

STEPHEN CRANE AND AN UNSACRAMENTAL NATURE

by 1264

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B.A., Yankton College, 1967

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1969

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STEPHEN CRANE AND AN UNSACRAMENTAL NATURE

Man's relationship to nature is the primary concern of two major literary works--Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In both works, the protagonist must come to an understanding of this relationship. This is accomplished through direct interaction with the violent forces of external nature. The relationships understood by the two central characters are quite different and the views of nature out of which these positions grow are also different. This paper will attempt to delineate these relationships and the views of nature which are their sources. Parallels of structure, incident, style and diction will be drawn between the two works as a means of illustrating the comparisons.

The differences in the ways the two writers view nature are illustrated in two documents that help reveal their respective literary creeds. In 1802 Coleridge wrote in a letter to Sotheby:

Nature has her proper interest, and he will know what it is who believes and feels that everything has a life of its own, and that we are all One Life. A poet's heart and intellect should be combined, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature¹

¹ Quoted by Humphry House in "The Ancient Mariner", The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: A Handbook, ed. Royal A. Gettman, (San Francisco, 1961), p. 151.

Crane, in an undated letter written about 1896 to Lily Brandon had this to say about nature and art's relationship to it:

So I developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one. Later I discovered that my creed was identical with the one of Howells and Garland and in this way I became involved in the beautiful war between those who say that art is man's substitute for nature and we are 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 and keep Garland and I /sic/ out of the big magazines. Howells, of course, is too powerful for them.²

These two statements summarize the distinctions between Crane's and Coleridge's view of nature. Coleridge can speak of the combining of the poet, and by extension, man, with external nature and all else into One Life. This is what Robert Penn Warren calls the "sacramental vision."³ This view or "vision" of nature not only allows for, but demands the union of God, man and nature. Warren goes on to explain this concept.

The theme of the "One Life," of the sacramental vision, is essentially religious--it presents us with the world, as the crew of the ship are presented with the Albatross, in "God's name." The poem is shot through with religious associations.

When Coleridge speaks of the poet's heart and intellect being intimately combined with the "great appearances of nature," he may be hinting at the idea of necessity. It is true, of course, that he takes these great appearances of nature to be revelatory of a supersensuous reality. For him Nature symbolizes God, though, as a matter of fact, there is also in Coleridge's thought the idea of a projective

²Quoted in Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950), p. 152.

³"A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. (New York, 1946), p. 71.

symbolism in Nature by which man realizes not God but himself. The problem of these two separate and perhaps contradictory ideas in Coleridge's thought on the symbolism of Nature need not concern us here. What does concern us here is that he apparently has some notion that the great appearances of Nature as symbols carry in themselves a constant, rich meaningfulness.⁴

The chief difference in the two views lies in what Warren describes as the ability of man to realize both God and himself. It is possible for Crane and his characters to come to an understanding of nature and by so doing become aware of the relationship to fellow man, but the possibility for union with all of nature does not exist for Crane. He sees nature as separate from man and there can be no other relationship between man and nature, except for indifference on nature's part.

Donald B. Gibson offers this discussion of Crane's views of nature.

A third remove from external, visible nature is nature as the manifestation of God. Crane does not discuss God directly in his fiction as he does in his poetry, yet one is likely to feel the presence in the fiction of those attitudes toward God explicitly expressed in much of his poetry. The poetry reveals that Crane never forgave God for allowing natural evil. His blasphemy stemmed from his awareness of the pain and suffering in the world, pain and suffering toward which God seemed indifferent.

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When he discusses fictionally the relationship between man and nature, he is in effect discussing the relationship between man and God, for what meaning does it have to attribute attitudes of any kind to nature in and of itself? I do not mean to suggest that Crane identifies nature and God; they are by no means equivalent. But in Crane's thinking God is responsible for the character of nature. Hence man's relationship to His work (nature) is indicative of man's relationship to Him. The benevolence,

⁴Warren, pp. 94, 75.

hostility, or indifference of nature is the benevolence, hostility, or indifference of God.⁵

