the comment that Americans took cognizance of the naturalists -- Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, and the Goncourt's -- over an extended period of years and that they reacted favorably from the first to Flaubert, and to Maupassant as soon as his stories were translated." This, notwithstanding their citation of Henry James' comment on Madame Bovary in the year 1878: "Everything in the book is ugly." In this isolated instance, what was of consequence to Frierson and Edwards was that less than ten years later, James was to say of the same work of Flaubert that it was a masterpiece. Apparently what compensated for whatever ugliness may have accompanied the frank descriptions of Emma Bovary's escapades with her lovers was the author's masterly way of telling an arresting story and his unwillingness to dwell--


20. Henry James, French Poets and Novelists, p. 102, quoted by Frierson and Edwards, op. cit., p. 1012.
certainly not in the spirit that Zola was to bring to his treatment of Nana—upon the sordid aspects of the lady's "fall." It may hardly be said of any of Flaubert's work that it was morbid or unenlightening. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century there came the band of Frenchmen who borrowed from Flaubert his candor and supplemented it with a delineation of "moral baseness unvaried by even a gleam of rectitude ...." This quotation is from a review entitled "The Rougon-Macquart Family" in the Nation for September, 1879 and refers specifically to the leader of this band, Émile Zola.

It is interesting that previous to this article in the Nation there had been little criticism of consequence of Zola in this country. Up until that time, this author's novels were available only in French; for the most part they were unnoticed. But in 1879, a fact that shocked the Nation's reviewer almost as much as Zola's admission that moral baseness existed was his (Zola's) "offering neither help or suggestion of anything better as possible." It was characteristic of these naturalists that they did not preach. They rendered. Cowley has said of them, "With a few exceptions they have no faith in reform, whether it be the reform


22. Loc. cit.
of an individual by his own decision or the reform of society by reasoned courses of action." Of course, what marks this as understatement is Mr. Cowley's implication that man is capable of decision and reasoned courses of action, a tenet to which naturalists on the whole do not subscribe. Perhaps that is why a critic for the Literary World at the turn of the seventh decade of the last century objected that "Zola's vice had no fascination in it. It is, he said, 'low, sordid, stupid, vulgar.'" It is Frierson and Edwards' opinion that the storm of American denunciation of Zola reached a crescendo in the years 1882 and 1883. They feel that in the next year, with a defense of the naturalists by Henry James in the January Atlantic Monthly, the tide turned. Realizing that Flaubert was acceptable to his compatriots, James referred to those authors who received his praise as "the French writers who grouped themselves about Flaubert." Among others, he had come to the defense of Zola, linking the Frenchman with Turgenev, who had been popular in America for over a decade, as well as with the author of Madame Bovary.

Of course, those qualities of "Zola and his tribe" which it was necessary to defend in 1884 are highly respectable today. Muller termed the early French naturalists "a new

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school of novelists who militantly insisted upon absolute fidelity to fact for its own sake and above all other considerations. They looked at life more closely and recorded their findings more minutely. Müller went on to emphasize that they concerned themselves with experience that had been hitherto ignored or treated only politely. Men like James and William Dean Howells assured Americans that they should be neither intimidated nor outraged. After the people had been convinced, it was necessary to condition them all over again to an acceptance of naturalism, alike in kind, written by their own countrymen, Dreiser, Norris, Stephen Crane. The purpose of the next chapter is to consider the writings of such Americans as these. In order to do so, the authors who anticipated them will be taken into account. Also, as in this chapter, the relative naturalistic significance of the various writers will be considered.

25 Müller, op. cit., p. 40.
CHAPTER III

NATURALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

It is apparent that foreign naturalistic influences were felt in America. Some idea of the extent of these influences has been given in the preceding chapter. The present chapter is concerned solely with the native sources and the development of American naturalism. An important reason for its developing as it did was the state of affairs in this country. In the decade following the Civil War, industry and big business made tremendous strides. The scientific method, as opposed to armchair philosophizing and guesswork, came to the fore. By the turn of the century the geographic frontier, for practical purposes, was closed. As will be indicated in this chapter, these extra-literary affairs played an essential role in the development of naturalism here.

In terms of literature, the realistic writings of Edward Eggleston and Joseph Kirkland were the most important landmarks on the road that led to naturalism. Hamlin Garland, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Stephen Crane were the first major American authors to use naturalistic techniques. William Dean Howells, especially, and Henry James dictated to the realists and naturalists alike. It will be necessary to say something of the realism of Eggleston and
Kirkland, and a great deal about the attitudes, styles, and lives of the naturalists. Since Garland and Norris were acquainted with Crane and exerted influence upon him, this relationship must be taken into account. More emphasis will be placed upon Howells in the capacity of literary dictator than upon James. The aims of this chapter are to emphasize in proportion to their importance the sources of American naturalism and to deal with the major aspects and incidents of its development.

Naturalism first made itself felt in the United States during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. However, the survey of its sources properly begins with the close of the Civil War. Eventually it arrives at a comprehensive study of literary naturalism, in perspective. In order to gain the desired scope, an over-all estimate of the American scene will be attempted. Major stress will be assigned to the burgeoning of industry and big business, the rise of science, and the progress and closing of the frontier in the United States.

The first major expansion of this country's industrial might is rightly associated with the decade following the Civil War. While the South launched upon its campaign of recovery, in the North big business and the factory system were nurtured and grew. "The multiplication of corporate businesses, the influx of cheap immigrant labor, the low wage and the long workday, the rapid growth of cities, the
springing up of labor organizations—all these concomitants of industrialism had appeared before 1860.\(^1\) It remained for the victors to utilize the peacetime weapons at hand. This they did. Capital invested in manufactures tremendously increased; the money value of factory products mounted with similar speed; in certain basic industries, the growth in productive output was even more enormous. It was an age of contrasts, for the slums might be seen from atop the great warehouses, and it was an age of sudden change. Desperate competition, spurred by the war, had figured prominently in the rapid expansion. Countless methods of exploitation and peremptory rejection of failure were the handmaids, as well as the results, of the tremendous business growth. The situation is best likened to a treacherous, imponderable spiral. Richard Hofstadter said of the time that it was "a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest."\(^2\) Ground of this kind would have lain fallow had it not been for naturalistic tools.

The country was entering upon the most lurid phase of that era competently recorded by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in *The Gilded Age* (1873) and by Matthew Josephson

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in The Robber Barons (1934). Men of two kinds, capitalists and industrialists, unscrupulously guided our fortunes. It is not surprising that early American naturalists came to term the ordinary individual "a pawn of the chessboard."

What gradually dawned upon the drivers of hacks, bricklayers, and factory girls in the twentieth century was obvious to Stephen Crane, for example, in the year 1892. Then, at the age of twenty-one, he penned his initial work. It was entitled Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, the story of a girl of New York's slums, of her brother, a driver of teams by trade, and of her brutal, drunken parents. In terms of the struggles of little people, struggles which were to them titanic, Crane sketched harsh, grim reality. He supplied the darker tones for the picture of the Gilded Age. This, at a time when only reformers and propagandists recognized the Bowery for what it was, when it was regarded by literary men of the genteel tradition as a favorite sightseeing district. Crane's style rendered a reflection in muddy waters of the crass materialism that dominated the new industrial age.

The science of the nineteenth century was both practical and philosophical. It inspired the creation of machines and industrial techniques. Know-how, technology, was substituted for guesswork; the calculated risk replaced a reliance on blind change; horsepower-rated generators and engines shouldered out the concept of manpower. Men in all walks of life pondered the significance of the change. In the year
1900, Henry Adams was prompted to contrast the faith which man had had in the Virgin with that which he placed in the Dynamo. As Norman Foerster pointed out in a preface to a collection of realistic and naturalistic works, "Supernaturalism gave way to naturalism, the belief that science can account for all phenomena. Free will was ruled out by a materialistic determinism." The rationalism of armchair philosophy had been soothing, if rambling and indefinite. Now, understanding might be sought in the ascendant psychological and social sciences, rooted in the soil of Darwinian and Spencerian thought. The rationalisms in which man had placed his trust were found unsound when subjected to experimentation and the probings of the laboratory technique. The balm, then, had been extracted from life; it had become an everyday struggle for existence.

In so long as there had been a frontier, romanticism had been justified. The term "the Feminine 'Seventies" is admirably descriptive of the decade following the Civil War. Bred of the conflict were tragedy and corruption. The nation's readership was ripe for refinement, idealization and, above all, romantic themes. William Frierson and Herbert Edwards found that during this period the fiction of even Henry James and William D. Howells contrasted strongly with

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their later work. "Bret Harte was dealing with noble villains and generous strumpets while Mark Twain was doing jovial extravaganza."

The year 1871 was marked by the publication of a book that foretold what was to come in the wake of the romanticism. It was Edward Eggleston's candid, authentic *The Hoosier School-Master*. In spite of its pious sentimentalism, it was in its day a classic of American realism. It involved a record in dialect of the life, the spelling bees and revival meetings, of backwoods Indiana. On the strength of this work, Hamlin Garland came to consider Eggleston our pioneer Mid-west novelist. However, the flavor of its material lent itself to conspicuous abuses of the realism of forthright authors of the future. The spelling bees and revival meetings were reminiscent of Bret Harte's local color. They were peopled by conventional personages, not types. There was little in the book that might properly be termed generalization. To draw the rather fine line that is necessary here, the work was more characteristic of a transition than of an innovation.

A real innovation in the treatment of native material was Joseph Kirkland's *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County* (1887). Spring County was of the Mid-west country, and in

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this way the book was like its great predecessor which had concerned an Indiana schoolmaster. Zury’s fictional adventures were based upon Kirkland’s own experiences and observations. They were vigorously, honestly told. Essentially, in its boldness and its ability to convey the feeling in the new land, in its realistic descriptions and forthright character portrayals, it went beyond anything that had preceded it. Hamlin Garland regarded it as the most realistic novel up until its time.

The important and lesser novels of Eggleston and Kirkland early came to the attention of William Dean Howells and Henry James. Both Howells and James praised these authors as pioneer depicters of the American scene. The compliment was to be taken seriously. It came from men already launched upon careers which were to bring them a sort of mutual pre-eminence in the field of American letters. James was himself a pioneer of psychological realism, but the fiction and criticism of Howells are the more important in naturalistic connections. Whereas James’ most distinguishing trait was his brilliant, highly complex style, Howells, in lapses from his didacticism, approached to naturalistic writing. Although the most he did was to approach, he was sympathetic with the early American naturalists.

Howells, a literary dictator, was sympathetic with conscientious American authors generally. As with Garland, the sympathy was sometimes not so fully returned. There were many who censured the dictator for affectations, and Garland was among the first. If Howells was not so plain as some desired, he was as American as anyone might ask. He encouraged the exploitation of native materials. He felt that here was the source of vigor and perspective that were totally unknown elsewhere. He urged originality. Above all, he desired an American realism portraying American characters and American scenes. In Howells' scheme, "realism" deserved to be underscored almost as much as did "American." Chiefly because of his didacticism and numerous contemptible disciples, he has been associated with that fiction of the late nineteenth century which was "grown in a hothouse and nursed by pottering old gentlemen...." Actually, Howells was an outspoken exponent of realism, even when romance still held its sway, so long as that realism was neither vulgar nor unAmerican. Too, he progressed with his times. As has been said, his late works contrasted strongly with his earlier. As Muller put it, the difficulty for the disparagers of Howells is that "a number of the nineteenth-century gardeners

6. Ibid., p. 134.

refuse to stay put in their hothouses. And their leader was the far from contemptible figure of William Dean Howells.

It seemed to Muller that this man was closer to truth than the crusaders of the 1920's who prided themselves on its discovery. Muller made the pointed observation: "His voice was deeper, for example, than the very loud voice of H.L. Mencken." Even from our totally different perspective, Howells is rightly seen as prophetic and deep-voiced. One of his favorites was Hamlin Garland who added strong naturalistic touches to "an American realism portraying American characters and American scenes."

