STEPHEN CRANE AND THE DRAMA OF TRANSITION

ROBERT W. SCHNEIDER

American intellectual historians have consistently designated the period from 1865-1917 as the era during which Americans in nearly all fields lost their religious orientation. Certainly no one would deny that it was a period that experienced a growth in secularism and materialism. Traditional Christian dogmas came in conflict with the new scientific theories of evolution at the same time that urbanization and immigration presented American churches with their most severe institutional problems. Add to this the apparent absorption of the American people in an unmitigated pursuit of material advantages, and one has the basis for a revolution in religious thinking on the part of the whole population.

Most historians have recognized, however, that popular opinion did not stray far from the tenets of traditional Christianity, despite the fact that religion was apparently playing a less important part in their daily lives. It was the intellectuals, not the men in the street, who were said to have changed their basic orientation. Under the impact of evolutionary theories and amid the confusion engendered by an industrializing America, the thinking segment of the population supposedly abandoned their religious backgrounds for the new cult of science and matter-of-fact knowledge.

This change from a religious to a secular, scientific orientation was, however, only one side of the revolution that is credited with bringing about a basic transformation in the thinking of the intellectual class during the period 1865-1917. The other side of this transformation was the change from a belief in the free will of man to a philosophy of determinism. A basic tenet of the American creed had been a faith in the freedom and ability of the individual to live his life apart from the controlling forces of institutions, traditions, predestination, and cosmic forces.[1] Further than this, Americans had insisted that man was also creative--that he could alter his society in the light of human reason.

This American creed of the free individual was being challenged in the post-Civil War period by many of the same forces that threatened orthodox Christianity--industrialization, the development of the corporation, urbanization, and the scientific theories of evolution. Industrialization and urbanization provided a challenge to traditional values; evolution seemed to provide a substitute for those values. As formulated by Herbert Spencer, the

doctrine of evolution promised an automatic progress which would occur without man's assistance.

The literary manifestation of this dual revolution is commonly called naturalism. Stimulated by the science of Darwin, the sociology of Spencer, and the novels of Emile Zola, American writers supposedly turned from religion to science, from free will to determinism. This literary naturalism could be either pessimistic or optimistic, so long as it was deterministic.

It is the opinion of this writer that, while these generalizations about the changes from a religous to a scientific orientation, and from a belief in the concept of the free individual to an acceptance of some form of determinism, may point up the most significant changes in American thinking, they simplify to the point of distortion the American climate of opinion during these years. The drama of the fin-de-siècle situation arises not from a simple change in philosophic orientation, but from the tensions in the human mind that arise from a commitment to the past as well as to the future.

One group of intellectuals that historians have tended to show as simple converts to Darwinism are the Progressive social scientists: Herbert Croly, Charles H. Cooley, Henry D. Lloyd, Richard T. Ely and Thorstein Veblen. But Professor David W. Noble has demonstrated that such a generalization is a complete distortion. In the first place, by no means did they desert the traditional commitment to religion. Rather, according to Professor Noble, during the early years of the twentieth century they developed an enthusiasm that found expression in the hope of a spiritual salvation within the context of the existing secular environment, a resurgence of social solidarity that was firmly based in a new religion of humanity. Scientific theories were used as an explanation for the faith of these social thinkers in the triumph of goals which they received or formulated, not on the basis of matter-of-fact knowledge, but on the strength of a basically religious faith.[2]

Nor did they desert the traditional notions of the free individual and man-made progress for a philosophy of determinism. They argued that man, the natural man, was inherently good, rational, unselfish, and creative. This natural man had been corrupted by historical society, but this historical society was itself being destroyed by the forces of industrialism which were freeing man to reorder society in the light of human reason. Man had the freedom and creativity to remold his society and would save himself by saving society as a whole. Thus provided with a social environment which was in line with the basic goodness of his own nature, man would progress indefinitely. Further, this progress would be a product of human freedom and creativity, not of blind deterministic forces.[3] Thus the social scientists retained a commitment to the traditional concept of the free individual as well as to the basic tenets of a theistic religion. They looked backward to the values of the past at least as much as they looked forward

to the methodology of the future, and it is this dual commitment that provides the drama and excitement in their intellectual biographies.