The nature of Coleridge is holy, "sacramental," something to strive for union with. It encompasses God and through the mariner's experience, Coleridge reveals what the relationship of God, nature and man is. Through this experience, the mariner becomes aware not only of the importance of his communion with nature and God, but learns the value of human fellowship as well. Crane's correspondent undergoes the same process, the result being different. Instead of learning to love "all things, great and small" (all of nature) as does the mariner, the correspondent learns that nature is "flatly indifferent." This nature is a nature without a responsive God as it is a nature distinct from man. But through his experience, the correspondent, like the mariner does learn the joy of the "brotherhood of man." This is the principal value of the correspondent's experience. As Eric Solomon puts it, "One aspect of the knowledge that slowly comes to him during the silent hopeless, long night makes up the philosophical core of 'The Open Boat.' Man is not important. Nevertheless, while the correspondent realizes the dehumanizing pathos of his situation, he also learns that in his wretched isolation he becomes a part of mankind."⁶

⁵The Fiction of Stephen Crane, (Carbondale, Illinois, 1968), p. 131-132.

⁶Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), p. 169.

The manner in which these views of nature are revealed can be illustrated through a closely examined comparison between the two works. There is much in "The Open Boat" that invites comparison with poetry. The language is metaphorical. The structure is tightly controlled. The style is highly economical. The work is filled with vivid images. In fact, as R. W. Stallman writes, "Crane puts language to poetic uses, which is to use it reflexively and symbolically." James B. Colvert suggests that "Crane's style is . . . consciously poetic" in "The Open Boat."⁷

The style of the story is often times ballad-like. As has often been pointed out, the correspondent's repeated "if I am going to be drowned" speeches constitute a refrain.⁸ Throughout the work there are examples of what could be called "incremental repetition," part of the ballad convention. "And the oiler rowed and the correspondent rowed; then the oiler rowed," (347)⁹ is one of several lines that reappear several times in the story.

Besides having some affinities with poetry in general, what in particular does "The Open Boat" have to do with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"? Examination of the two reveals some strikingly interesting parallels.

⁷Introduction to "The Open Boat," Stephen Crane: An Omnibus, (New York, 1952), pp. 415-420. Stallman prefers to regard the story as a long prose-poem. Colvert goes so far as to take the lines of prose and put them in "poetic" form for analysis. "Style and meaning in Stephen Crane: 'The Open Boat,'" University of Texas Studies in English, XXVII (1958), pp. 34-45.

⁸Charles R. Metzger, "Realistic Devices in Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat,'" Midwest Quarterly, IV, 1 (Autumn, 1962), p. 53. is one of several critics who have pointed this out.

⁹Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," The Complete Short Stories and Sketches of Stephen Crane, ed. Thomas A. Gullason, (New York, 1961), pp. 339-359. All future quotations will be taken from this edition. Page numbers will be placed in parenthesis in the text.

First of all there is the obvious similarity of the action of both works taking place on a boat in the ocean. The two boats have several persons aboard at the start of their respective voyages. The tales have the nautical references to the wind, stars and directions.

Early in the relating of events of these journeys, the narrators are conscious of the horizon:

. . . Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill (22-23)¹⁰

The horizon narrowed and widened (339)

One of the things singled out for mention in both stories is the lighthouse. The mariner refers to "the lighthouse top" (24) and the narrator of "The Open Boat" comments that ". . . his [the correspondent's] eye chanced on a small, still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon. It was precisely like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find a lighthouse so tiny." (343)

Both ships get into stormy water and for the majority of the time, the persons involved have little or no control over their boats. Each work depicts a storm that is treacherous to those involved.

Despite the differences in the views of nature, its depiction is one of the chief similarities to be found in the two works.

"The Open Boat" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" present a nature that is violent, powerful and personified. Recalling the

¹⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," (1834 edition) printed in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: A Handbook, ed. Royal A. Gettamn, (San Francisco, 1961), p. 341. All future quotations will be taken from this text. Line numbers will be placed in parenthesis in the text.

Romantics' concern for and interest in nature, it is not surprising to see Coleridge dealing so explicitly with man's relationship to it. It is almost universally agreed that this issue is also the central one in Crane's story.¹¹ In an often quoted section of the story, the correspondent is seen coming to a resolution about the relationship of nature to man:

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. (35)

However, the correspondent doesn't reach this conclusion until after the reader has been allowed to see nature at work in the story.