Whereas romancers had studied the westward march of settlement in the lives of its victors, Hamlin Garland considered the lives of its vanquished. This author's Crumbling Idols (1894) denounced as inadequate the fanciful, glamorized treatments of the West. Also inadequate as models for American literature were the traditional masterpieces. Garland decried the dominance of conservative criticism in the East. He cited the work of Ibsen, Tolstoi, Howells, and Whitman as representative of the new force in literary affairs. In America, conspicuous by their absence were the

8. Muller, op. cit., p. 199.
most pregnant themes: turbulence and violence, spiritual unrest, political corruption, and social injustice. The foremost demand upon his contemporaries, Garland felt, was originality. This had been the author's practice in his own forthright versions of the Middle West: *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Prairie Folks* (1893).

Lars Ahnebrink said of the last quarter of the nineteenth century that it may "perhaps best be characterized as a battle between romanticism and realism in American letters." He reflected that the way lighted by Eggleston, Kirkland, and Garland was a road that turned gradually. Mark Twain was a transitional figure, having written both romantically and realistically. Like the novelists who looked ahead, poets were also stirred by the tide of new ideas. In the vanguard were those whose reflective bent was tempered by an awareness of the times: Sidney Lanier, William Vaughn Moody, and Walt Whitman. Still, the dominant literary form of the new era was the novel, best suited to mirror the changes wrought by industry, science, and the evaporation of the frontier.

For Garland, realism was not enough. In the eighties and nineties, this was the term applied to those whose aim it was to faithfully reproduce the conditions of everyday life. The author of *Crumbling Idols* felt that these writers chronicled, for the most part, conventional trifles. Of

their numbers there were too many still tainted by tradition and romanticism. Garland referred specifically to Howells and Henry James when he said:

... They no more give a real idea of this life of ours than a painter gives an idea of the landscape by painting the grasses with painstaking care. Their realism is of such character that to understand this age through their works would require as much reading and generalization as to judge of the present without any aid. They generalize nothing. They represent conventional personages not types.12

As with Eggleston's agrarian Indiana and some of the settings of Howells and James, Garland's material lent itself to caricature. It involved the return of the farmer to his interrupted career behind the plow. It concerned the battle of the tenant against the unreasoning landlord and elements, the loneliness and drudgery of the life of the Middle Border. The tribulations of the prairie farmer, of his patient, subdued wife, and of their offspring, subjected alike to the brutality and boredom of the pioneer existence: all were ripe for the exploitation of melodrama. They might so easily become a part of the tradition that sacrifices the farmer's daughter on the altar of the homestead mortgage.

What was Garland's solution? He asked for a treatment which was so sternly objective that it might be verified. He coined a word for this handling of material, veritism.

It may have been derived from Eugene Veron's *Aesthetics* which, along with Max Nordau's violent *Conventional Lies*, had aided in the formulation of Garland's policy. It may have been derived from the Italian *verismo*. At any rate, it involved not only the use of impressions that had been verified by comparison with impressions separated by an interval of time. It implied too a departure from the predominant use of sexual vice and crime "in the manner of Zola and certain of the German novelists." This statement, made by Garland in a letter to Eldon C. Hill dated February 14, 1939, was quoted by Lars Ahnebrink whose investigation of veritism has been used in this discussion. Hence, the author of *Crumbling Idols* shied from two extremes. He abandoned sensationalism at both extremes, that of melodramatic caricature reminiscent of Charles Dickens and that of Zola and German novelists in the tradition of Hauptmann and Sudermann. Garland was concerned with people whose lives were "hard, unlovely, sometimes drab and bitter but they were not sexual perverts." Again, in his own words:

... I argued that one could be as real and as true in presenting the average man and woman as in describing cases of incest, adultery and murder. I found as Whitman told me he had found in

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the life of the average American, a certain decorum and normality. As a veritist I have recorded my perceptions.15

In so far as Garland went beyond the gentility of Howells and James, he was a dissenter. Carl Van Doren has termed him the first to outline the critical position of the dissent. The reference is, of course, to the manifesto of Crumbling Idols. No discussion of the dissent from Howells and James is complete without a consideration of Theodore Dreiser. In this chapter it is desired that emphasis be placed upon that period when naturalism made its emergence. Chronologically, a consideration of Dreiser should come after the discussion of that period. However, since Dreiser casts light upon both Norris and Crane, writers rightly associated with the beginnings of American naturalism, his discussion precedes theirs. A consideration of Norris follows immediately thereafter. A lengthy discussion of Crane is the subject matter of the next chapter. It is hoped that what is to be said about Norris and Crane will have greater significance, having been prefaced by an examination of Dreiser.

Herbert J. Muller's account of naturalism in America in his Modern Fiction takes little account of Hamlin Garland.

15. Ahnebrink, op. cit., p. 140.

Muller further narrowed the field in a statement prefacing a discussion of Theodore Dreiser. He said:

In any event neither Crane nor Norris made a deep impression upon their audience. Both died young before the battle for naturalism was really fought out. The novelist who bore the brunt of this battle, which ultimately concerned the artist's right to make a thoroughly honest, unaffected study of American life, was Theodore Dreiser (sic.)17

In assigning to this novelist such a role, Muller took into account his (Dreiser's) utter want of taste and humor, his carelessness of form, and his concern for insignificant and dreary detail. Muller found that equally annoying was the novelist's posing as an impenitent moralist who insisted upon explaining the position and telling the story of his characters. This is diametrically opposed to the preference of the naturalist for rendition. But Dreiser was typical enough in his distrust of ethical values. The body of his work implies a negation of all that which is "professionally" moral and religious. Born of poor and strongly religious parents, Dreiser attended Catholic and public schools, revolting against the religious teachings of both. For what he was taught, he substituted a philosophy garnered of experience. He felt that why we are here and to what end is imponderable, that biochemistry is the explanation of human behavior, that drives and instincts steer man on his course,

that sympathy and mercy approach most nearly to a solution of man's plight. Dreiser's staggering compassion and utter sincerity made amends for his philosophical inconsistency.

Clearly a naturalist, Dreiser's determinism, his science, was not his forte. To most critics it was apparent that his powers of creation had at their source the intense sympathy which the author felt for his fellowman. The one naturalistic trait which this author used consistently to his advantage was uncompromising, zealous honesty. This is apparent through the whole reach of his great productive period, from *Sister Carrie* in 1900 through *The Financier*, *The Titan*, and *The "Genius,"* on to *An American Tragedy* written in 1925. The reason Muller gave in assigning to Dreiser's honesty a great significance was that in the writer's time this virtue was conspicuous by its absence in American fiction.

Malcolm Cowley did not agree that the brunt of the battle was borne by the man of whom Muller said he made a "thoroughly honest, unaffected study of American life." For this position, Cowley excluded, as well as Theodore Dreiser, the author with whom this thesis is concerned (as Muller specifically had done). Cowley said, having discussed Crane's feeling for language, "But it was Norris, not Crane, who set the standards for Naturalistic fiction in the United
States, and Norris had no respect for style." The near inability to write a workmanlike sentence was as characteristic of Norris as of Dreiser. The latter author was only less conscious of the circumstance. Norris wrote to Isaac Marcosson, "What pleased me most in your review of McTeague was 'disdaining all pretensions of style.' It is precisely what I try most to avoid." Cowley made the generalization that "a great many naturalists have used language as a blunt instrument; 'they write as if they were swinging shillelaghs.'" Since Flaubert, discussed as the guiding star of the French naturalists, used language as a rapier, this statement of Cowley's suggests that either approach serves naturalistic purposes, which is true. McTeague, a novel written during Norris' transition from a youthful romanticist to a naturalist, is not recognized as best representative of his creed. This honor is reserved to The Octopus (1899) written after the author visited a wheat ranch in California. The book dealt with the struggle of the ranchers against the railroad, and was the first of a trilogy conceived by Norris, the "Epic of the Wheat." The Pit (1903), an expose of the Chicago wheat exchange, was the

19. Ibid., p. 434.
20. Loc. cit.
This was the least naturalistic of his great works. The *Wolf*, a projected portrayal of the consumption of the wheat as bread in a famine-stricken European village, was left unwritten. The naturalistic pattern to which Norris generally adhered was rounded out by the posthumous publication of *Vandover and the Brute*. Prepared from an uncorrected draft, it made its appearance in 1914, twelve years after the author's death.

Norris wrote, besides creative works, a series of essays and articles which was published in 1903 entitled *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*. A discussion of this and other of Norris' criticisms is pertinent. Conclusions arrived at by Lars Ahnebrink in his *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* serve as a guide. Norris, termed by Cowley the man who set the standards for American naturalism, was a self-conscious as well as conscientious artist. This is emphasized by his enumeration of the novelist's responsibilities. Generally, it is a statement of revolt. In his critical revolt, Norris denounced alike the sentimental romances that had come in the wake of Scott, the historical novel, the supremacy of the "New England School" of writing, and the concept of life of William Dean Howells. Norris had a knack for phrasing colorful literary comments. One of these was that literature implied more than a "meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall paper and
Norris stressed the importance of plunging beyond externals. Also, he felt as did the other early naturalists that lacking was an original American fiction. Norris' essays were composed in great haste to satisfy the demands of editors, and for this reason they are not evenly consistent or exact. However, that he considered Zolaism something of a panacea and equated it with romanticism (of the right kind) is apparent. Realism might be accurate, but that was short of the mark. Truth, the artist's first responsibility, was the goal. Only a study of the deeper passions in the manner of Zola, Norris implied, approached the truth. "'Paint the horse pea-green if it suits your purpose,'" he said. "'To gain the knowledge of truth one should turn to 'life itself, the crude, the raw, the vulgar.'"

Even such a cursory glance at Norris' creed as this must include its notorious eulogy of Zola. The leader of the French naturalists was he who the American sought to emulate. Too, Norris' statement involved the implied likeness of naturalism to romanticism. Of "the world of Zola" Norris said:

Everything is extraordinary, imaginative,

22. Ibid., p. 158.
23. Ibid., p. 159.
grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout like the vibration of an ominous and low-pitched diapason. It is all romantic, at times unmistakably so, as in Le Rêve or Rome, closely resembling the work of all modern romanticists, Hugo. We have the same huge dramas, the same, enormous scenic effects, the same love of the extraordinary, the vast, the monstrous, and the tragic.24

In review, Herbert J. Muller contended that Dreiser bore the brunt of the battle for the naturalistic view of American life. Malcolm Cowley felt that this position was occupied by Frank Norris. Both critics tended to minimize the importance of Stephen Crane. Lars Ahnebrink was inclined to be less rigorous in narrowing the field. In determining the source of this country's new view of life, he said: "I have confined myself to an analysis of Garland, Crane, and Norris, since they seem to be the first important American writers to have been obviously influenced by naturalism." Irrespective of where emphasis is placed, it was in the nineties that a small group of American writers first adopted the basic naturalistic techniques. They were, of course, influenced by European models. The native realistic tradition also played a part. It is a known fact that Crane regarded Howells and Garland as his literary fathers. This link between Crane and Garland hints that there was interaction among the naturalists themselves. As the

24. Ibid., p. 158.
25. Ibid., p. v.
findings of Ahnebrink clearly show, this was true.

There was only a year's difference in the ages of Norris and Crane, Norris being the older. Although they met only once, they were conscious of each other's work. In the years 1896 and 1897, in the periodical *Wave* appeared criticisms by Norris of Crane's *Maggie* and *George's Mother*, together with a parody of *The Red Badge of Courage* and a criticism of Crane's London reporting by the same author. Their estimate of each other seemed to mingle envy with reserve. Crane's judgment of *McTeague* was complimentary, but he found the book unduly moral. Undoubtedly both Norris and Crane profited by their friendships with Hamlin Garland. Since Garland's assistance to Crane involved morale building as well as significant instruction, its discussion is reserved to the chapter on the latter author's life. Ahnebrink has said that Norris' debt to Garland seemed obvious in *The Octopus*. The reverse aspects of the relationship are summarized in Garland's unpublished diary. Ahnebrink has recorded that the older man wrote of Norris, "... He filled a large part in my life and thought ... For one so young his view of social movements and forces was singularly large—almost epic .... He was a man of great laughter -- of short, pithy speech -- humorous, almost always deeply sympathetic."