This drama and excitement naturally reached its peak in the writings of those individuals in whom the tension of a dual commitment was most intense. It is the purpose of this article to illustrate this tension in the writings of one of the most sensitive literary men of his time--Stephen Crane.

The relative uniqueness of Crane lies in his rejection of the prevalent ideas of progress, whether based on deterministic naturalism, as in the writings of Spencer and Zola; directed by the guiding hand of God, as in American Protestantism; or by the free will of the creative individual, as in the Progressive social scientists. This does not mean, however, that Crane was able to free himself totally from traditional ideas about religion and the nature of man, for rejection of progress did not involve a willingness to surrender the traditional human values.

Crane is usually included among the school of emerging writers in the America of 1890-1917 who, influenced by the naturalism of Zola, wrote of man as a product of natural forces who is devoid of free will. But Crane did not accept the notion, entertained by both Spencer and Zola, that the deterministic scheme of nature would lead to ultimate progress. Both God and nature, he felt, were totally indifferent to man and his aspirations. In The Black Riders, for example, he pictured the world as slipping away, while God's back was turned, to make meaningless voyages upon the sea of the universe.[4] A similar sentiment is expressed in the following poem from War is Kind.

> A man said to the universe:
> "Sir, I exist!"
> "However," replied the universe,
> "The fact has not created in me
> A sense of obligation."[5]

The indifference of nature to human struggle in this meaningless world is also an important aspect of the short story, "Death and the Child."[6] This story portrayed people in panic, fleeing from the scene of battle. They seemed to be tumbled forward as if caught in a torrent, one couple even forgetting to gather up their young son in their haste to reach safety. But "the sea, the sky, and the hills combined in their grandeur to term this misery inconsequent."[7] As he went toward the battle, Peza, the main character, "wondered if the universe took cognizance of him to an important degree," and he finally concluded "that the accidental destruction of an individual, Peza by name, would perhaps be nothing at all."[8] To the universe it was all very unimportant; nature is indifferent, both to the death of an individual and the misery of the mass.

Life itself is tragic, meaningless, inscrutable. A sheepherder named Bill was warned by some Mexicans that they were either going to drive him

off the range or kill him. A stranger rode into Bill's camp and landed in the middle of the battles which took place. Bill was killed, as were several of the Mexicans, and the stranger rode off again.[9] Where is the meaning, where the moral? There is none. The world is

> . . . a reptile-swarming place,
> Peopled, otherwise, with grimaces,
> Shrouded above in black inpenetrableness.[10]

The incompatibility of Crane's indifferent universe with the Progressive determinism of Spencer and Zola is quite obvious. The first path to progress has been rejected.

Scholars have seen from the beginning that much of Crane's apparent sense of the futility of life arose from the young writer's sense of conflict between the religious orthodoxy of his early training and the realities of life as he saw them. This conflict received its most direct expression in The Black Riders. Crane himself was extremely fond of this collection and stated that in it he had tried to set forth his ideas about life in general.[11] He was insistent that when the volume appeared in print it should contain all of the poems on religion, even if it meant that the scheduled publishers would refuse to handle the collection at all. He wrote,

> I should absolutely refuse to have my poems printed without many of those which you just as absolutely mark "No." It seems to me that you cut all the ethical sense out of the book . . . . The ones which refer to God, I believe you condemn altogether. I am obliged to have them in when my book is printed.[12]

It is important for understanding the mind of the young poet that he felt his poems contained "ethical sense," and that, despite the fact that he was, as usual, almost penniless, he was willing to forego publication rather than have that "ethical sense" deleted.