The strength, animation and personification of nature found in Crane's description are in many ways recognized in Coleridge's depiction of it. A comparison of stanzas and descriptive lines from both writers reveals the likeness. The examples of color words used to describe nature and the examples of animated nature are catalogued out of context, in order that the cumulative effect of this description can be estimated and the sequential pattern of their occurrences can be seen.

And now the storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his oertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

¹¹Eric Solomon, Donald Gibson, and Charles Metzger, among others, have described the theme of the work this way.

And now there came both mist and snow,
 And it grew wondrous cold:
 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
 As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
 Did send a dismal sheen:
 Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken--
 The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
 The ice was all around:
 It cracked and growled, and roared and howled
 Like noises in a swound. (41-62)

These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt
 and tall (340)

. . . (waves) nervously anxious to do something effective
 in the way of swamping boats. (340)

. . . this particular wave was the final outburst of the
 ocean, the last effort of the grim water. (341)

. . . terrible grace in the movement of the waves . . .
 the snarling of the crests. (341)

. . . the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men. (341)

The little boat, lifted by each towering sea and splashed
 viciously by the crests (343)

. . . waves continued their impetuous swooping at the dinghy.
 (344)

A changed tide tried to force them southward, but wind and
 wave said northward. (347)

. . . a particularly obstreperous sea (347)

. . . low and drear thunder of the surf (350)

. . . the tall black waves that swept forward in a most sin-
 ister silence . . . subdued growl of a crest. (350)

. . . growling of water (351)

. . . a wave suddenly raged out like a mountain cat (354)

. . . ominous slash of the wind (355)

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. (356)

. . . strange new enemy--a current. (357)

The natural color images in "The Open Boat" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reveal a similarity to the way in which the animation of nature is presented in the two works. The words are vivid and frequently used. Even though the views of nature held by the two writers are different, they describe it in much the same terms--animated and colorful. The number and repetition of color references in both works indicate a similar method of describing nature:

green as emerald (ice) (54)	hoary (water) (276)
white (fog-smoke) (77)	Blue, glossy green and velvet black ("attire" of water snakes) (279)
white (moon shine) (78)	golden (water) (281)
red (sun) (97)	black (cloud) (320)
white (foam) (103)	green (ocean) (433)
copper (sky) (111)	white (bay) (480)
bloody (sun) (112)	black (cloud) (322)
green, blue, white (water) (130)	crimson (shadows) (483)
like April hoar-frost (moon beams) (268)	blue (sky) (Coleridge's gloss on lines 263-271)
awful red (water) (271)	crimson (shadows) (483)
shining white (water) (274)	brown (leaves) (485)

The animated and colorful nature found in Coleridge is also found in Crane. Some of Crane's descriptive terms are:

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|--|--|
| slate (waves) (399) | gold (light of star) (350) |
| foaming white (wave-tops) (399) | bluish gleam (edge of the waters) (351) |
| emerald-green streaked with amber lights (sea) (341) | black (waves) (351) |
| brown (seaweed) (342) | a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like a blue flame (shark) (352) |
| (1) black (eyes of the bird) | black (waters) (352) |
| (2) black (eyes of the bird) (342) | flash of bluish light (352) |
| brown (mats of seaweed) (342) | sparkling streak (352) |
| like white flames (a great spread of water) (343) | dark fin (352) |
| long black shadow (the land) (343) | flame of the long tail (354) |
| black line (land) (345) | gray hue (sea and sky) (355) |
| line of black and a line of white (trees and sand) (345) | carmine and gold (waters) (355) |
| dark (vegetation) (346) | pure blue (sky) (355) |
| white (lip of a wave) (346) | white (sheets of water) (356) |
| gray (east-sky) (347) | white (comber) (356) |
| dingy (clouds) (347) | white (water) (356) |
| brick-red (clouds) (347) | white (slopes of sand) (357) |
| faint yellow (sky) (349) | green (bluff) (357) |
| streaked saffron in the west (350) | white (waves) (359) |
| black (sea) (350) | |