The net result of these influences and interactions was literature written in a new spirit, early American naturalism. Among the most pithy observations on this shift in emphasis are those of Herbert Muller in *Modern Fiction: A Study of Values*. This paragraph owes its illustrative citations to that author. Developments in the techniques of this country's naturalists, variously termed their literary creeds, choice of theme and setting, and type of characterization, are a shift in emphasis, at times so great a shift as to be recognized as something altogether new. The realistic impulse that has prompted early novelists is easily demonstrable. Despite their strong sense for fact, they were likely at any moment to subordinate fidelity of representation to humor, to sentiment, to melodrama, or to mere diversion. They accepted their position as public entertainers, hired to put on a big show. Muller illustrated the situation thus: "Tom Jones is a natural young scamp, but he is led through an elaborate series of artificial adventures and finally handed over to his angelic Sophia; David Copperfield travels a familiar road into maturity and marriage, but many of his fellow-travelers are clowns and freaks." In France in the last half of the nineteenth century, authors arrived upon the scene who subordinated artificiality, the clowns and freaks, and all the rest to an objective, realistic approach. The line of

development of this technique, culminating in its arrival and acceptance on these shores, has been indicated in a separate chapter. The purpose of this chapter has been to give an account of the native state of affairs before, during, and after the time that the French influence was regarded as an incursion.

Conditions of a nature other than philosophical and literary were responsible for the eventual approval of both foreign and native naturalism. The interdependent rise of science, industry, and big business together with the progress and closing of the frontier have been cited as compatible with the naturalistic tradition. In the post-Civil War period, the long work week and subsistence wage were a telling blow to romantic delusions. The rise and fall, exploitation and competition, of individual "Robber Barons" evolved into a treacherous spiral, "a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest." The unscrupulous pursuits of the "Barons" were no more depressing than the cold, indifferent aspect of the new science. No longer was man regarded as a divine creation of a loving God, not by the followers of Darwin and Spencer. Garland, Dreiser, Norris, Crane, their satellites, as it served their purpose, considered man and destiny as calculatingly, as indifferently as it seemed to them man was considered by fate, destiny, or what you will. When in 1920 Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* met with a surprisingly
favorable reception, it was because the crass materialism of the era had been made palatable to the taste of the American reading public. A whole progression of naturalists had been responsible. Their materials and their attitudes had stemmed from life.
CHAPTER IV

CRANE'S WRITINGS

Crane's writing, like his life, had a flavor of singularity mingled with genius. He was heir to a tradition of vastness, the tradition of Balzac and Zola. The output of those compatriots of Crane with whom he is most closely associated was, to say the least, substantial. Of his contemporaries, the realists, Howells and James, and his fellow craftsmen, Dreiser, Garland, and Norris, have each left a greater imprint, in terms of space. Crane's works of consequence included a full-fledged novel (which in his later years he considered too long), The Red Badge of Courage, two novelle, Maggie and George's Mother, and a handful of shorter stories, conspicuous among them "The Blue Hotel" and "The Open Boat." His works were compiled by Wilson Follett in 1925-26 and comprised twelve volumes. Crane has not been judged in terms of a dozen volumes. Critics have regarded his output as quite uneven. Generally, they have relegated to a second or third rank those works which were not cited here as consequential. The very lack of critical interest in the rest of his work is highly significant. Such critics as Lars Ahnebrink, Carl Van Doren, and Joseph Conrad, who have taken a considered estimate of Crane's stature, have
intentionally limited their high commendation to materials here mentioned. They have frequently stressed the wide difference between Crane's literary achievement and his work that smacked of professional reporting.

An amazing fact is that Crane earned an equal footing with men whose contribution was far greater, again in terms of volume, than was his own. The position that has been assigned to him was out of all proportion to the amount of his work, almost unprecedentedly so. Clearly, much of Crane's genius was in his compression of a comprehensive mass. This chapter's central purpose is to deal in this same way, in so far as the author is capable, with the essence of Crane's writing. Inevitably, the pros and cons of the existence of naturalism enter in. In the general scheme of the thesis, this chapter is preparatory for, and a preface to, the isolation and estimation of naturalism in Crane's work.

A general estimate of Stephen Crane has been made in eminently specific terms by Carl Van Doren, a critic who gave Crane one of his most gracious receptions. Two rather extensive quotations from different estimates made by Van Doren seem justified. Thereafter, Crane's own words are best expressive of his aims and of the methods he chose in seeking his ends. Crane's record of his literary beliefs is conspicuously brief, contrasting again with the extensive theoretical writings of fellow naturalists, notably Garland and Norris. In this chapter his comments are supplemented by
critical opinions. Critical activity involved a variety of attempts to catalogue the author's technique. These will be taken into account, emphasis being given to their relevance to a naturalistic interpretation. Since attempts to catalogue Crane have arrived at conclusions which are wide shadings of a general agreement, there is reason and hope for a close study of his naturalistic works. Incidentally, these include those of his output which have been adjudged his best. This chapter ends on the note that Crane may be profitably studied further; the effort should be rewarding.

In an attempt to put Crane in his place, so to speak, two statements made by Van Doren are acceptable with little comment. They present only the laudatory aspects of the picture. This they do admirably well:

Modern American literature may be said, accurately enough, to have begun with Stephen Crane thirty years ago.

What was at once original and mature in Crane was his habit of thinking. He called himself a man of sense, and deserved his title. For him the orthodox, the respectable, or the classical did not exist, or at any rate had no binding authority.... Its [the world's] orthodoxies and respectabilities were, he felt, only so much cotton in which it liked to pack itself; and its classical - that is, traditional - ways of representing itself in art, often mere frozen gestures. Too unschooled and too impatient to look for the reality behind accepted forms of manners or of art, Crane was too honest to pretend that he saw it there. If he could not see life face to face, he did not particularly care
to see it at all .... Reality for him, to be reality at all, had to be immediate and intense.¹

Again:

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) brought to naturalism an authentic young genius and an intensity new to the American novel .... Little used to reading, he admired Tolstoi and Flaubert so far as he knew them, but he was impatient of his genteel American contemporaries, whom he called insincere. His own observations in the slums and along the Bowery had convinced him that life was not what books made it out.

... he did not in the least mind that the savagery of his incidents might shock his readers. His method was as direct as his attitude. He arranged his episodes in a simple, natural order, all example and no precept.²

Wilson Follett received Crane in the same spirit as did Van Doren, and some significant comments made by Crane's editor logically preface the author's self-examination. In the Van Doren vein, Follett said: "On the basis of a three years' very complete saturation with the idea and the writings of Stephen Crane, I can testify that a repeated and searching, even a narrowly textual, study of his works tends greatly to heighten the conviction of his permanent importance, the sense of his scope and variety."³ Follett felt that the ultimate great thing in writing was the identity or

talent expressed in it. He found that Crane's own identity was a phenomenon of importance.

Of Maggie, "a cornerstone of American fictional history," Follett said, it "is so solidly in its place as when it gave pain to the gentle soul of Richard Watson Gilder, before the author was twenty-one." Gilder was The Century editor who first pointed out to Crane the preponderance of adjectives and slaughtered infinitives in the book. Sensing that the real objection was the fearful shock sustained by the editor, Crane is reported to have said: "You mean that the story's too honest?" Follett found that the wholeness of Crane's perception was marred by the very vividness of his honest portrayals. The author's grasp and rendering of a total situation was manifested in his repetition of characters and communities from book to book. Follett made the enlightening comment, which implied Crane's deficiency in quantity, that "not even Mr. Sinclair Lewis has (except by quantitative measurement) surpassed him" in the reproduction of the whole American character and background in the desultory conversation of nobodies.

Crane's own story of his revolt against the treatment of rosy-hued surfaces which was current at his time is

4. Ibid., p. 537.
5. Thomas Beer, Stephen Crane, p. 86.
expressive of the author's independence and confidence in his cause. It was contained in an undated letter to a friend. Crane said:

You know, when I left you, I renounced the clever school in literature. It seemed to me that there must be something more in life than to sit and cudgel one's brains for clever and witty expedients. So I developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one .... I became involved in the beautiful war between those who say that art is man's substitute for nature and we are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth, and those who say -- well, I don't know what they say .... they can't say much but they fight villainously ....

Those letters of Crane's which have been preserved were, almost without exception, undated. Nevertheless, they are the most nearly complete account of his creed. As he said himself, "I have been very careful not to let any theories or pet ideas of my own creep into my work." Nor did he write a formal discussion that might be termed his literary credo. His longest discussion is of article length. He did maintain that preaching was fatal to literary art. He said that if there was any moral lesson in his version of life, he did not try to point it out. In the footsteps of Zola,


he felt that this was the reader's task.

In his correspondence, Crane expressed the importance of his friendships with Garland and Howells. He wrote, "The one thing that makes my life worth living in the midst of all this abuse and ridicule is the consciousness that never for an instant have those friendships at all diminished." It was Crane's honesty, of course, that had been abused and ridiculed. Crane felt that Garland and Howells were men of good sense, and he knew that they believed him sincere. Deprecating his importance, he termed his work "brief and inglorious as it is"; said of it, it "does not amount to a string of dried beans ...." Again, "I also know that I do the best that is in me, without regard to cheers or damnation .... To keep close to my honesty is my supreme ambition. There is a sublime egotism in talking of honesty .... This aim in life struck me as being the only thing worth while. A man is sure to fail at it, but there is something in the failure."

By Crane's own admission, there was suffering in the failure too. He echoed the cry of the ages that has identified suffering and pure art. There is an eloquence and intensity, typical of this artist, in his extolling of pain

10. Ibid., p. 116.
12. Loc. cit.
inherent in good literature:

Of all human lots for a person of sensibility that of an obscure free lance in literature or journalism is, I think, the most discouraging. The Red Badge of Courage was an effort born of pain -- despair, almost; and I believe that this made it a better piece of literature than it otherwise would have been. It seems a pity that art should be a child of pain, and yet I think it is. Of course, we have fine writers who are prosperous and contented, but in my opinion their work would be greater if this were not so. It lacks the sting it would have if written under the spur of a great need.13

This brief recognition of Crane's literary pronouncements has touched only the high points. Before passing on to what critics have said more specifically about his technique, it might be well to re-emphasize the importance which Crane attached to literary art. He verbalized what Zola had tacitly admitted, that life evades us; for Crane, a rendering of life was the aim, the justification, of literary art. He realized that there were writers who felt the goal was within reach. The nearness to which he approached it is testified to by his lack of illusion. The optimists, Crane said, were deluded. Apparently they had not struggled hard or long enough. They had not suffered.

In quest of reality, Crane rejected the easy route. He shied away from the "devices" of the writer of "craft" fiction. He has been quoted as saying that he renounced "the

clever school" in literature. Follett observed of Crane that in characterization he disliked any label so easily applied and repeated as the name of a person. To this Follett attached much significance. He said of the writer that "his sharp phrases identify as inexorably as the names Trunnion, Pecksniff, and Brugglesmith; and this startling, at times appalling, distinctness is of course a cardinal virtue of his manner ...." Earlier Follett had given examples to prove his point. For example, in the first version of *Maggie*, no character was named at all. Maggie was identified as "the girl"; other characters by such tags as "the girl's mother" and "the girl's brother." The Negro of "The Monster" was named Henry Johnson, but he is remembered chiefly as the man who had no face. The one vestige of a name in "The Open Boat" is that of the oiler's, "Billie." Important characters of "The Blue Hotel" are merely "the cowboy," "the Easterner," "the gambler," and "the Swede." One of Crane's strangest titles, "The Clan of No-Name," gets the point across. Crane himself was probably the clan's most conspicuous member. Follett observed, "Probably no other writer, and certainly no other modern realist, has had a similar reluctance to refer to his characters by their 14

ordinary human names ...."