Granville Hicks and Amy Lowell have both noted that one of the main themes of The Black Riders is the rejection of the wrathful God of orthodox, Old Testament Christianity who intervenes in the affairs of man.[13] Their assertion is supported by a number of the poems. In number twelve, for example, Crane refused to accept a God who visits the sins of the father upon the children, and in number nineteen he rejected both the God who persecutes men and the people who protest when one man strikes back.[14] Similar sentiments are expressed in less violent form in War is Kind, where God is asked if He has ever made a just man. He replies that He has made three; two are dead, and, as for the third, if one listens one will hear the thud of his defeat.[15]

The latter poem, like many other works of the young rebel, pictures God as a cold being, indifferent to man rather than an actual oppressor. Crane's most complete rejection of the idea that God intervenes in human affairs was presented in "Man Adrift on a Slim Spar." In this poem a man

was floating in the ocean on the spar of a wrecked ship while wave after wave lashed over him--and God did nothing. Crane was not here denying God the power to act, for he wrote:

> The seas are in the hollow of Thy Hand;
> Oceans may be turned to a spray
> Raining down through the stars
> Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.[16]

Yet God did not help the man whose pale hand was sliding from the polished spar. Why? Because "God is cold."[17]

If this were the extent of Crane's poetic statements on religion, the critics who portray him as a rebel against religion would be guilty of no more than literary exaggeration. But this is not all, for Crane's rejection of the Old Testament God of the Mountain did not mean that he was able to separate himself from his religious heritage. Van Wyck Brooks was perhaps the first to make a clear distinction between the two Gods that appear in The Black Riders,[18] an insight that was developed by Professor Daniel Hoffman. Hoffman contends that Crane knew little, if anything, of scientific determinism; that on the contrary, he was of an essentially religious nature, inheriting from his father the belief in a merciful, indwelling God.[19]

This personal, indwelling deity of Crane's is the God who rises from his throne to embrace the little blade of grass that can think of no noble deeds it has accomplished.[20] This God whom Crane acknowledged, as opposed to the wrathful God of orthodoxy, is clearly seen in number fifty-one of The Black Riders.

> A man went before a strange God--
> The God of many men, sadly wise.
> And the Deity thundered loudly,
> Fat with rage, and puffing,
> "Kneel, mortal, and cringe
> And grovel and do homage
> To My Particularly Sublime Majesty."
> The man fled.
>
> Then the man went to another God--
> The god of his inner thoughts.
> And this one looked at him
> With soft eyes
> Lit with infinite comprehension,
> And said, "My poor child!"[21]

From this example one can see the tremendous emotional strain that existed in the mind of this young writer, a tension that arose from his dual commitment to the past and to the future. He could not accept the dogmas of orthodox Christianity, but neither could he forget the personal, benevolent, Methodist God of his childhood. Here was no simple rejection of the

old for the new, no switch from a religious to a scientific orientation, but a crisis of the mind, the individual mind, that could not be solved by an intellectual acceptance of new ideas.

It has been suggested here that Crane rejected progressive determinism and orthodox Christianity as paths to progress and human salvation. The only other path that remained was that espoused by the Progressive social scientists who contended that man could progress indefinitely through the exercise of his creative free will. But historians and critics are almost universally agreed that Crane believed man was living in a universe in which man had little freedom of choice.[22] To what extent did Crane believe that man was bound by cosmic and social forces? The answer to this question is crucial for an understanding of his dual commitment.

The question of cosmic determinism as opposed to man's free will plays an important part in both The Sullivan County Sketches and "The Blue Hotel," but is dealt with most explicitly and completely in "The Open Boat."[23]

Several important aspects of Crane's philosophy are dramatized in this story, but the central question here is whether these men had free will or were simply the victims of fate and an indifferent universe. Crane left little room for doubt about nature's indifference to the individuals involved in this adventure. To the correspondent the tower on the shore represented "the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual. . . . She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent."[24]

What is man's reaction to a situation such as this? Crane wrote:

> When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples.[25]

In other words, his reactions are defiance and frustration.

But what about the action and logic of the story? Fate undoubtedly landed the first blow by casting these men adrift for no good reason upon the sea. There, faced with the indifference of nature, their primary reaction was rage and frustration. But their next response was action. The captain took command and directed his miniature crew to the door of safety. All of the men acted rationally and effectively to make the best of the given conditions. So men can will, and act according to that will, in a crisis situation.