Elements of plot on one work often correspond quite closely to those found in the other. One of the most significant parts of the action of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the advent of the albatross. The albatross becomes Coleridge's symbol of nature; when the Mariner kills it, he is out of communion with nature and his suffering begins. "The Open Boat" also has its "albatross." In Crane's work the bird is a canton flannel gull. But the resulting action is much the same. The bird is recognized, and if it is not welcomed (as is the albatross in "The Ancient Mariner"), at least it is not rejected either. Both birds act in an unnatural manner. The albatross eats unusual food and flies around distractedly; the gull seems to have the unnatural intention of landing on the captain's head. The response to this action is that "The captain naturally wished to knock it away with the end of the heavy painter" (342) In one sense he too has committed the same kind of sin as the ancient mariner--alienating himself from nature, or as Crane might put it, eliminating possibilities to come "closer" to nature and truth.

The other men at first reject the mariner for his act, but when what seems to be a positive result of this action occurs, they align themselves with him and (as Coleridge makes very clear in his gloss) become accomplices in the crime. The same kind of accomplices are found in "The Open Boat." The men see the gull as "uncanny and sinister," and "The cook and the correspondent swore darkly at the creature." The narrator remarks that ". . . the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow gruesome and ominous." (342) In both ships, the whole crew is guilty of rejection of and alienation from nature.

Another interesting correspondence between the two plots comes near the end of both narratives when the boats come to shore. The mariner's boat comes to the harbor where suddenly it sinks. It is only through the efforts of the rather mysterious hermit that the mariner is saved. The hermit persisted in bringing help to the old sailor even though the Pilot was reluctant. This hermit seems a strange character. He is described as something of a "natural man," someone rather primitive, uncultivated, somewhat strange in appearance and apparently close to nature. As named by Coleridge, "The Hermit of the Wood" makes his home along the forest brook in an ivy-covered setting, surrounded by owlets and wolves.

For the correspondent, too, mysterious aid brings him to shore after his boat also capsizes. There is something strange about the man who comes to the correspondent's rescue. In a way, he too might be termed a "natural man":

Presently he saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off him. . . . Then he saw the man who had been running and undressing and undressing and running, come bounding into the water He was naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint. (358)

Some striking similarities of style and diction occur in the two works. For example both tales compare the motion of the boat to the movement of a violent horse.

Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.
Then like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound: (387-390)

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and by the same token a broncho is not much smaller. the craft pranced and reared and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. (340)

Both narrators point out that the wind blows through their characters' hair. The mariner exclaims that "It raised my hair . . ." (456) and the correspondent complains that ". . . the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men." (341)

Similarities of tone are found in the two men's description of sighting land.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree? (464-467)

Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white--trees and sand. Finally the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea. (345)

In the course of the narrative the central characters are described in both works as sleeping a death-like sleep. The mariner remarks "I thought that I had died in sleep." (307) and the men of the open boat are described as having "slept once more the dead sleep."

After the sin of alienation from nature has occurred through the sailors' rejection (in both tales) of the symbol of nature, a kind of curse is placed on both central characters--the ancient mariner and the correspondent. For their guilt, both men must

suffer what Andrew Lytle calls a "dark night of the soul."¹² "The dark night of the soul" is one of the steps of mystic experience through which a union with and knowledge of God is reached. During the "dark night" the soul goes through a stage of alienation and loss and cannot find God at all. After this experience, however, if one persists, the union and knowledge are achieved.¹³

For both men the "dark night" experience is a kind of trial. In each account, the time and suffering involved are announced in a rather direct, yet understated manner. The mariner complains of his experience when he says "There passed a weary time" (143) and the correspondent echoes this complaint when he remarks "A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night" (350). The ancient mariner goes on to lament:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony. (233-235)

Similarly the correspondent "thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans." (352)

After these characters have begun to feel their isolation, they are again visited by creatures of nature--this time from the sea rather than from the air. It is as if they are being

¹²"The Open Boat": A Pagan Tale," The Hero with the Private Parts (Baton Rouge, 1966), p. 71. While the purpose of this discussion is not to see "The Open Boat" as a mystic experience culminating in a union with God, Lytle so argues and with some justification. The concept of "the dark night of the soul" seems a useful way to describe (in humanistic terms) the experience of both characters.