15. Loc. cit.
Crane's choice of themes, like his treatment, had a naturalistic temper. *Maggie* was essentially a conflict of a girl of the slums against her environment; *George's Mother*, one of a young man in little better circumstances against his mother, his friends, his surroundings—in a word, against the milieu. The central conflict in "The Blue Hotel," as in the two *novellas*, was a hopeless one and ended in defeat.

The outcome of *The Red Badge of Courage* and "The Open Boat" was happier, if marred by loss of life. Significantly, the agony and strife of the victorious struggles seemed greater than in those that were lost. This was because of Crane's choice of emphasis. In *Maggie*, *George's Mother*, and "The Blue Hotel" the author stressed objectively the character of the unsurmountable odds. In "The Open Boat" he emphasized the feelings of men pitted against what appeared to them to be unsurmountable odds. The *Red Badge* is a documentation, in the best naturalistic tradition, of the terrible agonies of a human mind caught in a net of fear and despair. Clearly, victory seems to have been achieved not because the odds were any better, but because the victim was capable of greater suffering. In a logical analysis, Crane's world was a survival of the fittest.

All of Crane's themes were adaptable to a sentimental handling. This is no truer of any than of his first attempt, *Maggie*. Of the moral dangers of the slums, the one that has been given most frequent fictional treatment is its fostering
of prostitution. This is the effect it had upon Maggie. The theme lends itself to dramatization and orgies of sentiment. Walter F. Taylor has characterized the typical handling of a girl's fall as verbose, flaccid, sentimental, and didactic; he said of Crane's treatment that it was concise, vigorous, unsentimental, and amoral. The reference to a typical handling pertained, of course, to Crane's own time. What is typical today has been determined to some degree by Stephen Crane. Naturalistically, this author portrayed types rather than individuals: Maggie's father was the drunk of the slums; her brother, the selfish, imbecilic slum brother; her mother, the worst kind of slum mother. The characteristics of the environment were, if anything, more individualized than those of the people. Of the milieu, "an apartment-house that uprose from amid squat ignorant stables" and "a worm of yellow convicts came from the shadow of a grey ominous building" were descriptions within the space of a single paragraph.

Crane's "squat ignorant stables" and "worm of yellow convicts" were typical of his style. His choice of words, his use of adjectives and nouns as sharp cutting tools, has been responsible in large measure for his success. Distinctness which forbade confusion of one object of the milieu

with another, of one cobblestone or ragged carpet or grimy face with another, was not necessarily a naturalistic virtue. It has been a mark of good writing since the origin of the art. It was Crane's one best trait that transcended his consequential works. It spilled over into all that he wrote. With one whose art had so much personal identity as Crane's, there was always the temptation to liken it to a flash of lightning. Wilson Follett yielded nobly to the temptation more than once. Perhaps his best effort is contained in the words, "Each thing of which he wrote is seen with the startling intensity of objects revealed in the uncanny green brilliance of a lightning-flash, in such a way as to stand as a symbol of all things of its kind." This seems an exaggeration, but of few writers could it be said with such slight exaggeration.

As has been said, Crane's vivid style figured prominently in his being accepted to the ranks of the foremost American writers. Since it is a trait of various types of composition, on the basis of style, he might be assigned to different schools of composition. Also, his descriptions have had great appeal to the senses. Not only to the visual sense, as alluded to by the lightning-flash simile, but to touch and smell and hearing, Crane's descriptions have appealed. For many writers, adjectives have been a bane.

Their descriptions have been the passages skipped over by readers. The essence of Crane's difference is apparent in the renowned passage, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer," of which Joseph Hergesheimer said, "I thought of an actual red wafer, such as druggists fixed to their bottles; it had a definite, a limited, size for me, an established clear vermilion colour." The sensory stimulus of Crane's works has linked him with the impressionists. This is with justification. The response of readers to the author's impressions has been of the magnitude of that evoked by other impressionists.

Bernard Smith noted that Crane found sensory pleasure in that which was real rather than romantic. Apparently he considered Crane one of the foremost realistic impressionists. He said, "The desire for the nervous stimulants of fantasy and aberration ... is afterwards complemented by an interest in the sensory excitation of reality for its own sake, as in the prose of Stephen Crane."

Joseph Conrad went further than to imply that Crane was a singular impressionist. He termed him "the most single-minded of verbal impressionists." Commenting on


Conrad's description, Follett said, "Crane's range of vision was limited; but what he saw at all he saw as if it were for that moment the only thing worth looking at in the visible universe." In doing so, he dissociated it from all ordinary connections; thus detached and denuded, it was elevated to a higher, quasi-allegorical plane. That, at any rate, was Follett's contention. The fact is inescapable that many impressions Crane gave were totally different from any that had been given before. They were in terms of how he felt and saw, and to that degree he was an impressionist. That he had personal identity is another way of saying that he represented things as they appeared to his individual temperament. The tendency to emphasize this aspect and catalogue Crane as an impressionist must be taken into account. Herbert J. Muller stressed Crane's impressionism, excluding him from the ranks of the naturalists. Muller said of *The Red Badge of Courage*, "a remarkable feat of imaginative recreation, this account of a common soldier in the Civil War is no product of naturalism: Crane's method was scarcely the method of observation, and his aim was essentially impressionistic." Crane's impressionism will be taken into account in the following chapters which deal with a


naturalistic interpretation.

Crane has been catalogued as a realist too. Crane himself observed that "most of my prose writings have been towards the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism." With reservations, Ahnebrink agreed with the author and supported Muller's contention that Crane was not a naturalist. Whereas he supported Muller's negative statement with reservations, he emphatically did not catalogue Crane as an expressionist. He said:

Crane's literary credo, although expressed only in occasional fragments, has points in common with that of James, Howells, and Garland and demonstrates that, in theory, he was a realist—not a naturalist. In practice, however, he went beyond the realism of James and Howells and the veritism of Garland in such naturalistic stories as Maggie and George's Mother.

Hence, in the following chapters Crane's work must be considered in the light of both impressionistic and realistic interpretations as well as naturalistic. Although Ahnebrink said of him that "he started out as a naturalistic delineator of the slums and ended by outlining an historical romance," it will be safe to exclude romanticism. Referring to The Red Badge of Courage, Muller voiced the preponderance of critical opinion: "His novel was a realistic study of war

24. Ibid., p. 155.
25. Ibid., p. 104.
at a time when war was still the subject primarily of romance."

In appraising Crane, Alexander Cowie took into account both naturalistic and impressionistic characteristics. In this connection, he paid a well-deserved tribute to The Red Badge of Courage. Highlights of Mr. Cowie's estimate of Crane are contained in widely separated quotations from his book, The Rise of the American Novel. Referring to J.W. De Forest's work, Cowie said, "In the realistic descriptions of actual battle scenes De Forest excelled all nineteenth-century American novelists except Stephen Crane, author of The Red Badge of Courage (1895)." "In psychological insight into character, however, De Forest is inferior to Crane, for like most satirists, he was more successful in the analysis of motive than in the revelation of character in its totality." "Stephen Crane brilliantly united a naturalistic attitude with impressionistic technique ..." This seems a fair representation.

26. Muller, op. cit., p. 201.
27. John Wm. De Forest (1826-1906), author of the first realistic novel of the Civil War, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867).
29. Ibid., p. 520.
30. Ibid., p. 749.
Even in the light of the discussion by Messrs. Muller, Ahnebrink, and Follett, it seems that Cowie's conclusion might be maintained. If this were done, it might be profitable to judge between the importance of attitude and technique, assuming that Crane's attitude was naturalistic and his technique impressionistic. The remainder of this thesis will be concerned with drawing conclusions from Crane's text, with due regard for previous critical opinion. The controlling purpose will be a search for naturalism; wherever this quest leads to other modes of composition, judgments similar to the one suggested above will be made.
MAGGIE AND GEORGE'S MOTHER

For an interpreter of naturalistic writings, Maggie and George's Mother are considerably easier going than The Red Badge of Courage. Of the two chapters of this thesis which concern an examination of Crane's text, the first deals with the easier works. The difficult problems posed by The Red Badge of Courage are dealt with in the second. For the most part Maggie and George's Mother are straightforward naturalism. They are of novella length, much shorter than Crane's story of the Civil War. They are treated together not only because they are much alike as to type, but also because some of the same characters appear in each. For example, the heroine of Maggie is described in George's Mother as she appealed to the hero of the second work. The locales of the two novelle are practically identical; in both, themes of degradation persist to tragic conclusions.

I

As has been said, Maggie was Crane's first attempt, and it is only natural that a discussion of it should precede the criticism of any of the author's other works. Whereas impression is important in The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie does
not involve that literary technique. Its use by Crane is generally associated with his story of the Civil War. For that reason, a consideration of impressionistic techniques may be postponed until the next chapter, at which time *The Red Badge of Courage* will be discussed.

It is impossible to avoid the predominance of naturalism in *Maggie*. W.D. Howells said, "I think that what strikes me most in the story of 'Maggie' is that quality of fatal necessity which dominates Greek tragedy." This was an emphatic statement of the naturalistic principle. Implicit in Crane's novella were pessimism and determinism. Indeed, the pessimism of *Maggie* was bitter and unrestrained. As for determinism, the life of Maggie was never her own. It was as inexorably controlled by heredity and environment as were the lives of Greek tragic heroes by whimsical gods. The girl's heredity was bad; her environment, terrible. Crane's penetrating descriptive passages left no doubt of that. So, on the whole, it was a hopeless struggle, that of "a soul struggling vainly with an inexorable fate."

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1. The story of *The Red Badge of Courage* is related as a series of impressions in the mind of its hero, Henry Fleming. *Maggie* is not laid in a character's mind, nor is it impressionistic in any other important sense.

2. Wilson Follett, editor, *The Work of Stephen Crane*, X, 135. (Hereafter this reference will be cited as *Work.*)

With Crane's handling, there was sentiment for the heroine's intense suffering, but conspicuously absent was sentimentality. There may have been sympathy for even her deplorable parents and brother, but the sympathy was not expressed. In *Maggie*, the characters were all impersonal types with the exception of the heroine. She too was a type, but her characteristics were so individualized that the type itself enjoyed a certain depth of personality. *Maggie*'s virtues were such that the girl might endear herself to readers. Her trials were so elaborated that readers might readily be sympathetic. Details of the milieu abounded in Crane's story and those, vivid. Chiefly for the above reasons, the novella is a splendid source of naturalism. As it is consistently so, material will be treated in the order of its appearance, without regard for complete coverage.

Nowhere in the story did Crane use vigorous, dramatic language to better advantage than in the opening passage. The style was the antithesis of preaching. Implicit in the description of a little boy was his typical naturalistic background. In implication, as opposed to explanation, was the protracted objectivity. The opening paragraph set the tone for the whole story. It read:

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 pelt ing him. His infantile countenance was livid with
the fury of battle. His small body was writhing in the delivery of oaths.\textsuperscript{4}

Although some naturalistic authors have used language as a blunt instrument, the advantage of compression and precision is apparent. The purpose of such a description, naturalistically speaking, is to depict the squalor of the surroundings and the appalling state of the youths. Here Crane's ability to cut and hew with the tools of his trade proved a distinct advantage. "Howling urchins ... circling madly about the heap ... infantile countenance ... livid with the fury of battle," not to mention the body "writhing in the delivery of oaths"—it is almost necessary to requote the paragraph when taking into account the singular prose. On the other hand, "Rum Alley" and "Devil's Row," aside from being colorful, are signal for their suggestibility; in their latent power they recommend themselves to the naturalist. Crane's philosophy largely determined his kinship to Zola, Garland, and the tradition. Had his philosophy been different, then his ability to draw pictures close to life, to make them so individual as to stand as symbols, to use language richly associative for almost any reader—all these attributes would have made his work akin to realism and objectivity, a long way along the road to naturalism. Holding to a deterministic doctrine, Crane used language in the

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 137.
naturalistic cause. His choice of words helped to determine, as well as was determined by, his mode of composition. A discussion of Crane's naturalism that ignored his word power would be incomplete.