But willing and acting in the face of a neutral cosmos does not preclude frustration by inscrutable fate. While the others were saved largely by the joint action of the group, the oiler, who had worked hardest and had been the least excitable member of the crew, died on the very brink of safety.

Here, then, is Crane's view of man in his relations with the cosmos. Given the neutrality of nature, man can express his relative freedom in action, but the success or failure of that action is not totally dependent upon the extent of his efforts or his moral worth, but also upon the decision of fate. In spite of his freedom to will and act within a context, man in his relations with the universe faces ultimate frustration. Life is essentially tragic, but tragedy is possible only when there is not absolute determinism. The essential indifference of God and nature means that man has relative free will and freedom of choice as far as cosmic forces are involved. To this extent Crane remains within the American tradition, and the path to progress through the faith of the Progressive social thinkers in human creativity remains open. But what about the force of the social environment? Does man escape cosmic determinism only to be bound by the institutions, traditions, and socio-economic conditions of his own society?

An examination of Maggie, George's Mother, The Monster, and the minority of Crane's other writings in which he deals with the question of man in society reveals that he did not feel man's free will was destroyed by social forces. Maggie, for example, though she "blossomed in a mud-puddle," was not solely a product of her environment. The heart of Crane's viewpoint seems to have been that man in society is subject to illusions which are at variance with reality, and that human conduct is sometimes directed by a moral code which has little applicability to the lives of the participants. Man can break the code, he can depart from the social norm and to this extent he has free will; but if he does so he must expect defeat at the hands of social prejudices. This Crane had learned quite well from his own life experience.

Man can thus exert his free will in defiance of society. Crane's position here was in line with the old American tradition that the individual was essentially free from the control of institutions and traditions, as well as in conformity with the faith of the Progressive social scientists. Does this mean that Crane believed in the Progressive religion of humanity which stated that, since evil was socially inculcated, man could save himself by creating the proper environment?[26] Some historians and critics, notably Professor Russell B. Nye, have answered, yes. They have tried to portray the young author as an environmentalist and social critic who believed that man's problems arose from a corrupt and stunted environment.

While it is true that Crane expressed indignation over social and economic injustice,[27] it is not true that he felt these were the cause of the human dilemma. Crane made this quite clear in a letter to Catherine Harris in which he stated that the root of Bowery life is cowardice, a lack of the ability to take the knocks of fortune and rise from them.[28] This means that the root of the problem is personal; it is contained in the men themselves. This conclusion is supported by Crane's stories and by the fact that few of his plots deal with the problem of social evils--a fact that is in line with his

basically religious orientation with its emphasis on the "inner-directed man." Professor Hoffman has explained this as follows.

> His religious training had led him to consider most important the moral fortitude of the individual man, whatever his temporal circumstances. Crane consequently considered secondary the sort of social problems which the radical young Garland and the older socialistic Howells made the subjects of their fiction.[29]

What did concern Crane was the weakness of human nature, quite apart from his social situation. Here is the reason why Crane could not accept the Progressive social scientists' optimistic outlook. Man could not save himself by saving society because he was innately weak and selfish.

There is evil and selfishness within all men because, for Crane, that is the definition of humankind. It is for this reason, and not because of a universe that disregards him, that man can never find truth, or do complete justice, or be wholly unselfish. This is emphasized in a poem, recently published, in which Crane gave his own version of the first chapters of Genesis. He pictures God placing "a glorious apple" within the reach of man and then forbidding him to touch it. But the man, like the author himself, rebelled.

> The man answered in this wise:
> "Oh, most interesting God
> What folly is this?
> Behold, thou hast moulded my desires
> Even as thou hast moulded the apple.
>
> How then?
> Can I conquer my life
> Which is thou?
>
> My desires?
> Look you, foolish god
> If I thrust behind me
> Sixty white years
> I am a greater god than god
> And then, complacent splendor,
> Thou wilt see that the golden angels
> That sing pink hymns
> Around thy throne-top
> Will be lower than my feet.[30]

A similar sentiment is to be found in The Black Riders, where again the implication is that man has evil within him which cannot be wholly denied.

"It was wrong to do this," said the angel.
"You should live like a flower,
Holding malice like a puppy,
Waging war like a lambkin."

