

STEPHEN CRANE AND AN UNSACRAMENTAL NATURE

by 1264

LAWRENCE ARNOLD HOYLE

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

Approved by:

Hele B. Petrucci
Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1969
H68

Contents

Stephen Crane and an Un sacramental Nature 1
List of Works Cited 22

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.