Returning to the heap of gravel in the neighborhood of Rum Alley and Devil's Row, the lad atop the heap was called Jimmie. He was the brother of Maggie who lived in spite of the efforts of his associates. Her other brother, Tommie, died. He died as a babe, neither old nor fit enough to survive. "He went away in an insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian." In the course of the story, Jimmie grew to manhood; Maggie, a few years older, grew to womanhood and "went away" less illustriously, with more fanfare, than had her baby brother. It was the practice in her slum surroundings to give wide publicity to death in disgrace. Maggie became a prostitute; she committed suicide. Naturalistically, Crane rendered the heredity and environment responsible for her death. Practically nothing can be said about the story without revealing its pessimistic tone.

Crane concerned himself first with Jimmie's growing up. When he was a little boy he began to be arrested. "Before he reached a great age, he had a fair record."

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5. Ibid., p. 140.
6. Ibid., p. 155.
Isolated chapters of his youth suggest a consistent book. He had become a truck driver. "He developed too great a tendency to climb down from his truck and fight with other drivers. ... He had been in quite a number of miscellaneous fights, and in some general barroom rows that had become known to the police. ... Once he had been arrested for assaulting a Chinaman." Although two women in widely separated parts of the city had caused him annoyance with wailings about "marriage and support and infants," Crane implied that Jimmie was not without a romantic view of love. On a certain star-lit evening, young James said wonderingly and quite reverently, "Deh moon looks like hell, don't it?"

Whereas Jim was of the rule, a slum type, Maggie was the exception that proved the rule. Crane said of her growth into girlhood:

The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud-puddle. She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl. None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins. The philosophers, upstairs, downstairs, and on the same floor, puzzled over it ... 8

Even as a child she had piqued the philosophers' interest; her aversion for dirt, almost without precedent, had called her to their attention. However, since her mother attired her in grimy tatters, she went unseen by the mass. Having

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7. Ibid., p. 155.
8. Ibid., p. 156.
blossomed in the puddle, she came to the attention of the young men of the neighborhood. It was about this time that her brother, Jim, decided that she should no longer be an exception. He put it to her with classical directness: "Mag, I'll tell yeh dis! See? Yeh've eeder got t'go on d'toif et go t' work!" It is not difficult to imagine that Crane's spelling is a faithful guide to turn-of-the-century Bowery talk. In its fidelity, it is naturalistic. Since Maggie had a feminine aversion for the alternative, she went to work. For the most part, she lost her identity as the clean, pretty girl and joined the ranks of her type. "She got a position in an establishment where they made collars and cuffs." She perched atop her stool and "treaded at her machine all day, turning out collars with a name which might have been noted for its irrelevancy to anything connected with collars." ... "At night she returned home to her mother." Her life fell into the dreary, monotonous, thankless pattern which is rightly associated with the slums.

It was not long until the heroine met the man who was to be her downfall. For her, any relation whatsoever with this man was a form of escape. Living conditions in her home had become intolerable. Crane savagely portrayed the primitive, bestial qualities of Maggie's own mother. This woman had drunk whiskey all of one Friday forenoon. She had gone

9. Ibid., p. 156.
into a rage and destroyed furniture for the remainder of that day. When Maggie came home from her existence at the factory, she found her mother asleep amid the wreckage. The irony in the mother's first words to her daughter is immediately apparent. In the manner of her speech and in the choice of the word "snorted," Crane clearly implied the older woman's animal nature. He reported:

"Hah!" she snorted, sitting up suddenly, "where yeh been? Why don' yeh come home earlier? Been loafin' 'round d'streets. Yer gettin' t'be a reg'lar devil."10

It was shortly thereafter that Pete, the man of Maggie's downfall, arrived. He found the heroine in the midst of broken chairs and tables, various household utensils strewn about the floor. Crane elaborated this setting, skillfully uniting its effect upon Maggie with the effect that her mother's attitude must have had upon both the girl and the young man who had come to call on her. In part, Crane said:

The curtain at the window had been pulled by a heavy hand and hung by one tack, dangling to and fro in the draught through the cracks at the sash .... The fire in the stove had gone out. The displaced lids and open doors showed heaps of sullen grey ashes .... Maggie's mother, stretched on the floor, blasphemed, and gave her daughter a bad name.11

For the reader, Pete was pictured as a good-for-nothing. In Maggie's eyes, he was something more than the conventional

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10. Ibid., p. 163.
knight in armor. He was the key to a new life. He introduced her to a new kind of people, happy and contented individuals, and to a new kind of environment, the gay, glittering existence of the Bowery after night. It seemed to Maggie that there was no sacrifice that might be too great for Pete. She sacrificed her reputation as a "good girl" and was scorned by her society—and by Pete—thereafter.

Crane's irony was nowhere better than in his portrayal of the relationship of the man and girl previous to the sacrifice. Before she yielded, "Maggie perceived that Pete brought forth all his elegance and all his knowledge of high-class customs for her benefit. Her heart warmed as she reflected upon his condescension." Actually the young man did these things in order to assert his superiority, in order to bask in Maggie's adoration. When they entered a Bowery bar, "Pete walked aggressively up a side aisle and took seats with Maggie at a table beneath the balcony." Crane made it apparent that those things which impressed the girl most about Pete had their source in his previous experience. Pete's life had been evil. In terms of forces, evil deluded innocence, a representative naturalistic theme. At the bar Pete ordered, "Two beebs!" Leaning back, he regarded with eyes of superiority the scene before them. This attitude

12. Ibid., p. 165.
13. Ibid., p. 164.
Finally, even armed with a degree of knowledge, innocence was deluded. Crane related that the girl was conscious of the source of Pete's powers. The author indicated that she became self-conscious rather than suspicious:

A man who could regard such a sight the magnificent bar with indifference must be accustomed to very great things. It was obvious that Pete had visited this place many times before, and was very familiar with it. A knowledge of this fact made Maggie feel little and new.\textsuperscript{15}

In effect, Crane said that Good was not necessarily stronger nor wiser than Evil. However, the naturalistic world was one wherein people who were essentially of either kind suffered. Whereas Maggie was disgraced, Pete was subjected to the wrath of her brother, Jim. This brother had developed various bestial attributes in the course of driving teams. The occasion of his taking vengeance upon Maggie's despoiler is a splendid illustration of the naturalistic equation of man with animal. Crane said of the battle that ensued:

Pete at intervals gave vent to low, laboured hisses, that sounded like a desire to kill. Jimmie's ally, a sympathetic friend, gibbered at times like a wounded maniac. Jimmie was silent, fighting with the face of a sacrificial priest. The rage of fear shone in all their eyes, and their blood-coloured fists whirled.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 164.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 164-165.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 186.
Again, "The three frothing creatures on the floor buried themselves in a frenzy for blood." The attitude of the crowd that assembled at the bar where the fight took place was little more enlightening:

People heard the sound of breaking glass and shuffling feet within the saloon and came running. A small group, bending down to look under the bamboo doors, and watching the fall of glass and three pairs of violent legs, changed in a moment to a crowd. ... The crowd bent and surged in absorbing anxiety to see.

A policeman had appeared upon the scene. However, Jimmie made his escape. With his face drenched in blood, he dashed up a side street "pursued a short distance by some of the more law-loving or excited individuals of the crowd." The irony of "law-loving or excited individuals" requires no elaboration. Nor does the contention that Jimmie's attitude thereafter struck the predominant note of the work. Having eluded the crowd, which must have been excited for the most part, Maggie's brother debated going to the assistance of his ally, the sympathetic friend. Crane said of the incident:

At first Jimmie, with his heart throbbing at battle heat, started to go desperately to the rescue of his friend, but he halted. "Ah, what's d' use?" he demanded of himself.

All previous detailed criticisms have, to my knowledge,

17. Ibid., p. 186.
18. Ibid., p. 187.
20. Loc. cit.
discussed at length the heroine's forthcoming career as a street-walker and the tragic circumstances of her death. More knowledge of Crane's naturalism may be gained from a brief examination of *George's Mother* than from further consideration of *Maggie*, since this latter would be largely repetitious.

II

*George's Mother* is a story of the degeneration of a young working man in the face of a well-meaning, nonetheless depressing mother and a degrading environment that was stronger than the man. Not the least dangerous pitfall of the environment was drunkenness to which the leading character, George, early succumbed. The essence of George's downfall was the effect that liquor had upon him. For that reason, a summary of the naturalistic aspects of George's story is probably best told in terms of his submission to drink. The incidents of this submission leave little untold, and they illustrate best the motifs of man as an animal, the potency of exterior forces, and the darker aspects of life.

The setting of this novella was elaborated more thoroughly than was customary with Crane. His description was of a naturalistic milieu, exteriors and interiors being taken

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21. See, for example, Lars Ahnebrink's observations on *Maggie* in *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, pp. 249-264.
into account. The confusion and impersonality of the surroundings seemed to absorb the author. Of George's habitat, Crane said on the very first page:

The lights made shadows, in which the buildings loomed with a new and tremendous massiveness, like castles and fortresses. There were endless processions of people, mighty hosts .... Horsecars, a-glitter with new paint, rumbled in a steady array between the pillars that supported the elevated railroad. The whole street resounded with the tinkle of bells, the roar of iron-shod wheels on the cobbles, the ceaseless trample of the hundreds of feet. Above all, too, could be heard the loud screams of the tiny newsboys who scurried in all directions ....

Since George's home depressed him and he could find no peace in the outside world, he fled to the more compatible atmosphere of the saloon. At once, Crane's choice of an adjective made the situation clear. "That night, when Keleey [George's surname] arrived at the little smiling saloon, he found his friend Jones standing before the bar engaged in a violent argument with a stout man." Perhaps little is as significant as smiling, since George was escaping impersonality, enormity as much as unhappiness. The similarity to Maggie is in important matters of theme and treatment as well as in the minor fact of the ubiquitous bars.

Inside this particular saloon, George found companionship and comfort which contrasted with the well-intentioned

23. Ibid., p. 31.
scoldings of his mother in his home. In the naturalistic tradition, Crane rendered the situation. Of the group inside the bar he said: "They drew up in line and waited. The busy hands of the bartender made glasses clink. Mr. Bleecker, in a very polite way, broke the waiting silence." The desirable connotation of such an "unimportant" word as clink is an isolated instance not only of rendition, but of compression too. Its contrast with what has been said of Zola's descriptive technique is readily apparent. It is one of innumerable illustrations of Crane's ability to render naturalistically with a minimum of words.

This man Bleecker was the outstanding figure in the somewhat unknowing conspiracy against George Kelcey's better side. For a time Crane shifted the emphasis from the leading character to this other man. However, the author illustrated the effect that Bleecker's condition had upon Keleey. He told how Bleecker, the older of the two, was conscious of the way in which his importance dazzled George. At this, the prominent one grew warm. "Directly, then, he launched forth into a tale of bygone days, when the world was better." For his youthful listener, this world was already better than the one outside or at home. Bleecker, it seemed, had known all the great men of the bygone days. "He reproduced his

24. Ibid., p. 31.
25. Ibid., p. 32.
conversations with them. There were traces of pride and of mournfulness in his voice. He rejoined at the glory of the world of dead spirits. He grieved at the youth and flippancy of the present one. Here Crane not only set a merry example before George, but he also forecast what was to become of his leading character. Soon George was to imagine a grander past than he had actually experienced; soon he was to deprecate the present state of affairs. As Crane said of Bleecker, "He lived with his head in the clouds of the past, and he seemed obliged to talk of what he saw there"; this was to become the condition of George.