"Not so," quoth the man
Who had no fear of spirits;
'It is only wrong for angels
Who can live like the flowers,
Holding malice like the puppies,
Waging war like the lambkins."[31]

Thus Stephen Crane rejected the third path to human progress. Man could not progress by reforming society because society only magnified and did not create the weakness and selfishness of human nature.

Because Crane insisted that man can never find truth or justice, because he held that the end of life is frustration and life, itself, is tragedy, he is many times dismissed as a fatalist. Most of the liberal historians and literary critics have not been kind to him for this reason. But was he a complete cynic and fatalist who, despite the fact that he was unable to forsake his religious heritage, managed to escape the American attachment to free will? The answer, of course, is that he was not. Those who dismiss him as a simple fatalist are as mistaken as those who want to enlist him in the ranks of the social critics and reformers. While admitting that man could not achieve truth, justice, or selflessness, he insisted that man could try; he could attempt to save himself by creating a code of personal conduct. As he said of his own life:

> I do not confront it [life] blithely. I confront it with desperate resolution. There is not even much hope in my attitude. I do not even expect to do good. But I expect to make a sincere, desperate, lonely battle to remain true to my conception of my life and the way it should be lived. . . .[32]

It was the attitude of cynical fatalism in the people of the Bowery that so irritated the poet-novelist, and he treated the Bowery gangs in Maggie and George's Mother with satiric scorn. The "indolent and cynical young men" in the small town setting of The Monster were treated in the same manner,[33] and in number sixty-eight of The Black Riders he pilloried the cynic in verse.[34]

Crane specifically repudiated the cynic and pointed out some of the positive aspects of his own philosophy in this letter to Nellie Crouse.

> The final wall of the wise man's thought however is Human Kindness of course. If the road of disappointment, grief, pessimism is followed far enough, it will arrive there. Pessimism itself is only a little little way, and moreover it is ridiculously cheap. The cynical mind is an uneducated thing.

> Therefore do I strive to be as kind and as just as may be to those about me and in my meagre success at it, I find the solitary pleasure of life.[35]

In addition to his repudiation of the cynic, there is a glimpse of his belief in a code of conduct. This code is one of the most important, yet the least appreciated, aspects of Crane's philosophy, for it illustrates in striking fashion his adherence to the central core of his father's religious code and the tradition of free will. He never elaborated the details of this code of conduct in one place, so its content must be pieced together from various writings. In the letter above, he stated that man can never achieve complete kindness and justice, but he can have some limited success in striving toward them. The same is true of honesty, as can be seen in the following letter to Joseph O'Connor in which Crane also definitely embraced the Promethean struggle.

> . . . For I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition. There is a sublime egotism in talking of honesty. I, however, do not say that I am honest. I merely say that I am as nearly honest as a weak mental machinery will allow. 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.[36]

The most misunderstood aspect of Crane's code of conduct is his espousal of the heroic ideal. This ideal does not mean, as Hartwick has taken it to mean, that Crane, like Norris and London, particularly admired "man with the bark on."[37] Nor can Crane, because he denounced the lack of ambition in the Bowery, be linked "in a curious way with contemporary purveyors of uplift and success literature," as Professor Persons has suggested.[38] Crane's heroes were not big brawling giants who triumphed over the universe as well as their human foes. In fact, they usually did not triumph at all. They could not be classed with success literature because they seldom, if ever, succeeded. The individual simply proved himself on the battlefield by his heroism--by his adherence to a code which all know and none can express. Similarly, in civilian life one became a man by striving after truth, honesty, and kindness. Chances are that the man in war would no more succeed in his attempt than the man in peace, but success was not the important factor. Rather success in such pursuits is beyond human grasp; the important thing is the attempt. In Crane's writings the result of heroic action, the result of almost every attempt to live up to this code, was death for the actor. Nor was this death usually of any significance from the viewpoint of military strategy or social improvement. The only significance was the development of the individual through

willed involvement and adherence to the code. Crane, in one way, demanded more of man than did the purveyors of success literature, or even the orthodox clergy, for he asked man to strive with no hope of ultimate success or reward.