¹³This concept, which is discussed early by St. John of the Cross, is defined as above in William F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, (New York, 1960), p. 298.

given a chance to test their alienation from nature through exposure to representatives of it. At first the alienation seems thorough. The ancient mariner's first response to the "creatures of the calm" is a "wicked whisper", instead of the prayer that he intended. Coleridge is careful to point out that the ancient mariner despises these creatures. It is the same in "The Open Boat." After the first appearance of the shark, we are told that "the presence of this biding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would have if he had been a picknicker. He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone." (352) At this point neither the mariner nor the correspondent has lessened any of his alienation from nature.

But both of them get "another chance." The creature from the sea visits again. The description of this event for the ancient mariner is remarkably similar to that of the correspondent.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
 I watched the water-snakes:
 They moved in tracks of shining white,
 And when they reared, the elfish light
 Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
 I watched their rich attire:
 Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
 They coiled and swam; and every track
 Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
 Their beauty might declare:
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,
 And I blessed them unaware: (272-285)

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the reader is told the effect of this "unaware" blessing. Coleridge glosses the result as "The spell begins to break," and at that time the

outward sign of the Mariner's guilt, the dead albatross, falls off his neck. Through his act of blessing the water snakes he re-establishes his bond with nature and begins to decrease his alienation. A passage from "The Open Boat is remarkably like these stanzas of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

There was a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters. It might have been made by a monstrous knife.

There there came a stillness, while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea.

Suddenly there was another swish and another long flash of bluish light, and this time it was along side the boat, and might almost have been reached with an oar. The correspondent saw an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail.

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But the thing did not then leave the vicinity of the boat. Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals short or long, fled the long sparkling streak and there was to be heard the whiroo of the dark fin. The speed and power of the thing was greatly to be admired. it cut the water like a gigantic and keen projectile. (352)

The similarity of the description of the shark, its color and its activity, to that given for the water snakes is striking. The similarity of the correspondent's response to that of the mariner is also striking. Having initially rejected the second representative of nature, the correspondent later admired the strength of this magnificent creature. It is through admiration of the beauty of the creatures that both characters are able to expiate their guilt. There are, however, some differences in the descriptions of and responses to the sea creatures, and it would be foolish to attempt to make the parallel complete.

Through the experience of accepting and admiring nature both men are able to come to an understanding of it and how it affects the individual. The mariner through his experience can postulate at the end of the poem:

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small; (612-615)

The correspondent too, learns a lesson from his "dark night of the soul." He begins to see man's relationship to nature.

This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. (355)

He now understands, as he hadn't before, that nature is a neutral and amoral force. It is not treacherous, seeking actively to do him personal harm as he had thought earlier. Nor is it a beneficent force attempting to aid him--also one of his earlier conceptions of nature. (He had supposed that such things as the seaweed which marked their progress and the wind that filled the overcoat used as a sail were part of a helpful nature.) He realizes that nature cannot be anything but indifferent to man, but this must not and does not keep from admiration and acceptance of it.

A still more important lesson for the mariner and the correspondent is learned through the trial of the "dark night." They both realized the value of the bond with humanity. The mariner grieves because his former fellow crewmen "so beautiful!" now

"all dead did lie." In his proverbial summary of the value of his experience, he is careful to include the love of man as well as the other creatures of nature as an important aspect of his lesson, thus completing the union--the "One Life." He tells the Wedding Guest the joys of human fellowship--walking to church, enjoying the society of "Old men, and babes, and loving friends/ And youths and maidens gay!" (605-606) He persuades the Guest that his recognition of the importance of humanity came through his aloneness, after the rest of the crew had died.

The correspondent too learns the importance of his own humanness through his experience. He recognizes the union that he achieves with his fellow man is indeed "the best experience of his life."

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dinghy. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heart-felt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said it was so. No one mentioned it. (343-344)

For the men of the open boat, the experience has been profound. The death of the oiler has a significant effect on them. It strengthens the bond of humanity among the remaining

three and extends that bond to all men. These men know the importance of their experience.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters. (359)

They too, like the mariner, have something to interpret and the message is substantially the same: accept and admire nature, understand man's relationship to it, and recognize the importance of the brotherhood of man. For the men of the open boat, this experience has not been so complete as the comparable experience was for the mariner. While they have come to an understanding of nature, they realize that they are not of the "community of nature," that they are separate from nature.