As for the effect of Bleecker, "Kelcey was proud that the prominent character of the place talked at him, glancing into his eyes for appreciation of fine points." Three paragraphs later, Crane summarized George's estimate of the carefree imbiber thus: "He admired Bleecker immensely." He developed a brotherly feeling for the rest of the group; it seemed to him that they were all gentle-spoken. "He began to feel that he was passing the happiest evening of his life. His companions were so jovial and good-natured; and everything they did was marked by such courtesy." George's downfall was inherent in his own gullibility. His situation was strikingly like that of Maggie.

Two other instances might be given of the rendition of

26. Ibid., p. 32.
the warmth of the bar as opposed to home and of George's sus-
ceptibility to this superficial warmth. Crane said of one
of the group:

"Here," said O'Connor, "it's my turn now."

He called and pounded for the bartender. He
then sat with a coin in his hand warily eyeing the
others. He was ready to frustrate them if they of-
fered to pay. 27

There soon appeared an intruder, a common drunk. The men
sprang to their feet and dispatched him. Of George and his
companions Crane said: "They sat down again. Kelcey felt,
in a way, that he would have liked to display his fidelity to
the others by whipping the intruder." 28

George was demonstrably susceptible to the warmth; as
with Maggie, he was aware—if he could believe the experi-
enced Bleecker—of the reason for the superiority of what he
admired. The incident involved another of the group: "After
a time Jones began to develop qualities of great eloquence
and wit. His companions laughed. 'It's the whisky talking
now,' said Bleecker." 29 George seemed to ignore this really
significant observation. Thereafter, he could not have
enough of escape to saloons. He was gravitated to any gath-
ering where liquor was served.

27. Ibid., p. 33.
28. Ibid., p. 35.
29. Ibid., p. 33.
Crane gave a thoroughly naturalistic version of young George's further encounters with Bleecker and his crowd. The author represented the contact of the neophyte with the initiates in a series of episodes. George was consistently gullible; the men of experience were always affable, always ready to welcome a bright young man into their midst. As the episodes continued, the difference between George and the others became less and less apparent. Crane rendered this change in terms of the conversations of the group. He described the various objects of the milieu that had become common to the men. They used in common a body of tavern phrases; gigantic mugs of beer and shot glasses of whiskey were representative properties of these beer-hall settings. Again, this strategy of Crane's was the antithesis of preaching; his technique was typically naturalistic. At a party at old Bleecker's, young George first touched the depths. He became thoroughly drunk, and the after effects clearly indicated George's further course.

A brief examination of the naturalistic aspects of *George's Mother* is completed with a discussion of Crane's treatment of Bleecker's party. The culmination of the episode was George's awakening in the morning. Crane splendidly contrasted the youth's situation before and after the event. The author's description of the assembly of men at Bleecker's when the party began contained something of all that was said in the above paragraph about Crane's episodic portrayal of
George's course. At the house, the size of the usual group was increased by the presence of strangers:

Everybody was excessively amiable. Kelcey felt that he had social standing. The strangers were cautious and respectful.

"By all means," said old Bleecker. "Mr. Kelcey, have a drink! An' by th' way, gentlemen, while we're about it, let's all have a drink!"

There was much laughter. Bleecker was so droll at times. 30

Crane's treatment of the milieu is possibly the most pertinent and interesting aspect of the entire episode. The objects are very much a part of the men's fetish, their after-night existence:

With mild and polite gesturing they marched up to the table. There were upon it a keg of beer, a long row of whisky-bottles, a little heap of corncob pipes, some bags of tobacco, a box of cigars, and a mighty collection of glasses, cups, and mugs. Old Bleecker had arranged them so deftly that they resembled a primitive bar. There was considerable scuffling for possession of the cracked cups. Jones politely but vehemently persisted upon drinking from the worst of the assortment .... Everybody showed that they were awed by Bleecker's lavish hospitality. Their demeanours expressed their admiration at the cost of the entertainment. 31

The state of these articles the next morning indicated the nature of the episode. After the tumults of the previous night, the interior of the main room "resembled a decaying battlefield." The air was stifling with the stench of

30. Ibid., p. 50.
31. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
32. Ibid., p. 58.
tobacco, men's breaths, and stale beer. "There was ruck of broken tumblers, pipes, bottles, spilled tobacco, cigar-stumps." In the middle of everything was old Bleecker, George's hero; his body had the appearance of a "corpse that had been flung there."

"Inspired by the pitiless ache in his head," George determined to reform. He knew by the feel of his stomach that the good life was the only wise one. However, he did not know which way to turn. The old routine without the lift afforded by alcohol seemed impossible. "He trembled before its exactions." He was the cornered, naturalistic animal. His environment had stimulated his primitive drives into action; in George's pattern of activity, liquor had sloughed off the veneer of civilization.

Kelcey was thirsty. The idea of a draught of clear, deliciously cool water absorbed him. He staggered over to a sink in one corner of the room. He moved carefully; "he understood that any rapid movement might cause his head to split." Crane's vivid description of the disillusionment that followed strikes again the story's naturalistic tone of defeat. He said of George and his surroundings:

The little sink was filled with a chaos of broken glass and spilled liquids. A sight of it filled him with horror, but he rinsed a glass

33. Ibid., p. 58.
34. Ibid., p. 59.
with scrupulous care and, filling it, took an enormous drink. The water was an intolerable disappointment .... He put down the glass with a gesture of despair. His face became fixed in the stony and sullen expression of a man who waits for the recuperative power of morrows.35

Not the least surprising, the morrows brought no recuperative power. As with Maggie, the youth discovered that outside forces had combined with destructive inherent drives; the prospects were all tragic. In Maggie and George's Mother, Crane told a story of deterioration, degeneration, with scientific fidelity to fact. To a lesser degree, he stressed the essential bigness of their worlds. Of course, as compared with the pitifully inadequate leading characters, the worlds were of enormity. Crane detailed the circumstances of the milieu in each story. He left no doubt for the readers' minds that the characters were themselves types who were thrown into situations that were common in America's great cities. Finally, he let these representative types tell their own stories; he did not give vent to his own feelings. Only in the savagery of his irony did Crane so much as indicate his attitude.

The Red Badge of Courage is quite a different matter. What has been learned of Crane's naturalism should be helpful in its consideration, the task of the next chapter.

35. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
CHAPTER VI

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

The Red Badge of Courage (1895) was Crane's longest work, his most popular, and it has already been mentioned in naturalistic connections. The foremost objective of this chapter will be to examine the naturalism in this novel of Crane's. To properly define this naturalism as the author's attitude, or his controlling theme, or merely his use of setting or of characterization will be attempted. Finally, the importance of naturalism in The Red Badge of Courage will be compared with that of both impressionism and realism.

The novel was a story of war written before the author had ever seen a battle. More surprising, the story was told in terms of the impressions of its hero, Henry Fleming, during his baptism of fire. It is understandable that it would have been much easier to describe armed conflict, even in an original manner, than it would have been to give an introspective study of a soldier's experience. But Crane did the latter, and his success has been attested to by war veterans to this day. The impact of The Red Badge of Courage was of international proportions. H.G. Wells said of Crane in 1900, "His success in England began with 'The Red Badge of Courage,' which did, indeed, more completely than any other book has
done for many years, take the reading public by storm. Its freshness of method ... came—in spite of the previous shock of Mr. Kipling—with a positive effect of impact." Wells himself considered it "a new thing, in a new school." Crane had done right, and that well, when he had introduced to a great reading public a singular method of portrayal. Had his experience been first-hand, his achievement would be more understandable. He had begun "as a growing mind must needs begin, with the record of impressions, a record of a vigor and intensity beyond all precedent."

The setting of the story was the battle of Chancellorsville. In this protracted Civil War engagement, Crane purported to give the impressions of Henry Fleming. Initially, the hero was anxious to be under fire in order to demonstrate his valor, his patriotism. The chance that he might not be valorous when thrust into the slaughter occurred to Henry again and again. He assumed the aspect of a nonchalant stoic in order to cover his own feelings. In battle, the catastrophe of fear overtook him. He fled, only to recover his composure after a hectic afternoon's tramp among the retreating and wounded. The remainder of the conflict is less

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2. Loc. cit.

3. Ibid., p. 242.
nightmarish, laid as it is in the mind of the excited hero. The man has been, in a measure, seasoned; and when he fights again, he stands his ground. By this time he had known what it was to run. Despite the terror, the gruesomeness, the filth and brutality of hand-to-hand encounter, it was easier to stand than run. Rather than tramp among the defeated, Fleming chose to fight beside the courageous. For all his cynicism, Crane did believe in the virtue, and the possession of it by his hero was inimitably shown.

Upon what material had Crane's insight and imagination worked? Carl Van Doren felt that the story was a realistic memory of the Civil War which former soldiers had exchanged in the vernacular and retold to listening boys. That in his youth Crane was in a position to collect such material is true. As a reporter, his favorite haunts became police courts and Bowery bars. The vernacular speeches throughout Crane's work attest to his competence as a listener. Van Doren's research prompted him to say of the author's listening to the accounts of veterans, "Here was Crane's primary source." A brother of Stephen had made a detailed study of the battle of Chancellorsville; Crane himself had been


fascinated by the era. Speculation has been great, but there probably will never be an explanation sufficient for The Red Badge of Courage.

The opening passage was grand, nearly without restraint, and appropriate to the whole. It began:

The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness at the noise of rumors. It cast its eyes upon the roads, which were growing from long troughs of liquid mud to proper thoroughfares. A river, amber-tinted in the shadow of its banks, purled at the army’s feet; and at night, when the stream had become of a sorrowful blackness, one could see across it the red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp fires set in the low brows of distant hills.

One would not suppose that such an auspicious start was originally even better. Nevertheless, Hamlin Garland contended that it was. Garland had seen the original draft of The Red Badge. He said of the first sentence that it fairly took him captive. "It described a vast army in camp on one side of a river confronting with its thousands of eyes a similar monster on the opposite bank." Garland’s judgment was that "the finality which lay in every word, the epic

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6. Crane’s own explanation was that he had gained his knowledge of war on the football field! Hamlin Garland, "Stephen Crane as I Knew Him," Yale Review, n.s. III (April, 1914), 498.


breadth, the splendor of the pictures presented—all indicated a most individual and striking imagination as well as a mature mastery of literary form." However, in its printed form the book did not have the quality of the manuscript. Such was Garland's judgment. He found that "the prodigious opening sentence which so impressed me on that memorable day disappeared entirely from his copy and the printed book lacked many other of the most notable pages of the original manuscript. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most vivid pictures of battle in our literature ...." That the book may have been even better in rough draft is an interesting sidelight to the most important stylistic consideration thus far: Crane's technique had elements of impressionism; those, important. That it contained naturalism will now be indicated.

There was with this novel of Crane's a readily discernible unity. Van Doren made the significant statement that the author "worked within tangible limits." The device used by Crane to narrow the limits of the book was the mind of Henry Fleming. With the exception of the great descriptive cantos, the panoramic landscapes and the pictures of the masses, the book was in terms of Henry Fleming's own little

10. Ibid., p. 505.
world. This device alone was largely responsible for the unity. Coupled with it were a consistency of tone, pessimistic, and of outlook, naturalistic. Henry's achievement of courage at the end of the book received such little stress that it cannot be rightly said to infringe upon the dominant tone, which was decidedly pessimistic. Because of the unity and consistency of the work, naturalism may be found in almost any part of it. To this author's knowledge, there is no particular part that is inconsistent with the whole in its emphasis of naturalism or realism or impressionism. For that reason it will be unnecessary to attempt a sampling of the entire book. The clarity afforded by an examination of passages in the order of their appearance recommends itself to a study of The Red Badge of Courage. That is the method which will be undertaken here.