Crane's admiration for the fighting men who lived up to the code by doing their duty on the field of battle is shown in many of his writings. This quotation is from his "War Memoirs" of the Spanish-American War.

> They stood out in simple, majestic commonplace. It was the behaviour of men on the street. It was the behaviour of men. In one way, each man was just pegging along at the heels of the man before him, who was pegging along at the heels of still another man, who was pegging along at the heels of still another man who--
> It was that in the flat and obvious way. In another way it was pageantry, the pageantry of the accomplishment of naked duty. One cannot speak of it--the spectacle of the common man serenely doing his work, his appointed work. It is the one thing in the universe which makes one fling expression to the winds and be satisfied to simply feel.[39]

The "excellence of human conduct" was what Crane admired, and he admired it in the individual no matter which side he was on. Anyone who can conquer the animal instinct to flee, who will cling to the code of conduct and do his duty, is a man. These men who stand and fight are not boasting, strutting heroes but common, everyday men who know that adherence to the code may well mean their death. The qualities of doing one's duty and accepting death are perhaps best shown by Crane's group of battle veterans in "The Little Regiment."[40]

In many of his stories Crane showed what he believed man not only should, but could do. Not all men, however, measured up to his standards, and light is shed upon the code by a look at one man who could not make the grade. Such a man was Peza, the main character in the short story "Death and the Child," mentioned previously.[41] Peza, an Italian-educated Greek, came back to Greece as a war correspondent during the Greek War. Here he became emotionally involved in the scene of his father's homeland under invasion and the people in flight. He decided, therefore, to enter the conflict and joined the battle with dreams of grandeur. Then, frightened more by the dead men around him than by the enemy, Peza bolted and fled. Finally he managed to crawl to the top of a hill where he was confronted by an abandoned child. When Peza emerged over the top of the hill, the child looked up from his play and asked, "Are you a man?" The reader is left with no doubt that, in Crane's mind, Peza was not a true man. He could not assume the sacrificial role that brings death, but brings also dignity.

Crane spoke directly of the code in his short story, "Clan of No-Name."[42] This is a series of connected sketches at the opening of which Crane por-

trayed a young girl who was deceiving her wealthy suitor to write to an unknown lover. Then the scene changed to a field in Cuba where an insurgent force was trying to get a supply of ammunition through Spanish lines. Among the insurgents was a new man, a young American lieutenant. When this group was attacked by the Spanish, the American, although new to the fight, realized instinctively that he was bound by a code of honor to fight a delaying action so that the supplies would not be captured. When he was killed, Crane revealed that the lieutenant had been the young girl's lover. Finally the scene switched back to the girl, who has agreed to marry her wealthy suitor. Crane concluded with this description of the code:

> For the word is clear only to the kind who on peak or plain, from dark northern ice-fields to the hot wet jungles, through all wine and want, through lies and unfamiliar truth, dark or light, are governed by the unknown gods; and, though each man knows the law, no man may give tongue to it.[43]

The young lieutenant who knew and obeyed the code lost his life but achieved tragic dignity. The girl, who either did not know or would not follow the code, achieved material success but lost dignity as a human being.

For the men in "The Open Boat" there was also a code of conduct, just as there was for the men in battle. Crane wrote:

> To express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid. . . . On the other hand the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness. So they were silent.[44]

Throughout the ordeal there seems to have been complete agreement on everything, as each man followed the same unspoken code of conduct. It would also seem that through adherence to this code of conduct in a crisis situation, man can achieve a sense of brotherhood and lose the feeling of isolation that is so prevalent in Crane's writings.

> It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him.[45]

The correspondent, "who had been taught to be cynical of men," knew that this feeling of comradeship was "the best experience of his life."[46]

This bond of fellowship that developed in the boat was not limited to the members of the small crew, but rather it involved a fellowship with mankind. As they were coasting along, the half-forgotten verse of "A Soldier of the Legion Lay Dying in Algiers," crept into the head of the correspondent. He had had to learn the poem as a child and he

> had been made acquainted with the fact that a soldier lay dying in Algiers, but he had never regarded the fact as important. . . . Now, however, it quaintly came to him

> as a human living thing . . . it was an actuality--stern, mournful and fine. . . . He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers.[47]

This sense of the discovery of comradeship and fellowship, not only with those who share the crisis situation but with the struggles of mankind, can also be found in Crane's war stories.