It is safe to say that "The Open Boat" deals in part with the beauty and force of external nature. It is equally safe to say that one of the chief functions of the story is to examine the relationship of man to nature. When the correspondent accepts the representatives of the natural world and gets beyond the alienation which had resulted from his earlier rejection of those representatives, he is able to come to an understanding of the workings of his world. The nature he understands is not the same as for the mariner, as suggested above. Realizing that nature is an amoral force and therefore indifferent, the correspondent is able to direct his imagination to the fellowship of man, which produces "the best experience of his life."

The supernatural has disappeared, along with the sacramental, from Crane's nature. There is no room for miracles or mysteries in the natural forces that act in "The Open Boat." Not so in "The Ancient Mariner." For example, the force that drives the mariner's ship to shore at the end of the poem is clearly a supernatural intervention. This force is capable of moral action, unlike the nature that the correspondent begins to understand. He recognizes nature to be an amoral force. So, when at the end of the story, the correspondent speaks of a wave that flings him safely to shore as a "true miracle of the sea," he wisely undercuts the effect of this statement by calling it also "an event in gymnastics." It is a miracle of the sea, not of God or even of all nature. He does not think that nature has interceded in his behalf.

The parallels in "The Open Boat" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" make room for speculation as to how to account for them. While it is quite probable that Crane would have had access to the poem there is no external evidence that he was influenced by it. Crane's reading is for the most part, unknown. There are, however, some interesting coincidences that are difficult to explain. Both works, for instance, consist of seven numbered sections. Another example that is even less easily understood is Crane's use of the archaic word "quoth" (342). In a story which usually employs the standard modern responses of "said," "cried," and "explained," why he chose this word as a tag only once when no archaic effect

was sought is unclear. In Coleridge's poem "quoth" is often used as are many other archaisms. It is puzzling why Crane should have chosen to employ it.

Lloyd N. Dendingger, in a very brief article finds a relationship between the two works.¹⁴ His argument that Crane is parodying "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by inverting the imagery is based on three images and fails to account for many of the other parallels. The article does reinforce, however, this paper's contention that there is indeed a relationship, whether it is direct or indirect, deliberate or unconscious, between the two works.

The seven part structure, the enigmatic "quoth," and the many parallels of structure and style pointed out in this paper certainly raise the question if indeed Crane may have been influenced by Coleridge's work. Is it because the most direct source of "The Open Boat" is Crane's own experience in the shipwreck of the "Commodore," that no one has looked for possible literary sources? Is it not possible that when Crane was attempting to order his experiences into an artistic narrative he turned to another masterpiece of sea-fiction for ideas and structural techniques? Present external evidence gives no clue. Unexplained coincidences and extensive parallels raise the question.

¹⁴"Stephen Crane's Use of Key Images of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" Studies in Short Fiction, V, ii (Winter, 1968), pp. 192-194.

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STEPHEN CRANE AND AN UNSACRAMENTAL NATURE

by

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B. A., Yankton College, 1967

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1969

The relationship of man to nature is the central concern in two major literary works--Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In both works, the protagonist comes to an understanding of this relationship through direct experience of the violent forces of external nature. This paper attempts, through an extended comparison of Crane's short story and Coleridge's poem, to delineate these relationships to nature.

The essential difference in the relationships discovered by Coleridge's mariner and Crane's correspondent is that for the correspondent in "The Open Boat" it is impossible to achieve a total union with nature, whereas this union is the final achievement of Coleridge's mariner. The view of nature which regards all in it--including man--as essentially holy is what Robert Penn Warren calls "the sacramental vision." This is the view that Coleridge offers. But such a position is no longer workable for Crane. The holiness of nature is gone and man is distinct from external nature, rather than a part of it. However, both works affirm man's dignity and reveal the importance of the bond of humanity for the protagonists of the tales.

Similarities of style, diction, plot and tone between "The Ancient Mariner" and "The Open Boat" are numerous, and these are detailed in this study. The apparent but unacknowledged parallels raise the question whether Crane may not have had Coleridge's work in mind as he wrote his story.