Henry Fleming was a raw Yankee recruit. "One night, as he lay in bed, the winds had carried to him the clangouring of the church bell as some enthusiast jerked the rope frantically to tell the twisted news of a great battle .... Later, he had gone down to his mother's room and had spoken thus: 'Ma, I'm going to enlist.'" He had known nothing of war except what he had garnered from newspapers, the gossip of the village where he was born, and his own imaginings. Encamped by Chancellorsville, he discovered that he

knew nothing of war, nor of himself engaged in war. He came to regard himself as part of a vast blue demonstration. The loss of life was not his responsibility; the problems he faced were not his own problems. The problem that came to absorb him was whether he was courageous or cowardly, how he would react in the face of Confederate fire. In relegating responsibility and personal problems to the mass, he had thoroughly confused himself:

He felt that in this crisis his laws of life were useless. Whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail. He was an unknown quantity. He saw that he would again be obliged to experiment as he had in early youth. He must accumulate information of himself, and meanwhile he resolved to remain close upon his guard lest those qualities of which he knew nothing should everlastingly disgrace him. "Good Lord!" he repeated in dismay.\(^{13}\)

The object of the impressionist is to present his material as it is seen or felt by himself or a leading character, a spokesman. When more stress is placed upon actuality, upon objectivity, the purpose is clearly not impressionistic. The above passage is obviously a record of how Henry Fleming felt. How he "felt" refers to how he thought rather than to his sense of touch. The impressions are intellectual rather than sensory. They are an objective listing of thoughts entertained by young Fleming. Conservatively, it might be stated that the technique is as naturalistic as impressionistic.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 31.
The other important stylistic consideration is the author's attitude, which is demonstrably naturalistic. Henry Fleming is a rational animal, and little more. No longer does he have what might properly be termed a philosophy. His sets of standards and values are gone. In this situation, he does not know himself. Stripped of self-knowledge, rationally, there is but one recourse. Henry reasons that he must experiment as in his youth and draw logical conclusions. The character seems as much a scientist, a naturalist, as his fictional creator.

The quotation is an important one, if not in terms of the whole book, in terms of Henry's character and position. He was subjective enough and no more subjective than to sense his plight. Truly, instinctively he sensed the plight. He knew that his standards had left him, not by any profound deduction, but by their very absence when he tried to call them forth. Not in a quest of knowledge in the sense that the phrase has come to have, but spurred by a great need Henry resorted to experiment. Logic was a last recourse. Earlier, Crane had explained that young Henry entertained the pleasant illusion that one day his troubles might vanish, that his uncertainties would knock themselves one against another until they were exhausted and done. With even more certainty than that the youth's character was plain, unsophisticated, it may be said that his position verged on the hopeless. There was hope only so long as he retained his
sanity, his ability to perform boyish experiments. This is a typical naturalistic dilemma. It recalls Cowley's statement that naturalism is pessimistic determinism; true, so far as it goes. Pessimism was cited as a trait of naturalism in this thesis' controlling definition. There is no question that the above passage, and Henry's position generally, were pessimistic. Henry was a man of few words, but his summary repetition of "Good Lord!" was almost eloquent.

Henry's impressions of his surroundings were consistently vivid. Sometimes they were distorted. Occasionally, both kinds occur in a single sentence, as when "in the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun; and against it, black and patternlike, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse." Now there is no question that the "yellow patch" image is a vivid one; nor should there be any question that the "gigantic" colonel on his "gigantic" horse is an exaggeration. It should be mentioned again that the novel is laid in the mind of the hero. In its context, the quoted description was of an impression of Henry's. As further quotations will establish, there is no denying that this technique of giving the leading character's impressions was integral in The Red Badge of Courage. For the most part, this technique jostled comfortably with the naturalistic attitude. The brief

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passage cited above prefaced a longer one wherein naturalism came to the fore.

The time was night; across the river was camped the enemy. Crane returned to the "gigantic" colonel:

As he looked all about him and pondered upon the mystic gloom, he began to believe that at any moment the ominous distance might be aflame. Staring once at the red eyes across the river, he conceived them to be growing larger, as the orbs of a row of dragons advancing. He turned toward the colonel and saw him lift his gigantic arm and calmly stroke his moustache.15

It is hardly necessary to cite the "mystic gloom," "ominous distance" or "the orbs of a row of dragons advancing" as evidence of impressionism. The eyes may have appeared other than "red" to different observers; another person might have been absorbed with something else entirely than the "eyes." These were Henry’s impressions. In the culminating sentence, the colonel's arm was "gigantic"; but here, in the crucial place, it was not the impression but the attitude that was paramount. The gloom was mystic and Henry dreaded that the ominous distance might soon be aflame. His life was in the colonel's hands. The colonel stroked his moustache.

The colonel's gesture served the literary purpose of that served by a stationary wind-tower in Crane's short story "The Open Boat." In the story, a correspondent aboard an open boat had descried this wind-tower along the horizon.

15. Ibid., p. 38.
"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 ...."  The colonel, it will be remembered, calmly stroked his moustache. As the colonel was impressed with Nature, "she did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent."  As might be inferred from these quotations and others like them, this short story has been widely acclaimed as a naturalistic piece. Nowhere is it better than in its impersonal representation of Nature. The representation is two-fold impersonal: Nature is likened to an inanimate object, the wind-tower; she seemed neither beneficent nor wise, rather, indifferent, flatly indifferent. For a mind as subtle as the correspondent's, implicit in the colonel's gesture were all these implications. As a character, Henry Fleming was typically naturalistic, whereas the correspondent was not. In this particular instance, The Red Badge of Courage is probably more naturalistic than "The Open Boat."

Eventually, Henry did see action. It came in the wake of agonies of suspense. "One grey dawn, however, he was

16. Norman Foerster, editor, American Poetry and Prose, p. 1182. (The University of Arizona library does not have Work, Vol. IX.)

17. Ibid., p. 1183.
kicked in the leg by the tall soldier, and then, before he was entirely awake, he found himself running down a wood road in the midst of men who were panting from the first effects of speed." Crane did not particularize further about the panting men except to say that "the loud soldier's shrill voice could be heard ...." "The loud soldier" like "the tall soldier" are evidence of Crane's unwillingness to rely upon labels. These men were types, not just as Henry Fleming was impressed by them, but as the author chose to render them. Of course, the representation of types, the use of impersonal characters, is signally naturalistic. To get on with the story, "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.... He felt carried along by a mob." The most ardent exponent of naturalism might go into raptures at this point. In view of Henry's total inability to change his course, in the light of naturalism's definition, nothing further need be said. However, Crane desired to give the picture in sharper terms. He told how on all sides regiments burst into view. Of Henry, "The youth perceived that the time had come. He was about to be measured. For a moment he felt in the face of his great trial like a babe, and the flesh over his heart seemed very thin." Comment is scarcely necessary. Of

20. Ibid., p. 48.
course, the naturalism of the preceding quotation might be weighed in intellectual terms against the impressionistic technique. The tone, the whole feeling, of the situation is overwhelmingly naturalistic. The difficulty with this, as with all isolated instances, is that, lacking in coverage, it is inconclusive. However, at the least, a body of isolated references, if representative, may serve as a guide to accurate conclusions.

At this point in the novel, Crane was obliging in amplifying the naturalistic situation. He seemed absorbed in the deterministic aspect of his character's difficulty. In that difficulty, Henry looked about himself calculatingly. "But he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It enclosed him. And there were iron bars of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box." Again, Crane rose to elevated, incisive language in elaborating upon a situation that was already apparent. The strength of the prose carried the weight of repetition. Really surprising, and I think significant, is that the author was not yet content. His next paragraph was his final comment in this connection. It concerned itself with Henry's feelings:

As he perceived this fact [that he was in a "moving box"] it occurred to him that he had never wished to come to the war. He had not

22. Ibid., p. 48.
enlisted of his free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government. And now they were taking him out to be slaughtered.23

The "merciless government" is reminiscent of "iron bars of tradition and law on four sides." This is something else that Crane had said before. Also, significance should be attached to the sentence, "He had not enlisted of his free will." That is making a naturalistic contention where it was hardly justified. It will be remembered that Henry had gone down to his mother and said, "Ma, I'm going to enlist." He had done so in spite of his parent's protestations. This fact was supplied by Crane. For Henry Fleming to say that he had not enlisted of his own free will was to state a lie. His rationalizing thus is understandable. In its context, the notion is Henry's. However, a naturalist might make the statement as plain truth. The wording is that of an author's comment. For those who prefer to regard it as such, the inescapable fact is that Crane held to naturalistic tenets.

As indicated above, rather than being monotonous, Crane's repetitions made for intensity. Those ideas which Crane dramatized intensely may have been felt intensely. If so, he was absorbed with the naturalistic doctrine. Since degree or intensity is an important literary consideration, it should not be neglected. All literary modes are shadings of the same thing, writing. Those things which are held to

23. Ibid., p. 49.
most tenaciously by a writer deserve to be rated highly. This seems applicable to Crane's naturalism.

To continue with *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane carried his youthful hero through many realistic engagements. Frequently the descriptions were involved, but among the best are brief ones. As here, the pictures of the fighting men were impersonal:

> Across the smoke-infested fields came a brown swarm of running men who were giving shrill yells. They came on, stooping and swinging their rifles at all angles. A flag, tilted forward, sped near the front.

> As he caught sight of them the youth was momentarily startled by a thought that perhaps his gun was not loaded. He stood trying to rally his faltering intellect so that he might recollect the moment when he had loaded, but he could not.24

There was no individuality in the "brown swarm of running men who were giving shrill yells." By present-day standards, the sentence is almost awkward in its lack of personal identity. The men stooped and swung their rifles at all angles, but no instance was cited of how a particular man advanced. Consistently, this was Crane's naturalistic treatment of the mass. As regards the individual, Henry, he was again in a dilemma. His intellect was faltering; he tried to recall his loading the rifle, but he could not. The words have a ring of finality. Indeed, if the rifle had not been loaded, the result might have been of a most final kind. The

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circumstance and the treatment are clearly naturalistic.

Crane described the dead mass as he described the live:

Under foot there were a few ghastly forms motionless. They lay twisted in fantastic contortions. Arms were bent and heads were turned in incredible ways. It seemed that the dead men must have fallen from some great height to get into such positions. They looked to be dumped out upon the ground from the sky.25

These passages have been representative of Crane's treatment throughout The Red Badge of Courage. The "ghastly forms motionless," the "arms were bent and heads were turned," the "dead men must have fallen" were typical again of the work's over-all impersonality. The picture was in Henry Fleming's mind. It was a thoroughly naturalistic picture, even to the origin that the bodies appeared to have. It was not as though they had been shot down from mounts or fallen in an advance; it was in the abstract, as though they had been dumped upon the field. They might just as well have been spilled from a dump truck. There they were and Crane chose to give no explanation of how or why. He did not lecture on whose was the responsibility. In his "War Memories" he had linked the explanation of war with the explanation of life: "But to get the real thing! ... It seems impossible! It is because war is neither magnificent nor squalid; it is simply life, and an expression of life can always evade us. We can never tell life, one to another, although sometimes we

25. Ibid., p. 66.
think we can."

One of the most notorious incidents of the book has attained its fame because of its naturalism. This was the incident of Henry's experimenting with a squirrel while fleeing the Confederates. The hero's flight was a disorderly, rambling one. His faculties had faltered to the point where he rushed from battle spurred by blind fear, instinctively. For a time the rational animal was simply animal. When he was exhausted, he rested in a wood. Becoming absorbed in a "jovial" squirrel, Henry playfully threw a pine cone at it. The little animal ran with chattering fear. "High in a tree-top he stopped and, poking his head cautiously from behind a branch, looked down with an air of trepidation." To this, Henry attached significance:

The youth felt triumphant at this exhibition. There was the law, he said. Nature had given him a sign. The squirrel, immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado.27

Henry was elated that the squirrel had not bared "his furry belly to the missile," had not died "with an upward glance at the sympathetic heavens." The youth conceived of it as an ordinary member of the species, doubtless not a philosopher of the race. Henry was an ordinary man, and under fire he had run. This was no cowardly act. He had done as Nature

27. Ibid., I, 82.
dictated. He had been wiser than those that stood, for he had obeyed the law, and now he clearly saw the law. The squirrel had not been deluded by campaign posters, so Henry's act was the act of a sensible, undeluded man. With a flash of insight, the youth had seen that man and animal alike were subject to Nature's law. Here, Crane credited his character with knowledge of the basic naturalistic assumption. Those that deny the author's naturalism must account for it in one of his simple characters.