Man can and should seek truth, justice, honesty, and kindness. He can and should seek involvement with mankind through the doing of duty and obedience to the code. These things he should seek, though the personal qualities he can never truly find and involvement with mankind may very well mean death. This in itself is a great deal to ask of man, but there is still another facet to Crane's requirements, one which in many ways is the most difficult to explain. That loyalty to one's fellows in a crisis situation is part of the code has already been shown, but Crane also dealt with another kind of loyalty, which might be called love-loyalty, or loyalty of one individual to another.

Love themes occur most frequently in Crane's poetry, and here love is generally linked with pain, despair, and violence. The whole of "Intrigue" expresses the themes of love as a sacrifice, love as momentary joy and ceaseless remorse, and love as violence.

This connection between love and suffering is important with regard to the idea of loyalty. To truly love is to suffer. But if one can scale the heights of devotion to a love that surpasses devotion, he can find life. Thomas Beer, Crane's biographer, reported an incident which Crane witnessed in the Bowery, where a young prostitute was protecting with her own body the head of her drunken procurer from the kicks of his assailants. Daniel Hoffman has connected this incident with number sixty-seven of The Black Riders, "God Lay Dead in Heaven." The last lines of this poem read as follows.

> Then from the far caverns
> Of dead sins
> Came monsters, livid with desire.
> They fought,
> Wrangled over the world,
> A morsel.
> But of all sadness this was sad--
> A woman's arms tried to shield
> The head of a sleeping man
> From the jaws of the final beast.[48]

Here is Crane's idea of love-loyalty. The relationship of two lowly individuals is universalized, as "the streetwalker and her drunken pimp are become Man and Woman."[49] Love-loyalty, like so many other aspects of Crane's code, demands involvement which will in all probability lead to sacrificial death.

Many of Crane's ideas about man, his place in the universe, and his obligation to achieve manhood, found unified expression in Crane's only best-selling novel, The Red Badge of Courage.[50] As man is an insignificant creature in the universe, so Henry Fleming was an insignificant pawn in the totality of the Civil War. But this insignificance does not totally deprive Henry, or man in general, of free will nor does it relieve him of moral responsibility. Henry, like all men, had the instinct to flee from danger, and the evil, selfish side of his nature could and did rationalize such actions. But he also possessed the capacity to fulfill his essential humanness by conquering his instinctive fears and, through a feeling of involvement with his fellows, to achieve manhood. The immediate occasion of this feeling of unity and consequent loss of selfishness may not be, indeed probably will not be, a willed, rational act. But once it comes, the individual still must wilfully involve himself if he is to achieve full manhood. Henry became a man after the battle when he rejected his old rationalizations, accepted the realities of life, and became involved in the human struggle. The Red Badge of Courage is a particular instance in which a particular individual achieved human dignity in a particular way; but it is also a symbol of what man can achieve.

Stephen Crane, like many of his contemporaries, was in rebellion against the society of which he found himself a part, but, had he been aware of their writings, he would have rejected the solutions of the equally rebellious social scientists. The key to this rejection would have been his lack of faith in their adherence to the traditional American concept of the natural man as essentially good, unselfish, and creative. For Crane, man was an insignificant isolato in a universe that did not regard him as important. Alone in this neutral universe man can act with relative freedom, but the success or failure of that action can never escape from the operation of a quixotic fate. Man in society is within, not apart from, this cosmic drama. For Crane, man in the social situation is not bound by his environment but by the evil side of his nature. Too weak to reform himself, man is unable to reform society or even to attain sustained social solidarity. This position places Crane in essential opposition to two of the social scientists' fundamental concepts--the altruistic nature of man and the doctrine of progress.

Yet he retained one aspect of the Progressive code in his insistence that to be a man means willed involvement in the human struggle. This activist spirit finds expression in the fulfillment of duty during time of war, and in the quest for truth, justice, and kindness in civil society. Perhaps nowhere else did Crane more clearly show his nostalgia for the faith of his father than by this retention of the basic elements of New Testament Christianity as the core of his ethical code. Although he placed his emphasis on human frailty (and this certainly is not outside the Christian tradition), Crane actually demanded more of man than any other writer of his time, for

he insisted that to be a man means to engage in the Promethean struggle without hope of either victory or reward. And, by his writings, he indicated his belief that some men can achieve this true manhood through willed involvement in the human struggle, an involvement that will probably mean suffering and death, but which also means the realization of the only goal open to man--the achievement of tragic dignity.

From this discussion it can be seen that Stephen Crane's philosophy was the result, not of a simple conversion to the determinism of Darwin and Zola, but of the modification of his basically religious orientation brought about through his perception, largely intuitive, of the realities of life in fin-de-siècle America. Like many others of his generation, Crane found that he could not totally reject the ideas and values of his tradition. His mind tried to accept the conclusions of scientific, matter-of-fact knowledge and the realities of the world around him, but he could not rid himself of his intellectual and emotional inheritance. To ignore this conflict within the minds of the men of this period is to miss the absorbing intellectual drama of their generation. History is change, but it is also continuity.

The College of Wooster

Footnotes:

[1] On this point see this author's "Man and the Progressive Novelist" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Minnesota, 1959), Chapter I.

[2] See David W. Noble, The Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis, 1958); and "The Religion of Progress in America, 1890-1914," Social Research (Winter, 1955), 417-440.

[3] Ibid.

[4] The Collected Poems of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett (New York, 1930), 8.

[5] Ibid., 101.

[6] The Works of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett (12 vols., New York, 1925-27), xii, 241-68.

[7] Ibid., 242.

[8] Ibid., 248.

[9] Works, xii, 64-84.

[10] Collected Poems, 31.

[11] Stephen Crane, An Omnibus, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York, 1958), Letter from Crane to Copeland and Day, Sept. 9, 1894, 602.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition (New York, 1933), 160; and Introduction to Works, vi, xix.

[14] Collected Poems, 14, 21.

[15] Ibid., 83.
[16] Ibid., 129-30.
[17] Ibid., 130.
[18] Ibid., 141.
[19] Daniel G. Hoffman, The Poetry of Stephen Crane (New York, 1957), 13-14.
[20] Collected Poems, 20. See also 41.
[21] Ibid., 55. See also number fifty-three, 57-58.
[22] See, for example, Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism (Minneapolis, 1956), 85; Harry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction (New York, 1934), 25; Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (Cambridge, 1950), 189-94.
[23] Robert W. Stallman, Stephen Crane: Stories and Tales (New York, 1955), 215-21.
[24] Ibid., 236.
[25] Ibid., 233.
[26] Russell Nye, "Stephen Crane as a Social Critic," Modern Quarterly, xi (1940), 53.
[27] For examples see "Man and the Progressive Novelists," Chapter III.
[28] Omnibus, 655-56.
[29] Hoffman, 175-76.
[30] Hoffman, 76.
[31] Collected Poems, 59. See also 11 and 54.
[32] Stephen Crane's Love Letters to Nellie Crouse with Six Other Letters, ed. Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells (Syracuse, 1954), 43-44.
[33] Works, iii, 37.
[34] Collected Poems, 40.
[35] Love Letters, 35.
[36] Omnibus, 680.
[37] Hartwick, 27.
[38] Stow Persons, American Minds (New York, 1958), 333-34.
[39] Works, ix, 238.
[40] Ibid., ii, 29-53.
[41] Works, xii, 24-68.
[42] Ibid., ii, 151-74.
[43] Ibid., 174.
[44] Stallman, Stories and Tales, 218.
[45] Ibid., 220.
[46] Ibid., 220-21.
[47] Ibid., 233-34.
[48] Collected Poems, 72.
[49] Hoffman, 140.
[50] The arguments in support of the following interpretation of this novel may be found in my "Man and the Progressive Novelist," 185-92.