When Henry again heard "the ripping sound of musketry" and "the breaking crash of the artillery," he became distracted. "His mind flew in all directions." He behaved animalistically. He was like a curious beast, except that he was aware of the contradiction:

He listened for a time. Then he began to run in the direction of the battle. He saw that it was an ironical thing for him to be running thus toward that which he had been at such pains to avoid. The explanation that Crane had occur to Henry was no better than an absence of explanation, as with animals. The author said of Henry that "he said, in substance, to himself that if the earth and the moon were about to clash, many persons would doubtless plan to get upon the roofs to witness the collision." Now there is little getting around the

28. Ibid., p. 85.
29. Loc. cit.
30. Loc. cit.
astuteness of the observation. Also, it applies to Henry's situation. However, neither the boy's act nor his explanation grant to intellect any superiority over instinct. The reverse seems true. Only a curious, foolish animal would have run to the battle. As an animal would be unaware of any superiority, Henry was unaware of his folly. In difficult situations, this character was naturalistic in the fullest sense of the term.

Henry was gravitated on to the encounter. An external force—the naturalistic contention—seemed to draw him. As he advanced, he reflected. He minimized the danger of what he approached. "The ripping sound of musketry" and "the breaking crash of the artillery" were, after all, merely "perfunctory popping." Henry did not recall that by his own definition he was now disobeying the law. In order to justify his move, he worked his bad sense overtime. Henry further reflected:

... he saw a sort of humour in the point of view of himself and his fellows during the late encounter. They had taken themselves and the enemy very seriously and had imagined that they were deciding the war. Individuals must have supposed that they were cutting the letters of their names deep into everlasting tablets of brass ....

The youth, Henry, realized how wrong these "individuals" were. As to fact, "the affair would appear in printed reports under a meek and immaterial title. But he saw that it was

31. Ibid., p. 86.
good; else, he said, in battle every one would surely run save forlorn hopes and their ilk."

To start at the beginning, the only sensible attitude was a serious one. It was "seriously" in a more important sense of the term than Henry assigned to it. The wise warrior would not have been concerned so much about the appearance of himself and the enemy. He would have been intent, among other things, upon the preservation of his life. Henry was more concerned about his rationalization. Departing from character to a consideration of the milieu, Crane's use of "individuals" is interesting. Here, the author verbalized the apparent fact that of the soldiery there were individuals. He went no further. For the "tall soldier" or the "loud soldier" he substituted the term individuals, though they were still men who all thought alike. They all supposed --incorrectly--that they were making banner headlines, putting their stamp upon history, so Henry concluded. What Crane said was that these individuals were of a type. It is a preference of naturalistic writers to deal with such characters. Of course, Henry Fleming was himself a type. His reflections quoted above were those of a naturalistic character in a naturalistic predicament. For the moment, the forces had gotten the better of the type.

To get on with the story, Henry came presently to a

32. Ibid., p. 86.
road from which he could see the troops in action. He en-
countered the retreating:

In the lane was a blood-stained crowd streaming
to the rear. The wounded men were cursing,
groaning, and wailing. In the air, always, was
a mighty swell of sound that, it seemed, could
sway the earth. With the courageous words of
the artillery and the spiteful sentences of the
musketry mingled red cheers. And from this re-
gion of noises came the steady current of the
maimed.33

Again, the multitude was treated en masse. They were "a
blood-stained crowd," "the wounded men," "the steady current
of the maimed." Too, the tremendous confusion was palpably
measured. It is inconsequential to the naturalist that his
world may seem disordered. In most naturalistic stories,
havoc reigns for a time. For a considerable period of time,
havoc reigned in The Red Badge of Courage. It was havoc in
the field and, more important, in Henry Fleming's mind. In
naturalistic terms, it was the story of a disordered man in
disordered times. In the cursing, groaning, and wailing,
suggestive of the multitudes of Israel in Herod's time, and
in the decisive sentence, "In the air, always, was a mighty
swell of sound that, it seemed, could sway the earth," Crane's
prose admirably served the naturalistic purpose.

Finally, Crane's ironic personification of the artil-
lery and musketry, previously treated together, is a signifi-
cant technique. The words of the artillery were "courageous";

33. Ibid., p. 87.
the mingled, spiteful sentences of the rifles were "red cheers." The confusion was created by man, and man was not enjoying it. Henry Fleming, almost man personified, had fled; he had rued the day that he had enlisted. In the midst of terror and bloodshed, the guns rejoiced. To witness another's courage and joy in one's defeat is miserable. When these virtues are attributes of inanimate objects, there is no taking out one's spite by "punching the other fellow in the nose." This must have manifested itself to Henry. The noise was really not courageous; nor were the explosions cheers. They were only so comparatively, as conceived by a distorted mind's eye. Thus, entities devoid of virtue and emotion were better and happier than Henry. They had not fled nor sorrowed. The noise in its suggestiveness and vigor was better than Henry's guilty conscience.

In review, the quotation concerned with the maimed had several naturalistic aspects. The people were treated impersonally. A whole group of the wounded was considered, rather than a segment that might have been treated more specifically. Practically, these people were treated as were the inanimate objects of the milieu. They were utilized in the naturalist's tradition. Too, their cries were mingled with the rifle and cannon fire. They added to the swell of sound that seemed to sway the earth. The confusion was naturalistic in magnitude and temper. Man, capable of sorrow and cowardice, was presented against a backdrop of guns that appeared happy,
courageous. Crane subtly introduced the hypothesis that the lot of inanimate objects is better than mankind's. In few naturalistic passages has greater pessimism been implied.

On the whole, the different naturalistic aspects of The Red Badge of Courage have been indicated and discussed. Throughout the book the same elevated, sparkling prose persists. The language, the style were Crane's own, and their suitability to naturalistic purposes was again and again manifested. Although there never was a writer who used language just as this author did, many naturalists have used the same themes and techniques. The most important of those themes and techniques were:

1. The characterization of types
2. The use of a detailed, all-embracing setting (the milieu)
3. The scientific fidelity to fact
4. The depiction of masses
5. The theme of pessimism
6. The theme of enormity, chaos
7. The theme of men dominated by heredity, environment, and instincts.

Some of these are representative of various other literary modes; every one of them is typical of naturalism.

Realism approaches a scientific fidelity to fact, but the other techniques and themes are not necessarily representative of it. Whereas it generally implies the use of great detail, it does not approach so near to the milieu as
it does to the accuracy of naturalism. Naturalism may right-
ly be said to be an amplification and extension of the real-
istic principle. In that even where The Red Badge of Cour-
age is most like realism it is more like naturalism, it is
unquestionably not a realistic novel. It has so much that
is not realistic; and where it is, the principle is extended
and amplified.

In its psychological insight into the character of Henry
Fleming, The Red Badge of Courage was impressionistic. Fur-
ther, the material of the book was presented as it was seen
or felt by this character. To consider the importance of
this presentation in its most favorable light, it might be
said that Crane's over-all technique was predominantly im-
pressionistic. The author, beyond doubt, had a naturalistic
attitude. The presence of all the major naturalistic themes
attests to that. In consideration of all the evidence, it
seems that his aim was essentially naturalistic. Two facts
may be stated with certainty: (1) The Red Badge of Courage
contains a combination of impressionistic and naturalistic
techniques; (2) the author's attitude was naturalistic.
CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to determine to what degree, if any, the writings of Stephen Crane were naturalistic. This entailed a determination of what naturalism is. As a result, it was necessary to find out something of its origin in France. In turn, it was well to examine the development of naturalism in the United States, the author's own country. Finally, the thesis involved a discussion of Stephen Crane's prose in general terms and a textual criticism of his major naturalistic works. Two short stories, "The Blue Hotel" and "The Open Boat" were considered lightly in the body of the thesis. Two novelle, Maggie and George's Mother, and a full-length novel, The Red Badge of Courage, were discussed at length in the two last chapters. Findings and conclusions arrived at early in the thesis were increasingly utilized as the project developed.

It was found in the first chapter that there is much disagreement as to what naturalism is. It was necessary to glean a definition from the writings of naturalists and from the conclusions of critics. Emphasis was placed upon the condition of naturalistic works rather than upon critical comment. It was felt that what critics accurately observed
of naturalism was more nearly universally true than were their conclusions. In this way, previous critical activity guided the determination of a definition. Thus considered, naturalism seemed to emphasize the importance of uncontrol­lable heredity and environment and of powerful drives and instincts in the lives of men, a deterministic doctrine. The literary term took into account the vast, panoramic aspect of existence. It generally involved the characterization of types, the expanded setting of the milieu, scientific accuracy, and the depiction of masses. Because of its chaotic, deterministic aspects, the tone of naturalism was pessimis­tic. These were its cardinal characteristics.

The materials of Chapters II and III lent to the work perspective. The period during which naturalism emerged was considered. Because of its pertinence, the state of the liter­ature of France and Russia was taken into account. Some of the information seemed gratuitous, but it accounted for the existence and development of the tradition to which Stephen Crane was heir. It helped to explain why naturalism ever came into being. Indirectly it elaborated the definition of the first chapter; it manifested the similarity between foreign and domestic naturalism. Even in the chapter that concerned French and Russian influences, the emphasis was up­on the effect that they were to have upon the American prod­uct. The aim of these two chapters, in the broadest sense, was to insure that the eventual estimate of Crane would
involve neither oversimplification nor the making of undue exceptions. Zola and his important predecessors and contemporaries in France were considered. Tolstoi and Turgenev were found to be the most influential of Russian realists, as regards American naturalists. The contributions of the foremost writers in the progression from realism to naturalism in this country were considered. Edward Eggleston, Joseph Kirkland, Henry James, W.D. Howells, Hamlin Garland, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Stephen Crane were prominent in the progression. The circumstances of their times and the influences upon all the writers, foreign and domestic, were considered in the light of their naturalistic manifestations. This work was a preparation for a general consideration of Crane's writings in the fourth chapter.

It was at once apparent that Crane had shared much of the experience and the philosophy of other realists and naturalists, at home and abroad. As a result, in many respects he wrote as they did. He said of himself that he renounced the clever school in literature. He felt that his dual quest was of nearness to life and of truth. It was hardly necessary to comment that these quests were those of the great naturalists who had preceded him. In his attempt to render reality to the written page, Crane rejected the easy route. He abandoned the "devices" of the "clever school." For these he substituted straightforward exposition and an unprecedently vivid use of language. He was pessimistic about
the state of man, and his attitude was reflected in his work. In the attempt to arrive at a significant estimate of Crane's naturalism, a survey of his writings seemed inadequate. Already a cursory glance at the material of "The Open Boat" and "The Blue Hotel" had indicated that an isolation of naturalism in Crane's text recommended itself. Maggie, George's Mother, and The Red Badge of Courage were his longer naturalistic works. For that reason, they were selected for textual criticism.

In Chapters V and VI, representative naturalistic portions of the stories were isolated. Sometimes single sentences seemed inconsequential. The point proved by even a lengthy quotation seemed inconclusive in terms of the body of a whole work. However, the accumulation of representative quotations, considered in the light of previous findings in the thesis, strongly indicated certain conclusions.

Pessimism seemed to abound in the narratives of deterioration in Maggie and George's Mother. Two facts about The Red Badge of Courage seemed certain: the techniques of its author were impressionistic and naturalistic; his attitude was naturalistic. In terms of the definition arrived at for naturalism, Crane's most important writings qualified as naturalistic. They involved the philosophy of determinism. There was in them characterization of types, emphasis on the milieu, fidelity to fact, and the portrayal of masses. Since
these statements might be made without reservation about the author's major works, and since these are the principal criteria of this literary method, it is determined that naturalism occupied a position of the first rank in the prose of Stephen Crane.


